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From the Executive Director



Robyn Hilger

This summer, I've had the privilege of spending much of my time traveling to ACDA state conferences. Every conference is different, but they all remind me of the same thing: our strength is found in our communities that gather to sing, learn, and support one another.

National and regional conferences are big and exciting. But state conferences have an energy all of their own. They're significantly more personal. I get to see you in your own communities, surrounded by colleagues who know you well and understand the work you do every day. There is a comfort in these spaces that is hard to describe but easy to recognize. These gatherings give me the chance to experience ACDA through your eyes.

Being with you gives me a much richer understanding of what teaching, conducting, and leading look like in communities across the country. Those conversations matter more than you might realize. They shape the work we do at the national level by reminding us that every decision ultimately serves conductors, singers, and the communities you call home. No matter where we are, the commitment to creating meaningful musical experiences that enrich people's lives is remarkably consistent.

As another school year and concert season begins, I know many of you are already thinking about the first rehearsal, the folders waiting to be filled with music, and the singers who will soon walk through your doors. It's an exciting time, but it can also feel overwhelming. One of the greatest gifts of ACDA is that wherever you are, there is a community of colleagues who understands both the challenges and the rewards of what you do. After spending the summer with so many of you, I'm even more convinced that those connections are one of our association's greatest strengths.

Thank you to our members and leaders in Texas, Minnesota, Washington (by video), VoicesUnited, New York, and Oklahoma (home team) for welcoming me into your worlds this summer. Thank you for your conversations, your hospitality, your willingness to share, and for the great eats! I always leave these visits with a notebook full of ideas and a renewed appreciation for the remarkable people who make this organization great. Thank you for spending your summer growing and learning. Thank you to our volunteer leaders for investing your time and energy into creating these opportunities for all of us. (Want me to visit your state event? Invite me! Email executivedirector@acda.org. I'd love to come!)

Robyn Hilger

ADVOCACY STATEMENT

The human spirit is elevated to a broader understanding of itself and its place in the world through the study of and participation in choral music. Singing in a choir produces more active and involved citizens. It affects self-worth in youth and adults. It builds connectivity throughout communities. Society benefits from the aesthetic beauty and community of singers created by choral programs within schools, houses of worship, and community organizations through involved citizenry, connectivity throughout communities, and feelings of personal self-worth. The American Choral Directors Association and its membership resolve to ensure the survival of choral programs for this and future generations by:

Actively voicing support for funding at local, state, and national levels of education and government; collaborating with local and national organizations to ensure the distribution of arts funding data and arts-related activism opportunities; advocating for full access to choral singing and inclusion of all singers in a choral program; and ensuring the distribution of advocacy statements and data regarding choral programs.

From the President



Edith Copley

The August issue contained the 2027 National Conference Honor Choirs information for grades 5–12. Please encourage your students to apply and assist them with the application. The deadline to apply is **Thursday, September 23**.

I write this column in the middle of the summer knowing that many of you are soon beginning a new academic semester, liturgical year, or concert season. Summer gives us time to relax and recharge but also time to plan for the coming year. Choosing repertoire is a major part of that plan. This has always been a “love/hate” activity for me. Well, I guess I should say “daunting” rather than “hate.” Even though the process is very time consuming, I love to discover new music. For those teaching in the classroom, the repertoire is your textbook filled with high-quality music for the right grade level. Amazingly the textbook changes almost every quarter! Just imagine other subject area teachers changing textbooks every quarter; they probably wouldn’t be very happy. In contrast, we are eager to open the “next book” filled with great music and expressive texts for our next performance.

For many years, I chose a combination of old and new repertoire so the students could explore historic performance practice and music “hot off the press” by living composers. Each program had five or six headings (prayers, love, loss, joy, etc.) Now I try to create an overarching concert theme that offers a more cohesive program for the singers and audience.

We typically include music with different tempi, keys, meters, dynamics, and languages in our concert programs. It’s also rewarding and educational to feature music from around the world as well as works by under-represented and/or historically excluded composers. Commissioning a new work is a wonderful way for singers to meet and work with a living composer and participate in bringing a new choral composition to life. To make commissioning more affordable, consider joining forces with other choral ensembles in your state, district, or community.

Another important consideration when choosing music is the text. Brad Holmes, retired professor from Millikin University, shared this quote at an Arizona ACDA summer conference: “Always choose one piece in the program that has your heart.” I believe music with beautiful poetry or an inspirational or thought-provoking message are the pieces that capture our hearts. Enjoy the “daunting” journey of discovering music and texts that will build heartfelt connections within your choir and community for this coming year.

Edie Copley

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From the Guest Editors



Sean Michael Burton



C. Michael Porter

To say that France's artistic DNA is embedded in Western music may sound like a cliché. The roots of Western music flowed along the River Seine in Paris during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with contributions from the Notre Dame School of Polyphony. Royal institutions at Versailles supported great contributions by French Baroque composers. Cultural movements, such as *La Belle Époque* and *fin de siècle*, inspired visionaries to expand established compositional structure and aesthetics. As the celebrated French author Victor Hugo wrote, *Ce qu'on ne peut dire et ce qu'on ne peut taire, la musique l'exprime* ("Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remain silent").

Despite France's artistic footprint in Western musical development, particularly its contributions to choral history, French choral music rarely appears on concert programs as often as repertoire from other Western cultures, particularly German, Italian, and English. This may stem from unfamiliarity with language or lack of exposure to French repertoire. This *Choral Journal* issue offers a *souçon* of research, literature reviews, and pedagogical tools that will aid readers in their pursuit to bring the rich tapestry of French choral music to their singers. Timothy Flynn's research on Belle Époque composer Jules Massenet and the Orphéon tradition highlights a post-Revolution amateur choir tradition that held an important role in French society. Hugh Macdonald introduces readers to several effective choruses by George Bizet, famously known for his operatic contributions. Pierre Villette is celebrating a centenary in 2026, and Sean Burton's analysis of Villette's motets, along with Michael Porter's interview with Stephen Layton—a celebrated conductor recognized for his recordings of French choral repertoire—introduces readers to Villette's *œuvre* and reexamines the trajectory of French choral music in the twentieth century. Finally, two highly effective articles by James Wilson (in the On the Voice column) and Anthony R. Reeves (a 2001 *Choral Journal* reprint) break down barriers conductors may face when teaching French diction or making historically informed choices about French Latin usage.

It is our hope that this issue will inspire readers to explore more of France's contributions to choral music and to embrace the styles and nuances of these incredible composers whose music lives on—in perpetuity.

Fêtons la chanson française !

Call for Submissions for ACDA Publications

The ACDA publications staff and editorial boards are interested in receiving articles of interest to the choral profession. Submission highlights are below for the 3 ACDA publications. Email Amanda Bumgarner, ACDA Publications Editor, with questions abumgarner@acda.org.

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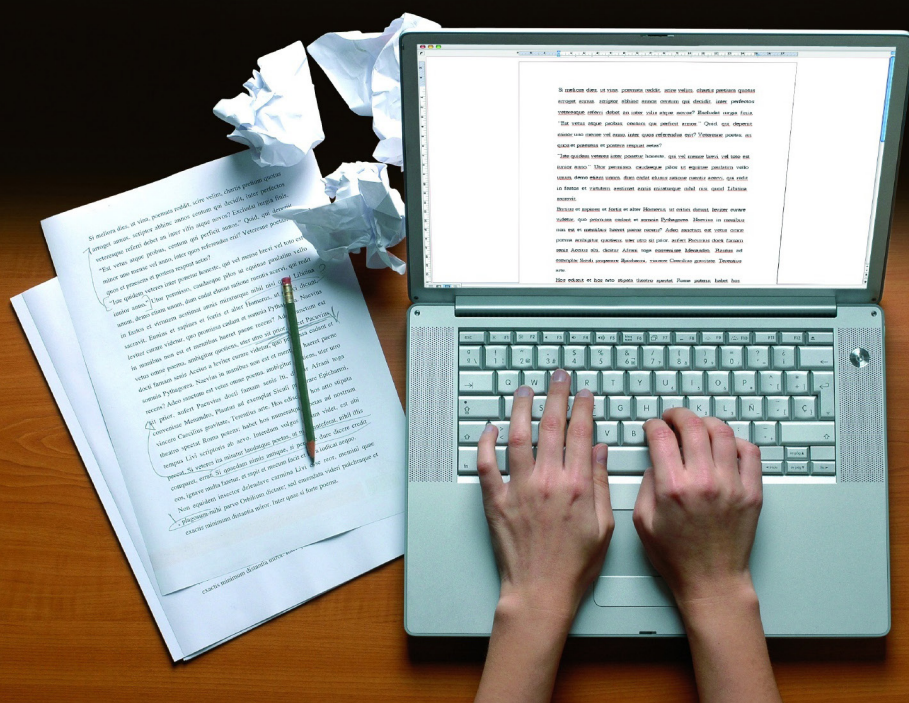
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Jules Massenet and the Orphéon Tradition

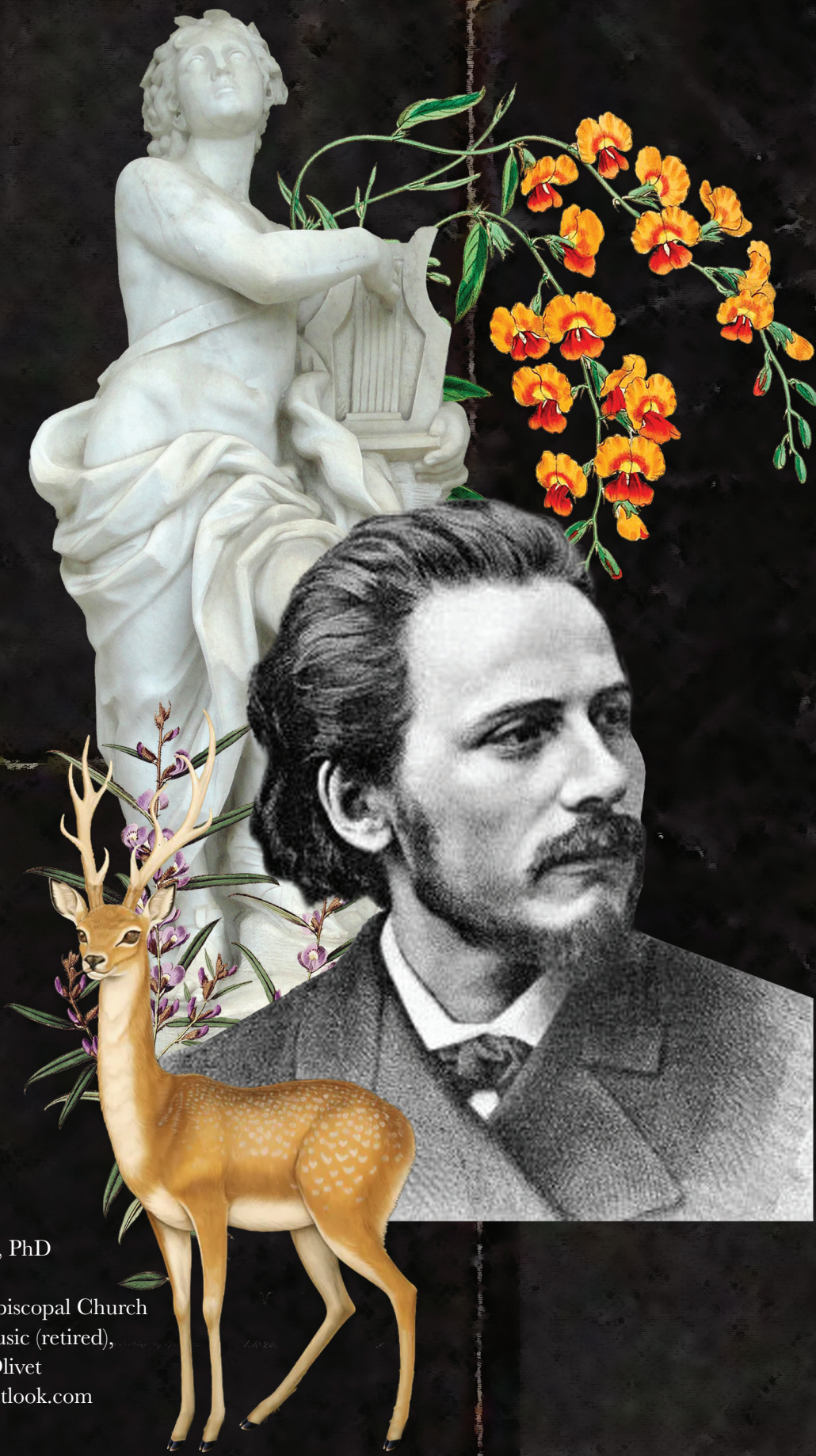


TIMOTHY FLYNN

Jules Massenet (1842–1912) was known primarily as a composer of theatre music, with over two dozen operas to his credit, which does not include the nine others that remain incomplete, recycled, or lost, as well as numerous examples of incidental music, oratorios, and ballets. He became famous throughout France and the world for his dramatic stage works. In addition to this, he composed over two hundred mélodies and piano pieces, many of which demonstrate his close ties to the salon tradition. He also composed several orchestral suites, a handful of chamber pieces, and other miscellaneous works.

One genre that seems to have escaped

public attention is his choral music. While in Italy as a Prix de Rome recipient, Massenet began composing a Mass, which was *de rigueur* for someone in his position to send back to Paris as one of their first pieces. In March of 1865, he reports as having composed the Kyrie and Gloria of a Mass, but ultimately he abandoned the work altogether.¹ Other attempts at composing a Mass also did not come to fruition. He did, however, compose a few small-scale solo motets, which were fashionable during the nineteenth century. According to his most recent biographer, Jean-Christophe Branger, many of what were considered larger scale choral pieces have either been lost, destroyed, or left as fragments.²



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Jules Massenet and the Orphéon Tradition

There are several smaller choral works published by Massenet's two regular publishers, George Hartmann and Henri Heugel, while a few were published by E. et A. Girod (Paris). Many of these works demonstrate a close connection with the Orphéon tradition in France, which was popular throughout the nineteenth century and continued well into the post-World War II generation. Orphéon societies have an important social, political, and musical history and were amateur choral ensembles primarily (though not exclusively) comprising male voices.³

This article will offer a general overview of the importance of this amateur choral tradition in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France and Massenet's relationship with it, while also examining three selected works that are still relevant to our contemporary music making: *Le Moulin*, *Vilanelle*, and *Moines et Forbans*.

The Orphéon Tradition

Clair Rowden aptly notes that France's choral tradition does not progress in an unbroken and smooth path of development as other national schools might.⁴ The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are a good example of this. During the revolutionary period of the 1790s, the long tradition of choir schools that trained *maîtrises* (children) was abolished by the new Republic. Musicians eventually found work in the "emerging secular arena" especially among the grand Revolutionary spectacles that incorporated huge, massed choirs "symbolizing the brotherhood of humanity and the will of *le peuple* (the people)."⁵ Many famous composers such as François-Joseph Gossec, Étienne Méhul, and Luigi Cherubini wrote patriotic songs and hymns glorifying the new Republic. With the Concordat of 1801 between Napoléon Bonaparte and Pope Pius VII, sacred music along with some of its earlier traditions returned to France. During the so-called July Monarchy of Louis Philippe (1830–48), "the Republican tradition of popular massed choirs" continued to find a place in music making, especially with the establishment of the Orphéon movement.⁶

In 1833, Louis Bocquillon-Wilhelm (1781–1842) founded "a specifically Parisian orchestra of voices

alone made up of singers, most of them artisans, with only the most basic musical education"⁷ called the Orphéon movement. This undertaking, which Bocquillon-Wilhelm had originally begun with school children during the Bourbon Restoration in France (1814–1830), spread throughout the nineteenth century with Orphéon groups and festivals starting all around the country.⁸ Several prominent music periodicals, including the *Revue et gazette musicale*, *L'Art musical*, and *La Maîtrise*, dedicated articles to the movement and often reviewed performances and competitions of the various organizations. By the 1860s and 1870s, there were even specific journals devoted to the Orphéon movement, which included *La France orphéonique*, *La Presse orphéonique*, *L'Orphéon populaire*, and *Le Festival: journal musical et orphéonique*.⁹ While some of these periodicals were short lived, they were nevertheless important tools for reporting the concerts and competitions of various Orphéon societies throughout France as well as other musical events.

Orphéon societies prospered during the French Republic and the Second Empire of Napoleon III (1848–1870) as well as the ensuing Third Republic (1870–1940). According to French music scholar Jane Fulcher:

Cultural officials during the period of Napoleon III, saw music as a moral panacea to *ameliorate* the condition of the French working class. Throughout the Empire, the government was convinced of the need for the worker to be trained in the art, and further, of the importance of making good music accessible to this social group.¹⁰

The Orphéon society was an ideal resource not only for providing basic musical training but also for spreading the ideals and morality of Empire. These singing groups for the French worker—whether agricultural, artisan, or shop worker—were part of a utopian societal view of early French intellectual and social theorists, including Joseph Fourier (1768–1830) and August Comte (1798–1857). It was socially important that workers participated in musical endeavors because it was believed that this art form could civilize people. Various articles in the periodic press supported this be-



lief, stating that Orphéon societies would “provide a *noble distraction* for the workers.”¹¹ What is interesting is that, according to Fulcher:

The average French worker avidly sought self-improvement, welcoming all educational advantage as an escape from isolation, both social and cultural, and from the ignominy of the laboring class.¹²

The Third Republic also found the Orphéon tradition useful for championing the ideals of republicanism in post-Imperial France, which included a common culture, a right to education, legal equality, and democracy. These were ideals that the Orphéon symbolized, because it was an “amalgamation of politics, philosophy, and art, in an integral whole”¹³ standing for unity in which music had the power to reconcile differences in class. The leaders of the Third Republic believed music could contribute to a liberal democracy in four main ways: (1) music could discipline private desires and internalize public virtues; (2) music could serve as a connection between people who had diverse and at times conflicting social backgrounds; (3) music could help people negotiate differences and conflicts fashioning new identities; and (4) music could help inspire and create consensus amid uncertainty.¹⁴

With changes in the government due to the 1879 elections, politics and music embraced greater egalitarianism: Women and Protestants took a greater role in musical life; traditional French heroes were celebrated in both civil life and music (at this time, Saint-Saëns premiered his opera *Etienne Marcel*); and there was a greater visibility of contemporary French music with government subsidized music festivals, including large-scale choral and instrumental groups. Finally, secularism played a greater role in events that had previously been completely religious. Patriotic and secular music was often now mixed with religious music at the annual Good Friday concerts, for example.¹⁵

Music in general, and Orphéon societies specifically, played a role in the transmission of republican ideas not only to the audience but among the performers as well. Thus, middle- and lower-class workers, many of whom were rural or associated with agricultural work,

became the instruments of political and social change.

Massenet and the Orphéon Movement

During his career, Massenet was connected with the Orphéon movement as a composer of works predominately for men’s voices. In 1866, not long after his return to Paris from his *Prix de Rome* sojourn and while he was composing his first opera (a one-act opéra-comique, *La Grand’Tante*), Massenet won an Orphéonist competition with his two choruses, *Alleluia* and *Le Moulin*, both with texts by Gustave Chouquet (1819–1896). According to a review in *Le Moniteur des pianistes* (April 20, 1866), the *Alleluia* won first prize unanimously, and *Le Moulin* won second prize. To quote the critic: “The second chorus, written for four men’s voices, is picturesque with a strong melodic feel and there are none of the usual banalities.”¹⁶ The *Alleluia*, composed for mixed voices, is described as possessing “a brilliant sound and remarkable vigor” composed in the “grand manner of Handel.”¹⁷ Massenet made a very successful debut in the arena of music for Orphéon societies with these two pieces—types of compositions that he continued to cultivate throughout his career.¹⁸

Le Moulin

Le Moulin (*The Mill*) is a delightful piece that tells the story of millers and their work at the mill. Table 1 on the next page provides a translation of *Le Moulin* along with key areas, metric changes, tempo markings, and overall formal design. Massenet begins the chorus—which is in praise of the virtues of working in a mill—with points of imitation and musical motives that reflect the laughter mentioned in the text (Figure 1 on page 11). The publication indicates this chorus was the winner of the Competition of the City of Pairs in 1866.

The text of the chorus describes the work of the miller: “By the ferry the wheat comes to us in sacks, the flour leaves in sacks. The same morning at dawn we repeat again...” (*par le bac le froment nous vient en sac, par le bac la farine part en sac. Le soir comme a l’aurore nous repe-*

Jules Massenet and the Orphéon Tradition

tons encore).¹⁹ While the chorus begins in bright D major, at this point, the composer moves to D minor using common tone modulation. The chorus also contains a sense of national pride in the miller's work: "proud fellows, let us sing this cheerful refrain that pleases in France" (*fiers lurons nous chantons ce gai refrain qui plait en France*). To give even more color, the turning of the mill wheel is imitated in the first bass part with its constant "tic tac tic tac tic tac" with the accent on the offbeat (Figure 2 on page 12).

The B section of this rounded binary form is more introspective, and the musical style changes. Massenet modulates at first to B^b major before the music becomes more harmonically unstable. The text describes how the humble poor people dream of abundance, and the miller's work has "many charms"... it "cures the dark anxiety of the artisan and the orphan." There is also an implication that the work of the mill is for the benefit of both the "castle" and the "cottage," thus giving a sense of equality among the classes and bestowing a

Table 1. *Le Moulin* Translation with Musical Format

Form	Text	Key Area	Meter	Tempo	Measures
A	When our mill is full of wheat, laughter, and despair, white millers, proud fellows, let us sing, yes, let us sing this cheerful refrain that pleases us in France: tick tock tick tock tick tock.	D major and transitioning to D minor with common tone	2/4	<i>Allegretto bien rythmé</i>	29
	By the ferry the wheat comes to us in sacks, the flour leaves in sacks. The same morning at dawn we repeat again: tick tock tick tock, by the ferry the flour leaves in sacks, by the ferry leaves in sacks.	D minor	2/4	(no change)	40
B	Ah! In our cities, in our valleys, in the isolated countryside, do you hear the distant sound? To the humble roof in poverty, it dreams of abundance, and serves as an alarm clock, our work has many charms. It cures the dark anxieties of the artisan, the orphan. For the castle, the cottage, may the water of the river always turn our mill, turn the mill.	B ^b major; D minor; G minor; B ^b major (modulatory)	6/8	<i>Andante non troppo</i>	24
	White millers*, proud fellows, we sing this cheerful refrain that pleases us in France: tick tock tick *Refers to the millers being covered in white dust from the making of flour.	Transition to d minor	2/4	<i>Allegretto con moto</i>	48
A ⁱ	tock... By the ferry the wheat comes to us in sacks, the flour leaves in sacks. La la la la la...	Ending on D major			

LE MOULIN
 CHOEUR POUR QUATRE VOIX D'HOMME.
 Paroles de **GUSTAVE CHOUQUET.** Musique de **MASSENET**
 Couronné au Concours de la Ville de Paris 1865

All^{to} bien rythmé

1^{ers} TENORS 2^{ds} TENORS BARYTONS BASSES

Lors que no - tremou - lin tour - ne

Lors que no - tremou - lin no - tre mou - lin Lors que no - tre mou -

Lors que no - tremou - lin no - tre mou - lin tour - ne plein

Lors que no - tre mou -

Leggiero

plein tour - ne. plein de - blé de ri - re

- lin le mou - lin tour - ne. plein de - blé de ri - re

tour - ne. plein de - blé

lin tour - ne bien plein de

mf Ritard

de rire et d'es - pé - ran - ce blancs meu - niers

de rire et d'es - pé - ran - ce blancs meu - niers

ri - re, de rire et d'es - pé - ran - ce blancs meu - niers

ri - re, de rire et d'es - pé - ran - ce blancs meu - niers

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Figure 1. Jules Massenet, *Le Moulin*, c. 1866, mm. 1–13. IMSLP, Public Domain.

Jules Massenet and the Orphéon Tradition

sense of the importance of the physical labors of the millers for all of France. *Le Moulin* is a chorus in praise of the virtues of the humble yet important work of the miller. This idea is aligned with the political and social purpose of the Orphéon organizations, and as it was music of the laboring class, it was important these individuals felt pride in the importance of their work.

Vilanelle

Massenet continued to compose works for Orphéon organizations. In 1868, he was awarded second prize for a chorus titled *C'est Dieu* and third prize for another titled *En Avant*, both for the use of Orphéons.²⁰ *Vilanelle* was composed for four-part tenor/bass chorus and won a “Division supérieur” award in the Orphéon composition contest at the 1872 Exposition Universelle. This was the same year Massenet completed his oratorio *Marie-Magdeleine* and the year his full-scale opéra-comique, *Don César de Bazan*, premiered.

Vilanelle is a charming love song that gracefully captures the pastoral setting in which the singer dreams of his sweetheart and leisure time away from work.²¹ Massenet marked the score *très léger et quasi un scherzo* [very lightly and like a scherzo], and the rhythmic pulse

of the inner voices gives a frivolous and bouncing accompaniment to the melodic duet of the outer voices (Figure 3 on the next page).

The overall formal design of this chorus is a rounded binary. The first 49 measures are in G major and present the A section, while the B section begins in C major in m. 50 (Figure 4 on page 14). This central section, while brief, changes both the meter (from 6/8 to 3/4), and the tempo marking changes to *Andantino simple et tranquille*. Then in measure 67, part of the A section returns, creating the rounded portion of the form. The ancient *forme fixe* of a *villanelle* is more complex, especially in its poetry and rhyme scheme, so it is clear that Massenet’s inspiration was simply in the rustic and pastoral qualities of the genre, not in its structural elements.

Vilanelle is not without its musical challenges, and according to *Le Ménestrel* (August 18, 1872), this chorus was used as the competition piece at the 1872 Exposition for Orphéon groups at the “division supérieur.”²² It undoubtedly remained a popular composition for accomplished Orphéonistes and was being performed at festivals and competitions as late as 1898.²³ Table 2 on page 15 offers a diagram of the musical form with a translation of the text.

Figure 2 shows a musical score for Jules Massenet's *Le Moulin*, measures 20–36. The score is for four voices: T1 (Tenor 1), T2 (Tenor 2), B1 (Bass 1), and B2 (Bass 2). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8. The lyrics are: "Par le bac Par le bac le fro - ment nous vient en". The B1 part has a rhythmic accompaniment of "tic tac tic tac" with first and second endings marked. Dynamics include "pp" (pianissimo) and "pp" (pianissimo).

Figure 2. Jules Massenet, *Le Moulin*, ca. 1866, mm. 20–36.
IMSLP, Public Domain.



VILANELLE
CHOEUR À 4 VOIX.
Couronné au Concours de Composition Musicale
de l'Exposition Universelle de Paris de 1872.

Paroles de **J. RUELE.** Musique de **J. MASSENET.**

En vente au Bureau du journal L'ORPHEON, 25, Rue de Navarin.

All^o vivo. (♩ = 138)
très léger et quasi un scherzo. *pon 1^o* *p dol.*

1^{er} TÉNORS. 2^{me} TÉNORS. 1^{re} BASSES. 2^{me} BASSES.

L'oiseau ga
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
Allons au bois, le chêne pous-se, al -
-zouille dans le bois; On entend
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
-lons au bois! Et sur la branche et sur la mousse, al -
de joyeu-ses voix! On en-tend de joyeu-ses
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
-lons au bois! On en-tend de joyeu-ses

1872

MUS

Figure 3. Jules Massenet, *Vilanelle*, 1872, mm. 1–11. IMSLP, Public Domain.

Jules Massenet and the Orphéon Tradition

allarg. **Andante simple et tranquille** (♩ = 69)

The musical score is for a four-part setting of Jules Massenet's *Vilanelle*, measures 45-60. The tempo is marked *Andante simple et tranquille* with a quarter note equal to 69 beats per minute. The score is written for four voices: Tenor 1 (T1), Tenor 2 (T2), Bass 1 (B1), and Bass 2 (B2). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into three systems, each starting with a measure number (45, 52, and 57). The lyrics are in French. Dynamics include *f* (forte), *ff* (fortissimo), and *pp sotto voce* (pianissimo sotto voce). The first system (measures 45-51) begins with *allarg.* (allargando). The lyrics for the first system are: "bois! al-lons au bois! Sous la bran-che fleu-ri - e c'est". The second system (measures 52-56) continues the lyrics: "un bien doux plai - sir! De rê-ver a sa mi - e, de rê-ver à loi -". The third system (measures 57-60) concludes with: "sir! Ou dit à la fau-vet - te le nom de".

T1
bois! al-lons au bois! Sous la bran-che fleu-ri - e c'est

T2
bois! al-lons au bois! Sous la bran - che

B1
bois! al-lons au bois! Sous la bran - che

B2
bois! al-lons au bois! Sous la bran - che

T1
un bien doux plai - sir! De rê-ver a sa mi - e, de rê-ver à loi -

T2
c'est un doux plai - sire! De rê-ver, de rê-ver à loi -

B1
c'est un doux plai - sir! De rê-ver, de rê-ver à loi -

B2
c'est un plai - sir! De rê-ver, de rê-ver à loi -

T1
sir! Ou dit à la fau-vet - te le nom de

T2
sir! Ou dit à l'oi - deau le nom de ses

B1
sir! Ou dit à la fau-vette ou dit le nom de ses a - mours et l'é-cho, l'é-cho le re - pè - te

B2
sire! Ou dit à l'oi - seau le doux nom de

Figure 4. Jules Massenet, *Vilanelle*, 1872, mm. 45–60.
IMSLP, Public Domain.



Moines et Forbans

A third chorus by Massenet associated with the Orphéon tradition is *Moines et Forbans*. The work's title page indicates that it was composed for use as a competition piece for Orphéon groups at the "superior division" at the competition in Lyon on May 20, 1877. This chorus also became popular and was still being used as a competition piece as late as 1897, according to the review from *La Nouvelle France Chorale*.²⁴

Moines et Forbans (Monks and Pirates) is a large-scale dramatic work that makes various technical demands upon the performers and contains effective elements that enhance the drama. Composed in a large binary form, the A section is subdivided into three subsections (Table 3 on the next page). The first, in a rocking 12/8, sets the stage of evening on the water near the monastery as the Angelus bells are ringing and prayers are being said over the "blue ocean." The Gregorian chant melody of the "Pater noster" is heard quoted by the

first tenors like a priest intoning the prayer, while the other voices comment on the rising of the pious chant (Figure 5 on page 17).

The following subsection is a French paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer in E^b major in a simple homorhythmic chorale-like setting. As this section comes to a soft, plaintive conclusion, a few measures of transition prepare the listener for the "hellish refrain" coming from the sea, which responds to the prayer just sung "to the God of Light."

The contrasting large B section ensues, in which a ship of pirates on the ocean proclaim, "War on the monks, war on the nuns!" as they prepare to pillage and attack. With daggers in hand, the pirates are ready to disembark and sack the convent and monastery. Massenet uses both homophonic declamation as the pirates shout as well as points of imitation as they cry, "Forward, forward, pillage!" This section builds to a feverish climax in the coda, rivaling of some of Massenet's

Table 2. *Vilanelle* Translation and Musical Format

Form	Text	Key Area	Meter	Tempo	Measures
A	The bird chirps in the wood; we hear joyful voices, let's go to the woods! The oak is growing, let's go to the woods. We hear voices there. Let's go to the woods! [with repetitions]	G major	6/8	<i>très léger et quasi un scherzo</i>	49
B	Under the flowering branches, it's a very sweet pleasure to dream of one's sweetheart, to dream of leisure, or to tell the warbler the name of one's love, and the echo repeats it until the last fine days. Let's go to the woods!	C major that modulates back to G	3/4	<i>Andantino simple et tranquille</i>	16
A'	The bird chirps in the wood; we hear joyful voices, let's go to the woods! The oak is growing, let's go to the woods. We hear voices there. Let's go to the woods!	G major	6/8	Tempo I° <i>Meme mouvement en admettant que la croche de la mesure précédente</i>	33

Jules Massenet and the Orphéon Tradition

Table 3. *Moines et Forbans* Translation and Musical Format

Section	Text	Key Areas	Meter	Tempo	Measures
A	Night will cover the blue ocean with its veil, the coast where the golden broom grows. The Angelus rings, barely in the sky, a star shines for another hour, and everything falls asleep, yes, everything falls asleep. "Our Father who is in heaven" while the waves at the shore come to murmur their complaint or their confession of love. "Our Father who is in heaven," from the walls of a canopy rises this pious chant that we love to say every day.	B ^b major	12/8	<i>Andante sostenuto</i>	1-23
	May your holy name, Great God, Our Father, always be blessed, always be sung. Grant bread to our misery! May it be done according to your will, O God, Our Father, in heaven as on earth. Pour out the treasures of your indulgence, merciful God, upon us who offend you. We will forgive those who offend us. Good God, save us when we groan, and all evil yields to your power.	E ^b major	2/4	<i>Andante religioso</i>	24-65
	To this prayer to the God of Light, this hellish refrain responds on the sea.	Modulates to G major	4/4	<i>Allegro moderato</i>	66-69
B	War on the monks, war on the nuns! From the convent onto the deck, let's carry the large tons! From the convent, let's sack it! War on the monks, war on the nuns! At midnight, our crew, dagger in hand, will disembark; at midnight everyone will say, "Forward, pirates! Forward! Pillage! War on the monks, war on the	G major	2/4	<i>Allegro brillante</i>	70-131
	nuns! Nothing is as joyful as a voyage, which begins the cry: Pillage! War on the monks, war on the nuns! Forward pirates! Forward! Pillage! From the convent, let's sack it! War on the monks, war on the nuns! From the convent, let's sack it! Pillage! Pillage! Forward! Forward, pirates!			<i>Très accentué</i>	132-152

own opera choruses (Figure 6 on the next page). Unlike some of the composer's choruses for the Orphéon societies, this work contains a complete narrative rather than a poetic text. The musical style and dramatic content of this chorus remind the listener of opera choruses typical of the French Romantic period. See Table 3 for a translation and description of the music form.

It could be argued that the text of *Moines et Forbans* promotes, albeit in a surreptitious fashion, the anti-clerical position of republican ideals of the French Third Republic (1870–1940). During the time of the composition of this piece for the competition in Lyon, Georges Clemenceau (1841–1929) announced that he was running for office, and his platform included many secular liberties such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly. He also desired to expel the Jesuits and establish free, secular, and compulsory primary education, the final point being the *coup de grâce* of the republican idea of the separation of Church and state.²⁵ So, this chorus composed for an Orphéon competition appears to contain some undercurrents of anti-clericism and contributes to the tensions between the rising tide of republicanism promoted by progressives and the conservative political beliefs of the Catholic Church.

Conclusion

Massenet maintained a relationship with the Orphéon tradition to varying degrees throughout his entire career. According to the most recently published works list of the composer provided by Jean-Christophe Branger, Massenet composed works for tenor/bass beginning in 1866, and the last one he composed was in 1912, the year of his death (Table 4 on page 19).²⁶

Many of these compositions were created as competition pieces for Orphéon groups, while others became favorites of such ensembles. For example, *La caravane perdue* appeared regularly in concerts of Orphéon societies between 1885 and 1898, and it is mentioned frequently in one of the Orphéon journals, *La Nouvelle France Chorale*.²⁷ This work seems to be one of the more popular compositions, no doubt due to the musical exoticism employed by Massenet, which was very much in vogue during this time. The chorus *Le Sylphe* was dedicated to Massenet's longtime friend, music critic Julien Torchet (see Figure 7 on page 20), and it was performed as a competition piece for the "division d'excellence" in Lyon.²⁸ Another such work, *Amour!*, was composed in 1880 for the "Concours institutionnel de Romans et Bourg-de-Péage" (Figure 8 on page 21).

In July 1912, Massenet composed his final chorus, *Morte à Néron*. At the conclusion of the manuscript, he

A Même mouvement

15 **f**

T1 PA - TER NOS - TER QUI ES IN CÆ - LIS

T2 **mf** Tan - dis que le flot à la

B1 **mf** Tan - dis que le flot à la

B2

Figure 5. Jules Massenet, *Moines et Forbans*, 1877, mm. 15–17.
IMSLP, Public Domain.

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111 *f*

T1 Guerre aux moi- nes! Rien n'est gai _____ comme un voy - a - ge Qui com -

T2 mi - nuit! _____ Guerre aux moi- nes!

B1 _____ comme un voy - a - ge Qui com- mence au cri: Pil - la - ge! Pil - la -

B2 *f* Guerre aux non - nes! à

117 *M* *ff*

T1 mence au cri: Pi - la - ge! Pi - la - ge! En a - vant for- bans!

T2 *f* Rien n'est gai _____ comme un voy - a - ge! En a - vant for- bans! *ff*

B1 ge! Cha- cun di - ra: à mi - nuit. _____ En a - vant for- bans! *ff*

B2 mi - nuit, cha- cun di - ra: _____ En a - vant for- bans! En a -

124 *a tempo*

T1 En a - vant! Pil - la - ge! Guerre aux moi- nes! Guerre aux non - nes!

T2 En a - vant! _____ Pil - la - ge! Guerre aux moi- nes! Guerre aux non - nes!

B1 En a - vant! _____ Pil - la - ge! Guerre aux moi- nes! Guerre aux non - nes!

B2 vant! _____ Pil - la - ge! Guerre aux moi- nes! Guerre aux non - nes!

Figure 6. Jules Massenet, *Moines et Forbans*, 1877, mm. 111–131.
IMSLP, Public Domain.



Table 4. List of Music for Tenor/Bass by Massenet

Title	Date	Poet	Publisher
<i>Alleluia</i> (for TTBB and another version for SSTB)	1866	Gustave Chouquet	Girod
<i>Le Moulin</i>	1866 (?)	Gustave Chouquet	Girod
<i>Hymne à la paix</i> (the second version is for TTBB voices)	1867 (?)	Gustave Chouquet	MS: F-Pan, F12 3098
<i>Villanelle</i>	1872	Jules Ruelle	L'Orphéon
<i>La caravane perdue</i>	1876 (?)	Gustave Bazin	Georges Hartmann
<i>Moines et forbans</i>	1877	Gustave Chouquet	Georges Hartmann
<i>Le Sylphe</i>	1879	Émile Bernier	Georges Hartmann
<i>Amour!</i>	1880	Paul Millet	Georges Hartmann
<i>1812</i>	1886	Émile Bernier	Georges Hartmann
<i>Donnons</i>	1889/90	Georges Boyer	Georges Hartmann
<i>Chant de concorde</i>	1893	Simon Salmona	Henri Heugel
<i>Alerte!</i>	1898 (?)	Joseph Maissiat	Henri Heugel
<i>Morte à Néron</i>	1912	Maurice Galerne	Henri Heugel

Jules Massenet and the Orphéon Tradition

wrote “cruelle chaleur” [cruel heat]. This work, according to Jean-Christophe Branger, “is perhaps his last fully completed piece.”²⁹ Massenet died on August 13, 1912.

These works for tenor/bass voices born from the longstanding Orphéon tradition, as well as other choruses for mixed voices, demonstrate Massenet’s unique creativity as a composer. His ability to capture the image and drama of a given text is heard not only in his large-scale works for the stage but also in these smaller

unaccompanied works, where he has only voices to rely on. Massenet was a composer who was able to take simple elements and create something dramatic and emotional, and his writing always “displays a true mixture of training and talent.”³⁰ His choral works represent music from a rather lost tradition, but they remain as vibrant, interesting, and rewarding now as they were when they were composed. As his great rival, Camille Saint-Saëns, remarked upon the composer’s death, “Many have imitated Massenet; he imitated no one.”³¹ C

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the piece "Le Sylphe" by Jules Massenet. The score is written on aged, yellowed paper and includes both vocal and piano parts. At the top left, there is a dedication: "à mon ami Julien Tordet". The title "Le Sylphe" is written in the center, with the subtitle "Chœur pour la voix d'homme" below it. To the right, it says "poésie de J. Bernier" and "musique de J. Massenet". The tempo and mood are indicated as "Allegro Scherzando" with a time signature of 12/6. The score is divided into measures, with some measures numbered in blue ink (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19). The vocal lines are written for a male voice (tenor or bass), and the piano accompaniment is for a piano. The lyrics are in French and include phrases like "Sur ton aile arden", "Pars, sylphe amoureux", "Beau sylphe léger, fais moi voyager", and "Sylphe a-moureux!". There are some red ink markings and stamps at the bottom of the page, including a circular stamp that says "BIBLIOTHEQUE" and a rectangular stamp that says "G.H. 11/12".

Figure 7. Jules Massenet, *Le sylphe*, 1879, mm. 1–7. IMSLP, Public Domain.

(Entrée pour le Concours International de Roumans et Bourg-de-Péage -)
8-9 août 1880.

Amour !...

pièces de Paul Milliet. — Josephes pour la voix de femmes.

Andantino Cantabile — (60 = 1) —

Reve ou divin mys — te — re, l'amour dans son effort, Nous ar —
Reve ou mys — ti — re, l'amour dans son effort.
Reve ou divin mysti — re, l'amour dans son effort, Nous ar —
Reve ou mysti — re, l'amour dans son effort, Nous ar —

mes: — — —

zache à la terre avec les ai — les d'or... Coeurs joyeux...
Nous arrache à la terre à vue les ai — les d'or... Coeurs joyeux
zache à la terre à vue les ai — les d'or... les ailes d'or...
— zache à la terre à vue les ai — les d'or... Coeurs joyeux

ou moro — les, Vous aimerez un jour: L'é — ti — saine les
dieu: Vous aimerez un jour: L'é — ti — saine les
Cœurs moro — les, Vous aimerez un jour: L'é — ti — saine les
dieu: Vous aimerez un jour: L'é — ti — saine les

6. H. 11/2 9/16

[Riv 811]

Figure 8. Jules Massenet, *Amour!*, 1880, mm. 1–4. IMSLP, Public Domain.

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NOTES

- ¹ Demar Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle of His Life and Times* (Ama-deus Press, 1997), 31–32.
- ² Jean-Christophe Branger, *Jules Massenet une vie au service du théâtre* (Paris: Fayard, 2024), 996.
- ³ Branger, *Jules Massenet*, 994–95.
- ⁴ Clair Rowden, “Choral Music and Music-Making in France,” in *Nineteenth-Century Choral Music*, ed. Donna M. Di Grazia, (Routledge, 2013), 207.
- ⁵ Rowden, “Choral Music and Music-Making in France.”
- ⁶ Rowden, “Choral Music and Music-Making in France.”
- ⁷ Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (University of California Press, 2009), 197.
- ⁸ Jane Fulcher, “The Orphéon Societies: ‘Music for the Workers’ in Second Empire France,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 10, no. 1 (June 1979): 48.
- ⁹ These periodicals and others can be found in the Bibliothèque nationale de France.
- ¹⁰ Fulcher, “The Orphéon Societies,” 47.
- ¹¹ Fulcher, “The Orphéon Societies,” 52.
- ¹² Quoted in Fulcher, “The Orphéon Societies,” 53.
- ¹³ Fulcher, “The Orphéon Societies,” 56.
- ¹⁴ Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 84–90.
- ¹⁵ Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 304–07.
- ¹⁶ Branger, *Jules Massenet*, 102.
- ¹⁷ Branger, *Jules Massenet*, 102.
- ¹⁸ Branger states that Massenet only cultivates this type of music until the 1880s, but the list of works Branger himself supplies suggests that Massenet continues composing works for TTBB voices and other vocal arrangements used by Orphéon societies well into the 1890s and even one such composition, *Mort à Néron*, in 1912, the year of his death.
- ¹⁹ The translations of the texts are by the author unless otherwise stated.
- ²⁰ “Paris et Départements,” *Le Ménestrel* (February 16, 1868): 93. Branger, *Jules Massenet*, mentions the chorus *En Avant* in his list of Massenet’s works in his most recent and comprehensive study on the composer. However, there is no mention of *C’est Dieu. En Avant* he dates as being composed in “1867?” and he posits that presently it is lost.
- ²¹ There is some possible *double entendre* in the text, which reads, “Let’s go to the woods...the oak is growing, let’s go to the woods” [*allons au bois!...Le chêne pousse allons au bois*], because it is there, in the woods, that the singer dreams of his sweetheart and tells the warbler the name of his lover.
- ²² Anon., “Concours de Composition Musicale ouvert par la Direction de l’Exposition d’Économie Domestique,” *Le Ménestrel* (August 18, 1872): 340.
- ²³ Anon., “Fêtes et concerts,” *La Nouvelle France Chorale* (February 16, 1898): 1.
- ²⁴ Anon., “Concours d’Éxecution: sociétés chorales,” *La Nouvelle France Chorale* (June 16, 1897): 1.
- ²⁵ Mary McAuliffe, *Dawn of the Belle Époque* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2011): 64.
- ²⁶ Branger, *Jules Massenet*, 994.
- ²⁷ This is but a few of the issues in which performances of this work were reported. J. Monestier, “Concours d’exécution au Grand Théâtre” (July 1, 1885): n. p.; Anon., “Appéciation du Jury, Cercle Choral de Chambéry” (September 1, 1893): 1; Anon., “Concert: Le Mans concert Populaire de la Société Chorale” (Nov. 16, 1894): n. p.; Anon., “Fêtes et concerts” (February 16, 1898). According to WorldCat, the only copy of this chorus, *La caravane perdue*, is found at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.
- ²⁸ Anon., “Concours d’exécution division d’excellence (Lyon), *La Nouvelle France Chorale* (September 1, 1881): n.p.
- ²⁹ Branger, *Jules Massenet*, 951.
- ³⁰ Hervé Oléon and Mary Dibbern, *Massenet: Catalogue Général des Oeuvres* (Pendragon Press, 2016): xxvii.
- ³¹ Camille Saint-Saëns, “Jules Massenet,” *L’Écho de Paris* (October 13, 1912): 1.



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REVISITING PIERRE VILLETTE: *AN EXPLORATION OF THREE SELECTED MOTETS*

Sean Michael Burton

The year 2026 marks the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of French composer Pierre Villette (1926–1998). The unaccompanied choral music of Villette represents a mature synthesis of conservative compositional techniques and twentieth-century harmonic innovations, including the influence of jazz on composers working in Paris during the immediate aftermath of World War II. His relatively conservative compositional style furthers a lineage through the music of Gabriel Fauré, Claude Debussy, Francis Poulenc, Maurice Duruflé, and Olivier Messiaen. Though a classmate of Pierre Boulez at the Paris Conservatory in the 1940s, Villette engaged in an alternate approach to composition, avoiding the dominant French modernism of the mid-twentieth century. Instead, Villette combined retrospective influences ranging from Gregorian chant—similar to his teacher, Duruflé—to the provocative harmonies of Poulenc and Messiaen.¹ The resulting sound image runs the gamut from ethereal to feral.

Villette kept only a part-time career as a composer, in part due to health problems and his primary occupation as an academic administrator, first as head of the Besançon Conservatory (1957–67) and later as director of the Darius Milhaud Conservatory in Aix-en-Provence (1967–87).² His output of eighty-one compositions includes small-scale pieces for orchestra, chamber music, and choral works.

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Though not particularly well known in the United States, nor often performed in his native France, Villette's choral music enjoys regular performance throughout Germany, Japan, and in the United Kingdom.³ In addition, there are a variety of commercial recordings available by British choirs. Beauty and accessibility unite in the choral music of Pierre Villette, making his motets relevant to myriad ensembles and a broad audience. This article highlights Pierre Villette's personal attributes and compositional style while exploring three of the composer's fifteen unaccompanied motets.

Biography

Born into a musical family on February 7, 1926, Pierre Marie Charles Villette received his primary artistic influence during his formative years from his father, Henri Villette.⁴ A skilled amateur musician, Henri played piano, violin, organ, and viola, experimented with composition, and conducted a civic orchestra of some two hundred musicians while operating a wood-working business.

The family resided in the city of Duclair, Seine-Maritime, near Rouen. From the age of six, Pierre sang in the choir of Rouen's Saint Evode Cathedral, where he learned the organ from Jules Lambert and sang plainchant as well as a variety of choral music by major composers including Palestrina, Mozart, Beethoven, and Franck.

During his teenage years, Villette followed the model of significant French composers from previous generations. He devoted himself seriously to the organ and worked as the organist of two small churches, Saint Thérèse de Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray and Saint Paul de Rouen.⁵ By the age of fifteen, after approximately one year of commuting weekly to Paris for lessons in organ and harmony with Maurice Duruflé, Villette gained successful entrance into the Paris Conservatory.⁶

Villette's education at the conservatory began in 1941. There he entered the composition class of Jean Gallon (1878–1959), the teacher of luminaries such as Messiaen, Duruflé, and Dutilleux, the latter whose music Villette admired more than all of his contem-



Photo courtesy of Josette Villette.

poraries.⁷ Regrettably, the Nazi occupation of Paris interrupted his studies, and the young composer left France's capital city for *service agricole obligatoire* (compulsory agricultural service) on his grandmother's farm in Normandy.⁸ Following the 1944 liberation of Paris, he returned to the conservatory and continued his study of composition with Henri Büsser (1872–1973).

During the early 1940s, Villette attended several live performances of The Glenn Miller Orchestra. According to his wife, Josette, these experiences hearing live jazz profoundly impacted the young composer and strongly influenced Villette's compositional style.⁹ By 1948, Villette's studies were suspended again. His father's sudden passing forced Pierre to return home and manage the family business. The strain of dealing with

his father's affairs took a significant toll on his health, and he endured seven operations, culminating with the removal of a lung. Despite hardships of health, Villette's creativity persevered, and he won the second Grand Prix de Rome in 1949 for his cantata *La Résurrection de Lazare*.

During the early 1950s, Villette spent long periods recuperating in the Alps but still continued to compose, earning the Prix Georges Bizet in 1954. In the same year, while working as a church organist/choirmaster in Plateau d'Assy, he met his future wife, Josette; the two were married in 1956. In 1957, Villette's career in academic administration began in Besançon.

Throughout a distinguished thirty-year career as head of the Besançon Conservatory and director of the Darius Milhaud Conservatory in Aix-en-Provence, Villette established himself as a fair but strict administrator¹⁰ as well as a passionate advocate for music education.¹¹ In 1987, Pierre Villette retired from academic life, devoting himself solely to the composer's craft—in his own words, “à la gloire du Seigneur” (to the glory of God).¹²

Donald Hunt, the first choral conductor to champion Villette's works in England during his tenure as organist and master of the choristers at Worcester Cathedral and close friend of the Villette family, eloquently describes the composer's final years:

After his retirement, Villette continued to live in Aix-en-Provence, patiently cared for by his devoted wife as his health deteriorated. He continued to compose, but the works were now almost all on a smaller scale, mostly devoted to instrumental offerings, especially for the piano. But inevitably there were more works for the church, as this was always a high priority for him; throughout his life he had a strong faith, and he gained so much inspiration from the language of the traditional Catholic liturgy, hence an almost continuous supply of motets, many of which he would not have heard sung in his lifetime.¹³

Pierre Villette passed away on March 6, 1998. Fondly remembered by his family and friends as a devout

Catholic, he is no less memorable for his kindness and generosity to students, witty sense of humor, and artistic sensitivity, the characteristic which most inspires this study.¹⁷

Overview of the Motets

Villette's unaccompanied motets fall into three periods of composition. The early period, 1944–60, was marked by seven works for mixed chorus (Table 1 on the next page). The second period, 1983–91, is where we find Villette's most extended works: *Attende, Domine* (1983), *Inviolata* (1991), and the 1983 *O magnum mysterium*, a less complicated motet in comparison to the other two. The late years, 1992–95, function primarily as a return to simplicity. Villette produced four works for mixed chorus: *O quam amabilis es*; *Notre Père d'Aix*; *Jesu, dulcis Memoria*; and *Panis angelicus*. The only exception to this more restrained compositional style is the composer's lone contribution to the treble choir literature, an intricate setting of *O quam suavis est* (1993).

Ave verum, Op. 3

Following the example of such esteemed French composers as Gounod, Franck, Fauré, and Saint-Saëns, Villette completed his setting of *Ave verum* on April 9, 1944, at the age of eighteen. Villette scored *Ave verum* for unaccompanied mixed chorus, dedicating it to his cousin, Canon Roland Delestre.¹⁵

Villette cast *Ave verum* in five sections, congruent with the structure of the original Latin text, a short Communion hymn whose authorship is thought to be by either Pope Innocent III or Pope Innocent IV.¹⁶

The text of *Ave verum Corpus* commemorates Christ's redemptive Sacrifice, and especially focuses on the great symbol of Baptism: the pouring forth of water from his pierced side.¹⁷

Two textual omissions in Villette's *Ave verum* warrant exploration. He avoids setting the words “O Jesu pie” and “miserere mei, Amen,” instead repeating the words “O Jesu dulcis” twice (first in the soprano and alto voices, then in the tenor and bass voices) and

Table 1. Pierre Villette's Unaccompanied Choral Works
Pierre Villette. *Catalogue des Oeuvres de Pierre Villette*. Unpublished Manuscript, 1995.

Title	Opus	Year	Publisher
<i>Ave verum</i>	3	1944	Heugel/Alphonse Leduc/ Wise Music
<i>Salve Regina</i>	5	1944	Heugel/Alphonse Leduc/ Wise Music
<i>O Salutaris hostia</i>	21	1954	Heugel/Alphonse Leduc/ Wise Music
<i>Hymne à la Vierge</i>	24	1955	Éditions Durand/ Universal Music Publishing Group
<i>O Sacrum convivium</i>	27	1959	Heugel/Alphonse Leduc/ Wise Music
<i>Strophes Polyphoniques pour le Veni Creator</i>	28	1959	Éditions À Cœur Joie
<i>Adoro te</i>	31	1960	Éditions Durand/ Universal Music Publishing Group
<i>Attende, Domine</i>	45	1983	United Music Publishers
<i>O magnum mysterium</i>	53	1983	Éditions Durand/ Universal Music Publishing Group
<i>Inviolata</i>	66	1991	United Music Publishers
<i>O quam amabilis es</i>	71	1992	United Music Publishers
<i>Notre Père d'Aix</i>	75	1992	Édition Philippe Caillard
<i>O quam suavis est</i>	76	1993	Éditions À Cœur Joie
<i>Jesu, dulcis Memoria</i>	78	1994	United Music Publishers
<i>Panis angelicus</i>	80	1995	United Music Publishers

moves forward with an outburst on the text “O Jesu fili Mariae” before concluding the motet with the text “Tu nobis miserere.”

The decision to repeat “O Jesu dulcis” in hushed tones without setting the words “O Jesu pie,” and the insertion of the text “Tu nobis miserere” (you have mercy upon us) instead of “miserere mei, Amen” (have mercy upon me, so be it) may function as a manifestation of the composer’s personal faith. With this alteration of text, perhaps Villette implores God to make a spiritual presence known during a period of world conflict.

Mediant harmonic relationships dominate Villette’s tonal aesthetic, although the presence of pervasive unresolved dissonance throughout *Ave verum* resists conventional analysis solely with Roman numerals. Nonetheless, Villette clearly delineates the motet’s five-part structure with fermatas at each major cadence point, and the composer’s avoidance of parallel fifths concurs with established conventions of common practice voice leading.¹⁸

Christopher Hyde cites jazz as a speculative but significant harmonic feature of Villette’s compositional style,¹⁹ an assertion confirmed by Villette’s widow, Josette, and daughter, Anne. A minor example of parallel fifths concurs with the presence of a thirteenth chord in second inversion found in measures 37 and 38 of *Ave verum* (Figure 1 on the next page).²⁰

A final note concerning the harmonic attributes of *Ave verum* concerns Villette’s release of tension in the last three measures, concluding the work on an enhanced yet unresolved chord (D major with an added sixth). This manner of conclusion became a trademark for Villette’s *a cappella* choral music, as evidenced in Table 2.²¹

Hymne à la Vierge, Op. 24

According to Villette’s handwritten *Catalogue des Oeuvres de Pierre Villette*, the composer completed what is likely his most

performed and certainly most recorded work on April 3, 1955, dedicating *Hymne à la Vierge* to “Chanoine DEVÈMY.”²² However, the year of composition cited in both the 1967 published edition by Éditions Durand and the notes to the 1976 recording with the Worcester Cathedral Choir is 1954.²³ To confuse matters further, Donald Hunt and Fiona Clampin cite Josette Villette as the dedicatee in their respective publications on Pierre Villette.²⁴ The cover page of the sole manuscript source, a facsimile, cites 1955 as the year of composition, and there is no visible dedication on the score.

Despite its unclear genesis, the popularity of Villette’s

Table 2. Enhanced and/or Unresolved Conclusions in Villette’s Unaccompanied Choral Works

Work	Last Chord
<i>Ave verum</i>	I +6
<i>O Salutaris hostia</i>	I 9 +6
<i>Hymne à la Vierge</i>	I (but with +4 → 5 appoggiatura)
<i>O Sacrum convivium</i>	I -7 -3 -5
<i>O magnum mysterium</i>	I+6
<i>Inviolata</i>	I +11
<i>O quam amabilis es</i>	I +7 9
<i>Notre Père d’Aix</i>	I 9
<i>O quam suavis est</i>	I +7 9 +11
<i>Panis angelicus</i>	I +7 9

The image displays a handwritten musical score for the motet *Ave verum*. The score is written on four staves, with lyrics in French. The first system includes the lyrics "in ex a mi ne . pp { o Je sus dul cis". The second system includes "o Je sus fi li Mari ae Tu no bis mi se re". The third system includes "o Je sus fi li Mari ae Tu no bis mi se re". The fourth system includes "o Je sus fi li Mari ae Tu no bis mi se re". The score is signed "Pierre Villette" and dated "9 Avril 1944".

Figure 1. Last page of *Ave verum* manuscript facsimile.

Hymne à la Vierge is well documented. The piece has been performed throughout the world and professionally recorded by several outstanding ensembles, including the Cambridge Singers, Choeur de Chambre de Rouen, Choir of New College Oxford, Holst Singers, Rodolfus Choir, Westminster Cathedral Choir, and Worcester Cathedral Choir.

Tonally centered in F major, Villette's setting of Roland Bouh  ret's French poem is scored for unaccompanied four-part mixed chorus with choral division of eight parts (SSAATTBB) and optional soprano soloist. While the harmonic language of *Hymne    la Vierge* bears similarity to *Ave verum*, *Salve Regina*, and *O Salutaris hostia* (in terms of mediant harmonic relationships and chromatic embellishments), it is distinct from the three earlier compositions because of its tuneful melody, predominantly homophonic texture, strophic structure, and overall simplicity. These compositional decisions elegantly and concisely declaim Bouh  ret's cosmic prose (in translation²⁵):

   toute belle Vierge Marie,
Votre   me trouve en Dieu
le parfait amour.
Il vous rev  t du manteau
de la Grace
comme une fianc  e
Par  e de ses joyaux.

O beautiful Virgin Mary,
in God your soul discovers
perfect love.
It cloaks you with the mantle
of Grace
like a betrothed
adorned with her jewels.

*All  luia, all  luia. Je vais chanter ta louange, Seigneur
Car tu as pris soin de moi,
Car tu m'as envelopp  e du voile de l'innocence,
Car tu m'as faite avant le jour,
Car tu m'as fait pr  c  der le jaillissement des sources.*

*Alleluia, alleluia. I will sing your praise, Lord,
for you have looked after me,
for you have covered me with the veil of innocence,
for you have made me before the day,
for you have made me go before the gushing of fountains.*

Vous   tes n  e avant les collines
   sagesse de Dieu,
porte du Salut

You were born before the hills,
O wisdom of God,
the way to salvation.

Heureux celui qui marche
dans vos traces
Qui appr  te son c  ur    la voix
de vos conseils.

Happy is he who walks in your
footsteps,
who prepares his heart to listen
to your advice.

Avant les astres vous   tiez pr  sente
M  re du Cr  ateur au profond
du ciel.
Quand Dieu fixait les limites du monde
Vous partagiez son c  ur   tant    l'oeuvre
avec lui.

You were present before the stars,
Mother of the Creator, in the very
depths of heaven.
Quand Dieu fixait les limites du monde
When God was creating the world,
working with Him you shared
His heart.

In his setting of the second verse, Villette creates a notable contrast of texture by indicating the text may be sung by a soprano soloist while the chorus accompanies with quiet humming voices or on the vowel "o."²⁶ Cre-

ating an atmosphere of otherworldliness, this gesture may be intended to evoke an image of humankind's earthly journey (represented by the soprano soloist) toward divine salvation (represented by an angelic humming chorus).

In *Hymne à la Vierge*, Villette firmly establishes the presence of jazz harmonies as an aspect of his compositional style, particularly in the coda (Figure 2). This facet of the composer's personal harmonic language ultimately becomes idiomatic to the majority of his unaccompanied choral works.

A closing thought concerns the enduring popularity of *Hymne à la Vierge*, the cause of which cannot be definitively identified beyond academic speculation. Besides its musical attributes, this author contends the fame of *Hymne à la Vierge* is also related to a practical matter: concert programming.

Three observations support this conclusion. First, the beautiful French language text immediately offers contrast on any program featuring unaccompanied works in Latin, English, or other languages. Second,

an appropriate and convenient partner can be found in Benjamin Britten's *A Hymn to the Virgin*, a pairing that invites comparison, engaging both performers and listeners. Lastly, the overarching theme of Marian devotion is suitable for use in a plethora of concert and liturgical events, especially to programs produced during the Christmas season. An example of the latter includes the 2006 Christmas Eve Service of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College Cambridge, where *Hymne à la Vierge* was performed, recorded, and subsequently broadcast on international networks.

Attende, Domine, Op. 45

Following the composition of *Adoro te* in 1960, Villette did not complete another piece for a *cappella* chorus for more than twenty years, until the 1983 *Attende, Domine*. While no documented explanation exists for Villette's lack of composition in a genre at which he excelled, the combination of a time-consuming career as an academic administrator and opportunities to compose instrumen-

Handwritten musical score for the Coda of *Hymne à la Vierge*. The score is written on four staves. The first staff is marked "Coda" and begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are "O tou-te bel-le" and "Vier-ge ma-ri". The second staff continues the lyrics. The third staff continues the lyrics. The fourth staff continues the lyrics. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like "p", "f", "mf", and "pp". A handwritten note at the bottom reads: "Nota - La seconde strophe peut être chantée par un soprano solo le chœur s'accompagnant à touches fermées ou sur la voyelle \"e\" /pp".

Figure 2. Coda from *Hymne à la Vierge* manuscript facsimile.

tal music likely took precedence over writing in a genre in which he was already established. In the intervening decades between *Adoro te* and *Attende, Domine*, Villette completed thirteen compositions, devoting himself primarily to instrumental music. In these years, he also composed two large-scale choral-orchestral works commissioned by the French government, the 1970 *Missa da pacem* and the 1981 *Messe en français*.

The genesis of *Attende, Domine* lies in Villette's *Hymne à la Vierge*, accidentally discovered by Donald Hunt in 1975.²⁷ As previously mentioned, Hunt, then organist and master of the choristers at Worcester Cathedral, went on to champion the composer's music, recording several Villette motets with the Worcester Cathedral Choir in the mid-1970s.²⁸ Villette encountered Hunt's recordings and sent a letter of appreciation on December 13, 1978, which began a "close friendship and fruitful musical relationship" between the two men.²⁹

On February 7, 1983, Villette finished the final version of *Attende, Domine*, an extensive six-minute motet scored for unaccompanied SSATBB chorus, dedicating it to Donald Hunt, a commission by the Friends of Worcester Cathedral.³⁰ Manuscript analysis reveals Villette's struggle in returning to the genre of the unaccompanied motet. He completed the first version of *Attende, Domine* on February 7, 1982 (also cited as the date of completion in Villette's 1995 *Catalogue des Oeuvres*). However, Villette extensively revised the motet, dating the last page of the final version February 7, 1983, and writing 1983 on the cover page.

With the exception of his 1959 setting of *O Sacrum convivium*, Villette scored all of his unaccompanied choral works for SATB chorus, some with divisi, prior to *Attende, Domine*. Villette's utilization of texture in *Attende, Domine* foreshadows his most extended unaccompanied choral work, the 1991 *Inviolata*, serving to paint the text with expressive vocal registration in addition to mediant harmonic motion and chromatic embellishment as observed in the composer's earlier motets for unaccompanied chorus.

The motet's G minor opening, starkly cast in octave unison whole tones, imbues the penitential text with an aura of stark pathos (Figure 3 on the next page). Villette quotes this motive twelve times throughout the motet,³¹ functioning as a juxtaposition of prayerful re-

pentance and unabashed human expression.

In the second phrase, Villette exploits the full SSATBB texture, but in hushed tones and close harmonies, uttering the repentant text. While Villette remains somewhat faithful to the overall structure of the text, he adjusts the word order of the second stanza, beginning with "omnium Redemptor," then setting "Ad te Rex summe." He also avoids the phrase "quia peccavimus tibi," preferring instead multiple repetitions of "Attende, Domine, et miserere" with the aforementioned whole-tone motive, functioning as a structural unifier throughout the motet as it appears in the text.

The full translated text of *Attende, Domine* follows:³²

Attende, Domine, et miserere quia peccavimus tibi.	Hear us, O Lord, and have mercy, for we have sinned against Thee.
Ad te Rex summe, omnium Redemptor, oculos nostros sublevamus flentes: exaudi, Christe, supplicatum preces.	To Thee, highest King, Redeemer of all, do we lift up our eyes in weeping hear, O Christ, the prayers of your servants.
Attende, Domine, et miserere quia peccavimus tibi.	Hear us, O Lord, and have mercy, for we have sinned against Thee.
Dextera Patris lapis angularis, via salutis, Janua caelestis, ablue nostri maculas delicti.	Right hand of the Father, corner-stone, way of salvation, gate of heaven, wash away our stains of sin.
Attende, Domine, et miserere quia peccavimus tibi.	Hear us, O Lord, and have mercy, for we have sinned against Thee.
Amen.	Amen.

REVISITING PIERRE VILLETTE: AN EXPLORATION OF THREE SELECTED MOTETS

Villette paints the words “via salutis” (way of salvation) in measures 34–37 with simultaneous homophonic and imitative settings in the men’s, then women’s, voice parts. With the addition of “Janua caelestis,” or “gate of heaven,” what appears to be the first climax

of the motet occurs on the downbeat of measure 39.

However, Villette repeats the words “dextera Patris,” first set in measures 30–32, with a quickly paced diminuendo. This gesture prepares the true climax of the motet in measures 41–42 on the words “lapis an-

Adagio (♩ = 56 - 58)

Soprano 1
Soprano 2
Alto
Tenor
Bass 1
Bass 2

p

At - ten - de___ Do - mi - ne___ et mi - se - re,

unis. p

At - ten - de___ Do - mi - ne___ et mi - se - re,

Adagio (♩ = 56 - 58)

Piano
(for rehearsal only)

5

S1
S2
A
T
B1
B2

pp

qui - a pec - ca - vi - mus___ Om - ni - um Re - demp - tor___

pp

qui - a pec - ca - vi - mus___ Om - ni - um Re - demp - tor___

pp

qui - a pec - ca - vi - mus___ Om - ni - um Re - demp - tor___ *p* Ad te

pp

qui - a pec - ca - vi - mus___ Om - ni - um Re - demp - tor___

Figure 3. Pierre Villette, *Attende, Domine*, mm. 1–8.

United Music Publishing, 1985.

gularis” (cornerstone). Here Villette declaims the text in block chords, constructing a literal representation of the cornerstone. Immediately following this eruption, the tutti chorus exclaims *Attende, Domine*, marked *fortissimo* by the composer. Then the opening whole tone motive recurs in muted *piano* tones as the proverbial sinners seek atonement for their outspoken transgressions.

In measure 46, Villette begins a new section with “ablue nostri maculas delicti” (wash away our sins), a deviation from the text’s structure. This digression re-emphasizes the collective plight of humankind as supplicants desiring absolution.

After beseeching mercy with several repetitions of “Attende, Domine et miserere” throughout measures 49–58, the opening motive returns in variation on the word “Amen” as the coda begins in measure 59. At this moment, Villette firmly establishes a G major tonic, resulting in what Hyde affirms as “a i – I modulation across the motet via the mediant, submediant, leading and dominant keys, all of which are taken in their non-diatonic forms.”³³ In this case, change of mode to the parallel major as a compositional decision functions to conclude *Attende, Domine* with an ethos of divine redemption, complete with angelic humming tones in the final measure.

Conclusion

An examination of Villette’s motets, including documentation of the composer’s personal attributes, discussion of text-music relationships, exploration of compositional style, and practical observations for performance clearly substantiates the relevance and merit of the composer’s compositional output. Hunt asserts:

Pierre Villette speaks with a very individual voice in his compositions; he is rarely affected by fashions, and generally makes few dramatic gestures. His music is finely crafted, revealing a tender lyricism blended with a tinge of melancholy, and, especially in his choral compositions, preserving a sense of wonder...to those of us who have made a study of his music, he is instantly recognizable through a turn of phrase or by an unpredictable succession of in-

novative progressions, yet everything he wrote is unmistakably French. He is no imitator, nor is he an experimenter; minimalism and serialism were not in his vocabulary...When the achievements and influences of French music in the twentieth century are eventually assessed it is unlikely that Pierre Villette’s name will figure prominently, but there can be little doubt that his country’s music would have been poorer without him. Those of us who have ‘discovered’ him will certainly feel that our musical lives have been greatly enriched by the experience.³⁴

Hunt’s final summation of Villette’s legacy reflects the composer’s primary professional activity in Besançon and Aix-en-Provence. Villette was educated in Paris and frequently interacted with well-known contemporary composers such as Henri Dutilleux and Witold Lutoslawski.³⁵ However, his residency outside of France’s musical epicenter resulted in a lack of appreciation for and exposure to his music. As we celebrate the Villette centenary in 2026 and studies of his music continue to emerge, the greater musical world will grow to value the significance and quality of Pierre Villette’s contributions to choral music. 

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Pierre Villette and the Twentieth-Century French Choral Tradition: An Interview with Stephen Layton

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In 2025, artists around the world marked the centennial of Pierre Boulez's birth with retrospectives and concert series devoted to the musical maverick. While these events celebrated Boulez's legacy, they also provided opportunities to reexamine his influence through a contemporary perspective. For example, *The New York Times* published two articles that provided clear-eyed assessments of Boulez's impact.¹ *Times* music critic Joshua Barone praised this musical "titan" for his contributions to twentieth-century music, while acknowledging that "his music, like that of his peers from the post-World War II generation of high modernists, like Karlheinz Stockhausen and Luigi Nono, is brilliant but out of fashion, and difficult to program."²

Pierre Villette and the 20th-Century French Choral Tradition:

Boulez's repute as Europe's musical *l'enfant-étoile* cast an imposing shadow on more traditional, conservative composers during the mid-twentieth century, particularly in France. As scholars and critics reexamined the impact of Boulez and his avant-garde contemporaries during his centenary, the contributions of lesser-known French composers were recognized, and an accurate image of twentieth-century French music emerged through this critical reassessment.

Pierre Villette (1926–1998) is one such benefactor from this reexamination. Born one year after Boulez, Villette enjoyed a prestigious musical pedigree. Both studied harmony with Olivier Messiaen at the Paris Conservatoire, but their careers diverged as Boulez quickly gained notoriety as the champion of serialism and the avant-garde. Simultaneously, Villette's compositions were considered too traditional and *passé* for post-World War II Europe. Just as 2025 saw a reexamination of Boulez and his "titanic" musical standing, 2026—Villette's centenary—offers scholars and musicians a chance to rediscover the brilliance of this forgotten composer and examine his music within the lineage of French choral music.

Given Villette's penchant for religious compositions, it should be of no surprise that his motets found favor in the English choral tradition. The celebrated English conductor Donald Hunt championed Villette's music in the 1970s, and Villette's motet *Hymne à la Vierge* frequently appears in the Choir of King's College Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. This English admiration of Villette's music is further illustrated with the Holst Singers's 2006 recording of Villette's choral music under the direction of Stephen Layton.

Layton's proclivity for Villette and the twentieth-century French choral canon stems from his training within the English Choir School tradition. During these formative years, Layton not only performed Villette's works but studied under teachers who promoted Villette's music. The following interview with Layton revisits the music of Villette and places it within a broader French lineage of choral excellence. This interview from July 16, 2025, was recorded and transcribed using the AI-powered transcription service TurboScribe and reviewed by the author for accuracy. In addition, the interview is edited for clarity and brevity.

Can you tell us about your musical beginnings? What were some of your earliest memories and influential mentors?

My earliest mentors were in Winchester Cathedral, where I was a choir boy with Martin Neary and James Lancelot. It was an amazing period in the history of British choral music in cathedrals. We're talking mid-seventies to early eighties. I came from a humble home in Derbyshire and went 150 miles to the school at Winchester Cathedral. That was quite a big change for me. And I felt, after arriving and living there, that the world had changed for me.

Another important influence was when we went on tour to the United States in 1979. It was no ordinary tour. It included the Kennedy Center and the National Cathedral in Washington, and Carnegie Hall and St. John the Divine in New York. We also did quite a few broadcasts. There was an NBC documentary about this tour, which I vaguely appear in as a little kid singing with my little glasses on.³

My other great influence was James Lancelot, who was the organist at Winchester. At the end of my time with Martin, he received a bicentennial Fulbright fellowship to the United States to study for six months, and Lancelot ran the Winchester choir. I remember he encouraged me to play J. S. Bach's *Fantasia in C minor* in the cathedral after service, and he just let me run wild on Sunday nights playing the organ to my heart's content and making a lot of noise!

Lancelot was the organ scholar at King's College Cambridge, where I ended up. That's where I first heard Villette. During the 1986 [Lessons and Carols] service at King's College Cambridge, we sang the *Hymn à la Vierge* of Villette. I think that was probably the first time it had been sung to a large audience.

At Cambridge, my influence was Stephen Cleobury. It was there that I reconnected with choral music more than I had as a boy. I discovered a wider repertoire, especially early music, as we sang plenty of Tallis, Byrd, Lassus, Gibbons, Schütz, Palestrina, and Vittoria.

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Villette's centenary offers a chance to rediscover the brilliance of this forgotten composer.

What particularities of French choral music present challenges to conductors and choirs? Are there specific aspects about the French Choral tradition that are particularly challenging for an English-speaking choir?

I think if the music is in French, that's going to be more of a challenge, obviously. Let's just look at Poulenc as our best example, because it's easier for an American or an English choir to sing Poulenc when he writes his motets in Latin—the ones for Lent or the ones for Christmas—or indeed the wider orchestral choral pieces, like the *Gloria* and *Stabat Mater*. Once we move into some of Poulenc's secular works and the poetry of Paul Éluard, we've got difficulties. It's much easier to sing in Italian and Latin for Americans and English people.

Other than that, I think it depends on what French music we're considering. If we're looking at the early Baroque, Lully, etc., there's a way of pronouncing early French just as there is with early English. Or whether we're looking at the later, contemporary French music of Poulenc, Duruflé, and Fauré. I guess that's where Villette comes in.

This is a centenary year for Pierre Villette. Your recording of Villette's motets is recognized as the gold standard for his works. When examining his compositions and comparing them to other twentieth-century French composers, they can be described stylistically as conservative. Within this lineage of French choral music, where do you think Villette fits in?

That's a very good question, and it's not a quick answer. The first thing to say regards Boulez. Villette

studied at the Paris Conservatoire between about '41 and '49, while Boulez was at the [Paris] Conservatoire between '43 and '44. Boulez was in Olivier Messiaen's composition/advanced harmony class, and Villette studied not officially with Messiaen, but with Noël Jean-Charles André. However, it seems clear that Messiaen was the overall composition guy at the time. It seems beyond any doubt that Villette and Boulez shared classes [at the Conservatoire].

Your question, though, was where does Villette stand? Well, he obviously doesn't stand so proudly as Messiaen or Boulez, for all sorts of reasons. Messiaen created his own compositional technique, and Boulez absorbed some of that and also absorbed the technique of twelve tone and Schoenberg. But I think what's interesting is that Villette still managed to do something of his own, specifically that he's writing primarily for the glory of God.

That's the similarity with Messiaen, of course, but probably not with Boulez. And Villette manages to write a variety of repertoire for choir specifically. Repertoire that is easier to sing, for sure, and a few pieces that are highly complex, such as the later *Inviolata, Attende Domine*, or *O sacrum convivium*. These are tricky pieces by any standards. Whereas some of the other motets, such as *Panis angelicus*...are quite simple. Although it's his own voice, you can still point to Messiaen, whom he admired. Where do you hear that the most in Villette's *oeuvre*? Probably in his *O sacrum convivium*, which, of course, Messiaen wrote a version of.

Villette was clearly just not interested in twelve-tone music but quite interested in Messiaen. I think you see the link with Messiaen is also strong because of his religious devotion. Toward the end of his life, Villette stated that he was writing *à la gloire de Dieu*. Of course that was Messiaen's entire existence as well.

There's Villette's *Strophes polyphoniques pour le Vénéré Créateur* that the Holst Singers recorded. This shows the strong influence of the Roman Catholic Church and chant on Villette in a way that was a million miles from Boulez's influences, which were Berg and Schoenberg and a little bit of Stravinsky. I suppose you could say Villette's influences were more from Fauré and Duruflé.

In trying to assess Villette now, I think he was one



Pierre Villette and the 20th-Century French Choral Tradition:



of those cases where he was “not a prophet in his own land.” Messiaen and Boulez were absolutely respected in their own country. Particularly Boulez, whom we know as a master composer, educator, conductor, world-traveling musical messiah.

But Villette, even to this day, is little known. A few years ago I did a whole raft of Villette pieces with Accentus, a French choir in Paris. Nobody in the organization knew about his music. Why is that? Well, I don’t know. The “prophet in his own land” sentiment could be part of this. I think there’s also another issue in the three virtuoso pieces of which I’ve mentioned earlier; I mean, look, they’re incredibly difficult!

Although I stressed that the three difficult pieces are not for the faint hearted, everything else is for everybody. It’s very approachable without sounding patronizing. It’s very tuneful. It’s easy on the ear and has some glorious Parisian harmonies, which most of us really love and enjoy.

One thing I might just say that’s quite interesting about Villette and Boulez. I met Josette Villette [Pierre’s wife] in Aix-en-Provence, where she lived. We talked about her husband and about his music. Amongst the interesting things she said was that her husband didn’t really get on very well with Pierre Boulez. Villette stated there was some encounter where he was sitting on the street at the café, and Boulez passed by and seemingly ignored him.⁴

Now, I don’t know when this was, but his widow said this with a slight sadness. I think Boulez saw Villette as a bit of an “also-ran.” Villette had that view of himself as well. Villette had gone to Besançon to be a professor. He’d not gone to Paris like Boulez. He then went to Aix-en-Provence, which is a good place to work. But again, it’s not Paris, which was the big job.

We can certainly hear the influences of Messiaen and religious mysticism in Villette’s choral works. But I also hear influences of Poulenc and Milhaud in Villette’s harmonic language: his very disjunct, yet lyrical, melodies, and with jazz stylistic traits; there are added ninths and thirteenth chords, especially at ending cadences. Can you speak more about those types of influences and how they specifically serve the text of each motet?

Oh my goodness, yes. Villette pieces are famous for never ending on a consonant chord. His most famous piece, *Hymne à la Vierge*, ends with an F major with added just about everything! And *Inviolata* ends with two harmonies. Messiaen used a lot of bitonality. It’s possible that this bitonality in Villette comes from Messiaen.

These additive harmonies—where you’ve got two harmonies in the last chord—are found throughout his works, not just in *O sacrum convivium*. This [harmonic inventiveness] probably came out of the experimental environment and ideas of *Les Six*, which included Milhaud and Poulenc. But where I think Villette didn’t go in a way that Poulenc and Milhaud went was in the comedy, the theatre, the radical changes of dynamic, and of course the sort of sheer rhythmic drive that you can find in something like *Le Bœuf sur le toit* (Milhaud) or in Poulenc’s Organ Concerto or *Gloria*. Villette is just not into that same rhythmic drive. He’s much more into the harmonies—the jazzy harmonies—for their sensuality and giving time for them to vibrate, be heard, and to enjoy the luxuriance of those harmonies. As opposed to using those harmonies for rhythmic, violent, ecstatic clashes at great tempo.

I really hear that in Villette’s *Attende, Domine* with its affinities to Poulenc’s Lenten motets. It has a very short and disjunct melodic cell at the beginning that’s repeated, yet there is that Poulenc lyricism to it. Can you speak a bit more about that?

Poulenc, as you know, is an enormous great French god of a composer. The Lenten motets are late thirties from Poulenc. *Attende, Domine* is nearly fifty years later. Without any shadow of a doubt, Villette would have known every work of Poulenc. At the beginning of *At-*

tende, Domine... Villette uses a quasi-plain song with the devil's interval between G and C[♯]. I'd say [there are the hints] of the Poulenc that you've mentioned of his motets.

The greater influence on Villette, in my view, is Debussy and Ravel with their whole-tone scales and chromaticism [which Poulenc would later use.] Let's consider the most obvious piece of Debussy, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. Villette and Debussy are inhabiting a similar sound; they're inhabiting that pre-Messiaen world of whole-tone scales of Debussy and Ravel. Boulez goes somewhere completely AWOL, toward Schoenberg. Villette looks back over this tradition, which is really Duruflé, Debussy, Ravel, and Poulenc.

Let's move on to another of Villette's motets, *O Magnum mysterium*. It is a great example of how a composer understands the theology and mystery of the nativity. It is also very similar to Poulenc's motet of the same name. Can you speak more about how Villette espouses this Catholic theology/mysticism within his works, especially this particular motet?

It's interesting in how it starts out—simply, as if it's almost a homage to the Poulenc. [The Villette motet] starts off with one voice, very simply. It's a similar tempo to Poulenc at the beginning, with the same sort of feel. But here's the difference. Somebody once said that Poulenc was Stravinsky with sugar. I would say Villette was more Fauré and Duruflé with added sugar. Poulenc's *O magnum mysterium* has an austerity about it. Yes, there's a lovely melody, but it's pretty much unrelenting four-part harmony. It's very economical; it's just three parts at the beginning before the sopranos come in, etc. And the Poulenc is much more a bass harmony, say, at the start with something floating over the top, which keeps coming back. The Poulenc is more concise.

What we hear with the Villette is that he's wearing his heart on his sleeve and just letting it all pour out. There's less discipline [than in the Poulenc]. It's much more fluid and freer in the way he's trying to get the spiritual effect out of this text.

I believe at this point, you're the only person to have recorded Villette's *Inviolata*, which is a very expansive, highly chromatic double choir motet (see Figure 1 on the next page). This piece represents Villette at his most experimental. Beyond the obvious technical challenges, were there other aspects of this motet that provided a specific challenge to you and your group?

Yes, the number of singers is quite critical to make it work. But I tell you what was really the hardest thing. Although this is music composed for choruses, it's definitely music conceived at the keyboard. You could imagine Villette playing a G major chord with a sustaining pedal, holding the G major chord in the left hand. And then the right hand, with the left-hand chord sustained with the pedal, he dabbed around with other chords. I'm pretty sure that he was trying to get these bitonal ideas together on a keyboard.

It's just simply hard to get the intonation sorted. What's happening is that the vertical is being created all the time by these piano chords. It's blisteringly difficult to sing it and to know at any given moment what your role is in the chord as a singer. In other words, when you're moving every harmony on a quaver, on an eighth, and a new vertical harmony is created. Does it just work if everybody sings the same dynamic for their whole phrase? No, it doesn't. Because sometimes you might be arriving at a G major chord with all those additives, and somebody might have an E, and somebody might have an F[♯], and somebody may have a D.

Now, where is the E? Where's the F[♯]? Where is the A? Where are they in the chord? Where's the spacing? You know, it's the oldest thing in the hills in terms of how you balance the technical perfection of any chord, whether it be in an orchestra or a choir.

So, the specific challenges of *Inviolata* are how you create these vertical harmonies where it all “zings.” And the answer is the balance of different parts. Of course, this is getting into the technical questions of everybody singing the same vowels, and the turning of the vowels, and the diphthongs, and all of that technical stuff that makes a chord zing.

Now, to talk about that in relation Poulenc, which is similar to Villette. I talk about Poulenc intonation—Poulenc tuning—how Poulenc sat at the keyboard and

Inviolata

Source: 6^e av

Largo (♩.: 48/52 av)

1^{re} sopranos
p In-vi-o-la-ta in-te gra et Cas-ta es ma-ri-a

2^e sopranos
p In-vi-o-la-ta in-te gra et Cas-ta es ma-ri-a

1^{er} altos
p In-vi-o-la-ta in-te gra et Cas-ta es ma-ri-a

2^e altos
p In-vi-o-la-ta in-te gra et Cas-ta es ma-ri-a

1^{er} tenors
p In-vi-o-la-ta in-te gra et Cas-ta es ma-ri-a

2^e tenors
p In-vi-o-la-ta in-te gra et Cas-ta es ma-ri-a

1^{er} Basses
p In-vi-o-la-ta in-te gra et Cas-ta es ma-ri-a

2^e Basses
p In-vi-o-la-ta in-te gra et Cas-ta es ma-ri-a

Deuxième Chœur (ad libitum)
p ma-ri-a, ma-ri-a

Reduction des Vix
p

pour la répétition seulement

Figure 1. *Inviolata* manuscript facsimile.



jammed these fantastic chords. Is it an equal temperament when we're doing them in Villette or Poulenc? Or is it in what I sometimes call Poulenc temperament? Which would then resonate through into Villette temperament. How, without equal temperament, do you make certain harmonies zing by doing various things to different notes? And how do those notes zing out of the context of vowels, with words...how do you tweak it [to make the vertical harmonies zing]?

I always say that Poulenc "sounds" easier than it looks on the page. When we see the score and the melody and harmony on the page, our brains "freeze" rather than just trusting the melodic line.

Yes, you're absolutely right. If you're looking at, for instance, Poulenc's *Figure humaine*, which is ferocious in its angularity, this is true. Come to think of it, in the four Lenten motets, I've done a little bit of judicious swapping of parts in some places, which we're allowed to do as conductors if we're being a bit naughty.

It's all the same notes, but you find that sometimes there could be an alto singing a baritone bit in a certain place, and just by little tweaking [of parts] you can make it slightly easier to sing. I can't remember whether I tweaked anything with Villette's pieces. One does this with great hesitation, but sometimes something keeps bugging you, and you can't get it balanced or in tune. You can slightly reinforce a part or put a few more voices on it. There are ways around it.

What are your top three French language choral works that conductors should be programming more with their choirs?

I mean, do we mention Poulenc or Duruflé? Not really. They are so well known. So, we're probably looking at Villette and Milhaud as two composers worth investigating who are not often performed. There's a rather beautiful piece, *Le deux cites*. There's also *Le Promesse de Dieu*, which Milhaud wrote in America, actually. Obviously, there's André Jolivet and Daniel Jean-Yves Lesur, but that's much more avant-garde; they're not for the faint-hearted. You need a very good choir to do that.

If you said to me, who are my favorites? It's an absolute no-brainer. To me, Poulenc is one of the greatest composers to have walked this earth. And I love virtually every note he wrote. If I had to choose a single piece of Poulenc choral music, I would choose the *Gloria*, which seems to have Poulenc absolutely in a nutshell. And the other composer is Duruflé, whose *Requiem*, for me, is unsurpassed.

You have conducted and recorded a plethora of literature. Are there any pieces that remain on your conductor bucket list?

There are so many, I don't even want to tell you what they are; but whether in this life I have a chance to conduct them, who knows? Just too many things. 

NOTES

¹ Joshua Barone, "Pierre Boulez Was a Titan of 20th-Century Music. What About Now?: Critic's Notebook," *The New York Times*, April 8, 2025; "Did a Single Generation Ruin Modern Music for Everyone Else?: Critic's Notebook," *The New York Times*, October 7, 2025.

² Barone, "Pierre Boulez."

³ "Winchester Sings"—a documentary on the Winchester Cathedral Choir Tour of the USA in 1979," posted December 19, 2024, by Winchester Cathedral, YouTube, 53 min., 25 sec., <http://youtube.com/watch?v=uLv4p6u9wJg>.

⁴ Barone provides a similar anecdote illustrating Boulez's abrasive personality. "Because Boulez was so powerful, his severity could be poison for any artist who didn't adhere to his worldview...[Esa-Pekka] Salonen recalled watching Boulez virtually end the career of a composer after hearing his work..." Barone, "Pierre Boulez."



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The Choruses of Georges Bizet

BY HUGH MACDONALD

When it comes to the nineteenth century, choirs and choruses are accustomed to singing the great German works by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Brahms, and the Verdi Requiem is familiar to most big choruses. But French music is less often sung, especially by smaller choirs; they might sing some Berlioz or some Gounod, but few choirs have any choral music of Georges Bizet (1838–1875) in their repertoires unless they still sing *Ave Maria* to a tune from *L'Arlésienne* or join in the refrains of the Habanera or the Toreador Song from *Carmen*. While a few might know Bizet's *Te deum*, his name is so irrevocably attached to *Carmen* that even such popular works as his Symphony in C and the *L'Arlésienne* suites seem to lie in its shadow.

Choral works by Bizet are sufficiently various to fit any program of mixed works, and these are now all published by Fishergate Music, some of them never published before. As in Berlioz, Gounod, and a number of French composers of the period, women's voices are deemed to be "Dessus," so that altos in modern choirs are singing the second Dessus line and occasionally sharing the tessitura of the first Dessus. It was the influence of German and English choruses that led the French to adopt the SATB lineup, a process that was evolving during Bizet's working life.

Composition students at the Paris Conservatoire were expected to prepare for a career in opera, with

the Prix de Rome the first goal for ambitious young musicians. In the examination for this prize, the preliminary test required the composition of a fugue and a chorus. This is the origin of Ravel's five early choruses, and there are similarly four Bizet choruses that came into being this way, two of them in the examination itself in the years 1856 and 1857, two from practise efforts written in class for his composition teacher, Fromental Halévy. These are all accompanied by a small orchestra.

The earliest of these is the *Valse avec chœur* (Waltz for Chorus), dated January 11, 1855, when Bizet was sixteen. He was given verses from an earlier French opera, in this case *La Nuit de Noël*, an opéra-comique by Henri Reber on a libretto by Eugène Scribe, first played at the Opéra-Comique in 1848. The words are banal jollification in praise of waltzing and dancing, but the music is a brisk tuneful waltz with two B sections in contrasting keys. Likely from the same year is another "practise" chorus, the *Chœur d'étudiants* (Students' Chorus). The text is again by Scribe, this time taken from the opera *Le Lac des fées* by Auber, played at the Opéra in 1839. The riotous text is sung only by men's voices, with two tenors and two basses given brief solos, and student high spirits are in plain view.

In 1856, Bizet sat the exam itself and set *Le Golfe de Baïa* (The Gulf of Baïa), two stanzas from an evocative

The Choruses of Georges Bizet

poem about the Bay of Naples by Alphonse de Lamartine. This is a lovely work, with a soprano solo hovering above the chorus, especially at the end where the repeated “la la la” fades into the distance (Figure 1). Bizet liked it so much that he adapted parts of it for his opera *Ivan IV* ten years later.

He passed the preliminary test that year but failed the main exam, so he again entered for the prize a year later, 1857, when the set text was *La Chanson du rouet* (*Spinning Song*), a poem by Leconte de Lisle. This catchy piece calls for a soprano soloist and the same small orchestra and mixed chorus as *Le Golfe de Baïa*, and while the singer loves her spinning-wheel, a middle section ruefully acknowledges that the wheel will one day spin thread for her shroud.

Bizet passed the preliminary round and then went on to win the Prix de Rome itself. A year later he was in Rome with the obligation to write a sacred work as proof of his industry as a young composer on the state’s dime. He decided to write a *Te Deum*, which was composed between February and May 1858, soon after his

arrival in Rome. On April 17, 1858, he told his mother that the *Te Deum* was finished but still needed to be orchestrated. “I am not sure what to think of it. Sometimes it seems good, sometimes detestable. What’s certain is that I am not cut out for religious music.”¹

The *Te Deum* was first performed in 1971. It requires a full orchestra with soprano and tenor soloists. In four movements, it has a lively soprano solo for the “Tu rex gloriae” and a “Te ergo quæsumus,” which seems to take Mozart’s *Ave verum* as a model. A broad passage at “Pleni sunt cœli” in the first movement, repeated in the last movement, will be familiar to those who know *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, composed six years later.

In 1859, while he was still in Italy, Bizet composed his longest work for chorus and orchestra with reciter and vocal soloists. This is the “ode-symphony” *Vasco de Gama*, composed in Rome between January and March 1860 and submitted by Bizet as holder of the Prix de Rome. His plan was to write a “grande symphonie”² on the *Lusiad*, the Portuguese epic by Luiz Vaz de Camões (1524–80). The clear model for such a work was the

The musical score for measures 128-134 of Georges Bizet's *Le Golfe de Baïa* is presented for five vocal parts: Soprano Solo, Dessus I, Dessus II, Ténor, and Bass. The score begins at measure 129 with the instruction "(comme venant de très loin)" and "pp" (pianissimo). The Soprano Solo part features a melodic line with "Ah!" lyrics. The Dessus I and Dessus II parts provide harmonic support with "Ah!" and "La" lyrics. The Ténor and Bass parts provide a rhythmic foundation with "la la la" lyrics. The score is written in G major and 4/4 time.

Figure 1. Georges Bizet, *Le Golfe de Baïa*, 1856, mm. 128–134.
Fishergate Music. Used with permission.



ode-symphony *Christoph Colomb* by Félicien David, played in Paris in 1847, which has similar scenes of sailors setting sail, a catchy song for a young male sung by a soprano, a mighty storm, a prayer, and a happy arrival. Bizet's librettist was a French linguist living in Rome, Louis-Michel-James Lacour-Delâtre, although Bizet was not happy with his work and had to replace some lines with lines of his own.

The action covers the departure of Vasco da Gama's 1497 expedition from Lisbon. A double chorus of sailors and soldiers sings farewell to Portugal, and the young officer Léonard, a soprano, sings the *Boléro* that Ines used to sing to him. This is a gem, a clear pointer to the verve and character that Bizet put into *Carmen*. The giant Adamastor appears and causes a storm to threaten the ship with torrents of chromatic scales. The monster, sung by six basses in unison, warns the Portuguese to turn back. Calm returns, but fear remains. Vasco calls the men to prayer, a lovely movement for six-part chorus mostly unaccompanied. Land is espied and they all rejoice. Asia yields its treasures and submits to the invaders.

Vasco de Gama is a half-hour work for full chorus and orchestra with a reciter and three soloists. It was labeled "Part I," although no other part was ever composed. It was submitted to the Institute in June 1860, whereupon the Academicians warned the young composer against harmonic boldness but observed that the work promised a brilliant future. After his return to Paris, Bizet conducted the first performance at a concert by the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts on February 8, 1863. The next performance took place on July 17, 1863, in Metz with the Orchestre National de Metz Grand Est conducted by David Reiland, recorded with other choral works by the Palazzetto Bru Zane.

In complete contrast, *Saint-Jean de Pathmos* (*St John of Patmos*) is a setting for unaccompanied men's voices of a text by Victor Hugo based on the book of Revelation. It was composed for a Belgian choral festival in 1865. Bizet's friend Edmond Galabert wrote: "I was staggered by the elevated character of the piece and by its difficulty. So Bizet explained to me that Belgian choral societies [*orphéons*] were on a quite different level to that of French societies and that this choral piece would be very well performed. Unfortunately I do not recall the

Belgian town it was intended for. I have a vague idea that it was not Brussels, but I can't be certain."³ Galabert was probably referring to Cambrai, actually in France, where Bizet was a member of a twenty-five-man jury judging choruses from all over Belgium and northern France on August 20, 1865. Bizet's chorus was probably performed at that time, although no record of a performance has been traced. It is the only unaccompanied choral work Bizet is known to have written, and it offers a challenge for intonation and stamina, running for eight minutes unaccompanied and including a fugue.

For the Exposition Universelle presented in Paris in 1867, two composition *concours* were announced by the Minister in charge, one for a *Hymne*, the other for a *Cantate*. Bizet entered for both (his cantata *Les Noces de Prométhée* is lost). Of the two poems offered for the *Hymne*, Bizet chose *Hymne de la paix* (*Hymn of Peace*) by Gustave Chouquet, which was published on April 6, 1867. Compositions had to be submitted by June 1 and identified only by a motto, with the author's name and address attached in a sealed envelope. Bizet entered under his pseudonym Gaston de Betsi, and in pursuit of anonymity he had Galabert copy the score for submission, while the autograph has not survived.

Under the chairmanship of Gounod, the judges examined over eight hundred works, all today preserved in the Archives Nationales.⁴ Some were simple melodies without accompaniment for one verse only; some, including Bizet's, were extended settings. A few called for full orchestra. Bizet alone used full chorus and a large brass ensemble, heavy in Sax instruments. For his motto, Bizet chose "Fù il vincer sempre mai laudabil cosa," the first line from Canto XV of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1516), "To win was always a splendid thing."

Bizet seems to have composed his *Hymne* tongue-in-cheek, hardly expecting it ever to be played. Galabert, who also competed in the two competitions, later said that the judges seemed to think the *Hymne* was just a choral work, with the heavy brass added as some kind of joke.⁵ No prize was awarded, and Bizet's *Hymne* has never been performed. The vacuously patriotic sentiments of the verse would make it hard even for French choruses to tackle without a few misgivings. The music, it must be said, shows every sign of having been writ-

The Choruses of Georges Bizet

ten in a hurry, and the unreasonably heavy demands of saxhorns and extra brass suggest that Bizet knew it would be rejected. After all, the prize for the cantata on this occasion was won by Saint-Saëns, who made no unreasonable demands, yet his piece was never played.

Perhaps Bizet's finest choral work is *La Mort s'avance* (*Death Awaits*), a setting of two somber verses from Cantique CLX of *Cantiques spirituels* (1728) by the Abbé Pellegrin, librettist of Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*. Nothing is known of the work's origin or purpose, although its subtitle, *Méditation sur deux études de Frédéric Chopin*, reveals that it takes its harmonic sequence from Chopin's *Étude* op. 25 no. 12 in C minor and *Étude* op. 10 no. 1 in C major. It is clearly a mature work and was probably performed under Bizet's direction since he wrote out the choral and orchestral parts himself, and a vocal score was published in 1869.

One last choral piece is a brief *Ecce Sacerdos*, published after Bizet's death in 1885 in *Le Livre choral*, an immense collection of sacred works compiled by Prosper Sain-d'Arod. It is for soprano/alto voices in three parts and keyboard (piano or organ). The text is an antiphon and a responsory from the Liturgy of the Hours and the Graduale Romanum.

Choral music in Paris in Bizet's time was dominated by his friend and mentor, Gounod, and by the composer of *Mignon* and *Hamlet*, Ambroise Thomas, both of whom wrote abundantly for choirs. Bizet was often called in as rehearsal pianist. One great might-have-been is the thought of more operas if he had not died at age thirty-six shortly after the premiere of *Carmen*; but one might equally lament the unwritten choral music he might have written if he had been spared. His operas display magnificent choral writing, including little-known scenes from *Ivan IV* and *La Jolie Fille de Perth*, which could easily be extracted and performed on their own. What we have is worth the exploration by choirs both large and small.

Most of these choral works have recently been recorded for the first time in the admirable collection of four CDs issued as no. 6 in the series "Portraits" from Palazzetto Bru Zane (BZ 1059), the foundation that has done so much to support French music of the nineteenth century. The second CD in the box opens with the recording of *Vasco de Gama* mentioned above,

followed by *Le Golfe de Baïa*, *La Chanson du rouet*, *Chœur d'étudiants*, and *La Mort s'avance* sung by the Flemish Radio Choir also under David Reiland. These recordings are a revelation for anyone unaware that these vital works even existed.

Two of these pieces, *Le Golfe de Baïa* and *La Mort s'avance*, are published with singing English translations, and it is planned to provide English singing versions of all the rest. The distribution of these works in orchestral or piano/vocal score is handled by Ficks Music of Philadelphia.

An expert group could tackle *Saint-Jean de Pathmos*, but experts are not needed for the Prix de Rome choruses. These could be performed with piano, since vocal scores are published with piano reductions in all cases. *La Mort s'avance* makes a powerful impression, and *Vasco de Gama* would be a bold adventure for choruses, just as da Gama's famous voyage of 1497 was for him. 

Hugh Macdonald is the Avis H. Blewett Professor Emeritus of Music at Washington University. He is the author of several books related to music of the nineteenth century and the general editor of the twenty-six-volume New Berlioz Edition (Bärenreiter, Kassel).

NOTES

¹ Letter of April 17, 1858. Hugh Macdonald, *Bizet in Italy* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2021), 41.

² Letter of August 3, 1859. Antoine Marmontel, *Symphonistes et virtuoses* (Paris: Chaix, 1881), 259.

³ Georges Bizet, *Lettres à un ami, 1865-1872*, ed. Edmond Galabert (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1909), 21.

⁴ F-Pan F¹² 3097-3099.

⁵ Georges Bizet, *Lettres à un ami*, 26.

LIFT EVERY VOICE

Call for Submissions

Lift Every Voice is a column concerning issues of access, diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and restorative practice (ADEIBR) in choral music. We hope that this column can provide a space to incubate ideas about inclusive practices and provide mentorship for choral practitioners.

Logistics:

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- Use *Choral Journal* style guide, available online at acda.org/choraljournal
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Review process:

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- Research articles on ADEIBR topics in choral settings
- Reflections on personal experiences: writing grounded in lived experience



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On the Voice

Matthew Hoch, editor <mrh0032@auburn.edu>

A Stepwise Approach to Teaching French Diction in the Rehearsal Setting

by James Wilson

One of the main deterrents to programming French repertoire is the time it takes to separate the text from the score. A repetitive call-and-response approach may serve the basic need, but it leaves singers with little understanding of the language, the rules of its pronunciation, and the stylistic flow. Conversely, the conductor typically does not have time to teach a crash course in IPA and French diction. What follows in this article is a step-by-step approach to maximizing the singers' understanding of French diction within a timeframe that respects the many objectives of the rehearsal process.

Step 1.

Incorporate IPA into your teaching

For directors who do not have a background in IPA, I recommend "IPA Made Easy" by Anna Wentlent. This is a straightforward pocket guide to understanding the syllables and their applications to English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, and Latin. Alfred Music offers a corresponding set of posters for the rehearsal space. For those who have open wall space that is visible to all singers, I recommend hanging a set in the arrangement of a vowel chart.¹ This illustrates where vowels are formed in the mouth from a side point-of-view, with tongue vowels making up the left-side border and lip vowels forming the right-side border (see Figure

1 on the next page).

For singers who are new to IPA, applications to American and British repertoire are typically more digestible than applications to foreign languages. This can help in sculpting the precise vowels for which we all strive. If, for example, your choir is flattening an [ɛ] vowel, the vowel chart may be used as an aid to describe and demonstrate the tongue placement spectrum from the vowels [e] to [ɛ]. Rather than simply telling the singers that their [ɛ] vowel needs more "height," they will understand we are asking for a different tongue position. Moreover, if the choir is mixing an [o] vowel, we can describe and demonstrate the migration between a purely formed [ɔ] vowel and a tongue-affected [œ] vowel. It can be helpful to understand and anticipate what vowel formations our choirs may be prone to forming based on their region.²

Step 2.

Introduce French Vowel Sounds Using a Vowel Chart

Once our singers have built an understanding of the primary IPA syllables and their applications to English repertoire, they should be ready to incorporate French vowel sounds. It may be helpful to teach or remind the choir that English is a language of Germanic or-

igin, with Germanic cadence and glottal interruption, whereas French is of Latin origin and features a much more lyrical and uninterrupted flow of syllables. Like most languages, French flows in a regular alternation between vowels and consonants. Take, for example, the opening line of Debussy's *Trois chansons*:

Dieu, qu'il la fait bon regarder.³
[djø kil la fε bõ rə.ɡar.de]

Unlike American English, the vowels in French are quite pure. In introducing these vowels to a choir, it is better to slowly entone the syllables than to simply speak the words.⁴ This offers singers a better opportunity to experience the unique formation of each vowel and how each connects seamlessly to the following consonant. While entoning the above example from *Trois chansons*, be sure to maximize the length of the vowel sounds, minimize the consonant interruption, and con-

nect each syllable as seamlessly as possible.

French features several vowels that do not appear in English. These include the mixed vowels [y], [ø], and [œ]; and the nasal vowels [ɑ̃], [ɛ̃], [ɔ̃], and [œ̃]. Using a vowel chart, describe and demonstrate the position of each of the mixed vowels in relation to their basic vowel cousins:

Mixed vowel [y] is tongue vowel [i] with the addition of lip vowel [u]

Mixed vowel [ø] is tongue vowel [e] with the addition of lip vowel [o]

Mixed vowel [œ] is tongue vowel [ε] with the addition of lip vowel [ɔ]

Next, describe and demonstrate the position of each of the nasal vowels in relation to their basic vowel cousins. Technically, a nasal vowel is formed by the slight lowering of the soft palate, which results in greater resonance (i.e., resonant space) in the nasal passage.⁵

Nasal vowel [ɑ̃] is modified open vowel [a]

Nasal vowel [ɛ̃] is modified tongue vowel [ε]

Nasal vowel [œ̃] is modified mixed vowel [œ]

Nasal vowel [ɔ̃] is modified lip vowel [o]

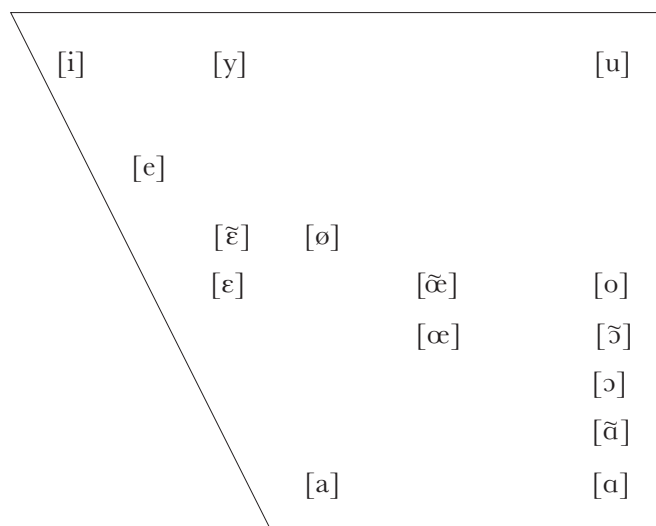


Figure 1.

A vowel chart featuring vowels used in the French language.

Step 3.

Assess the Singers' Individual Understanding and Ability to Pronounce French Syllables Correctly

Entoning takes time, and rehearsals will not often allow for extensive repetition. This is where directors often resort to a reactive call-and-response method that leaves us vulnerable to scattered Americanisms. One way to offer the individual reinforcement and practice that will best benefit the choir is to record and share a full entonation of your French repertoire. If you have one or more French-speaking singers, this can be a nice way to recognize and incorporate their specialized skill.⁶

Directors working in a classroom setting may wish to ascribe entonation recordings as a point of assessment. Your institution's Blackboard or equivalent media sharing platform is an excellent place to upload, assign, and assess entonation recordings. If students are provided the written IPA, the French text, and a recording of the correct pronunciation entoned slowly and clearly, a fair and objective point-assessment should be possible to execute.

Step 4.

Apply Correct Pronunciation to the Music

Directors often choose to separate the text from the pitches and rhythms as an initial step in the learning process. Whether the preference is solfège singing, count singing, or singing on a neutral syllable, it may be helpful to remove text as a point of concentration, thus allowing singers to devote most of their attention to notes and rhythms. This is especially true when a new and potentially challenging text is to be applied. If the music and text is taught separately and to a moderate level of proficiency, directors will enjoy a smoother transition in aligning proper pronunciation to the notes and rhythms. The smoother the transition, the easier it is to catch noticeable inaccuracies and offer corrections in the moment. Naturally, some singers will take to proper pronunciation more readily than others. Recorded entonations can help in bringing each singer to the same level of proficiency without the loss of rehearsal time.

Common Pitfalls

American singers who are new to French will often fail to entone pure vowels and, instead, maintain the mixture of American diphthongs, for example, [feɪ] instead of [fɛ] in the word *fait*. Slow entonation will help to clear away unintended vowel mixtures and purify the aggregate vowels.

When working with mixed vowels, it is common to have to ask for adjustments to either the tongue or lip positions. Note that when singers are asked to make these adjustments, the lips and tongue will tend to migrate together as a result of English-speaking muscle memory. A good way to teach mixed vowel purity is to isolate the lip vowel before adding the tongue position. For example, ask the singers to phonate on [u] before adding [i] in the tongue so that a pure [y] is the result. Conversely, singers may be asked to isolate a pure tongue vowel before adding the lip position. If making these new and unique vowel sounds causes your choir members to laugh, you're probably on the right track.

Singers may be prone to incorporating the "American r," leading to pronunciations such as [ɪə.gæ.ɹeɪ] instead of [ʁə.gar.de] in the word *regarder*.⁷ When singing in French, singers should be instructed to lightly flip the *r* [r] with a forward tongue placement. Some directors allow for stop-plosive [d] as a substitute for flipped *r* [r], but the French *r* should always remain vibrant and maintain airflow.

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Like [r], the consonant [l] may be formed in different places either frontally, with the tip of the tongue against the upper front teeth, or back with the mid-portion of the tongue pressing back in the throat. The latter is common in American English, whereas the former is required for proper singing in French. Singers should avoid singing on an [l] despite it being a voiced consonant. In the second phrase of Debussy's *Trois chansons* no. 1, the [l] in the word *belle* should be minimized and formed at the front of the mouth. The initial vowel [ɛ] should be maximized while carefully avoiding migration to the [l]. In this and other instances, it may be helpful to instruct your singers not to let the consonant pollute the quality of a pure vowel.

There are many complexities, nuances, and exceptions that go beyond the scope of this overview of instructional approach. For a more detailed and thorough study on these topics, see *A Course in French Lyric Diction* by Deborah Williamson. 

Resource List for Further Study

Adams, David. *A Handbook of Diction for Singers*, 3rd ed. Oxford University Press, 2022.

Davis, Eileen. *Sing French: Diction for Singers*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. Éclairé Press, 2003.

Debussy, Claude. *Trois chansons*. Choral Public Domain Library (CPDL), 1999 (rev. March 22, 2001). <http://www.cpdl.org/>.

Grubb, Thomas. *Singing in French: A Manual of French Diction and French Vocal Repertoire*. Schirmer Books, 1979.

IPA Source LLC. Library of Congress ISSN 2771-876X. <https://www.ipasource.com/>.

Wentlent, Anna. *IPA Made Easy: A Guidebook for the International Phonetic Alphabet*. Alfred Music, 2014.

Williamson, Deborah. *A Course in French Lyric Diction*. GIA Publications, 2019.

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NOTES

¹ Wentlent uses [ɔ̃] in both the guidebook and corresponding posters, however [õ] is more standard in the teaching of French diction.

² For a more detailed list and IPA-based description of regional accents in the United States, see Eliza Simpson's *The Complete Guide to Regional American Accents* at www.boldvoice.com.

³ Author Deborah Williamson illustrates French consonant/vowel alternation using the line “mais j'entends, que tu m'aimes bien” from Reynaldo Hahn's *À Chloris*. Deborah Williamson, *A Course in French Lyric Diction* (GIA Publications, 2019), 5.

⁴ Although *entone* is a lesser-used spelling of the word *intone*, it is grammatically correct to use. In this context, it separates what we as directors would recognize as a chanted, i.e., “pitched,” *intonation* from that of a spoken exercise for improved diction. Moreover, the word's origin is from Middle French—*entoner*.

⁵ Williamson, *A Course in French Lyric Diction*, 37.

⁶ French speakers may need to be instructed to avoid the French guttural *r* [ʁ], which is generally limited to speech and French popular song.

⁷ For those unfamiliar with the IPA syllables [ɹ], [ʁ], and [ɛɹ], pretend you are Brad Pitt's character in the movie *Inglorious Bastards* attempting to pronounce the word *regarde*.

In Memoriam

Donald Bailey (1943–2026)



Donald L. Bailey, born to R. B. Bailey and Margaret Ham Bailey in Carlsbad, New Mexico, on April 10, 1943, went to be with His Lord and Savior on Good Friday, April 3, 2026. Dr. Bailey earned degrees from Eastern New Mexico University and the University of Northern Colorado. He continued to pursue post-graduate studies at Indiana University, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and Westminster Choir College.

Donald served as the director of choral activities at Baylor University from 1993 until his retirement in 2008. Prior to his appointment at Baylor, he held similar positions at Arizona State University, Texas Tech University, Houghton College in New York, and Eastern New Mexico University, receiving teaching excellence awards at both ASU and Houghton. He served as president of the Texas Choral Directors Association from 2001 to 2003, and in 2008 he received the Choirmaster Award from TCDA for exhibiting “unparalleled leadership in the choral field.”

During his distinguished career, choirs under Donald’s direction were invited performers at three ACDA national conferences, five TMEA conferences, as well as the New York State School Music Association, Arizona MEA, and the Music Educators National Conference. He frequently appeared as an all-state clinician and was a guest conductor at both Carnegie Hall and Avery Fisher Hall in Lincoln Center.

Despite his numerous accomplishments and accolades, his greatest legacy shines in the lives of everyone he touched. He dedicated his life to musical excellence and to glorifying God. He was an exemplary mentor to hundreds of choral directors and music teachers across the country. Donald is survived by Karen, his beloved wife of sixty years. Dr. Bailey’s music is available through Alliance Music Publications and Gentry Publications. His compositions will continue to be enjoyed by choirs for generations to come.



HEADLINING PERFORMERS



CLOCKWISE

Conspirare

Craig Hella Johnson, Artistic Director

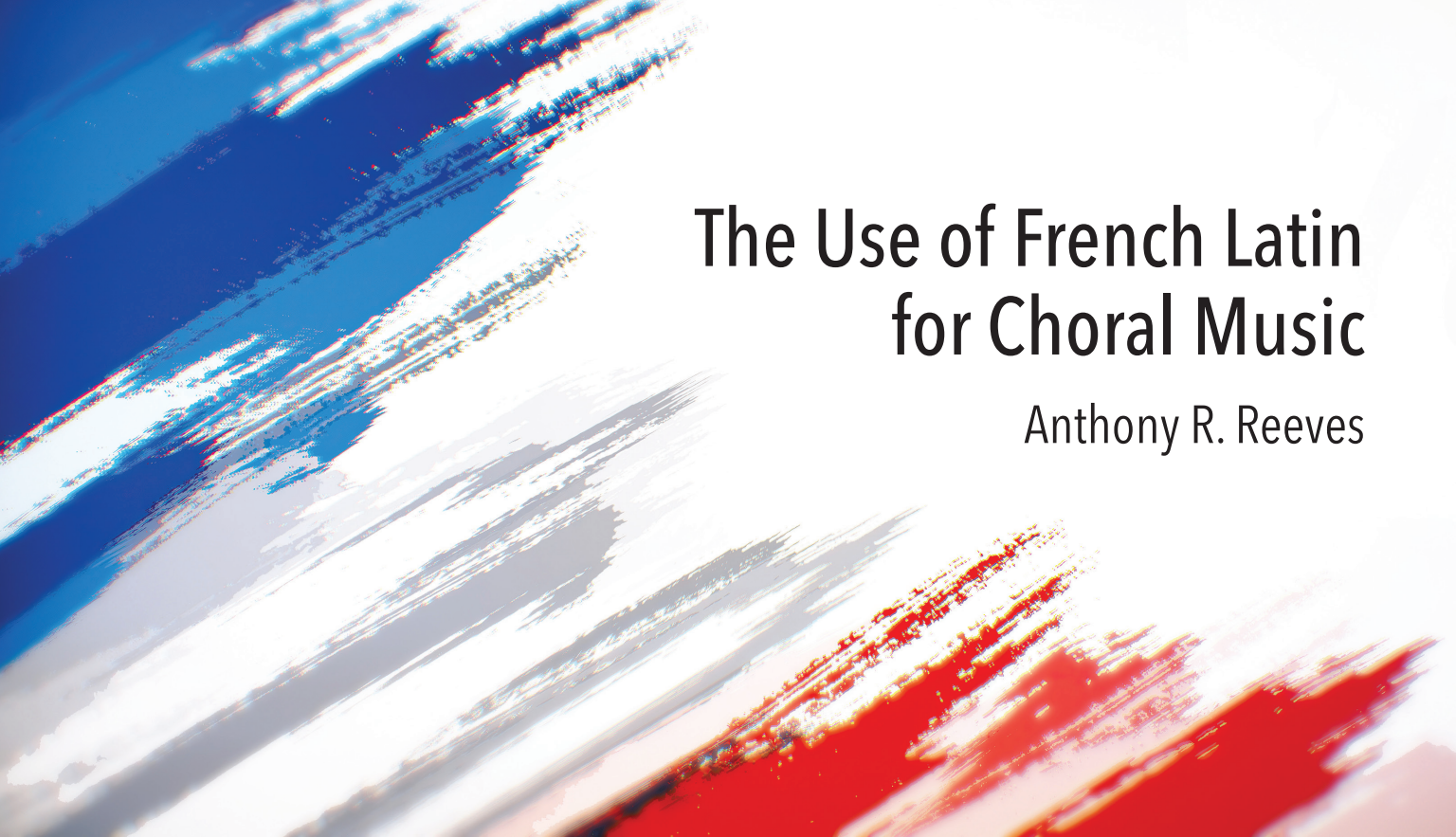
Incheon City Chorale

Eui-Joong Yoon, Artistic Director

Tenebrae

Nigel Short, Director

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The Use of French Latin for Choral Music

Anthony R. Reeves

Editor's note: This article is reprinted from Choral Journal (October 2001) with the approval of the guest editors for use in this focus issue on the topic of French choral music.

The last fifty years have witnessed an explosion of research and knowledge about performance practice in almost every area of music. Basic musical elements once thought to be absolute, such as articulation, vocal technique, and ornamentation, have been subject to great experimentation and debate. Conductors everywhere are becoming increasingly aware of new discoveries regarding authentic performance practices and are putting them to use in their work. This is best seen in the abundance of performances and recordings featuring original or reproduction instruments.

An area not fully integrated into the general practices of most choral conductors, however, concerns the use of colloquial Latin pronunciations for choral music. Some conductors feel it is simply too time consuming to work out complex pronunciations. They are unsure what is authentic, and insecure about their own abilities in this area. As a result, the only regional pronunciation heard with any regularity is the Austro-German pronunciation of Latin. Those of us living outside Germany hear this Latin variant mainly because of the many professional choirs with recording contracts in German-speaking countries. However, some German

choirs overuse the Austro-German Latin (e.g., in performance of pieces such as the Mass settings of William Byrd) in much the same way liturgical Latin pronunciation is ubiquitous in America.

Relatively few conductors know about alternative Latin pronunciations, and even fewer understand the value of employing them. In fact, most regions of Europe have their own historical Latin pronunciations, and using the appropriate one can enrich performances of that region's repertoire and make them more historically accurate. One of the most distinctive variants of Latin pronunciation lies in the sounds of French Latin. Once conductors and performers understand the subtleties of French Latin, many idiosyncrasies of French choral repertoire (often very confusing to conductors and performers) will be less mysterious.

Latin: A Brief History of Pronunciation

Latin, like English, is a language of many different accents. Consider, for example, variants of the English language; people from Britain speak differently than people from the southern United States, yet the vocabulary germane to the language remains essentially the same. Because Latin is a dormant language, it is easy to forget that it too was pronounced differently in the various regions of the former Roman Empire. As the vernaculars



developed, their sounds colored the archaic language (Latin) used mainly by the church; this symbiotic development resulted in regional variants of Latin pronunciation. It is important to realize that the Roman Catholic Church did not codify today's "standard liturgical Latin" until early in the twentieth century; prior to that time, the Latin rites of the Church were pronounced differently from place to place. Thus, it makes sense that conductors can improve the stylistic integrity of any historic music by utilizing the appropriate regional Latin pronunciation. Following the same logic, applying French Latin pronunciation to French music can yield more authentic performances.

The History of French Latin

Of all the regional variants, the French Latins¹ have been especially infamous:

The Gallic² pronunciation of Latin was notorious from early times, when the Celtic Gauls came to speak the language of their Roman conquerors. It was later affected by the waves of Germanic settlers and invaders from the fifth to the tenth centuries.³

It is important to remember that in most of Europe, Latin was not the native tongue; it was forced upon local populations after Roman conquests. Influenced by their own indigenous languages, the native people colored Latin with their own speech habits and pronunciations. From the fifth century, Germanic settlers occupied northern Gaul; their language merged with that of the local Gallic-Roman descendants, giving birth to early forms of French and eventually affecting the Latin of the Church. This merging of tongues and dialects resulted in a form of Latin strongly flavored by Francien (the language of central France). Other regions of France, especially Normandy and Provence, developed their own dialectal variations, but it was the Germanic-Gallic-Roman Latin tongue that was to mature into modern French.

The emergence and development of medieval and modern French continued to influence the way Frenchmen pronounced Latin. A thorough investigation of

this matter will uncover at least four different pronunciation systems (in different historical eras) in central France, with other variant systems in certain French regions, as well as in what are now the Low Countries. When speaking of historic French Latin, this article refers to the time periods approximated by many linguistic historians as: mid-third century–800 C.E.; 800–1250; 1250–1650; and 1650–1920s.

Closely connected to French Latin is the Franco-Flemish pronunciation, used in the Low Countries. The Picardi Walloon tongue is still spoken in parts of northern France and southern Belgium, and was much more pervasive a thousand years ago. Although French, Flemish, and Dutch each exacted their influence on this region and its language, the region's own idiosyncratic pronunciation of Latin became significant in music history because of the influence of the Franco-Flemish (or Franco-Netherlandish) school of composers and the influence of the Court of Burgundy. Machaut, DuFay, Ockeghem, Josquin, and Mouton are but a few of the better-known composers associated with this school, and a great deal of their music would benefit from the use of Franco-Flemish Latin diction. (To be clear, the Franco-Flemish Latin variant is different from Dutch, or Netherlandish, Latin.)

Regional variants of Latin pervaded Europe until November 22, 1903, when Pope Pius X (r. 1903–14) issued his decree *Motu proprio*⁴ with many rules concerning sacred music and its liturgical performance. The *Motu proprio* included two matters meriting special note: guidelines for the restoration and performance of Gregorian chant, and directions for a universal pronunciation of Latin based on the Roman model. All the guidelines for official pronunciation follow this decree, including those in the *Liber Usualis* (itself a late nineteenth-century creation).

Pius X was more conservative than his predecessor (Leo XIII), and many historians believe he was responsible for a widening gulf between "modern thought" and the Roman Catholic Church. As an example of his conservatism, he instructed the Holy Office to issue a decree condemning those who applied new methods of research to Scripture or theology, resulting in a defecation of many Modernists from the Church (e.g., Alfred Firmin Loisy and George Tyrrell).



The French accepted Pope Pius's standardized pronunciation of Latin slowly and reluctantly. The French church had long been subject to the influences of Gallicanism, a French tradition of resistance to papal authority. Two kinds of Gallicanism may be discerned in French history: an insistence on special rights for the French monarch within the French church, and an insistence on some degree of independence for the French church from Rome. Even after the Roman Church established supreme papal authority as dogma in 1870, the French continued to resist. It could hardly have surprised anyone when they proved reluctant to capitulate on the matter of Latin pronunciation.

In 1912 the Pope wrote the Archbishop of Bourges urging him to press for the standardization of Latin pronunciation in France; as late as 1928, Pius XI wrote, "We, ourselves, express the keenest desire that all bishops of every nation shall endeavour to adopt it [the standardized Roman pronunciation] when carrying out the liturgical ceremonies."⁵ Whereas the French eventually gave in, their capitulation was neither willing nor complete. In recent years, increasing numbers of French performance and recordings employ the historic French Latin pronunciations. (Although it is interesting that while the German bishops elected, in 1972, to return to the use of German Latin, the French bishops never made a parallel decision.) In any case, a performer of French music written in Latin before the first few decades of the twentieth century would be shortsighted to ignore the performance ramifications of historical pronunciations.

Examples of French Choral Literature

Table 1 on the next two pages gives some examples of composers whose choral music can benefit from an historic French Latin pronunciation. The list is far from exhaustive but shows the breadth of pre-1920 composers to whom this article applies, as well as some post-1920 composers whose work (e.g., recordings, writings, or interviews) demonstrates their affinity for French Latin pronunciation.

Liturgical Latin vs. French Latin

The currently accepted liturgical Latin pronunciation has much to recommend it, largely because it is a comparatively simple system to teach and learn. Only five vowel sounds exist in modern Latin, and the consonants are simple, most sounding very much as they do in English. Furthermore, virtually no exceptions exist in the rules for liturgical Latin pronunciation.⁶ Familiarity with the system yields little confusion and efficient use of rehearsal time.

Standard liturgical pronunciation is essentially Italian Latin and hence shares many attributes with the Italian language. Because the vowels tend to be open and the consonants short and precise, the pronunciation does not interfere with the *bel canto* vocal production typically taught in private study. These very attributes, however, are also weaknesses. For example, open vowels, although they are unobtrusive to vocal technique and quite beautiful in artistic solo singing, tend to yield a colorless ensemble sound and can make it difficult to produce fine shadings of tone for text painting or other expressive purposes.

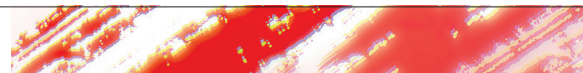
Another problem with the standardized liturgical pronunciation lies in its universality—the uniform rules cause singers to produce homogenous sounds regardless of composer, nationality, era, or style. It seems logical that composers determined the shapes of vocal lines based on the vowel sounds inherent to their own regional variant of Latin, or at least the variant of the region in which they worked. Performing vocal music using a pronunciation far removed from the pronunciation known by the composer is comparable to ignoring dynamic markings in a Chopin piano piece. This author believes it is impossible to create "authentic" performances of early music without making the sound of the text of paramount importance.

A significant difference between French Latin and liturgical Latin is that French Latin is not as uniform as the standardized version. Vowel sounds tend to change based upon where they are located in a word and what other letters are around them; many consonant sounds are predictably flavored by the sounds of French. Should anyone believe liturgical Latin is in any way neutral, it is important to understand that it is strongly flavored by the eccentricities of the Italian language. (Consider,

Table 1. Historic French Latin Pronunciation

Composer	Variant	Era
Berlioz	French	1650-1920
Binchois	Franco-Flemish	1250-1650
Busnois	Franco-Flemish	1250-1650
Campra	French	1650-1920
Charpentier	French	1650-1920
Jacobus Clemens	Franco-Flemish	1250-1650
Costeley	French	1250-1650
Delalande	French	1650-1920
Dubois	French	1650-1920
du Caurroy	French	1250-1650
DuFay	Franco-Flemish	1250-1650
Du Mont	French	1250-1650, 1650-1920
Durufié	French	1650-1920
Fauré	French	1650-1920
Franck	French	1650-1920
Gombert	Franco-Flemish	1250-1650
Goudimel	French	1250-1650
Gounod	French	1650-1920

The Use of French Latin for Choral Music



Janequin	French	1250-1650
Josquin	Franco-Flemish	1250-1650
Pierre de la Rue	Franco-Flemish	1250-1650
Le Jeune	French	1250-1650
Lully	French	1650-1920
Machaut	Franco-Flemish	1250-1650
Obrecht	Franco-Flemish	1250-1650
Ockeghem	Franco-Flemish	1250-1650
Poulenc	French	1650-1920
Rameau	French	1650-1920
Saint-Saëns	French	1650-1920
Sermisy	French	1250-1650

for example, the rules surrounding the pronunciation of the letter “c” in liturgical Latin, which are obviously Italianate.) Although understandable, given the location of the Vatican, this in no way affected the previous development of French Latin or the sounds understood by centuries of French composers.

Syllabic division is another aspect of the difference between standard liturgical Latin and regional Latin dialects. The French practice of ending syllables on vowels whenever possible directly affected the French pronunciation of Latin. Harold Copeman relates that Erasmus wrote about this in 1528, comparing the French and Dutch divisions (and pronunciations) of the Latin word “Christe”: the Dutch would have divided the word as “Chris-te,” while the French would have divided it as “Chri-ste.”⁷ This seemingly minor detail has

larger implications. For example, final [s] is not dropped in French Latin but is generally pronounced [s]; internal [s] is often dropped. The French division mentioned above would have resulted in a pronunciation of [krite]. (This is in direct opposition to the pronunciation of modern French; therefore, do not accept the postulate advocated by some that merely speaking Latin texts using the rules of modern French pronunciation produces French Latin.)

Syllabic stress in French Latin also bears the mark of French language. In French Latin, as in French, all syllables receive more or less equal stress, with a slight accent usually occurring on the final syllable of a word. In liturgical Latin, syllabic stress often occurs on the penultimate or antepenultimate syllable of a word. These intricacies of accentuation have obvious phrasing impli-

cations. A phrase Lully, Rameau, or even Fauré heard “just so,” performed with a light accent on the final syllable of the last word (with *le bon goût*, of course) sounds quite different when sung in modern liturgical Latin, with an accent on the penultimate syllable. The result of the latter method may be beautiful to our modern ears because we are accustomed to it but will not be stylistically accurate.

When singing Latin-texted French music using liturgical pronunciation, many performers notice the strange way the syllabification of the text lines up with the metrical structure; syllables that should (according to liturgical Latin) be unaccented often appear on the downbeats of measures. However, when one takes French Latin pronunciation into account, these problems disappear and the words fit perfectly within the metrical structure. Indeed, when singers observe the appropriate accentuation, some of the baffling characteristics of French music (e.g., the placement of some ornament signs in French Baroque music) suddenly make sense. Conductor and early music specialist Andrew Parrot writes:

In practice, it is all too easy to find reasons not to bother with the niceties of different historical pronunciations of Latin.... It may also be argued that in any case too little is known, and that relevant information and guidance remain inaccessible to non-specialists.... [However,] in my own experience there have been three principal benefits...firstly, a correctly underlaid text will become easier to sing...[because] the appropriate vowel from the period is likely to be technically more helpful to the singer.... Secondly, the rhythms of the music and language are more likely to match.... Thirdly, Latin is rescued from appearing to be a dead language, or the exclusive property of the modern Roman Church.... In short, what may appear to be merely a veneer on musical performance can shed unexpected light on the nature of the music itself and in particular it helps to refine our understanding of the subtle balance of music and text that characterizes the best vocal writing of any age.⁸

Examples of French Latin Pronunciation

An example from the standard choral repertoire will readily illustrate some of the differences between standard Latin and the French Latin of c. 1650–1920s. Table 2 on the next two pages lists brief, general guidelines about French Latin diction for music written during this time period. These guidelines are far from exhaustive, and French Latin, like French, allows many exceptions to the rules. In addition, it is important to remember the differing pronunciation practices in the different eras noted above (mid-third century–800 C.E.; 800–1250; 1250–1650; and c. 1650–1920s) and in different geographic areas. For more complete details and information, readers are encouraged to consult the resources at the end of this article. Table 3 on page 66 contrasts the standard liturgical and French Latin pronunciations of the Gloria of the Mass Ordinary.

Conclusion

Awareness of different systems of Latin pronunciation related to geographic regions and historic periods can enhance the stylistic integrity and beauty of sung music, as they are truer to the pronunciations understood by the composers. It stands to reason that when composers wrote vocal music, they made compositional decisions based on the Latin sounds they knew and used. If modern performers endeavor to reproduce the sounds of French Latin when singing French music, the musical product will be more stylistically appropriate and significantly more beautiful than if they use the modern universal pronunciation of Latin bearing little resemblance to the original pronunciation.

The careful choral conductor must consider accurate pronunciations when preparing to perform a piece of early music. Of course, one must take into account the ability level of the singers and available rehearsal time when deciding whether to use historical Latin, but if stylistic accuracy is the goal, appropriate historical Latin pronunciation is crucial. Choirs will reach the expectations set for them, and if proper diction becomes a goal of performance, conscientious choir members will endeavor to meet the goal.

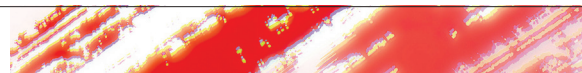
Table 2. Summary of Latin Pronunciation in France, c. 1650–1920

Spelling	Pronunciation Notes
Vowels	
a	[a], more forward than Italian or German
ae	[e] in an open symbol; [ɛ] in a closed syllable
am, an	[am] or [an] <i>but</i> : if a consonant follows, [ã] followed by the consonant
au	[o]; <i>not</i> open [ɔ]
e, ae, oe	[e] or [ɛ], as in "ae" above
em, en	[ɛm], [ɛn]
emp, ent	[ẽ mp], [ẽ nt]
eu	[ø]
i, y	[i]
im, in	[ẽ] or [im] or [in]
o	[o] in an open symbol; [ɔ] in a closed syllable
om, on	[õ]
non	[nɔn]
u	[y]
um, un	[ɯm], [ɯn]
unc, unt	[œt], [õt]
Consonants	
c • before e, ae, oe, i, or y • otherwise	[s] [k]
cc • before e, ae, oe, i, or y • otherwise	[s] [ks]
ch • before e, ae, oe, i, or y • otherwise	[ʃ] [ks]
g	[ʒ]
gn	[ɲ], or [gn] in certain words
h	mute
j	[ʒ]
qu	[kw]
quo	[ko]

s	usually [s]; but [z] between vowels or voiced consonants
s, t	not dropped at ends of words
ti	[si]
x, xc	[ks] before consonant; [gs] before vowel
z	[z]

Table 3. Contrasts Between Standard Liturgical and French Latin

Text	Liturgical Latin	French Latin
Gloria in excelsis Deo. Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.	[gl̥ɔria in ek̥sɛlsis deo ɛt in tɛra paks ɔminibus bɔnɛ vɔluntatis	[gl̥ɔria i neksɛlsi zdeo ɛ ti n̥tɛra pa ksominibɥ zbɔnɛ vɔlɔ̃statis
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te. Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.	laudamus tɛ bɛnɛdikamus tɛ adoramus tɛ gl̥ɔrifikamus tɛ	lodamy stɛ bɛnɛdisimɥ stɛ adoramɥs stɛ gl̥ɔrifikamɥ stɛ
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnum gloriam tuam,	gratsias ag̥zimus tibi prɔ̃ptɛr majam gl̥ɔriam tuam	grasia zḁzimɥ stibi prɔtɛ rmagnã gl̥ɔriã tyam
Domine Deus, Rex caelestis, Dues Pater omnipotens.	dɔmine deus reks t̥fɛlestis dues patɛr ɔ̃n̥nipɔtɛns	domine dey sre k̥sɛlestis dey spatɛ r̥ɔ̃n̥ipotɛ̃z
Domine Fili unigenite Jesu Christe. Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris,	dɔmine fili unid̥ʒenitɛ jesu kristɛ dɔmine deus, ḁpus dei filius patris	domine fili yn̥iʒenitɛ ʒɛzy krite domine dey, sag̥ny zdeɪ filiy spatris
Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram. Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis.	kwi tɔlis pekata mundi miserɛrɛ nɔbis kwi tɔlis pekata mundi sɥ̥ʃipɛ dɛprɛkatsionem nɔstram kwi sɛdɛs ad dɛxtɛram patris miserɛrɛ nɔbis	kwi toli spɛkata mɔ̃ndi mizerɛrɛ nobis kwi toli spɛkata mɔ̃ndi sysipɛ dɛprɛkasionɛ notram kwi sɛdɛ za dɛkstɛrã patris mizerɛrɛ nobis
Quoniam tu solus sanctus. Tu solus Dominus, Tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe. Cum Sancto Spiritu, In gloriq Dei Patris Amen.	kwɔ̃niam tu sɔlus sanktus tu sɔlus dɔminɥs tu sɔlus altisimɥs jesu Kristɛ kum sanktɔ spiritu in gl̥ɔria dei patris amɛn]	koniã ty solɥ sãtɥs ty solɥ zdominɥs ty solɥ zaltisimɥs ʒɛzy krite kɔ̃ sãɔ spirity i n̥gloria dei patris amɛn]



Resources for Further Study

When teaching alternative Latin pronunciations for the first time, one should not underestimate the amount of time singers need to become familiar with the new pronunciations and overcome years of exposure to “traditional” Latin. Several resources exist to enable performers to learn appropriate historical pronunciations. *Singing Early Music*, edited by Timothy McGee and others, covers numerous languages and dialects and includes a CD recording to help performers develop an ear for the correct pronunciations. Harold Copeman’s *Singing in Latin* offers a plethora of historical and practical information. A most interesting and informative book about French Latin is Patricia Ranum’s *Méthode de la Prononciation Latine Dite Vulgaire ou a la Française*. It is in French, however, and no English translation yet exists. 

Selected Bibliography

Copeman, Harold. *Singing in Latin*. Oxford: Harold Copeman, 1990.

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McGee, Timothy J., et al., eds. *Singing Early Music: The Pronunciation of European Languages in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*. Indiana University Press, 1996.

Ranum, Patricia M., and Jacques Le Clerc. *Méthode de la prononciation latine dite vulgaire ou it fa franraise: petite methode it l’usage des chanteltI’S et des rtficitants d’après le manuscrit de dom Jacques le Clerc*. Aries, France: Acres sud, 1991.

Anthony R. Reeves is visiting assistant professor of music at Hamilton College, Clinton, New York.⁹

NOTES

¹ Instead of French Latin, it might be more accurate to speak of French Latins. The pronunciations in different geographic areas developed and mutated over time. Conse-

quently, it is impossible to give a single set of diction rules for this pronunciation, as in actuality many different pronunciations have existed, one merging into or emerging from another. The task of the choral conductor is then more complex: to determine which of the French Latin pronunciations is appropriate for a piece of music, and then learn and teach it. The resources cited at the end of the article are good places to begin.

² Of or relating to Gaul, or what is modern France.

³ Harold Copeman, “French Latin.” In *Singing Early Music*, ed. Timothy J. McGee, et al. (Indiana University Press, 1996), 90.

⁴ Motu Proprio is the name given to Papal rescripts that use the words “motu proprio” (“of his own accord”) in the document. These words indicate that the Pope has made these decisions personally and of his own accord. It is neither a Brief nor a Bull, and usually creates laws or regulations or grants favors.

⁵ Quoted by Harold Copeman, *Singing in Latin*, 308.

⁶ For a complete guide to standard liturgical Latin pronunciation, see: The Rev. Michael de Angelis, *The Correct Pronunciation of Latin According to Roman Usage* (GIA Publications, 1937).

⁷ Harold Copeman, *Singing Early Music*, 95.

⁸ Andrew Parrot, Preface to Harold Copeman’s *Singing in Latin, or Pronunciation Explor’d* (Harold Copeman, 1990), vi-vii.

⁹ Editor’s Note: This is the author’s information published with the original article in 2001. We were unable to locate updated information for this publication.



Call for Research Poster Sessions
2027 ACDA National Conference
Application Opens: October 1, 2026
Application Deadline: November 3, 2026, 11:59pm CDT

The American Choral Directors Association will sponsor a research session at the 2027 National Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 7–10, 2027. The intent of the research poster session is to bring current research to light that impacts and informs our profession and to encourage our colleagues in the choral world to stay in touch with research in choral music.

We seek research reflecting the breadth and depth of choral music teaching, learning, and practice, including studies that may be completed or currently in progress. This session is designed to showcase a wide range of scholarship—such as investigations of rehearsal techniques, performance practice, repertoire selection, and emerging trends within the choral field—and to provide a forum for collegial dialogue around research.

Of particular interest are studies focused on repertoire, performance practice, conducting pedagogy, rehearsal pedagogy, vocal development, critical editions, theoretical analysis that informs performance, research in the K-12 setting, research with unique ensembles and in unique settings, research that spans the life of a singer from birth through adulthood, and research on vocal or compositional practices in contemporary choral music.

The poster session space will include an easel that will accommodate up to a 36" x 48" poster. Your poster should be a single full-color document no larger than 36" x 48" inches in size light enough to be pinned on the display board with push pins (the conference venue will have pins available). You will transport your poster to the conference site.

1. Abstracts submitted for presentation must comply with the following guidelines:

(a) If the data have been presented in whole or substantive part in any forum or at previous research sessions, a statement specifying particulars of the above must be included with the submission. Papers presented at other conferences will be considered only if the audience was substantially different (e.g., a state meeting or a university symposium). A statement specifying particulars of past presentation and venue must be included with the submission.

(b) The paper may have been submitted but must not be in print or in press prior to the submission deadline of the conference.

2. The research may be of any type, but a simple review of literature will not be considered for presentation.

Manuscript style of articles representing descriptive, quantitative, or qualitative studies must conform to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition, 2020). Authors of other types of studies (e.g., historical, theoretical) may submit manuscripts that conform to either *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (K. L. Turabian, 9th edition, 2018) or *The Chicago Manual of Style* (18th edition, 2024).

3. The following items are required for submission: An abstract of no more than 3000 characters (including references) summarizing your research purpose, method, findings, discussion, and implications. The name(s) or affiliation(s) of anyone involved in the submission must not appear in the abstract. Incomplete submissions (e.g., those discussing proposed research without any preliminary findings) will be rejected.

The submission form will also ask if this is your first time submitting to the research poster session as well as if you are a member of a historically marginalized group. These questions, in an effort toward equity and inclusion, will have no bearing in the blind review process, but will help ensure that emerging scholars as well as scholarship from diverse perspectives appear on the national research program.

Presenters must be current members of ACDA, and all persons whose work is selected for inclusion on the program are expected to register for the conference. It is understood that ACDA will not assume financial responsibility for travel, food, or lodging for poster session presenters. Your submission implies that you are prepared to travel and present at the conference if accepted.

4. To apply, visit <https://acda.org/resources/research-and-publications-committee>. The submission window will open on October 1, 2026, and the deadline is November 3, 2026, at 11:59pm CDT. The helpdesk will be available until 5pm CDT on the day of the deadline. Extensions will not be granted for any reason. Additionally, you must be an active, international, or student member of ACDA to submit for a research poster session.

5. All submissions will be reviewed blind by a committee of scholars. Applicants will be notified of the status of their submission via email by December 15, 2026.

The research poster session will be held at the 2027 ACDA National Conference in Minneapolis, MN, between March 7-10, 2027. A specific date and time for the presentation during the overall conference schedule will be published in the fall.

For questions, contact Jamey Kelley at Jamey.Kelley@unt.edu.

For technical or membership support, email membership@acda.org.



An example of poster session boards from the 2023 National Conference in Cincinnati.



2027 Student Conducting Masterclass Application Information

Application Opens: September 1, 2026

Application Deadline: October 15, 2026, 11:59pm CST

The ACDA Student Conducting Awards and Competition were initiated during the 1993 ACDA National Conference in San Antonio, Texas. In 2019, the event was reconceived as a masterclass model, shifting the emphasis from competition to mentorship.

For 2027, this opportunity will again be offered as the Student Conducting Masterclass, featuring both Undergraduate and Graduate categories.

Objectives

1. To acknowledge and reward outstanding undergraduate and graduate student conductors
2. To encourage score preparation and the advancement of conducting and rehearsal skills
3. To promote greater engagement in student activity at the ACDA National Conference

Selection Criteria

Acceptance will be based on:

- Conducting technique
- Rehearsal pedagogy
- Expressive musicality
- Use of appropriate performance practice

The student conducting masterclasses will take place at the 2027 ACDA National Conference in Minneapolis, with the undergraduate session scheduled for March 8 and the graduate session scheduled for March 9.

I. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Applicants must:

- Hold a valid ACDA active or student membership.
 1. To confirm membership status or locate your membership number, visit www.acda.org and click "Sign In" in the upper right corner.
 2. To join, visit www.acda.org/membership.
- Applicants must be either a full- or part-time degree-pursuing student at a college or university in the United States or U.S. Territory at the time of the application and at the time of the masterclass (March 8 & 9, 2027). Status will be verified by submission of a student ID card and sponsor verification.

- Submit a complete application portfolio via the ACDA application portal, which will include:
 1. Personal information (not visible to video adjudicators)
 2. Verification of video validity (faculty sponsor name and faculty sponsor ACDA membership number)
 3. Verification of student status; Student ID upload (.png, .jpg, .jpeg)
 4. Audition video upload (.mp4)
 5. Fully marked PDF scores of the two selections (2 separate PDF uploads)
 6. Résumé of conducting experience (.pdf)
 7. Headshot (.png, .jpg, .jpeg); for conference website and publicity, if chosen
 8. 900-character biography (for conference website and publicity, if chosen)
 9. \$20 entry fee (online payment only via debit/credit card at time of application)*

*If an applicant is experiencing financial hardship and cannot pay the \$20 entry fee, contact Dr. Jenny Bent, Collegiate Activities Coordinator (bentje@sonoma.edu) by September 15, 2026.

II. AUDITION VIDEO INFORMATION

Musical Submission Requirements

1. Applicants will rehearse and conduct two choral compositions. The video should show the conductor's ability to communicate and rehearse effectively with the ensemble and use appropriate and expressive gestures when conducting.
2. A fully marked, color PDF score analysis of both works must be uploaded (2 pdf uploads)
3. Repertoire Requirements:
 - a. One selection must be by a historically marginalized or underrepresented composer. One selection must be from the 17th, 18th, or 19th century. One selection must be from the 20th or 21st century. One of the selections must include mixed and/or asymmetrical meters (eg. 7/8, 5/4).
 - b. *Graduate applicants only:* One selection must be conducted with baton.

Additional repertoire considerations:

- Selections must contrast in tempo and style.
- Selections may be accompanied or unaccompanied. Keyboard reductions may substitute for orchestral accompaniment.
- Excerpts from larger works are permitted.

Repertoire resources (not exhaustive and not an endorsement by the committee):

- <https://www.composerdiversity.com/>
- <http://chorosynthesis.org/esvdatabase>
- <https://guides.library.yale.edu/music-diversity/repertoire>

Format & Duration

- Both selections must be recorded consecutively without stopping the device.
- No editing, sound enhancement, or post-production is permitted.
- The total conducting time, for both works, is a minimum of 10 minutes and maximum of 12 minutes.
- Rehearsal time should be balanced between selections.
- Applicants are encouraged to begin the uploading process early to avoid any technical issues. Late applications will not be accepted FOR ANY REASON, including technical issues the applicant may experience.

Camera & Audio Requirements

- Camera angle showing all conducting movements (full-frontal view is recommended and preferable)
- Clear, audible choral sound
- The applicant must announce title and composer before each selection.

Anonymity

- The applicant must not identify themselves or their institution in the video.
- No institutional logos, clothing, or signage may be visible.
- No spoken or written identification may be made.

Sponsor Verification

- The applicant will be required to provide the name, email address, and ACDA member number of one faculty sponsor who can verify the recording and student status, if asked.
- The sponsor must have either been present at the recording or viewed the final submission.

It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure compliance with all guidelines.

III. APPLICATION DEADLINE

All materials must be submitted by 11:59 PM CST on October 15, 2026.

All materials become the property of the American Choral Directors Association.

Technical support will be available via membership@acda.org until 5:00 PM CST on October 15, 2026.

Late applications will not be accepted for any reason, including in cases of technical difficulty. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit early. Applicants are responsible for planning ahead to ensure they can complete the application process on time.

Incomplete or erroneous applications will result in disqualification.

IV. AUDITION REVIEW PROCESS

The National Student Conducting Masterclass Committee will appoint a review panel to evaluate submissions.

- Up to four undergraduate and four graduate conductors will be selected.
- Review panelists may not evaluate their own students.

Applicants will be notified by email on or before December 4, 2026.

V. CONFERENCE SESSION INFORMATION

The Masterclass Sessions will be held during the 2027 ACDA National Conference.

Each selected conductor will:

- Participate in a pre-conference coaching session with a masterclass clinician.
- Receive live feedback on gesture, rehearsal technique, and score study during the conference session.

Selected conductors will receive complimentary conference registration and a \$250 honorarium. Additionally, they will be formally recognized in ACDA publications and acknowledged publicly at the 2027 National Conference.

Disclaimer

No person connected with the selection of masterclass participants may be involved with any decision involving that person's student (over the past three years) who has applied or been selected as a participant in the ACDA Student Conducting Masterclass.

For questions about the application process, contact Jenny Bent, Collegiate Activities Coordinator (bentje@sonoma.edu)

For technical support or membership support, contact membership@acda.org

Application Opens: September 1, 2026

Application Deadline: October 15, 2026, 11:59pm CST

Access the application at: <https://acda.org/resources-for-student-members>



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Designing the Community Choir Experience: Trust, Structure, and Singer Engagement in Volunteer Ensembles

by Matt Hill

Introduction: Moving Beyond Repertoire

In the choral profession, conversations about ensemble success frequently focus on repertoire selection, interpretive nuance, and the polished final performance. These aspects remain essential. Repertoire is, of course, the vehicle through which singers encounter artistry. However, the aspects mentioned above often overshadow a more foundational truth: the long-term vitality of a community choir depends far less on *what* we sing than on *how* we design the entire singer experience around human needs rather than musical demands alone.

I have spent more than twenty years balancing roles as a university choral educator, music minister, and community choir leader. In January 2007, I founded Sing Omaha, a nonprofit choral organization in Nebraska. Over the last twenty years, Sing Omaha has grown from a single adult ensemble into a vibrant ecosystem of nine choirs serving more than five hundred musicians annually across the Omaha area—including children, youth, and adult choristers, summer camp participants, and private lesson students. This growth is the direct result of years of intentional design that

placed the singer experience at the center of every decision, from the first rehearsal announcement to the final curtain call.

My work has also included significant experience in music ministry—leading volunteer (mostly adult) singers in worship settings that share many of the same dynamics as community choirs: intrinsic motivation, diverse musical backgrounds, limited rehearsal time, and high expectations for both artistic integrity and relational warmth. These parallel experiences across two decades have reinforced the consistent lesson that singers return and audiences grow when the experience feels thoughtfully designed.

Community choir participants choose to attend. They arrive after demanding workdays and family responsibilities, carrying varied musical backgrounds, and seeking both artistic fulfillment and meaningful human connection. When singers feel valued as whole people rather than simply as voices, they invest more deeply and stay longer.

Hilary Apfelstadt has long emphasized that rehearsals must “offer a logical sequence of strategies.”¹ Colin Durrant describes choral singing as a fundamental-

ly social activity, one shaped by the relationships and shared intention among singers.² Malcolm Knowles's andragogy theory further illuminates why adult learners thrive when experiences feel relevant, autonomous, and personally significant.³ At Sing Omaha, our guiding ethos is "Passionate Musicianship, Artistic Excellence, People First"—a triumvirate of virtues we aspire to daily.

In a previous *Choral Journal* article (November/December 2023), I focused primarily on rehearsal mechanics.⁴ This present article builds outward into a more comprehensive framework: sustainable community choir success rests on three interdependent pillars—trust, structural clarity, and purposeful engagement.

The timing feels especially meaningful as Sing Omaha marks its twentieth anniversary in 2026. Chorus America's *The Chorus Impact Study: Singing for a Lifetime* (2019) reported that more than 54 million Americans sing in choruses—an increase from 14% of the population in 2008 to 17% in 2019—yet traditional school and church ensembles continue to face ongoing participation challenges.⁵ Post-pandemic realities, hybrid expectations, retention pressures, and an aging yet socially hungry population have heightened the need for intentional design. Community choirs, alongside music ministry contexts, serve as vital engines for lifelong singing, delivering documented benefits including reduced loneliness (73% of singers reported feeling less alone), stronger social skills, greater optimism and resilience, and markedly improved quality-of-life measures—particularly for adults sixty-five years or older, where 69% rated their quality of life as "very good" compared to just 22% in the general population.⁶

By centering trust, structure, and purpose, we create environments where ordinary people willingly invest their time, energy, and voices in something larger than themselves. These benefits are not abstract; they manifest in the smiles on the faces of singers who tell us, "Rehearsal is the highlight of my week."

The Community Choir as a Distinct Ecosystem

Community choirs occupy one of the most complex leadership environments in the choral field. Unlike uni-

versity or school ensembles, they cannot rely on grades, credit, or degree requirements to compel attendance. Unlike professional groups, they lack contracts, stipends, or uniformly advanced training. Music ministry settings often mirror this hybrid reality, drawing volunteer adult singers who balance full lives with a desire for meaningful musical and spiritual contribution.

Instead, these ensembles thrive in a space defined by four key characteristics:

- Voluntary participation driven by intrinsic motivation.
- Highly diverse musical backgrounds and life experiences.
- Limited rehearsal time.
- Elevated expectations for both artistic excellence and relational warmth.

Over the years, I have watched college students, professionals, and empty nesters discover (or rediscover) their voices in an atmosphere that respects their busy lives. Adults respond powerfully when structures honor their time while fostering both artistic and communal bonds.

At Sing Omaha, these dynamics have played out across nearly two decades of growth. What began with a single adult choir has expanded into a multi-generational program with clear pathways. Over nineteen seasons, we have observed strong correlations:

- Retention rates correlate more strongly with rehearsal experience quality than with repertoire difficulty or "wow factor."
- Singer feedback indicates high satisfaction when expectations, schedules, and feedback systems feel transparent and consistent.
- Audience attendance has grown steadily when concerts emphasize shared identity and community storytelling rather than isolated programming choices.

These observations reinforce the central premise:

ensemble design—not repertoire selection alone—drives long-term sustainability and impact. These patterns have proven resilient across changing seasons, programming, and external challenges, including the profound disruptions of the pandemic years from which we emerged stronger in ensemble membership, concert attendance, and community impact.

Pillar I: Trust as the Primary Rehearsal Currency

Choral singing is an inherently vulnerable act. The voice is internal, deeply personal, and is exposed the moment sound emerges. In volunteer community or church settings where singers owe the conductor nothing beyond their presence, trust becomes the central currency of the rehearsal room. Without it, even the most brilliant repertoire and efficient techniques yield limited results. Trust manifests in three interrelated dimensions, each of which calls for a corresponding rehearsal practice:

- Confidence that the conductor arrives thoroughly prepared and respects singers' time.
- Psychological safety that encourages musical risk-taking rather than perfectionism.
- Assurance that feedback is constructive, specific, and delivered with care.

The ensemble tone opens when singers feel supported; when they feel judged or exposed, it tightens. When volunteer singers gather weekly not for grades or pay but for a shared sense of meaning, the quality of trust in the room is immediately felt. Technical progress accelerates dramatically once trust is firmly established—both between the conductor and the ensemble, and within the singing community itself.

Practical Applications

Each of the following practices targets one dimension of trust directly—preparation, safety, and feedback—and all three have been refined through parallel work in community choir and music ministry settings.

1. Predictable Rehearsal Design. Every rehearsal follows a consistent, reliable arc: for example, 5–10 minutes of physical and vocal activation followed by purposeful work through repertoire with a balance of attention to challenging material and opportunities to sing well through better-prepared or more accessible passages. The focus is always on striving to achieve rehearsal balance devoted to ensemble integration and musical flow. This structure echoes Apfelstadt's call for purposeful sequencing⁷ while accommodating adult attention spans and energy levels after full workdays or ministry commitments.

This consistent arc scales naturally for the 90- or 120-minute rehearsals more typical of adult community choirs: the physical/vocal activation and targeted skill/section blocks remain brief and focused, while the ensemble-integration segment expands proportionally to allow deeper musical flow without sacrificing efficiency or singer energy. In practice, this means that even on weeks when energy is low after a long workday, singers know exactly what to expect and can settle in quickly. See Table 1 on the next page for a sample rehearsal arc.

2. Collaborative Language and Tone. Small shifts in wording create large differences in safety. Instead of “That vowel is incorrect,” try, “Let's unify this vowel. Listen for the warmth and roundness we're building together.” These invitations foster ownership and reduce defensiveness. Over time I have seen these subtle linguistic choices transform hesitant singers into active participants who offer ideas and corrections to one another and to me.

3. Demonstrated Preparation and Score Mastery. Timothy Mount's guidance on the first rehearsal is especially relevant for volunteer ensembles: conductors must know the score intimately before singers arrive.⁸ Inefficient pacing signals disregard for limited time; efficiency in rehearsal is itself a profound form of respect. As David Brunner has observed, “most of the conductor's work is actually done behind the scenes,” and the rehearsal hour itself depends on whether that

Repertoire & Resources - Community Choirs

preparation “uses the available time in the most productive manner.”⁹

These three practices are especially powerful for singers with highly diverse musical backgrounds: the returning adult who has not read music in decades,

the gifted amateur who plays piano but struggles with sight-singing, the recent high school or college graduate eager to continue high-level music making, or the lifelong church singer whose primary training has been aural rather than notational.

Trust lowers the fear of “being wrong,” structural

Table 1. Sample 120-Minute Rehearsal Arc

Time	Piece	Special Instructions
7:00	Welcome and Vocalizes	
7:05		Teach by rote
7:10		Begin memorization right away
7:15		Review the A section rhythms on "doh"
7:20		Review pitches from mm. 22 – 33 on "toom"
7:25		Tease pitches mm. 11 – 21
7:30	Echo	Pitches mm. 1 – 17 on 'dote' on all choir 1
7:40		Pitches mm. 18 – end
7:55	Lift Thine Eyes	Remind tone color filter, run on text
8:00	Break	
8:10	Announcements	
8:15	Sound the Trumpet	long-line phrases - consistent tone color
8:20		Start soft, steady crescendo through long tones
8:30	Widmung	Pitches all the way through on 'loh'
8:35		Soprano 1s only on the top of 3-part mm 37-38
8:45	Hotaru koi	
8:50		Run through twice on "doh," once slowly, once at near tempo
9:00	Dismiss	

clarity provides explicit pathways (such as optional notation tutorials or section-leader mentoring), and purposeful engagement connects every singer's contribution to the ensemble's larger story. When adult learners see that their varied life experiences are assets rather than deficits, technical progress accelerates and retention soars—exactly as Malcolm Knowles's andragogy principles predict.¹⁰

When trust is present, singers take risks that elevate the entire ensemble. Hesitant volunteers will blossom into confident contributors once they feel genuinely supported.

Pillar II: Structural Clarity and Singer Buy-In

While trust operates at the interpersonal and emotional level, structural clarity functions at the organizational and systemic level. Clear structure answers the three silent questions every volunteer singer carries: *What is expected of me? How do I succeed here? What does sustained participation look like?*

Without clarity, even high-trust environments can erode under confusion or perceived unfairness. In my experience, the absence of a clear structure is one of the quickest ways to lose even the most dedicated participants. Volunteer singers thrive when structures feel fair, predictable, and respectful of their lives outside of choir.

Each of the three silent questions above can have a structural answer, and each has a music ministry parallel:

- 1. Visible Ensemble Pathways** (What does sustained participation look like?): A multi-level structure can create a natural trajectory, encouraging long-term investment from singers and audiences alike. Singers can literally see their journey from childhood into adulthood, creating a sense of progression and belonging.
- 2. Explicit and Consistent Expectations** (What is expected of me?): Attendance policies, preparation guidelines, and communication protocols should be outlined in a concise singer handbook

and reinforced consistently. Consistency matters as much as clarity: policies applied unevenly are almost as corrosive to trust as policies that are never communicated at all.

- 3. Administrative Simplicity** (How do I succeed here?): Streamlined online tools (e.g., the TeacherZone app) minimize logistical friction, allowing singers and staff to focus on artistry and relationship building rather than administrative confusion.

Structural clarity does not constrain a community choir—it liberates it.

Pillar III: Engagement Through Purpose

Participation opens the door; purpose keeps singers returning. Purpose crystallizes when singers understand why the music matters, what their unique role is within the ensemble, and what larger impact their collective work has on the communities they serve. Singers must feel connected to the expressive intent of the music. In community and ministry settings, that connection must extend beyond the notes on the page to the ensemble's broader identity and community role.

Aligning Artistic Vision with Community Engagement

While purpose begins within the ensemble, it must ultimately extend beyond the rehearsal room. For community choirs in particular, artistic success is inseparable from audience engagement. Unlike school or church ensembles, which operate within institutional or liturgical frameworks, most community choirs depend on ticket revenue, donor support, and sustained public interest as core components of their economic model. As a result, season planning must account not only for artistic integrity but also for audience accessibility, thematic clarity, and marketability. This reality does not diminish artistry, but it does reframe it. The question is not whether to prioritize artistic or audience considerations but how to align them in a way that strengthens both.

Designing with the Audience in Mind

Effective community choir programming begins with a simple but often overlooked question: Why would someone choose to attend this concert?

In my work with Sing Omaha and in similar community-based settings, audience engagement has proven most consistent when programming reflects three interrelated principles:

1. *Clarity of Theme*: Concerts framed around a clear, compelling idea provide an entry point for audiences who may not initially connect with repertoire alone. Titles and themes should communicate immediately without requiring specialized musical knowledge. Graphic design for social media promotion and concert programs is also both enhanced and simplified by a unified theme.
2. *Emotional Accessibility*: Programs that balance depth with approachability invite a broader audience base. This often includes repertoire that is text-driven, narratively cohesive, or culturally familiar, even when presented alongside more complex works.
3. *Communicability*: If singers can easily explain the concert's purpose to a friend or colleague, the program is more likely to generate organic audience growth. In this sense, singers themselves become the most effective marketing agents.

These principles align closely with Colin Durrant's assertion that choral singing is fundamentally a social activity.¹¹ The concert, then, is not simply a performance. A concert is a shared experience between ensemble and community.

Three High-Engagement Community Choir Concert Models

Community choir organizations often find sustained audience growth by programming within one (or more) of the following high-engagement concert types:

1. Thematic/Narrative Programming

Concerts built around a unifying idea or emotional arc (e.g., Choral Canvases [music inspired by visual art], The Poet Sings [secular texts by famous poets], Music in the Reeds [woodwind accompa-

nied]). A unifying theme provides continuity for the audience and a sense of shared purpose for multi-choir organizations.

2. Popular/Genre-Based Programming

Concerts centered on recognizable styles, eras, or cultural touchpoints (e.g., Yacht Rock Party, Sing Omaha Loves the 90s, Icons, One-Hit Wonders). These programs offer immediate accessibility and are particularly effective for audience expansion and first-time attendees. Venue matters: a club with a stage for a band may be more suitable for a pop/rock concert than a church, school, or community center.

3. Collaborative/Event-Based Programming

Concerts defined by partnership or scale (e.g., choir with orchestra, guest artists, interdisciplinary collaborations, commissions/premieres). These events often serve as anchor performances within a season, creating heightened visibility and artistic ambition.

Most successful seasons include a strategic balance of these models, allowing organizations to engage diverse audiences while maintaining artistic variety and depth.

Case-Based Observations from Practice

Shifts toward audience-centered thematic programming will likely correspond with measurable increases in attendance and engagement. More traditional concert offerings will benefit from this approach. Rather than presenting repertoire as a collection of individual works, framing concerts as unified artistic experiences—built around ideas such as reflection, celebration, or a well-conceptualized theme—will strengthen both audience connection and singer investment. Importantly, these gains are not the result of simplifying or even necessarily unifying repertoire, but of *contextualizing it more effectively*.

Balancing Artistic Integrity and Market Reality

For conductors trained primarily in academic or sacred traditions, the integration of audience-centered planning can feel like a departure from established

norms. However, it is more accurately understood as an expansion of the conductor's role. In community settings, the conductor functions not only as a musical leader but also as a curator of experiences and, to some extent, a steward of organizational sustainability. Thoughtful season design acknowledges that:

1. Programs must sustain singer engagement *and* audience interest.
2. Concerts must function as both artistic events *and* community gatherings.
3. Repertoire selection operates within a broader ecosystem that includes marketing, storytelling, and audience expectation.

When these elements align, the result is amplification: audiences grow, singers feel increased ownership, and the ensemble's artistic impact expands.

Practical Considerations for Season Planning

Conductors seeking to integrate audience-centered design into their work might begin with the following questions:

1. **Theme Development:** Does each concert have a clear, communicable idea that can be articulated in one sentence?
2. **Audience Entry Point:** What elements of this program invite first-time listeners into the experience?
3. **Singer Advocacy:** Can ensemble members easily describe and promote this concert to others?
4. **Program Arc:** Does the full season offer variety in tone, style, and accessibility to sustain long-term audience engagement?
5. **Alignment with Mission:** Do the selected themes reinforce the ensemble's identity and values?

These questions do not replace traditional considerations of balance, difficulty, and stylistic breadth. They

do, however, extend them into a broader framework of sustainability and community impact.

Sing Omaha Examples

1. **Programmatic Identity:** Concerts are framed as cohesive artistic journeys with thematic unity and community storytelling in multi-ensemble performance.
2. **Audience and Community Engagement:** Our pop concert attendance increased from 105 attendees in 2017 to 381 in early 2026 through intentional strategies and partnerships. This growth was not the result of flashy marketing; it stemmed from singers who felt so connected to the series' place in our mission that they became its most effective ambassadors.
3. **Shared Traditions:** Annual rituals, including our "Christmas Fanfare" featuring all nine choirs with professional brass and percussion, and milestone celebrations including anniversary events, give singers ownership and build belonging.

Singers have become enthusiastic advocates, recruiting others because they are invested in the organization's story—patterns I have also observed in music ministry volunteer groups over the years. When a singer tells a friend, "You have to come sing with us," that invitation carries far more weight than any brochure or social media ad. The three-pillar framework described in this article evolved through reflection across nineteen seasons at Sing Omaha. While the early years emphasized repertoire variety, challenge, and a desire to preserve continuity from singers' previous high school and/or collegiate experiences, later reviews revealed the greater power of process and design. Our post-pandemic returns highlighted purpose as a reconnection tool. After the return to in-person singing in 2021-2022, purpose-driven programming around themes of resilience and community healing proved especially powerful. These lessons show the pillars as interdependent and mutually reinforcing. My university teaching has also been enriched by these real-world insights.

Repertoire & Resources - Community Choirs

Practical Tools and Self-Assessment

Conductors can apply this framework immediately through reflective practice and simple tools. See Table 2 for a Community Choir Design Rubric based on the three-pillar framework.

Core Self-Assessment Questions

1. Trust: Do singers display confident tone and willingness to experiment?
2. Structure: Are expectations clear and consistently applied?
3. Purpose: Do singers articulate why the work matters and recruit others?

Five-Question End-of-Semester Singer Feedback Survey

(Anonymous, 5-point Likert scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

1. I feel psychologically safe to take musical risks in rehearsal.
2. Rehearsal structure and expectations are clear and respectful of my time.
3. I understand how my contribution fits into the ensemble's larger purpose and community impact.

4. The conductor demonstrates thorough preparation and constructive feedback.
5. I would recommend this choir to a friend (and why/why not optional open comment).

Five Red Flags of Weak Design

1. Rehearsals frequently run over or feel disorganized.
2. Singer questions about policy or expectations go unanswered for more than one rehearsal cycle.
3. Feedback is consistently vague or public/critical rather than specific and supportive.
4. No visible long-term pathways or milestone celebrations exist.
5. Singers stop recruiting friends or begin missing rehearsals without explanation.

Implications for the Field and for ACDA

Community choirs stand at the center of choral music's future in the United States. ACDA is uniquely positioned to support community choir conductors in this work through its long-standing focus on musicianship and repertoire; and with growing attention to organizational leadership, adult pedagogy, and culture-building.

Table 2. Community Choir Design Rubric (Simple 1–5 scale for each pillar; conductors may complete quarterly)

Pillar	1 (Weak)	3 (Developing)	5 (Strong)
Trust	Singers appear guarded; tone is restricted	Occasional risk-taking; some hesitation	Confident tone; frequent musical experimentation
Structural Clarity	Expectations unclear or inconsistently applied	Most policies clear but occasional confusion	Handbook, pathways, and communication are transparent and predictable
Purposeful Engagement	Singers attend but do not advocate	Growing ownership; limited recruitment	Singers articulate ensemble "why" and actively recruit others

Across the association, there are a variety of ways this conversation might continue to develop. At the national, regional, and state levels, conductors are already exploring questions of singer engagement, retention, and ensemble design through conference sessions, reading sessions, and collegial exchange. Continued attention to these areas—whether through interest sessions, informal mentorship, or the sharing of field-based practices—has the potential to further equip conductors working in volunteer, limited-rehearsal settings.

Within the National Repertoire & Resources Committee, particularly in areas related to Lifelong Choirs, there is meaningful opportunity to continue elevating practical frameworks that connect musical excellence with sustainable ensemble design. In many cases, the most effective contributions may be those that remain adaptable, scalable, and grounded in real-world application—offering conductors tools they can shape to fit the needs of their own communities. Ultimately, the sustainability and growth of our art form will depend on our ability to design experiences that foster trust, provide structural clarity, and ignite genuine purpose.

If we accept that people—not repertoire—are the true defining factor in community choir success, then the conductor's role expands into something both more complex and more deeply rewarding. We move beyond being mere preparers of music to intentional designers of human experience.

Chorus America's 2009 *Chorus Impact Study* documented that 54% of adult singers in their survey participated in community choirs compared with 38% in church choirs.¹² Comparable comparison data was not collected in the 2019 study, but the broader landscape—patterns of religious disaffiliation, post-pandemic volunteer fatigue, and the changing shape of adult civic life—suggests that community choirs continue to play an outsized role in adult lifelong singing. Conductor training must evolve accordingly to meet the needs of adult singers in limited-rehearsal environments.

We are not simply teaching notes or polishing music for public performance. We are crafting spaces where people feel safe enough to be vulnerable, clear enough about the ensemble's purpose and their role in it to invest fully, and inspired enough to give their voices—literally and figuratively—to something larger than themselves.

Final Thought

We began with a simple reframing: that what we sing matters far less than *how we design the experience around the singing*. When we design for people first, artistic excellence follows—not as a goal, but as a natural outcome. **C**

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NOTES

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- ² Colin Durrant, *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice*. 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2017).
- ³ Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*. 3rd ed. (Gulf Publishing, 1984).
- ⁴ Matt Hill, "Improving the Rehearsal Experience: Strategies for Success," *Choral Journal* 64, no. 4 (November/December 2023): 46–54.
- ⁵ Chorus America, *The Chorus Impact Study: Singing for a Lifetime* (Chorus America, 2019), <https://chorusamerica.org/resource/chorus-impact-study-singing-lifetime>.
- ⁶ Chorus America, *The Chorus Impact Study* (2019).
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- ¹⁰ Knowles, *The Adult Learner*.
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QUARTERLY ENDORSEMENTS



JULIAN DAVID BRYSON

Fire Flowers

4' 15" SATB; piano
English (Emily Pauline Johnson)

The story tells of being dropped into a destructive forest wild fire; told through driving, overlapping rhythmic ostinati and rising chromatic lines to symbolize rising flames. The metaphor is that of rising from the ashes of loss and destruction. Emotionally powerful; accessible for HS and above.

EDNA YEH

Quando Son Più Lontan

2' 50" SATB, div; a cappella
Italian (Yvo Barry)

16th century poem that explores the paradox of love intensified by absence—examining the lover's internal emotional state, rather than the relationship itself. Continual shifting of meter: 3/8, 5/8, 4/8, 6/8. Mix of chordal and imitative writing; requires secure, independent 8 vocal lines, and a flexible soprano soloist for the "morte" melisma. Emotional powerhouse for a secure ensemble.



TOM COUNCIL

Maria Wiegenlied

2' 52" SSATB; piano or harp
German; Eng option (Martin Boelitz)

Intimate devotional scene around the manger narrative, based on the beloved melody by Max Reger. Top soprano carries melody throughout, with lower voices in harmonic support, with occasional imitative cells. Rocking motion in piano (optional harp). Purity of line necessary; otherwise, accessible and lovely, HS and above.

JOSHUA CARTER MAYNARD

Seek

4' 30" SSAA, Alto solo; piano
English (Joshua Carter Maynard)

A charge to courage, urging an embrace of the unknown, trust in inner conviction, leadership with hope. A mix of traditional choral writing with a bit of the aleatoric. Begins with a Dorian soundscape in piano, to which voices join. Concludes with a vivacious section in 7/8. Also available for mixed voices; also orchestral scoring. Needs strong ensemble and a fine pianist. Compelling!



RAPHAEL AMADIO FUSCO

Le parole dei mesi

7' SSAATTBB, 3 opt S soli; a cap; body perc
Italian (Tonino Guerra)

On an obvious level, twelve phrases, one per month, each as a sensory image representing a particular time of year. Drawing upon the Italian madrigal tradition, Fusco primarily seeks to evoke memories from different times throughout a year. Some aleatoric expression, stylistic and metrical variety throughout. Brilliant and fun! Requires sophisticated skill level.

MIKE ROWAN

Nothing Was Wrong with Sarah Ray

7'; SSAATTBB; a cappella; Mez & Bar soli
English (Rosa Parks of the Boblo Boat)

Sarah Ray was represented, in 1945, before the US Supreme Court by NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall, in her case contesting having been thrown off a river ferry because she was black. Successful case paved the way for Brown v. Board of Education. Beautifully written and extremely impactful; no dry eyes! Semi-pro and above.



JOAN JOHNSON DREWES

Send Love

6' 20" SATB, divisi x4; S, A soli; piano
English (I Peter 4:10)

Central theme: each has unique gifts entrusted by God, to be used for the benefit of others, stewarded generously. Begins with a single solo voice, joined one at a time by other solo voices. Ultimately expands to four SATB choirs echoing each other, suggesting a passing forward to others. Piano plays an atmospheric role. Both compelling and meditative; secure singers needed.

LORETTA K. NOTARESCHI

Climate Mass

25'. SSATB; A,T,B soli; orchestra or piano
Latin & English (Mass; poetry by Alyse Knorr)

Ordinary without Credo; English poetry inspired by Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical calling the ecological crisis fundamentally spiritual; a crisis of human interaction. Moves from foreboding (Kyrie) into awe at God's creation (Gloria); tenderness and yearning, plea to "begin again." Choral writing largely chordal, with some imitation; very manageable for community level. Impressive solo writing. Moving.



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Recorded Sound Reviews

All Is Miracle:

The Choral Music of Kyle Pederson

Transept, Timothy J. Campbell, director
Navona Records, 2025

All Is Miracle: The Choral Music of Kyle Pederson is a release from the Sioux Falls, South Dakota-based choral ensemble Transept, directed by Timothy J. Campbell. Transept functions both as a forty-plus-member choir and as a twelve-voice consort of soloists featured throughout the album. Recorded in 2024, the project is devoted entirely to the choral works of Minneapolis-based composer Kyle Pederson and offers a compelling blend of unaccompanied selections and collaboratively accompanied works. Pederson, himself a native of Sioux Falls, brings added resonance to the recording, creating something of an artistic homecoming through this thoughtful partnership between composer and ensemble. He was also commissioned to compose for the 2026 Eastern ACDA Region's Envision conference in Providence, Rhode Island. This album includes new compositions, arrangements of traditional hymn tunes, fresh text settings, and representative works drawn from across the composer's *oeuvre*.

Recorded at the Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Sioux Falls and produced by the Grammy Award-winning team at Soundmirror, Inc., the album boasts seamless and pristine sound quality. The cathedral provides an

ideal acoustic environment, allowing the full spectrum of tonal color to bloom while preserving exceptional textual clarity. Each selection is rendered with transparency and care, and the programming unfolds organically from one piece to the next, resulting in a cohesive and beautifully curated collection of stand-alone octavos. The album contains seventeen individual works, but the centerpiece, *All Is Miracle*, commissioned for Transept, is truly breathtaking. Set to poetry by Charles Anthony Silvestri, the work pairs evocative text with Pederson's signature part-writing. It recalls the polychordal richness and "crunch-chord" sonorities of 1990's choral writing while maintaining Pederson's distinctive harmonic language. Though structurally straightforward, its power lies in the luminous simplicity of its harmonies, supported by a warm and expressive piano underlay.

The opening measures evoke the atmosphere of a cinematic score before the choir enters in hushed reverence. Mezzo-soprano Clara Osowski and soprano Savannah Porter bring warmth and brilliance to the texture without overshadowing the ensemble; instead, they function as an integrated fifth voice within the choral fabric. Collaborative pianist Paul Sanchez, featured prominently throughout the album, lends both weight and tenderness to the work, deepening its emotional impact.

Stars, the first selection to feature the twelve-voice

consort, is an award-winning work composed in 2016. Its seemingly straightforward four-part SATB texture belies the challenges of intricate tuning and shifting compound meters that propel the music forward with quiet intensity. Introspective and expansive, the work invites the listener to contemplate the night sky and meditate on distant light piercing the darkness.

Some of the album's most compelling collaborations appear at its center. *Sanctus*, another commission for Transept, combines the full choir with pianist Paul Sanchez and organist Jared Ostermann. The piece begins in a simple four-part texture before expanding into an eight-part anthem of striking breadth. Piano and organ provide a sustained harmonic foundation while chant-like motives are seamlessly exchanged among the vocal lines. Though concise, the work is a vivid example of the collaborative synergy between keyboards and choir.

Last Words, also positioned near the center of the album, is an ethereal unaccompanied setting drawn from three Gospel accounts of the crucifixion, commonly known as the Seven Last Words. Pederson weaves Latin and English texts together with striking dramatic intent: the English text offers the narrative perspective, while an octet emerging from within the choir sings Christ's words in Latin. This layered approach heightens emotional tension and drives forward a palpable sense of anguish and inevitability. Yet the work resists closure. Rather than concluding with a definitive cadence, Ped-

erson leaves the listener suspended on a delicate, unresolved chord, neither final nor anticipatory, mirroring the weight of the impending crucifixion.

Near the close of the hour-long album is an arrangement of Philipp Nicolai's *Wake, Awake*, titled *O Morning Star*, also commissioned for Transept. The familiar chorale melody is enriched with modern metric shifts and textural variation, making it an effective penultimate selection. It provides a striking contrast to the final track, *God Be with You 'Til We Meet Again*, a heartfelt arrangement composed in honor of Pederson's alma mater, the Augustana Choir in Sioux Falls. Featuring guitarist Jared Waln and soprano soloist Kayleen Sanchez, the piece embodies poignant simplicity and quiet beauty.

Pederson and Campbell have created a sonorous and thoughtfully designed compilation that highlights both the composer's expressive range and Transept's artistic excellence. This significant recording not only showcases a wide cross-section of Pederson's choral writing but also affirms the vitality and passion for choral artistry flourishing in the Upper Midwest.

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Dan Locklair: Sing to the World

Phoenix Consort
Adam Whitmore, director
Iain Farrington, piano
Convivium Records, 2026, 1:17:58

As the United States celebrates its semi quincentennial in 2026, choral conductors across the country are searching for American repertoire that explores the nation's musical and literary identity. Concert programs commemorating the 250th anniversary have created renewed interest in composers whose works engage directly with American texts and traditions. A possible selection among these voices is North Carolina composer Dan Locklair, whose choral music frequently draws

upon the poetry of major American writers, including Robert Frost and Walt Whitman. A Charlotte native, Locklair has developed a compositional language that balances lyricism and harmonic nuance while remaining attentive to the rhythmic and expressive qualities of text.

Browsing his scores, it becomes readily apparent that Locklair pays careful attention to text declamation, harmonic pacing, and dynamic contrast. A word does not pass by that is not connected to a musical idea. Sudden harmonic shifts illuminate moments of emotional significance, metric changes serve the text throughout, and carefully shaped dynamics allow each phrase to maintain direction. Even when paired with dense choral textures, which Locklair frequently utilizes, there is a remarkable clarity of line, ensuring that the text remains central to performance of his works. His music offers great depth for conductors and singers to engage with, rewarding careful preparation of each detail.

To that end, Locklair's music is in very capable hands with the Phoenix Consort led by director Adam Whitmore and pianist Iain Farrington. Throughout the album, their singing displays a great deal of sensitivity to the text. They provide dynamic motion to each line, as guided by the harmonic shifts present in the music. Their attention to balance must be lauded as well, which is a difficult task in the thicker choral textures demanded by Locklair's music. Farrington's playing matches this sensitivity, properly balanced into the collective textures.

The centerpiece of the album is *Sing to the World: A Choral Cycle in Five Movements in Celebration of Music*. As the subtitle reveals, each movement is the setting of a poem that reflects on the impact of music. While each movement is certainly worthy of discussion, I was particularly taken with the third movement, "An Hymn to the Morning," a setting of Phillis Wheatley's poem of the same title. Locklair weaves the four stanzas of Wheatley's poetry around a recurring refrain of the nineteenth-century spiritual "My Lord, What a Morning." The Phoenix Consort responds beautifully to the building arc of this movement, with each stanza's soloist beautifully ushering the work forward toward the final glorious declamation of "When the Stars Begin

to Fall."

Also featured on the album are two settings of celebrated New England poet Robert Frost. "For This is Love," originally written in celebration of a couple's thirtieth wedding anniversary, also represents Locklair's writing for the piano at its very best. The wordless opening minute of this work is a beautiful harmonic journey on its own, and it only expands from there. It is worth a listen or three. In "Bond and Free," Frost dichotomizes "Love" and "Thought" throughout his poem, to which Locklair responds by dichotomizing the tonalities of G major and G minor. The result is a carefully constructed work filled with harmonic turns to match the poetry.

The album also features two other works with strong sentimental connections for the United States. A triptych, *The Lilacs Bloomed*, based on Walt Whitman's 1865 poem mourning the death of Abraham Lincoln, dramatically captures the weight of this event in history. The second movement in particular is one of the most stirring moments on the album. "For Amber Waves" is a more unique setting of Katharine Lee Bates's well-known poem "America the Beautiful." Reminiscent of Knut Nystedt's "Immortal Bach," it is written as a spatial tune in which the singers surround the audience. The tune, however, is entirely original up until the final seconds in which the soprano soloist hints at the tune we all associate with this text.

Sing to the World offers a compelling reminder that American choral repertoire extends far beyond patriotic fanfares. For conductors searching for repertoire that thoughtfully engages on the American experience while offering meaningful musical depth, this album stands as an especially timely and rewarding recording.

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