

conducting technique finds less mirroring, little mouthing of words, and excellent eye contact in addition to the many other elements mentioned above.

Observing the Observer

We have discussed excellent conducting techniques and offered a few examples of elite conductors. Understanding the many benefits in watching others perform, let's consider now the most important professional to be studied carefully on video: you.

Now comes the fun part of video instruction. Arrange for your rehearsal or performance to be video recorded. Take note of the positives and negatives in your conducting, including mirroring, mouthing of words, and memorization. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you conducting beats/measures or phrases?
- How clear is your beat?
- How about eye contact?
- Is the choir rhythmically engaged, or are you “pulling it out of them?”
- Is the performance professional?
- In rehearsal, how many minutes do you talk and they sing? This may be the biggest surprise (and lesson) of all.

All of us are at different stages of growth as conductors. Carlos Kleiber was largely self-taught and grew up watching his father and others conduct. In this age of digital media, we too can watch the greats while constantly striving toward conducting excellence.

NOTES

- 1 www.oocities.org/wisconsinband/Old SiteStuff/history.html
- 2 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/uwdigicollect/4439276486>
- 3 James Kreger, <https://www.metorchestramusicians.org/blog/2014/4/7/making-music-with-carlos-kleiber-elusive-titan-of-the-podium?rq=kleiber>
- 4 Charles Barber, *Corresponding with Carlos: A Biography of Carlos*

Kleiber (Lanham, Maryland, The Roman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2011), 6-7

5 *Ibid.*, 7

6 Dr. Charles Barber corresponded with the reclusive Kleiber from 1989 until near the end of his life. He sent 51 video tapes over that period of time of various conductors to Kleiber, who was eager to see them. Carlos's responses are published in “Conversations with Carlos.” This book is highly recommended reading for the serious student of conducting.

7 Carlos Kleiber, *New Year's Concert*, Vienna Philharmonic, 1989, [@21:33](https://youtu.be/9QX4ff0Hmc)

8 Barber, *Corresponding with Carlos*, 122

9 Carlos Kleiber, *New Year's Concert*, Vienna Philharmonic, 1992, <https://youtu.be/R7Hn0do-xKE>

10 Carlos Kleiber, *Beethoven's Seventh Symphony*, Concertgebouw Orchestra, <https://youtu.be/2Sw97NzvvvE>

11 Harry Christophers, *Handel's Zadok the Priest*, <https://youtu.be/J6CNQqzN3mU>

12 John Eliot Gardiner, *Handel's Dixit Dominus*, <https://youtu.be/dS65-ZvUSSM>, <https://www.metorchestramusicians.org/blog/2014/4/7/making-music-with-carlos-kleiber-elusive-titan-of-the-podium?rq=kleiber>

A Community Divided: Gendered Discourse in the Ensemble Classroom

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“In order to promote an openness of access to musical possibilities and a richly balanced and communicative musical experience for everybody, we have to be willing to open up the complex webs of cultural behavior which hold music in its current state.”¹

In a world where “boys will be boys” and “you _____ like a girl,” we often do not realize the negative impact our words and actions have on adolescent males and females. Many of our teaching practices tend to reflect our implicit and perceived sex and gender biases. Based on my experiences in both secondary and higher education, I find that

discussions regarding diversity in education focus more on socio-economic status and cultural identity and less on gender discourse.

In this article, I hope to show that despite our ongoing work to promote gender equality, we may actually be making it worse. In our attempts to treat all students equitably, we might also be encouraging more divisiveness (whether we are aware of it or not). I also wonder if this is a never-ending cycle. Are we really doing anything different or are we talking about diversity just to check off a box? Outlined below, I challenge all choral directors to decide whether their repertoire choices, ensemble structures, curricula, and pedagogy are fair and equitable for all students, male and female alike.

It has been proven that children are able to identify gender stereotypes as early as age three.² By default, boys and girls learn misrepresentations of what it means to be either masculine or feminine. According to Patrick Hawkins, Arizona State University, these types of sex biases are then reinforced in general classroom reading materials. Most stories, he found, were about male characters who actively avoided being associated with a girl-type activity. Hawkins also found that major male characters had greater career roles than females.³ Aside from this print material, teachers might consider additional reinforcement of the gender divide in a student's formative years: lining up by gender, any game or activity played with boys versus girls, and physical education. There are countless additional examples highlighting the increasing divide between the sexes in educational settings.

Specific to the music classroom, researchers have found male-majority illustrations in technique books, male-majority advertisements in *The Instrumentalist*, and male-majority teacher preparation materials.⁴ As educators, we are not involved in the creation of these resources and the ways in which males and females are represented in the materials, so what are we doing to deter this practice in our classrooms? Gender equality and inclusion have now become standard terms in our educational vernacular, but how much is real and how much is just lip-service?

The Future is Female

Repertoire

A number of pedagogues would consider “good” choral music as legitimate (and traditional) if it is written by dead, white, Euro-American males. They might also believe the “best” music to be written for mixed choirs. By these standards, directors may turn a blind eye to this gendered music and may feel justified for continued use of an exclusionary canon.⁵

When one does look at gender-specific repertoire, the music often reinforces sex stereotypes. More often than not, women's choir music largely consists of slow ballads, lullabies, and love songs or the white middle-class definition of femininity.⁶ Men's choir repertoire often focuses on adventure, travel, and drinking, topics that might make boys feel like men or entice them into joining choir. In my opinion, there are countless works that promote misogyny and gender roles, for example, Offenbach's *Neighbors' Chorus* or Copland's *Stomp your Foot*.

Ensemble Structure

Let's say that the repertoire you have chosen does not reinforce a gender divide. Are the ensemble offerings at your school equitable? Is the mixed choir or the women's chorus the top choir? Why is that? Females undoubtedly outnumber males in many choral programs. One reason might be the perception that male singers are sensitive or effeminate, attributes often associated with females.⁷

The social misconceptions about singing are beyond the scope of this paper; however, the lack of male participation in choirs can influence female singers. Considering the imbalance of voice parts that occurs too often, are we inadvertently devaluing a number of talented females by making the women's choir the place for leftovers, for women who are not good enough? By default, are we also creating a more competitive atmosphere among females that may not exist among males? Is that fair or healthy?

The second-place status of female singers promotes the idea that the individuals in these ensembles can only rise to the challenge of being adequate or acceptable.⁸ Their sole function is to prove themselves worthy of eventually singing in the mixed choir.⁹ Whether intentional or not, this structure creates prestige hierarchy and a stigma that men are treated differently from women.

Curriculum

Now let's assume that you are already sensitive to the imbalance of voice parts, and that you already have ensembles that reflect the large number of talented women in your program. Does the curriculum include and support females? When we discuss choral music, we talk almost exclusively in terms of contributions made by men. Julia Koza writes that women are only mentioned as to whether they did or did not participate in choral singing. Women may not have sung during the Renaissance, but they were not absent from music's past.¹⁰ To prove this point further, directors are now promoting all-female composer concerts, acknowledging the ever-present gender divide.

What is our focus?

From a pedagogical perspective, choral directors invest a great deal of time and effort to the male changing voice. In fact, when director/teachers refer to the changing voice, it is sometimes difficult to discern whether or not they are talking about both sexes or just males.¹¹ We attend conferences and lectures on the topic. Complete chapters in numerous textbooks are dedicated to this subject. Add the fact that choral directors spend much time and effort recruiting men since, as I mentioned earlier, they are a minority in many choir programs. The question then arises—if our curriculum and pedagogy are male-driven and if male singers tend to monopolize much of our attention, are the females receiving the music education they need and deserve?

Summary

Gender inequality in choral music is not new, but how often do we look at this problem from the female perspective? Teachers are constantly trying to find new ways to foster inclusivity in their classrooms. Despite our best efforts, male and female singers are not represented equally in many choral programs.

Unfortunately, we must work within certain confines beyond our control—adolescent peer pressure among men, a lack of female representation in music history materials, and singing techniques that are generally more challenging for young men. With all that said, how do we work through these challenges while trying to empower our female singers? Great strides have been made in gender equality, es-

pecially in education, but the journey is long and full of challenges. Given strong leadership by clear-headed choral directors, the challenges can be met.

NOTES

- ¹ Jo Glover, "Music, Gender and Education Conference, Bristol University, March 1993," *British Journal of Music Education* 10, no. 3: 152, doi: 10.1017/S0265051700001698
- ² Nicola Dibben, "Gender Identity and Music," in *Musical Identities*, ed. Raymond MacDonald, David Hargreaves and Dorothy Mill (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- ³ Patrick Hawkins, "What Boys and Girls Learn Through Song: A Content Analysis of Gender Traits and Sex Bias in Two Classroom Textbooks." *Research and Issues in Music Education* 5, no. 1 (2007): 5. <https://ir.stthomas.edu/rime/vol5/iss1/5/>
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Julia Eklund Koza, "Getting a word in edgewise: A feminist critique of choral methods texts." *The Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (1994): 71.
- ⁶ Ibid. 72.
- ⁷ Julia Eklund Koza, "The 'missing males' and other gender issues in music education: Evidence from the Music Supervisors' Journal, 1914–1924." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 41, no. 3 (1993): 219, doi: 10.2307/3345326
- ⁸ Phillip Swan, "The Y Factor in an X Chromosome World" in *Conducting Women's Choirs*, ed. Debra Spurgeon (Chicago: GIA Publication, 2012): 133.
- ⁹ Jill Wilson, "Preferences Of and Attitudes Toward Treble Choral Ensembles." *Research and Issues in Music Education* 10, no. 1 (2012): 4. <https://ir.stthomas.edu/rime/vol10/iss1/4/>
- ¹⁰ Koza, "Getting a word in edgewise," 70.
- ¹¹ Koza, "The 'missing males' and other gender issues in music education," 224.