



PROJECT : ENCORE™

Quality-Tested New Music beyond Traditional Publication

By Deborah Simpkin King

It seems like everyone today is performing new music. Composer competitions are springing up everywhere, and premiere performances and even commissions are no longer as unusual as they once were. Short of groups with an intentional focus away from new music (Renaissance, Gospel, etc.), most ensembles and conductors give at least a nod toward performing the music of living composers. While continuing to honor the role of traditional music publishing houses, a great deal of compositional activity has nothing to do with a traditional publisher. Twenty years ago, most conductors would have turned almost exclusively to publisher catalogs and their reading sessions for repertoire. Most composers would have sought a publisher who would manage everything from printing and promotion to performance rights.

A recent survey reveals that 63 percent of professional composers reported being deeply involved with promotion of their own work.¹ Composer Hilary Tann states, “It used to be that publishers selected composers and then promoted them... Publishers aren’t doing that anymore. So we are extending the base [and] pulling into our different communities.”² In addition to the promotional ingenu-

ity displayed by individual composers, a number of composer collectives have emerged,³ promoting a larger body of music through the joint efforts of a group of composers.

New Dilemma for Conductors

While for champions of new choral music these developments are exciting and inspiring (and identifiable enough as to be making their way into curricula of some conservatories and schools of music), they come with their own set of challenges. For composers, self-promotion represents a siphoning of creative energy away from the creative work of composi-

er enough time. Additionally, many excellent composers are no longer even seeking traditional publication, so conductors cannot rely exclusively on publishers’ catalogs.

Given the changing world of music publishing, promotion, and distribution, the need for a means of evaluating the large quantity of new music demands a unique response—a new resource to extend the role traditionally born by editorial staffs of traditional houses of music publication. That need, in combination with an intense interest in addressing the challenge composers face when seeking performances beyond the premiere for a new work,

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tion. For conductors, even avowed repertoire enthusiasts who delight in reading through new scores, the evolution away from the traditional publishing house model has placed them on the receiving end of material from hundreds of composers eager for a performance—and there is nev-

er enough time. Additionally, many excellent composers are no longer even seeking traditional publication, so conductors cannot rely exclusively on publishers’ catalogs.

has given birth to an initiative called PROJECT: ENCORE™ (P:E). P:E is a catalog of contemporary choral music that provides twenty-first-century conductors with a lens for repertoire discovery and evaluation. Its platform is a unique website containing a free catalog of contem-

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porary choral music that has been reviewed and endorsed by a panel of renowned conductors. Each catalog entry contains a full sound file, an almost-complete score, composer biographical and contact information, and full description, including text (and translation, where applicable).

Each score contained within the Catalog has been submitted by its composer after it has had a significant public performance. New scores are added to the Catalog quarterly, as the final stage a three-month-long review process. Composers may submit as many as four post-premiere works each year (one per quarter) for anonymous review by three reviewers, each a professionally recognized conductor with a documented commitment to new music. Approval by two of the three reviewers results in an endorsement of the score as a P:E composition and its entry into the Catalog. With only approximately 60 percent of the submissions accepted into the Catalog, the review is a serious vetting process and represents a significant endorsement for a composer.

The rich body of new choral music found in the P:E Catalog encompasses varied styles, voicings and instrumentations, lengths, and levels of complexity. The search function is robust, even including such elements as keywords, seasons of the calendar and liturgical year, and poet/author. Introduction to the noteworthy P:E composers themselves is arguably of equal value to the compositions contained within the Catalog. Composers and conductors of P:E compositions are encouraged to display the P:E indicia⁴ and explanatory footnote in program listings and individual oeu-

vres catalogs. (Figure 1)

P:E compositions are a mix of works traditionally published, self-published, and coop-represented. Publishers have picked up some compositions following their P:E endorsement.⁵ None of this in any way alters the P:E status of a work. P:E is a resource, not a competitive entity, collaborating supportively with all who share the mission of promoting high-quality choral composition.

The P:E catalog includes some composers with long track records of publishing and a history of commissions. Others are much younger in their careers. The unifying identifier is the high quality of each composition accepted. Acceptance of one work by a composer is not a guarantee of acceptance of others he or she might submit, as review is completely blind. Although P:E currently contains the work of more American composers than any other single nationality, the recent addition of a translator function to the online catalog reflects the already-noteworthy and growing number of international submissions. Reviewers

reflect an international mix as well.

The Story Behind the Product

As with many things that ultimately take on significant proportion, P:E had its genesis in the very tangible experience of one composer and one conductor and her ensemble. It was upon the return of Schola Cantorum on Hudson from its invitational tour to Austria in 2008 to perform the European premiere of the thirty-minute unaccompanied Latin *Mass* by Randall Svane that it was decided that something had to be done about the difficulty composers experience in seeking post-premiere performances.

The ensemble had performed the American premiere of *Mass* in 2005, following which, premiering conductor Deborah Simpkin King collaborated with the composer in seeking additional performances for this admittedly challenging composition. Letters were sent to a strategically selected list of choirmasters around the world, along with the full score and sound file of the premiere



This work is part of the PROJECT : ENCORE™ Catalog of Contemporary Choral Music. PROJECT : ENCORE™ works have been premiered, and then evaluated via blind adjudication by prestigious conductors as being works of excellent quality. The online, searchable catalog is located at: ProjectEncore.org.

Figure 1

performance. Follow-up communications were sent to each from the premiering conductor, encouraging a receptive look at what had proven to be a wonderful, if difficult, work.

Two years later, the Kapellmeister at the Salzburg Cathedral expressed interest, inviting the European premiere in Sunday morning mass in the heart of the weeks of the famed Salzburg Festival but only if the premiering choir heard in the sound files sent to him would come to perform it. The tour was arranged and carried out, providing a memorable experience for composer and for the traveling members of Schola Cantorum on Hudson. It also provided the catalyst for what would become P:E.

The experience highlighted a serious challenge long recognized in the community of composers: As challenging as it can be to secure a first performance for a new work, it is much more difficult to find groups and conductors willing to take on a second or third performance once the cachet of a premiere has been spent.

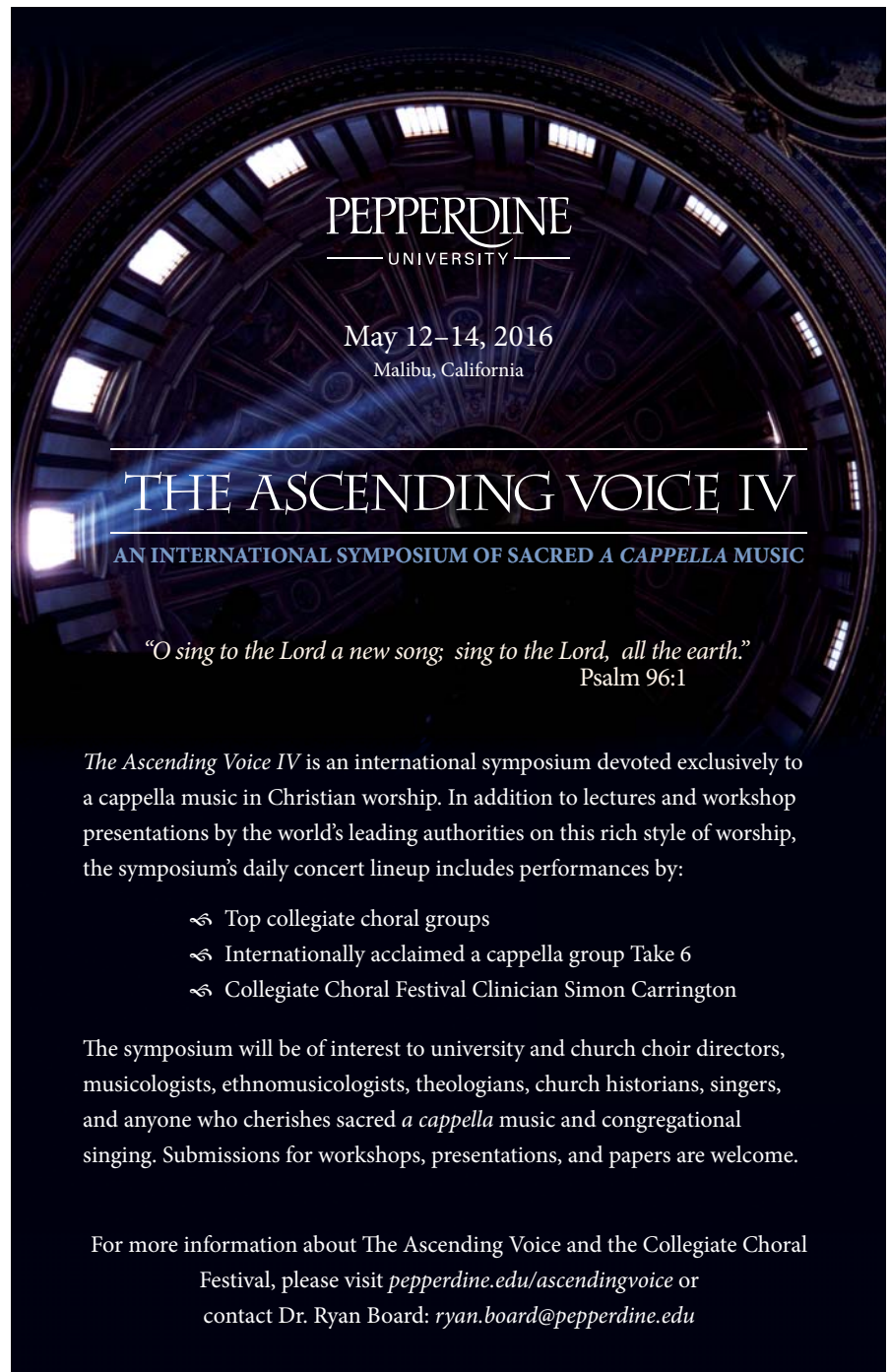
After the Premiere

William Latham, on being accosted by one of his more eager students with an invitation to come to a premier performance of that student's latest composition, responded by saying, "Let me know when you get a second performance. That one I'll come to."⁶ "Many of my choral works involve large forces—soloists, chorus, orchestra," states composer Andrea Clearfield. "I find it difficult to obtain second performances of these big works, especially in these economic times when organizations

may be cutting back on programming large contemporary pieces."

"Sometimes word of mouth will carry good news of a good performance," says composer Hilary Tann, "but quite often I have felt, especially

with smaller ensembles, that the publicity machine doesn't work so well... Clearly, the works are programmed because they're commissioned. It's the later performances that are the problem."



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AN INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF SACRED A CAPPELLA MUSIC

*"O sing to the Lord a new song: sing to the Lord, all the earth."
Psalm 96:1*

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- ☞ Top collegiate choral groups
- ☞ Internationally acclaimed a cappella group Take 6
- ☞ Collegiate Choral Festival Clinician Simon Carrington

The symposium will be of interest to university and church choir directors, musicologists, ethnomusicologists, theologians, church historians, singers, and anyone who cherishes sacred *a cappella* music and congregational singing. Submissions for workshops, presentations, and papers are welcome.

For more information about The Ascending Voice and the Collegiate Choral Festival, please visit pepperdine.edu/ascendingvoice or contact Dr. Ryan Board: ryan.board@pepperdine.edu

An additional dilemma, perhaps less considered, is shared across the board: Although a premier performance carries with it its own cachet, it is often only after that first performance that the worth of a composition begins to reveal itself. Lacking a second preparation and hearing, it is possible for a masterwork to sit neglected on a shelf indefinitely. It is a scenario played out in the studios of even well-known composers with some of their favorite works. “I have a couple of good pieces that are sitting, waiting for their second and third performances,” adds Tann.

Motivated to make a difference, Schola’s artistic leadership decided to highlight the issue with a concert season (2009-10) featuring post-premiere compositions. The board, supportive of the reasons behind the proposed direction, was concerned about the ability to promote concerts featuring unknown pieces and composers. Nonetheless, the plan to investigate what repertoire could be found to fulfill the mission was approved.

A stumbling block was soon encountered: There were no resources through which to locate such works. Short of scanning headlines of major news publications throughout the world for reviews of newly premiered works, it was unclear how such compositions were to be found. Unwilling to be diverted, and recognizing that an extensive effort would need to be undertaken, it seemed obvious that the results should somehow be made available in ways that would benefit more than just a handful of composers, and those singers and audience members associated with Schola Cantorum on Hudson.

A New Paradigm

Endeavoring to address the second-performance conundrum with lasting, and potentially broad, impact became the catalyst for an innovative global initiative that spawned a new model of musical interdependence between composers, conductors, and ensembles. A steering committee was formed to help establish parameters addressing quantity manageability (one score per quarter, maximum, from a composer) and quality insurance (high-level conductor reviewers). Although financial sustainability was a concern for the small 501c3 parent organization, the decision was made at the charter level that the online resource would remain free for use by composers and conductors, alike. Determined to create a resource of lasting value, legal counsel was consulted regarding all elements of score rights, submission and access, and reviewer confidentiality. Ultimately an artist was commissioned to create the unique P:E logo, and a United States trademark was sought and awarded.

The P:E online catalog of choral works (ProjectEncore.org) officially launched in June of 2009 and called for its first round of score submissions the following month. Today it is a continually expanding (101 composers and 151 compositions as of May 2015), robustly searchable online catalog of premiered compositions evaluated by an international panel of renowned conductors of new music. Using the Catalog’s broad search capabilities, conductors can find music to fit particular programs or pairings. The Catalog provides detailed information about the works represented, links to their compos-

ers, streamable sound files, and study scores.

P:E has been welcomed with overwhelming gratitude within the composer community. “It is a brilliant idea to be able to search the database for pieces that fall within certain thematic categories,” comments Composer Clearfield. “Thematic programming has lately become very successful, as it can bring together communities and can involve educational components and attract a wider audience. P:E can direct conductors to works that might fit particular programs or pairings.”

The online catalog is designed to facilitate integration of new compositions into choral programming by providing detailed information about new works, links to composer and publisher websites, sound files, and sample pages of scores. Where gaining a second performance has traditionally depended on a composer’s ability to shop a score, P:E serves as a bridge between composers and conductors, and provides international exposure for premiered compositions accepted by its review pool.

Support for the Project

Operational support of P:E has, to date, been the gift of Schola Cantorum on Hudson⁷ to the choral industry. As the project continues to grow, additional resources will be needed for its maintenance on behalf of the choral art. The founding leadership is committed to continuing to provide P:E as a free resource. Although it is not within the mission to help composers acquire premiere performances or commissions, an interesting secondary resonance is seen as

composers and conductors who have met surrounding a P:E composition often continue the communication into other projects and collaborations. Sharing a vision has a way of producing interesting surprises within the creative community.

The Unique Mission

The founding mission underlying P:E is that of identifying post-premiere choral compositions of high quality that are deemed worthy of additional performances by a high-level team of reviewers. It should be noted that high quality does not necessarily mean difficult. The spectrum of style, voicing, length, and difficulty is very broad, and the search function is robust. The intent is two-fold: 1) to address the second-performance problem in a way that stands to make a significant difference; and 2) to provide a twenty-first-century paradigm for the discovery, evaluation, and endorsement of new choral music.

P:E is:

- a completely online catalog of vetted, post-premiere choral music that has not (at the time of its submission) received significant attention beyond the premiere;
- a bridge between conductors and composers;
- an endorsement of compositional quality; hence, a marketing arm for composers

P:E is not:

- a publisher

- a collective

What Makes P:E Different from a Collective?

Objective review is what distinguishes P:E from a Collective. There is no commitment to all of the work of any composer or group of composers. One accepted score by a given composer can be (and has several times has been) followed by another submission that is not accepted. All identifying names and indicia are redacted before the scores go to review.

The Review Process

P:E compositions have been blindly reviewed by a high-level, multinational team of reviewers, each of whom has a significant programming commitment to new music and is a highly noted conductor. The perspective from which P:E reviewers

are asked to evaluate each composition is one of expansiveness beyond their own performance needs and style preferences. Each composition reviewed must be evaluated for its musical quality, its exploration of the choral idiom, and programmability, be it for church choirs, independent amateur groups, school choirs, or professional choruses. P:E attempts to serve the needs of the entire new music community by establishing a bar of review, much as has historically been provided exclusively by the traditional publishing industry but without the need to include profitability in its equation. To that end, P:E makes no charge either to composer or to conductor.⁸

Submission Process

A composer may submit up to four scores per year, one per quarter.⁹ Each score is sent to three of the reviewers



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from the P:E review pool. At least two “thumbs up” are necessary for acceptance. As previously mentioned, the acceptance rate is approximately 60 percent. The entire process is by quarter annum, including public announcements of new acceptances. Each composer has his or her own P:E page, where partial score (composer’s choice of how much) and full sound file, along with composer biography and contact information are presented. The function of P:E is to facilitate the connection; having done so, it has no further role and receives no fees from any parties.

Who Are the P:E Reviewers?

These are necessarily unsung heroes, remaining anonymous for the same reason that the director and founder of P:E is not a reviewer: complete avoidance of not only a possible conflict of interest but even the appearance of conflict of interest. Reviewers give their time quarterly for no reason beyond their contribution to the choral art. Conductors interested in becoming part of the P:E pool of reviewers will find that

process explained on the web site. Note: P:E reviewers must not be composers, themselves.

Conclusion

The mushrooming popularity of new music performance represents an exciting opportunity for conductors and composers; it is a return to a historical norm. Interest in the newest scores was a tradition the musical world has arguably been side-stepping for about a century.¹⁰ Whatever the musical, social, even psychological explanations for the suspicion of new music that emerged through the first half of the twentieth century, today all options are at our fingertips! Historical scores are plentiful (often even freely downloadable), and new music is available in abundance for review and study, evaluated and described through efforts like that of this project. Whether searching to fill a specific programming need, seeking to discover a fresh compositional voice, or even to engage directly with a composer, P:E is a resource to explore! 

Deborah Simpkin King is the founder of PROJECT : ENCORE™ and Schola Cantorum on Hudson. She also serves as interim director of choral activities at William Paterson University and director of arts ministries at the Episcopal Cathedral of Trinity and St. Philip’s in Newark. Pro-bono leadership within the industry includes her chairmanship of the New York Choral Consortium and coordination of the New Jersey ACDA High School Choral Festival since 1994.

NOTES

- ¹ Joan Jeffri, “Taking Note: A Study of Composers and New Music Activity in the United States” (commissioned by the American Music Center and the American Composers Forum). New York, NY: Research Center for Arts and Culture [producer]. Princeton, NJ: Cultural Policy and the Arts National Data Archive [distributor]. 2008.
- ² Maureen Dowdell, From unpublished interviews of PROJECT: ENCORE™ composers, 2010.
- ³ Any list provided here is necessarily incomplete. Here is a sampling: C4: The Choral Composer-Conductor Collective in New York City; Independent Music Publishers Cooperative; Northwest Choral Publishers; MusicSpoke.com.
- ⁴ PROJECT: ENCORE and the Butterfly Logo are trademarks registered in the US Patent and Trademark Office.
- ⁵ The first PROJECT: ENCORE composition to be picked up by a publishing house was Ivo Antognini’s “Agnus Dei,” which Hal Leonard publication proudly bears the P:E indicia. Other works have already been published when submitted, though P:E reviewers are carefully protected from that knowledge by a very thorough



redaction of all identifying publisher markings.

⁶ An anecdotal story as told by that over-eager student, Wayne Eastwood (a PROJECT: ENCORE composer.)

⁷ Schola Cantorum on Hudson is an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit choral/vocal organization, founded in 1995 by Dr. Deborah Simpkin King, that

performs its full concert season in both Manhattan and New Jersey. For more information, visit ScholaOnHudson.org.

⁸ Arrangement for purchase of scores and obtaining rights to performance is made solely between composer and conductor.

⁹ See submission guidelines at: ProjectEncore.org/submission-guidelines

¹⁰ Historical readings, as can be found in such resources as Oliver Strunk's *Source Readings in Music History*, *Weiss/Taruskin's Music in the Western World: A History of Documents*, etc., are filled with entertaining reading about reactions to new musical experiences.

The ACDA Teaching and Conducting Priorities Survey

This research initiation helps launch a new Center for Conducting Pedagogy, a project of the ACDA Standing Committee on Research and Publications, chaired by William Belan. The survey marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of principal investigator Alan Gumm's benchmark study, "The development of a model and assessment instrument of choral music teaching styles" by profiling both the teaching and conducting priorities of current choral directors. As in the 1990 national survey, the purpose is to verify and broaden our understanding of choral pedagogy by describing the diverse skills, schools of thought, and background predictors of how choral music is taught and conducted.

ACDA members should have already received an email invitation with a link to the survey. Your participation is appreciated. Your response will help address member priorities and set new initiatives for the future. Results will be shared through *Choral Journal*.

