



Social justice work typically challenges us to cross-cultural fluency. Our formal (European-derived) training as choral conductors too seldom equips us to meet this challenge—or even to recognize any blind spots that may hinder our success. In this article, a cohort of thirteen conductors of color working both within and beyond dominant choral culture share their observations on these effects, along with their recommendations for developing stronger engagements with less familiar musics and the people whom those musics represent.

AS our nation grows increasingly divided over current political and social issues, choir directors have sought to use their concert programs to explore issues of social justice, past and present. Embarking upon this work, however, we begin to see that many aspects of our music making are deeply entrenched within the very systems of oppression we are attempting to challenge, and we may unintentionally replicate elements of these systems in our teaching and performances. In going beyond the mere intent of our teaching for social justice to focus on its actual impact, how might we make choices that help us to consciously dismantle rather than unwittingly uphold the systems that perpetuate oppression?

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CROSS-CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT IN CHORAL MUSIC FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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W I T H I N T E R V I E W S F R O M

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Felicia Barber

Keshena Cisneros-Watson

Felicia Coleman-Evans

Melanie DeMore

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Although “social justice” can be variously defined, we aim to respond specifically to concert programs that focus on issues of racial injustice in the United States, and those that feature the music of social and political struggles from cultures across the globe. As conductors at Chicago Children’s Choir (CCC)—which was founded during the Civil Rights Movement to unite children from different racial, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds through the pursuit of musical excellence—we work to ensure that our singers gain access to diverse repertoire and a cultural understanding of the music they perform. We do this through sharing our own areas of expertise and through seeking out opportunities to deepen our knowledge of other genres. Most recently, the authors journeyed together to South Africa through the organization *Village Harmony* to study traditional Black South African choral music from Black South African teachers.

In considering how best to share the music of different cultures with our singers, we strive to address the power dynamics at play in our field, acknowledging whose music is most often featured, taking care to learn music from culture-bearers whenever possible, and studying how to teach and perform music from different traditions with knowledge, authenticity, and integrity. As conductors we question how best to use our privilege, and the platforms accessible to us, to elevate and amplify the voices of those not typically given such platforms so that they may speak for themselves to a larger audience.

With this goal in mind, we reached out to conductors of color who work in a variety of settings. Soliciting observations regarding our field’s inadvertent contributions to the systems of oppression many are trying to combat, we asked what we might do differently to make our music a useful tool for social justice. The following pages present a compilation of these discussions, which took place through email, by phone or video call, or in person throughout March and April of 2018. We understand that these interviewees do not speak for all choral educators; the intent of this article is simply to share the discussion that resulted with the hope of encouraging open dialogue moving forward.

Respondents (listed alphabetically)

Ahmed Anzaldúa, Founder/Director of Border CrosSing/Justice Choir Songbook co-editor

Felicia Barber, Director of Choral Activities at Westfield State University

Keshena Cisneros-Watson, Music Educator/Vocalist

Felicia Coleman-Evans, Soprano, Minister of Music at Bryn Mawr Community Church/Applied Voice Instructor at North Park University

Melanie DeMore, Vocal Activist/Conductor/Composer/Song Leader

Derrick Fox, Director of Choral Activities at University of Nebraska-Omaha

Marques L. A. Garrett, Assistant Professor of Music in Choral Activities at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Lynnel Joy-Jenkins, Artistic Director of the Princeton Girlchoir and Choral Teacher at the Timberlane Middle School

Lonnie Norwood, Founder/Director of Audacious Praise/Conductor at Chicago Children’s Choir

Dawn Pemberton, Professional Vocalist and Founder and Artistic Director of Roots N’ Wings Choir (Vancouver)

Stan Spottswood, Artist/Composer/Educator

Shekela Wanyama, Choir Director at Lakeside School and Conductor with the Bellevue Girlchoir

Theresa Williams-Johnson, Choir Director Kalamazoo Central High School

Questions

- 1) What are some of your pet peeves regarding how choirs tend to learn/perform the music of other traditions/cultures (specifically, non-classical repertoire)? You can write about a specific genre/instance or write more generally about how choirs approach the music of other cultures (American cultures or cultures from other parts of the world).
- 2) Can you give some suggestions or advice to help choirs learn to do a better job performing music from other cultures/traditions and avoid the pitfalls you addressed in the first question?

Discussion

Felicia Barber observes that in our current cultural climate “it is important that we stay vigilant and proactive in our education about and preparation of literature from diverse backgrounds.”¹ Ahmed Anzaldúa concurs, pointing out that many music educators “are not properly exposed to music from cultures outside their own.” The pressure to perform this music out of a sense of political correctness, rather than a deep understanding and appreciation of the music and its culture, means that this repertoire “is not always being approached from the fundamental belief that it is valid, *important* music.”² Stan Spottswood sheds light on the complexity of singing about social justice from a standpoint of reconciliation while simultaneously confronting the horrors of injustices past and present: “We have an obligation to our students to be truthful about the problem before we provide an alternate solution for how we deal with our feelings.”³ This often involves taking a deeper, more uncomfortable look at history, and making a conscious effort not to gloss over the difficult, painful aspects of social justice struggles for the sake of creating a feel-good concert program.

Providing a Platform through Collaboration

In order to create platforms that give voice to those who are underrepresented in our field, choral organiza-

tions must begin by employing more People of Color (POC) in both artistic and administrative positions. We must seek out opportunities to hire these same musicians to give workshops, guest lectures, and clinics on the music of their cultural heritage, and program more repertoire composed and arranged them.

One recurring observation of our respondents is the tendency to program concerts featuring African American music, all of which has been arranged by white people. What does it mean to create a program asserting that “Black Lives Matter” when each piece of music comes to the audience through the re-working of someone from outside black traditions? This is not to say that one should never perform music arranged by an “outsider,” but when presenting music through the lens of social justice, we must question these types of choices and make sure that they are consciously made.

The next question we must ask ourselves is, “have we reached out for guidance to someone from the culture whose music we’re presenting?” When the culture is from a faraway country, the costs of bringing in a guest artist can be prohibitive. But have we really explored all our local options? Have we sought guidance over the internet from musicians in other parts of the world? When approaching music from African American traditions, have we made an appropriate effort to bring in one of countless experts to work with our singers? What would such an effort involve?

Melanie DeMore suggests we explore collaboration. When practiced with sensitivity and respect, collaborating can provide a platform for culture-bearers to share their music and traditions while giving the choir the privilege of learning directly from the source.

Keshena Cisneros-Watson recently helped CCC build trust with a Native American ensemble (Medicine Tail) so the two groups could share a performance. She brought the ensemble to lead a workshop and to teach the singers about the members’ respective tribes and the different types of music the clinicians perform. The clinicians engaged the students in lively discussions about the ways in which they use their voices, drumming, and dancing to express and preserve their culture. After this exchange, the ensemble felt comfortable enough to teach the children part of a song to be performed jointly in CCC’s annual world-music festival. Whereas the

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children's choir singers would never have been able to perform this piece on their own, the opportunity to sing alongside the Native American singers in performance was a true gift.

Cisneros-Watson confirms that "since our music is sacred, some Native Americans might not be comfortable with choirs sharing their music; and as choir directors, we have to be okay with that.... If you are lucky enough to find a *drum* group or Native Americans who give presentations and are willing to share, it's a great opportunity for a choir!"⁴

DeMore cautions against relying solely on the written page, urging, "if you don't know, don't assume that just because you can go to the publisher and have them send one hundred copies to your choir, and it gives those little instructions on the inside page, that that's enough. Go a step further. *I'm going to bring somebody in.*"⁵ Dawn Pemberton encourages "inviting someone from the community/culture that you are borrowing from to a rehearsal or chatting with them on the phone or over tea... It's powerful to hear their stories, ask questions, and learn more. If they can't come to work with your choir, perhaps you can send them a recording and ask for their feedback."⁶

Derrick Fox also advocates bringing in guest artists; however, he cautions us to "be careful not to place a single person from a culture on a pedestal as the voice of a particular culture." Fox suggests seeking out diverse opinions and sources, just as classical choral research requires. He also reminds us to avoid the trap of "inviting a black person to work only on spirituals and gospel music" when they also have expertise in the classical realm.⁷

When working with a culture-bearer, be mindful of the importance of professional etiquette. Anzaldúa advises that it can be difficult to serve as a resource when directors who have done no advance preparation spend the majority of a workshop asking "very general, open-ended questions... ninety percent of which could be answered with a simple Google search." Anzaldúa stresses that:

Just being willing to do the music is not enough. You've got to put in the work... and if you're doing it for the right reasons, and looking for music that is enriching, creating good stories, and cre-

ating a fulfilling experience for your ensembles, then doing that kind of work isn't a chore, it's a joy. It's why we do what we do.⁸

When presenting the music of his culture, Anzaldúa expects educators to have prepared in advance by researching the geographical origin of the song, finding available translations, reading background information about the culture's history and current social struggles, researching the basics of the language and pronunciation, and compiling a list of specific, more in-depth questions to ask. Many of our respondents reported they rarely encounter this type of preparation from their hosts.

Fox advises that after having done their own research in advance of a clinician's visit, hosting conductors should then get out of the way. He and others report a tendency of hosts to use up too much time trying to demonstrate their own knowledge, rather than stepping back to allow the clinician space to teach.⁹ It is also important to acknowledge the work of clinicians and culture-bearers in program notes, crediting not only the composers or arrangers but also the people who came to share their culture with the choir directly.

Marques L. A. Garrett emphasizes the importance of educating both singers *and* audiences about the culture of the music being performed. "Unfortunately," Garrett says, "not enough people read the program notes. You will have their attention during the concert. Use that time not only to explain the music but to teach why the music is being performed, why it is of value, why it should remain in the repertory... and how the particular performance honors the tradition and heritage of a group of people who endured so much."¹⁰ Because audiences typically don't get to take part in workshops, sharing the clinician's teachings in creative ways during the performance can have a powerful impact.

Bringing in a clinician is of utmost importance when studying music from a culture that isn't represented by anyone in the community. Theresa Williams-Johnson laments that she has heard directors declare "I don't have any minority students in my program" as a justification for choosing not to explore music from other cultures. Here, a clinician becomes invaluable—not only as your choir's sole connection to someone from the culture

of the music, but perhaps even as some individuals' only connection to someone outside their race.¹¹

In "Social Justice and Music Education: The Call for Public Pedagogy," Randall Everett Allsup and Eric Shieh write:

As a profession, we need to examine the factors that lead particular students to avoid our music classes or to avoid speaking up in our music classes [as] these are often the result of systems of marginalization that relegate people to the "outside" of our classrooms, schools, and public spaces.¹²

Such examination can help us to lessen the pressures on any isolated students of color in the room. Only then might they eventually feel comfortable enough to provide guidance and feedback in repertoire familiar particularly to them; at best, they might feel empowered to take some ownership in helping to teach. Toward this goal, Barber echoes the importance of "bringing in reinforcements from within the school or members of the community,"¹³ which not only helps ensembles learn more about the music but also can make your minority students feel their culture is being recognized and respected, rather than further marginalized.

Choosing Repertoire

Another issue raised by many of our respondents is the need to hold choral arrangers and publishers to higher standards in purveying scores of music from cultures outside the classical choral realm. It should be standard practice to provide all known attributions, adequate background information, and accurate guidance in the language (i.e., translation, pronunciation, spelling) and to seek permission to arrange if the composer/source is known. Mass consumption of over-simplified arrangements perpetuates misconceptions and negative stereotypes about the "simplistic" and "primitive" nature of other cultures rather than cultivating respect for the music and an expectation for proper performance practice. Likewise, each time we perform these arrangements, we raise a new generation that, in Anzaldúa's words, "hasn't been exposed to it the way it should be done, as well as

its significance, and its context."¹⁴

Pemberton remarks how frequently information is missing from publications, stating that "there is often no acknowledgment of who the music belongs to or who it was created by."¹⁵ Shekela Wanyama describes how she once prioritized issues like "vocal suitability, opportunities to teach vocal and musicianship skills, and relevance to the concert theme and/or time of year" in selecting repertoire from other cultures. When she also began considering "the construction of the piece," questions began to arise: "How can a piece containing a few words of Swahili and an 'energetic' piano accompaniment be considered 'African,' when Africa is a huge continent with hundreds of languages?" Now she makes sure to ask: "Who is the composer? Who is the arranger? What are their connections to the culture the piece purports to represent?"¹⁶

While Wanyama acknowledges that it is possible to create concert arrangements of folk music, she feels that "those arrangements are not always done with integrity." She further asks, "is the musical culture recognizable in this piece, and if I'm not sure, can I find someone from that community who might be able to give me more information? Is there another piece or arranger I can work with that might be closer to the culture?"¹⁷

Wanyama believes that once we start asking these questions, we inevitably come to the issue of cultural appreciation versus cultural appropriation in our programming, which means "plunging headfirst into challenging waters and asking tough questions of composers, arrangers, publishers, and ourselves." She admits that she once programmed pieces "because they were easily available from the publisher." Though her singers and audiences might have enjoyed them, she was left feeling uncomfortable. Now, Wanyama states: "I commit myself to spending even more time on the search for repertoire that I can present to singers and audiences with my full investment."¹⁸

In her paper "Singing in the Dark: Choral Music Education and The Other," Deborah Bradley outlines how uninformed publications of "multicultural music" uphold systems of racism and oppression. One of the biggest challenges in bringing anti-racism work to choral music, Bradley argues, is that many music educators "prefer to think of music education as a 'purely artistic'

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endeavor, unencumbered by... political baggage.” Bradley asserts that “when we incorporate multiculturalism into our curricula with the intention of promoting cultural understanding within our pluralistic society, we are engaging in a political activity whether or not we want to so label it.”¹⁹

Bradley believes that one of the most harmful aspects of irresponsible publications is the lack of provided context. When background information is missing, singers and audiences fill in the gaps with common misconceptions and stereotypes about other cultures. Bradley argues further that, without context, “it is easy to ignore the real-life oppressions and pains that may have given rise to the music.” For example, many of our respondents believe choral educators too often resist learning and teaching the painful histories behind Spiritual texts, because acknowledging these would force us to re-think our tendency to program such pieces as exciting concert finales. Bradley posits that publishers deliberately omit such information because “the ‘product’ is easier to market if there is no political message or uncomfortable social context.” She observes that “commodification requires the de-contextualization necessary for mass marketing in a culture of Whiteness.”²⁰

Yet another problem exists when Westerners transcribe and publish music from oral traditions, as in Black South African choral music. The withholding of attribution to an arranger’s sources—and the failure to offer compensation to, or request permission from, the South African performers from whom the transcription was created—is, in Bradley’s words, “indicative of an ongoing imperialism: music of the former European colonies available for the taking, ‘owned’ by large, multi-national, predominantly white-owned corporations that dominate the music publishing industry in North America.” Once these transcriptions are published, Western corporations technically “own” the rights to songs they, in fact, played no part in creating. Bradley’s assertion rings true, therefore, that copyright laws can “perpetuate a form of imperialism built upon an unequal, and often racialized power dynamic.”²¹ Bradley warns us not to fall into the trap of painting all music making as a “universal good.” Our discipline, she argues, rarely reflects critically upon “the ways we may be reproducing racism, inequality, exoticism, sexism, and a host of other social injustices in

our practice and through the materials used.”²²

Our respondents agree that it is not simply up to arrangers and publishers to stop creating arrangements that perpetuate these systems of oppression; it’s also up to educators to stop creating a demand for them. By teaching our singers to value authenticity when approaching the music of other cultures, and by actively engaging with them about these issues, we can create a generation better-equipped to make informed decisions about programming music from outside the Western classical choral canon.

Applying Score Study to Performance Practice

Pemberton believes that changing the climate of what is considered acceptable in the choral world will involve addressing our “ethnocentric attitudes towards ‘non-European’ musical styles and cultures.” To do this, Lynnel Joy Jenkins advocates that choral directors apply “the same, if not more, dedication to the score-study and research of the proper performance practice”²³ when preparing music from other traditions.

Felicia Coleman-Evans asserts that we must approach not only the music of far-away nations with as much dedication as we do music from the Western classical canon, but also the marginalized musical cultures within our own country, such as African American traditions:

There is plenty of room for choirs to learn the intricacies of musical styles beyond the veil of European tradition using the same commitment and investigation it takes to perform classical music. For instance, my students are expected to study gospel music just like they’re studying classical music—dissecting every phrase, form, composer research, and so forth. They are expected to reference recordings of gospel legends and experts just like one would in studying Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms to build a foundation. Such an approach recognizes and honors the culture from which it originates.²⁴

Likewise, just as we search for the best, most accurate edition of any classical work when ordering scores for

our singers, we must be selective in choosing well-prepared publications of music from non-classical traditions.

In “Music that Represents Culture: Selecting Music with Integrity,” Carlos Abril encourages music educators to “strive to find music that is as representative of the culture as possible.”²⁵ Abril advocates immersing ourselves in the music through research and recordings so we can be more discerning in our selection of repertoire from the tradition of interest. He compares this immersion directly to our research of classical music: “Coming to know these characteristics is like getting to know the ‘musical voice’ of a composer like Mozart. You do not come to know his music after studying one score or listening to a movement from a piano concerto.” Abril

argues that the immersion process “is as much for you as it is for your students.”²⁶

Garrett believes that when studying unfamiliar traditions we must not only acquire a general sense of style but also focus on specificity and detail, attending to the subtleties of vocal tone, articulation, phrasing, etc., in “the same way that we study and inquire among scholars about the performance practice of Baroque ornaments in Bach.” Garrett also expresses concerns that, “speaking specifically about spirituals, some conductors fail to “put in the time and energy to read the treatises, articles, and books on the history, style, and appropriate performance practice.”²⁷ He urges conductors to consider the wealth of resources available on the history and performance practice of spirituals.²⁸

Composer Fair & Happy Hour

CALL FOR COMPOSERS

The National Conference of the American Choral Directors Association will feature our first-ever Composer Fair & Happy Hour, a meet-and-greet opportunity for ACDA members to have quality face time with composers from across the world. Distinct from the exhibit hall area, the Composer Fair will be a two-hour “pop-up” experience, where members can all gather in the same space and move from table to table, interacting with and conversing with composers of many ages, backgrounds, and traditions. Members will gain valuable time with composers of the music they love, and composers can meet directors to forge new partnerships for mutual benefit. Attendance at the Composer Fair is free to ACDA members who have registered for the National Conference.

The Composer Fair is open to any composer who is also a current, dues-paying member of ACDA on a first-come, first-served basis. Once the available space has been filled, no more Composer Fair registrants will be accepted. All Composer Fair registrations should be complete by December 1, to allow time for the list of composers to be printed in the Choral Journal conference issue.

Composers may register for the Composer Fair online at acda.org. More specific registration and fee information will be available in upcoming issues.

All participating composers are encouraged to bring their own complimentary materials to distribute to anyone in attendance. ACDA will not pay for duplication of materials for composers at the Fair, nor will Composers be allowed to sell hard copies of their scores. (Composers may encourage attendees to purchase their works online, but they may not set up a point of sale at the Fair.)

ACDA reserves the right to limit the number of composers taking part, if necessary, due to space limitations. A/V equipment and hookups will not be provided as part of the reserved space; those wishing for A/V etc, should reserve an exhibit hall booth space.

Questions about the Composer Fair may be directed to Dominick DiOrio at ddiorio@indiana.edu

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A number of respondents lament that too many music educators can't differentiate between gospel music and African American spirituals. When they perform a song from one genre, they add elements from the other without understanding performance practice for either style. When adjudicating festivals, Barber has encountered arrangements listed as "traditional spirituals" even though they included "full piano accompaniment, hand percussion, and harmonic reference to jazz/blues chords." Likewise, respondents voiced their frustrations at a choir's "singing loud or shouting"²⁹ without real attention to the differences in vocal style between the two genres.

In mislabeling, confusing, and conflating these genres, we perpetuate careless and harmful stereotypes that downplay the rich complexity and variety within African American choral traditions, and we demonstrate to our students that learning about these cultures isn't as important as learning about white traditions. Researching the stylistic elements specific to each African American singing tradition will dispel any misconception that they all sound the same. For example, in approaching diction in the spiritual, Barber encourages creating pronunciation charts (IPA recommended) for ourselves and our singers—and, of course, watching and listening to performances by choirs fluent in the style.³⁰ She emphasizes the importance of creating a warm vocal tone with rounded vowels and softened diphthongs and consonants. Barber also writes that African Americans do not necessarily stand still when singing but may move with the music, reflecting "a strong rhythmic tradition, whether that is polyrhythms, syncopations, etc." She adds that "internalizing the rhythms is key to performance."³¹ Authentic treatment of rests is "just as important as the sung text to create rhythmic flow and maintain the rhythmic integrity of the composition. If the music calls for an eighth-note, don't sing a quarter because it is easier." Barber also reminds us that "louder is not better." She urges us to pay attention to the full array of dynamic shifts marked in the score to help shape each musical phrase.

Barber also stresses the use of "authentic instruments representative of the style and cultural heritage." Many respondents wrote specifically that "a djembe is *not* used in every piece requesting 'percussion.'" Likewise, when performing the music of a tradition that doesn't use

drums, don't add them. By lumping together a multitude of cultures from vast geographical regions, we risk misrepresenting complex political relationships between cultures in other parts of the world, wasting an opportunity to teach our students about the unique contexts in which each culture's music is made. Our lack of specificity can contribute to false stereotypes, such as the idea that "Africa is just one big country."

Numerous respondents echo Fox's concerns regarding choirs that "add dashikis and other cultural garb as costumes in their performances of any non-Western music without researching if that choice is accurate, or problematic."³² Pemberton asks that we refrain from adding movement that doesn't belong to or fit the piece we're performing. One should take care to learn authentic movements and not simply superimpose generic motions. Traditional movements often have deep spiritual and cultural meaning and shouldn't be trivialized.

Anzaldúa challenges us to keep connecting the music back to the people who make it, reminding us that "any particular piece of music means something to certain people, and the way you present it... will show what you think of those people, or how you want to relate to them, or the kind of story that you want to tell about them."³³

Learning Music from Non-Classical Traditions

To underpin the importance of applying the same level of dedication in researching and preparing music from non-classical traditions, our respondents agree that music degree programs should provide instruction on learning and teaching music from choral traditions beyond the classical realm. This would better equip music educators to serve increasingly diverse communities or to bring more diversity of repertoire to homogeneous populations.

Williams-Johnson writes that "some choral directors are not willing to delve into multicultural or ethnic music because their schooling or experiences have not prepared them to be involved or engaged with such music." It is rare to encounter a graduate conducting program that requires study in the preparation and teaching of African American choral genres, let alone music from other parts of the world. The absence of African Amer-

ican genres from our choral-conducting curricula suggests that this music is insignificant within America's choral heritage and that one needn't know about this incredibly powerful, essential realm of American music in order to be a successful practitioner in our field. Requiring students to demonstrate knowledge and proficiency in these genres seems like an essential goal in breaking down choral practices that uphold systemic oppression and racial inequality.

Coleman-Evans reflects upon the long-standing implicit bias toward non-European music that she experienced, even while studying at a Historically Black College/University (HBCU). She asserts that although this mentality has changed a great deal at HBCUs over time, a general indifference toward learning about African American genres in depth still permeates the choral field at large:

The train of thought often went unquestioned because we were conditioned to accept that studying classical music was the elite standard... in some ways, jazz and gospel are still associated with common, lower-class people, and beneath a serious person in higher education. The suppression of music from other cultures is still implied today in how programs are structured with Spirituals and gospel pieces ending a program as a 'fun' and non-serious work. It is implied in our departmental courses and curricula. Many colleges and high schools have gospel choirs and jazz ensembles that are placed in the backdrop, but certainly not an integral part of the music department, oftentimes only student-led.³⁴

Lonnie Norwood asserts that the only way to shift the undervaluing of non-white choral traditions is to create a new generation of music educators; these "must be untiring culture connoisseurs advocating just how 'good' this music is." By excluding black music from our degree programs, we are telling students that we do not value that repertoire or—by extension—*those who created it and continue to create it.*³⁵

Norwood stresses the importance of "integrating a required humanities criterion that disseminates among future educators social-cultural understanding and sen-

sitivity, and integrates/expands cultural competency education into classrooms and communities."³⁶ This form of education, which Norwood stresses cannot simply be a day-long training session, requires participation in challenging conversations and a willingness to loosen the reins of cultural hegemony for the consideration of a greater diversity of viewpoints. Only through radical integration of non-white traditions into our choral curricula will we be able to dismantle our field's current upholding of systemic racial hierarchy and oppression.

Fox adds that in both our learning about and our teaching of African American genres, we must "look beyond just programming spirituals and gospel, and certainly look beyond programming the same few pieces by the same few composers that everyone else performs."³⁷ Learning the most recognized material within a genre is a valid place to start, but we can always challenge ourselves to pair a well-known work with something obscure, or to feature an unheralded composer together with a household name.

In attempting to create deeper connections to the music of other cultures, many educators struggle with the question: "How do we sing a text about something we haven't experienced?" DeMore responds that "it's a matter of being willing to be vulnerable." You should not attempt to "represent someone else's experience," but rather, "respond from your point of view as a human being." In speaking about how she introduces African American spirituals to non-black choirs, DeMore says:

I ask them... how many of you have ever felt afraid or unseen? That's what this music is about. If you are singing it as though you're representing yourself as a human being, then it makes all the difference in the world because you're not trying to tell me about my experience... Maybe our paths are not exactly the same. But you know what it feels like to be unseen and disrespected and terrified, and that longing to be seen as a real human being. That's what the music is about. If you can walk in that, then it's no longer disingenuous.³⁸

In her article "My Eyes Have Been Opened: White Teachers and Racial Awareness," Lauri Johnson echoes

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these sentiments, stating that “immersion experiences alone may not increase racial awareness, but opportunities to critically reflect on those experiences can help deepen understanding.”³⁹

The Continuum of Authenticity and a Lifelong Learning Curve

To commit to performing the music of cultures beyond the classical canon as authentically as possible, we must accept a lifelong learning curve. Rather than simply aiming to do one song from every culture in the course of our lives, we should revisit the music of traditions that move, inspire, and resonate with us. We should continue to build on our knowledge with each performance, keep track of what new information we glean each time we do further research, identify which new skills we plan to implement, and find new methods of enriching our students' learning experience every time we approach that culture's music. We might, for example, do one or many of the following: invite a guest artist; bring in a native speaker to coach diction; create a joint performance with a local dance troupe or cultural ensemble; learn about the culture's cuisine and have a feast before the concert; create a slideshow of images of the landscape from which the music comes; play source recordings for our singers; find a choir from that culture to evaluate a video of our performance (and offer them an honorarium for their time, effort, and generosity in coaching); arrange a field trip to visit a choir that performs the repertoire on a more professional level (such as a gospel choir in a nearby city or town—or an immigrant group that gathers to sing music from their homeland); or choose music from the cultures of our students, inviting their elders to provide coaching (once again: offering compensation for their time and effort, and being sure to credit them for their assistance). It is also permissible to take extra preparation to attain a new level of authenticity. Study the music over an entire year, rather than just a semester, to ensure that it's really performance ready.

Pemberton says: “Try your best to do your best. Be respectful always, and have compassion for yourself. It's okay to not have all the answers, but it's not okay to not seek out the answers.”⁴⁰ Anzaldúa offers that “the worst-case scenario for the conductor is some mild discomfort

when someone calls you out on not doing it correctly... but if you're doing things for the right reason, you'll work to improve.”⁴¹ In “Can't We Just Change the Words? The Role of Authenticity in Culturally Informed Music Education,” Lisa Huisman Koops describes Anthony Palmer's theory of authenticity as a continuum:

On one end is absolute authenticity: the music the way it is performed in its home setting... As soon as music is removed from the context in which it was created, absolute authenticity is no longer possible; teachers must evaluate how far on the continuum a musician can go.⁴²

Our job, then, is to learn enough to make informed choices about which elements of authenticity to strive for at each new stage of our relationship with the genre. This means always questioning our decisions. What aspects of authenticity are most important at this stage of my learning? What can't I achieve right now, and what would it take for me to be able to achieve it in the future? What are possible negative consequences for omitting the things I can't achieve, and do the benefits outweigh those consequences? Wanyama writes about the struggle one faces when starting to ask these questions:

There is a shift in perspective that is necessary for one to undertake this kind of interrogation of one's teaching methods, materials, and colleagues. For all of us, this is a challenging shift. ...We have to take a journey of humility, and continually acknowledge our ignorance and our privileges. It may take us more time, as we ask difficult questions, engage in conversation with colleagues and community members, and replace some of our standard “go-to” pieces with pieces that have more integrity. ...And yet, for some of us and definitely for many of our students, this shift in perspective will be a relief: finally, we can begin to see ourselves represented as full humans in the choral literature and tradition of our communities. We might even begin to feel a deeper sense of security, belonging, and engagement—something we all wish for our singers.⁴³

CROSS-CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT IN CHORAL MUSIC FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Pemberton encourages us to look honestly at our work at every stage to see where it falls on the spectrum of appreciation versus appropriation. Fox warns that “if your gut tells you that something about your presentation of a piece might be culturally inappropriate, listen to that voice and change what you are doing.” He emphasizes that when performing the music of another culture, “the ‘asking for forgiveness is easier than for permission’ adage should not be followed.”⁴⁴

Anzaldúa says of authenticity:

It all comes down to how much work you put in. And that work really allows you to make decisions about how to present this music with your group in the best way. ...By understanding the context of the music, the people connected to it, its significance, that gives you the tools to make the types of musical and pedagogical decisions

to put this music out in the best light. ...And there’s obviously no way a middle school choir in rural Minnesota is going to present it in the same way we present it in Mexico. But you can do it in a way that relates to the context of the piece... that is actually doing something to connect with a different community, with a different culture, to improve understanding, to improve empathy... so it really isn’t about being authentic for authenticity’s sake. ...It’s about being true to that basic intent of communicating and connecting.⁴⁵

While one could argue that viewing authenticity as a spectrum justifies not allowing the perfect to be the enemy of the good, we must remember the words of Anthony Palmer: “That compromise may be inevitable is not an issue. The primary question is to what degree



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compromise is acceptable before the essence of a music is lost and (the resulting performance is) no longer representative of the tradition under study.”⁴⁶

Conclusion

In “Social Justice and Music Education: Claiming the Space of Music Education as a Site of Postcolonial Contestation,” Lisa Vaugeois states that “in recent years, music educators have become increasingly interested in linking music education practices, programs, and projects to issues of social justice”; but practicing music education from this stance, we cannot get caught up in “discourses of charity—discourses that too often result in ‘feel good’ projects that valorize the giver while maintaining the inferior position of the receiver.”⁴⁷ She argues that these discourses allow us to avoid the truth of how we came into a position of power and privilege relative to those defined as “in need.”

Vaugeois asserts that we must address head-on how injustice functions within our field, which means “engaging with the political, locating ourselves historically and coming to terms with our implicatedness in injustice.”⁴⁸ Although art gives us the capacity to do good in the world, that *good* is not a given. Deborah Bradley’s words parallel this notion:

As choral music educators, we wield a powerful tool. Choral music has the ability to deliver social messages in a way unlike any other discipline. Through the act of singing, we embody not only the music, but also the message of the song. Such embodiment can occur with little or no conscious effort, yet the performative impact may be lasting, even permanent. This impact may be positive; it may also be hurtful.⁴⁹

To take full advantage of this power, we must refocus our attention on impact rather than intent. In creating an effective model for choral singing as a tool for social justice, we must actively “engage our students in discussions of whiteness and racism, both historic and current, deriving from what is and is not contained in the published music used in the classroom.”⁵⁰

Bradley and our respondents assert that engaging music education as a tool for social change requires going beyond “celebrating diversity” and “heroes and holidays” to confronting how racist hierarchies function both within our field and in society at large. We must move beyond studying music from other cultures from a strictly musical standpoint and find ways to engage with the people who create it. We must move away from “the polite and vague discussions of colorblind multiculturalism”⁵¹ to conversations that address and challenge the roles we unwittingly play in upholding systemic oppression. The opportunity to learn music from a tradition outside one’s own is a gift. If we use that learning experience as a space for questions that expose inequality, and if we work to devise strategies for dismantling the systems that uphold that inequality, then we may truly begin to engage our art as a tool for social justice. ■

NOTES

- ¹ Felicia Barber, e-mail message to Mollie Stone, April 2, 2018.
- ² Ahmed Anzaldúa, interview with Mollie Stone, March 28, 2018.
- ³ Stan Spottswood, e-mail message to Lonnie Norwood, Jr., March 17, 2018.
- ⁴ Cisneros-Watson, 2018.
- ⁵ Melanie DeMore, interview with Mollie Stone, March 31, 2018.
- ⁶ Dawn Pemberton, e-mail message to Mollie Stone, April 2, 2018.
- ⁷ Derek Fox, e-mail message to Mollie Stone, March 30, 2018.
- ⁸ Anzaldúa, 2018.
- ⁹ Fox, 2018.
- ¹⁰ Marques L.A. Garrett, e-mail message to Mollie Stone, April 4, 2018.
- ¹¹ Theresa Williams-Johnson, e-mail message to Stephanie Gregoire, March 28, 2018.
- ¹² Randall Everett Allsup and Eric Shieh, “Social Justice and Music Education: The Call for a Public Pedagogy,” *Music Educators Journal*, vol. 98, no. 4, (2012): 49. www.jstor.org/stable/41692638.

- ¹³ Barber, 2018.
- ¹⁴ Anzaldúa, 2018.
- ¹⁵ Pemberton, 2018.
- ¹⁶ Shekela Wanyama, email message to Mollie Stone, April 1, 2018.
- ¹⁷ Wanyama, 2018.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Deborah Bradley, "Singing in the Dark: Choral Music Education and The Other" (Paper Presented at the Philosophy of Music Education Symposium V, Lake Forest College, Lake Forest, IL, June 2003), 4-5.
- ²⁰ Bradley, "Singing in the Dark", 14.
- ²¹ Ibid., 15.
- ²² Ibid., 20.
- ²³ Lynnel Joy Jenkins, email message to Mollie Stone, June 11, 2018.
- ²⁴ Felicia Coleman-Evans, interview with Lonnie Norwood, Jr., March 30, 2018.
- ²⁵ Carlos R. Abril, "Music That Represents Culture: Selecting Music with Integrity," *Music Educators Journal*, vol. 93, no. 1, (2006): 38–45, www.jstor.org/stable/3693429.
- ²⁶ Abril, "Music That Represents Culture", 40.
- ²⁷ Garrett, 2018
- ²⁸ Garrett and Norwood recommend the following resources: *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro as Sung at Hampton Institute* (R. Nathaniel Dett, editor), *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals* (R. Nathaniel Dett), *American Negro Songs* (John W. Work), *The Books of American Negro Songs* (J. Rosamond Johnson and James Weldon Johnson), and *Folk Song of the American Negro* (John Wesley Work), *Way Over in Beulah Lan': Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual* (André J. Thomas), and Eileen Guenther's *In Their Own Words: Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals* provides additional insight into the circumstances the slaves endured." *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, and her vast survey of black men and women who contributed to music culture in the *Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians* (*The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Black Music*), as well as Sandra Jean Graham's *Spirituals and the Birth of a Black Entertainment Industry* (*Music In American Life*), which brings truth to light in examining the conflicting risings of the spiritual through white regulators and jubilee troupes. For those seeking musical teaching resources from cultures with indigenous polyphonic singing traditions outside North America, the authors recommend the multi-media resources featured on The Choral Imperative's website (www.thechoralimperative.com), which are produced in conjunction with culture-bearers of each respective tradition.
- ²⁹ Barber, 2018.
- ³⁰ Barber suggests referencing her article in the February issue of *Choral Journal* on dialect in spirituals as a guide: Barber, Felicia, "Gaining Perspective: A Linguistic Approach to Dialect Found in African American Spirituals," *Choral Journal* 58, no. 7, (February 2018): 24-33.
- ³¹ Barber, 2018.
- ³² Fox, 2018.
- ³³ Anzaldúa, 2018.
- ³⁴ Coleman-Evans, 2018.
- ³⁵ Lonnie Norwood, e-mail to Mollie Stone, April 19, 2018.
- ³⁶ Norwood, 2018.
- ³⁷ Fox, 2018.
- ³⁸ DeMore, 2018.
- ³⁹ Lauri Johnson, "My Eyes Have Been Opened: White Teachers and Racial Awareness," *Journal of Teacher Education*, vol 53, no. 2 (2002): 153-167. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/002248710205300200>.
- ⁴⁰ Pemberton, 2018.
- ⁴¹ Anzaldúa, 2018.
- ⁴² Koops, "Can't We Just Change the Words?" 24.
- ⁴³ Wanyama, 2018.
- ⁴⁴ Fox, 2018.
- ⁴⁵ Anzaldúa, 2018.
- ⁴⁶ Anthony J. Palmer, "World Musics in Music Education: The Matter of Authenticity," *International Journal of Music Education* 19 (1992): 32-40.
- ⁴⁷ Vaugeois, "Social Justice and Music Education," 163.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Bradley, "Singing in the Dark," 21.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 22.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 5.