

Senior Project Proposal

**Composing for the High School
Chorus**

Sarah Sounding

**Department of Performing Arts
Department of Teacher Education
Weber State University**

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Music Education Senior Project Proposal

Project Summary

The project that I will be doing to fulfill my senior project requirement will be a choral composition that utilizes many different compositional styles and techniques. I have chosen a light hearted text that will govern the musical mood of the work and allow for a variety of tools to be used including, fugue, a homophonic section with untraditional harmonies, using added sevenths and ninths, modal and key changes where it would be appropriate as governed by the text. I look forward to exploring the musical concepts that make people smile, rather than those that are just aesthetically pleasing and keep the cohesiveness of the work. The serious work is one I have had much more experience with not only as a composer but as a performer. Choral music has the unique challenge of putting text to music, not only is the emphasis of particular words need to be a consideration, but how each word is presented and set up. Upon completion, the work will be notated using Finale and each committee member will have a hard copy in a performance ready state.

Background and Objectives of the Project

I have composed works in the past that have been successfully performed by the Weber State Concert Choir. The works were purely creative and were governed only by a personal desire for text and genre. The work that I propose to fulfill the requirement of my senior project will be similar, except with the vocal ranges and skill level of the high school students taken into consideration as they pertain to voice leading, difficulty, vocal ranges and harmonic structure.

After viewing hundreds of works and listening to countless hours of performances, I have found that the compositional techniques and forms used in today's high school repertoire are limitless, so it would be futile to list them all. They range from Swingle style polyphony to through- composed homophonic works. I will, however, attempt to give a good representation of examples that are currently performed at the high school level. I have tried to take different pieces from various genres to point out the compositional qualities that are traditional and to each of the specific types that make them successful works. These examples are not meant to represent all genres, just be a basic representation of those most performed and some favorites from conductors around the country.

“If Ye Love Me” -- Thomas Tallis, (c. 1540) Public Domain

Sacred Anthem

Text:

If ye love me,
keep my commandments,
and I will pray the Father,
and he shall give you another comforter,

that he may abide with you forever,
e'en the spirit of truth.

Choral music cannot be adequately discussed without addressing at least one sacred work. The text is taken from the book of John in the Bible. The text is widely accepted in the Christian world and there is no controversy or contradiction surrounding the text. As for the music, Thomas Tallis does a wonderful job with the opening of this piece by using traditional harmonies in a chordal style with constant subtle dynamic changes, which shapes the tension and release of the phrases. The piece has a polyphonic section that is a fugue for all four voices. The melody makes a jump of a fourth and then descends as a second voice enters, repeating the original melody. The ranges of each voice are not extreme, but moderate. The piece was originally written for AATB, but is now traditionally performed with SATB. The melodic theme is repeated throughout the work and is wholly melodically driven. The work is in the major key. This is a moderately difficult piece. The students must be independent singers and able to hold pitch because this as an accapella work.

**“The Battle of Jericho” -- arr. Moses Hogan. (1996) SATB divisi;
unaccompanied; Spiritual; Hal Leonard #08703139**

Spiritual

Text:

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho,
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho,
and the walls came a tumbalin' down, down, down, down.
CHECK SPELLING-- TUMBL-IN'?

You may talk about your men of Gideon,
you may talk about your men of Saul,
but there's none like good old Josh-a-ua,
at the battle of Jericho, that morning;

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho,
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho,
and the walls came a tumbalin' down, down, down, down.

Joshua rose early in the morning,
that is when the trumpets blew,
they marched around the city,
at the battle of Jericho.

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho,
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho,
and the walls came a tumbalin' down, down, down, down.

Right up to the walls of Jericho,
he marched with spear in hand,
Joshua commanded the children to shout,
and the walls came a tumbalin' down, down, down, down;

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho,
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, the trumpets they did blow, so,
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, and the walls came a tumbalin' down.

The text is a traditional spiritual text with an unknown origin. As with other spiritual texts that grew out of the "corn ditties", songs that were sung in the fields, they were just tradition until someone wrote them down.

Moses Hogan began his musical career as a pianist, and as a result, his choral compositions are very percussive. His works are very difficult because of the rhythmic complexities and the ranges. The sopranos are usually up in the rafters and the basses are reaching the bottom of their range. The voice leading and jumps are not easy. The tenors are also asked to stretch to the top of their range and sustain a high tessitura. This particular piece has many rhythmic motives, so once those motives are learned, the rest is not so bad. To be performed well, this piece needs a good, strong men's section because they are the foundation and the symbolic representation of the march around Jericho. Hogan uses many seventh chords and added ninths and 13ths. The work is a spiritual, so it innately has a very rhythmic feel, with the use of dotted rhythms and staccato throughout. This work is in a minor key and rhythmically driven. There are many madrigalisms utilized in the piece, the wailing of the women and the descending line of "walls came a tumbalin' down" in the bass section. The work also inspires physical movement which sometimes is something that is forced in high school choirs. This is a large choir piece and the choir also needs a mature sound in order to perform it appropriately.

**“Feller from Fortune” -- Harry Somers (1969). Thompson/Alfred
#WEI-1008**

Secular, 20th Century

Text:

Oh, there's lots of fish in Bonavist' Harbour,
Lots of fish right in around here.
Boys and girls are fishin' together,
Forty-five from Carbonear.

Chorus:

Oh, catch a-hold this one, catch a-hold that one,
Swing around this one, swing around she.
Dance around this one, dance around that one,
Diddle-dum this one, diddle-dum dee.

Oh, Sally goes to church every Sunday,
Not to sing nor for to hear;
But to see the Feller from Fortune,
What was down here fishin' the year.
Chorus

Oh, Uncle George got up in the mornin',
He got up in a 'ell of a tear.

And he ripped the arse right out of his britches;
Now he's got ne'er pair to wear.
Chorus

Oh, Sally is the pride of Cat Harbour.
She ain't been swung since 'way last year,
Drinkin' rum and wine and cassis
What the boys brought home from St. Pierre.
Chorus

Oh, Sally got a bouncin' new baby,
Father said that he didn't care;
'Cause she got that from the Feller from Fortune,
What was down here fishin' last year

The text is a Newfoundland Sea chantey and really doesn't make much sense, but it is one of my favorite pieces because it is so fun to sing. The subject matter on some of the verses could be questionable if you take the piece seriously. The meter changes constantly; some of the rhythmic phrases are counter-intuitive. It is very rhythmic with emphasis on odd beats. The rhythmic drive through the whole work has the undercurrent of the original chantey, a cut-time feel, which is rather amazing considering all of the different rhythmic things going on. However, the text is what governs the emphasis and the meter. It is written in strophic form and has simple traditional harmonies. The melody is simple and repetitive. I enjoy the light feel of the piece and the comic nature of the text. Vocal ranges are not an issue, but students do need to know how to count!

“Gate, Gate” -- Brian Tate, (1998). Sanskrit/Buddhist text; earthsongs

Ethnic, 20th Century

Text: Gate gate, parasamgate bodhisva ha, halleluia
(Repeated 3 more times).

Yonder, yonder cross the river, everybody, halleluia

Gate gate, parasamgate bodhisva ha, halleluia

Everybody singing, everybody laughing, everybody gone now, halleluia

Everybody talking, everybody walking, everybody gone now, halleluia

Gate gate, parasamgate bodhisva ha, halleluia

Everybody singing, everybody laughing, everybody gone now, halleluia

Everybody talking, everybody walking, everybody gone now, halleluia

No more tears, no more suffering, no more fears, as we cross into the light.

Gate gate, parasamgate bodhisva ha, halleluia

Everybody singing, everybody laughing, everybody gone now, halleluia

Everybody talking, everybody walking, everybody gone now, halleluia

The meaning of the text is repeated in English in the song and allows high school students the opportunity to reflect on the philosophies of other religions and cultures. The text is quite repetitious but, the way the way the composer treats each occurrence, the listener is not necessarily aware of the reiteration of the text.

The work itself is diverse and rhythmically driven. The harmonies are traditional, but the work has many sections that function antiphonally as statement and commentary. The composer used unison in octaves, for emphasis in "no more tears, no more suffering" section, then there is a six part divisi reached at light, an effective and aesthetically pleasing madrigalism. The majority of the work is in alternating meters. There is even a nine sixteen measure, which keeps the listener on their toes. This is a popular work and the students that performed it enjoyed it a great deal.

"Danny Boy" -- Joseph Flummerfelt (1991).

Traditional Folk

Text:

Oh Danny boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling
From glen to glen, and down the mountain side
The summer's gone, and all the flowers are dying
'Tis you, 'tis you must go and I must bide.

But come ye back when summer's in the meadow
Or when the valley's hushed and white with snow
'Tis I'll be here in sunshine or in shadow
Oh Danny boy, oh Danny boy, I love you so.

And if you come, when all the flowers are dying
And I am dead, as dead I well may be
You'll come and find the place where I am lying
And kneel and say an "Ave" there for me.

And I shall hear, tho' soft you tread above me
And all my dreams will warmer, sweeter be
If you will bend and tell me that you love me
I will sleep in peace until you come to me.

The text is a traditional Irish poem that is from the perspective of a father to a son. It is very sweet and sentimental and perfectly appropriate for a high school choir to perform. This arrangement is an amazing harmonization of a beautiful melody, arguably one of the most lyrical melodies ever written. It is a strophic two-verse work with traditional harmonies. There is moderate use of suspensions but they are not so overused as to be predictable. The tenor and baritone parts are moderately difficult, but the other voices are fairly straightforward. The moderate ranges do not reach extremes. Intonation is an issue as it is an unaccompanied piece and the parts are very exposed due to the tempo and fluidity of the piece. It is melodically-driven but homophonic. The harmonizations

and phrasing foster the sweet and tender nature of the text; it is the perfect marriage.

The aforementioned titles have been chosen from personal experience, but these works are also found on many state recommended repertoire lists. I was curious as to why there are so many directors around the country that choose these works. As a result of his survey of 114 high school choral directors, Forbes (2001) suggests that choral directors choose repertoire based on the following criteria: (1) quality, (2) vocal performance skills that could be taught through the composition, (3) technical difficulty of the work, (4) potential of the work to provide an aesthetic experience, (5) musical elements that could be taught through the work, (6) vocal maturity of the singers, and (7) artistic demands of the composition. These criteria are useful guidelines for developing a composition for high school choral students.

The text that I will be using is an original work. (Please see the following page.)

A Fairy Rhyme

There was a young woman, who lived in a shoe,
Boo hoo, what would she do?
She had so many children; she was quite distraught,
She boo, hooed, quite a lot!

Then one day, in Once Upon a Time,
She found a Nanny, on sale for a dime.
She found her solution, not potion or spell,
To solve her abundance of children, how swell.

Not knowing the Nanny, a witch in disguise,
The young woman came home, to meet her demise.
The children were wise and knew something was up,
They tried to tell Mother right after they supped.

Then Hansel, Gretal and Little Red planned,
To get rid of the Nanny, all posts were manned.
They noticed at night she would hit the sauce,
This is how they had planned for their loss.

Later that night Boy Blue blew his horn,
And startled the Nanny, she fumbled forlorn.
Goldie, she opened the large furnace door,
While Miss Muffet's curd's were spilled on the floor.

The Nanny tumbled right into the flame,
The children knew just who to blame.
The moral of this little tale,
Never get your Nannies on sale!

Never, Never, Never, Never,
Never get your Nannies on Sale!

Amen.

I wanted to write a light hearted work that was adventurous and up tempo. There is a multitude of serious works out there and more of the light hearted repertoire lacks quality. I am going to write something that is fun and uses compositional devices that mirror the text. Possibly use a modal change on some of the serious lines about the Nanny being a witch and the young woman coming home to meet her demise and some polyphony on the Nanny tumbling line. Open the work with a nice round homophonic

sound with traditional harmonies and answer with a more irritating “boo, hoo” reply. As a future conductor, I would like to find repertoire that is fun for my choir to perform that teaches and challenges their abilities without having such a heavy and serious subject matter.

Objective: Utilize my own abilities in creating an original choral work and further develop my personal aptitudes for composition and understanding of a quality composition.

Procedure and Methods

I have been successful in the past, by getting inspiration from the text I develop. I look to the text as a source for phrasing, articulations, rhythmic ideas, and of course the overall expressive intent.

The texts that I have worked with have all been self-created texts. For this particular project I will be doing the same (See above)

As for a way to have the committee monitor my progress, I will email my progress every sixteen measures and incorporate any input that might be given.

Time Line

- First 24 Measures: Completed by February 20th, 2007
- Measures 24-end: March 20th, 2007
- Upon input and consideration from committee the final revision will be completed April 26th

Evaluation and Dissemination

Evaluation of the work would be subject to various compositional requirements, such as phrasing, harmony of text and melody, appropriate voice leading, vocal ranges and the complete overall cohesiveness of the work. These qualities would be subject to the evaluation of each committee member, as they deem fit.

The work will be available to each committee member upon its completion, no later than April 27th, 2007.

References

- The Battle of Jericho*. (Arr by M. Hogan) (1996) Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard
- Danny Boy*. (1991). (Arr. by Flummerfelt, J.) Chapel Hill, NC: Hinshaw Music
- Forbes, G. W. (2001). The repertoire selection practices of high school choral directors. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 49(2), 102-121.
- Somers, H. (1969) *Feller from Fortune*. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred
- Tate, B. (1998) *Gate, Gate*. Corvallis, OR: Earthsongs
- Tallis, T. (c. 1540). *If Ye Love Me*. Public Domain

Committee Signatures

The signatures below indicate that the music education candidate has been approved to complete the senior project described above.

Dr. Thomas Priest, Chair

Dr. Mark Henderson, Department of Choral Studies

Dr. Karen Brookens, Department of Vocal Studies

