

Literature Forum

High School Boys: Relish the Rowdiness with Repertoire

by

Jonathan Palant

As a new teacher, one of the most challenging parts of the job can be maintaining order in the classroom. In my first few years teaching, it was not problematic telling my students to be quiet and keep focus, and I did not regret taking points away if sight-reading or written tasks were not given the attention they required. What I found to be most tricky was penalizing a student who simply had a detrimental wealth of boyish energy—a problem many of us experience to this day! As a result, I quickly learned to program repertoire that encouraged appropriate rowdiness, and at times folly within music.

Recalling my undergraduate methods training, in each rehearsal there was to be a planned sequence of peaks and valleys. Each class period was to begin with a review, move to new material and conclude with the familiar. With the inclusion of lighthearted, and sometimes even raucous music in every concert program, students became more willing to give

consideration to the details required in, what they perceived to be, less “hip” music. Naturally, these choice selections are rehearsed toward the end of the class period on sunny days, and at the start of rehearsal on gloomy ones.

Although this philosophy naturally applies to all types of ensembles, I find that it especially pertains to the high school all-male choir. Whether we like it, high school boys will find the means to alter repertoire in ways we could never imagine. In my experience, boys will often change lyrics to make them more “modern” i.e., humorous. Boys also feel quite comfortable tweaking rhythms to make them easier to sing and freer for the voice. In my rehearsal room, the favorite musical technique employed by students and most frequently added is the voluntary obligato percussion part. This, according to the singers, gives the work a livelier sentiment.

In an attempt to stay at least one step ahead of my students, I always program one work per concert that adheres to another of my philosophies—let boys be boys. This chestnut allows me to let go of my control and relish the abundance of energy created in a classroom filled with aspiring young men. As a result, I program all types of pieces that attempt to focus the energy created in this environment.

The titles and descriptions below in no way formulate a comprehensive list of appropriate works that fill this educational need. The goal is to present a few new titles for perusal and to perhaps remind the reader of some golden standards.

African Processional, Jambo rafiki yangu

TTBB, percussion

D.V. Montoya edited by Ron Kean

Pavane Publishing, P1232

Beginning with a tenor solo, this Swahili welcome song is a great concert opener. The use of agogo bells, d’jembe, bass drum and shakers also add to the excitement. The minimal text and repetitive phrases could even be taught by rote if needed.

Betelehemu

TTBB, percussion

Arranged by Wendell Whalum

Lawson-Gould Music Publishing, Inc.,

LG52647

This work is the warhorse of the male repertoire. The transliteration makes the text quite simple and the rhythms, while perhaps not for the freshmen choir,

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are certainly accessible. The addition of percussion, clapping, and foot movement make this a piece not to be overlooked.

Do You Hear The People Sing?
from "Les Misérables"

TTBB, piano

Claude-Michel Schönberg arr. Ed Lojeski
Hal Leonard Corp., 08200983

Since most students seem to be already familiar with "Les Misérables," this piece serves as an enabler for high school boys. It encourages shy boys to phonate and beltors to refine their vocal skill. With a relatively simple piano part, it may also be a piece for your student accompanist.

Hold On!

TTBB, unaccompanied

Arranged by Eugene Thamon Simpson
Bourne Co., 404737

Not for the rhythmically weak, this unaccompanied spirited work became a favorite for my senior ensemble. The abundance of diacritical markings clearly instructs the singer how to achieve an honest interpretation of the style. There is little left unmarked and un-instructed. At first, the optional piano reduction was useful.

Jamaica, Farewell!

TB, piano, percussion and opt. synthesizer

Arranged by Bradley Nelson
Kjos Music Company, Ed. 5570

A "cool" tune, this piece allows my freshmen boys to work on phrasing, text stress, and off beat entrances. The limited ranges are also welcome for this age group. The added percussion parts go a long way.

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika


TTBB, unaccompanied

Enoch Sontonga arr. by Larentz-Jones
Shawnee Press Inc., C 0309

The perfect alternative to *Betelehemu*, *Nkosi Sikelel'* is the unofficial national anthem of Black South Africa. The phonetic spelling of the Xhosa text is provided and easily understandable. The work is broken into several sections divided by tempo changes. The addition of a single d'jembe makes this piece a perfect work for high school boys.

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O Susannah!

TTBB, piano—four hands
 Stephen Foster
 arr. Jonathan Crutchfield
 Mark Foster Music Co., MF1505

This quality four-part arrangement of the familiar tune is a welcomed addition to our repertoire. The ranges are appropriate and should make every singer comfortable. During the extended instrumental bridge, singers can create their best hoe-down noises. Meter changes and neat rhythms make this work just right for 3:00 PM.

Old Dan Tucker

TTBB, piano—four hands
 Arranged by Douglas L. Ipson
 Hinshaw Music Inc., HMC-1770

Written for the Brigham Young University Men's Chorus, this barn dance works well for the accomplished high school men's chorus. A middle section of composed hand clapping and foot stomping adds loads of excitement. Accomplished pianists are needed.

Old Dan Tucker

TTBB, piano
 Arranged by Michael Levi
 Belwin, OCT9620

A slightly less enthusiastic setting of the same work, Levi's interpretation contains more homophonic writing along with a very manageable "boom-chuck" piano part. This piece works well for a younger group.

Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder

TTBB, percussion
 Arranged by Robert DeCormier
 Lawson-Gould Publishing, LG51757

This Negro chain gang song encourages boys to stick out their chests and sing with gusto. There will be no room for wimpy sound! Although the notes and rhythms

are relatively simple, key changes help to keep this piece musically interesting and worthwhile. The addition of onomatopoeic percussion (chains, brake drums, etc.) completes this song.

Swing Down Chariot

TTBB, unaccompanied
 André J. Thomas
 Heritage Music Press, 15/1778H-2

Simply put, this piece is a "blast" to sing! Rhythmic intensity, soloistic passages for each voice part, and an exuberant ending make this a terrific piece for the junior-senior high school choir. Strong basses with F²s and good intonation are needed to make this tune work.

Whup! Jamboree

TTBB, unaccompanied
 Arranged by Robert Shaw
 and Alice Parker
 Lawson-Gould Publishing, LG51065

With a title like *Whup! Jamboree*, I expected my boys to be immediately dismissive of this piece. To my surprise, the singing continued right through the bell. I then found it amusing when my students asked if Robert Shaw and Alice Parker wrote anything else they could sing! This relatively homophonic setting of an Irish sea shanty does have some extreme ranges in the upper voices, but it provides a good opportunity to practice mixed voice.


Workin' On the Railroad!

TTB, unaccompanied
 Arranged by Donald Moore
 Belwin Inc., SV9438

The two American folk songs *I've Been Working on the Railroad* and *Dinah* are sure to be familiar to most young people today. By adding a "funky-swing" texture, Donald Moore brings them into the forefront of acceptable modern culture. This

three-part arrangement works great for any size high school ensemble (including the collegiate-style unaccompanied group). The chromaticism, while appearing difficult at first, fits in quite naturally and is achieved quickly. Add some finger snapping and it's a gem.

To let boys be boys means not only to loosen the reigns on classroom decorum at times, but it also gives musical control over to the ensemble when the need arises. Experimentation is the essence of learning; how better to teach our subject area than by encouraging individuality and expression within our students.



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