A Rationale for World Music in the Choral Classroom

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Introduction¹

I believe most music educators would agree that world music in choral classrooms and in concerts has become ubiquitous. The availability of published choral music from the world's cultures and ethnic groups, from ancient to modern, has grown tremendously over the last three decades to the point where there are now publishers whose catalogues are dominated by, or exclusively from, the genre most often labelled "World Music" (e.g., Alliance, earthsongs, and World Music Press). This was not the case in 1968 when the authors of the *Documentary Report of the Tanglewood Symposium* (Choate, 1968) asserted within the *Tanglewood Declaration* that:

Music of all periods, styles, forms, and cultures belongs in the curriculum. The musical repertory should be expanded to involve music of our time in its rich variety, including currently popular teenage music and avant-garde music, American folk music, and the music of other cultures. (p. 139)

In the year 2000, the participants at the Vision 2020 Symposium convened to create a vision statement that would guide music educators through the first two decades of the 21st-century (Madsen, 2000). One assertion from this vision statement known as *The Housewright Declaration* is remarkably similar to the quotation above and is particularly pertinent to the subject of this paper. That is:

All music has a place in the curriculum. Not only does the Western art tradition need to be preserved and disseminated, music educators also need to be aware of the other music that people experience and be able to integrate it into classroom music instruction. (p. 219)

Many other authors have offered statements similar to those of the *Tanglewood* and *Housewright Declarations* on the imperative for inclusion of musics of the world within the music education curriculum. I know of no contemporary scholarly writings that attempt to refute this imperative. This paper is based upon the assumption that music educators are in general agreement that world music must be an essential part of a balanced music curriculum. The rationale I intend to present to you today is an extension of this assumption.

Music educators must make decisions, both daily and long-range, about what they teach and how they will teach it; decisions that will meet educational goals and objectives and address student needs. This rationale for world music in the choral classroom is intended to provide a framework for this planning process. It has implications for both preservice and in-service choral music teachers and will attempt to address the needs of both groups. The framework is intended to provide the structure needed both for the inclusion of world music within the choral curriculum, and to guide the choral music teacher in selecting, teaching, rehearsing, and performing these musics. Three questions that will lead to the development of this framework are:

- 1. What are world music's underlying components?
- 2. What is the content and pedagogy of world music in the choral classroom?
- 3. What are the professional development needs for choral music educators?

Terminology

Since terms like world music, culture and ethnicity, and authenticity can have multiple meanings in society and our current educational environment, it is important to consider the connotations of these terms in the choral setting. These connotations are derived from the extant literature in the fields of anthropology, education, ethnomusicology, music education, and sociology.

World Music

In a recent book by the ethnomusicologist Bohlman (2002), world music is defined as:

that music we encounter, well, everywhere in the world. World music can be folk music, art music, or popular music; its practitioners may be amateur or professional. World music may be sacred, secular, or commercial; its performers may emphasize authenticity, while at the same time relying heavily on mediation to disseminate it to as many markets as possible. World music's consumers may use it as they please; they may celebrate it as their own or revel in its strangeness.... World music can be Western or non-Western, acoustic or electronically mixed. The world of world music has no boundaries; therefore access to world music is open to all. There's ample justification to call just about anything world music. (Preface, ¶ 1)

"There's ample justification to call just about anything world music." What does this mean for choral music educators? How might this definition enlighten us as to our approach to the content and pedagogy of choral music?

Bohlman's (2002) definition implies a methodology or way of thinking about the content and pedagogy of choral music. Therefore one could say that by labelling "just about anything" world music, the term world music, when applied to a choral music education setting, implies a process of planning and delivering the content of choral music education and the pedagogy related to that delivery. This idea impacts the manner in which this rationale and framework will unfold.

Culture and Ethnicity

Many writers have attempted to define culture and ethnicity. Most definitions are from the fields of sociology or anthropology. Casanova (1987), using sociological and anthropological literature, incorporates the educational environment into a definition of culture and ethnicity.

Culture and ethnicity [are] considered part of everyone's personal being rather than as special characteristics of people who differ from the dominant culture.... Culture includes all the ways in which people think, feel, and act as they try to solve their particular problems. Because these things are not static, we view culture as dynamic. (p. 373)

Manifold issues and concerns about teaching choral music from a world music perspective arise from Casanova's brief definition of culture and ethnicity. First, she addresses the perspective from which a teacher should address the curriculum and the students. That is, culture and ethnicity are particular to each individual student and the social structures to which the student belongs, and that those students whose culture or ethnicity differ from the dominant culture (Casanova refers to this culture as "WASP") should not be viewed as "special" or be stereotyped by the dominant culture. Second, Casanova (1987) states that culture is "the sum total of ways in which a group of people think, feel, and react in order to solve problems of living in their environment" (pp. 372-373). Music, when viewed from a cultural or world music perspective, can be considered a way in which a distinct culture goes about solving problems regarding the way they think, feel, and act.

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Choral music teachers teaching from a world music perspective can also view the process of teaching and learning music as problem solving. Koskoff (1999) posits this idea in her discussion of rethinking the "musical canon":

Perhaps we should stop looking at this from the perspective of canon, or even from that of multiple canons with their boundaries and individual entities, and move more toward a new perspective of "problem solving". This is a two-stage process, the first of which we are in right now: becoming comfortable with moving effortlessly from centre to margin and back again—living with likeness and difference simultaneously, and perhaps livening up our journeys with friendly or not-so-friendly engagements between centres and margins, between insides and outsides. (p. 558)

Problem solving is also a tenet of the praxial philosophy of music education as espoused by Elliott. Elliott (1995) uses the phrase "progressive musical problem solving," and describes this phrase as follows:

Inducting students into musical practices depends on selecting significant musical challenges that confront students with genuine musical problems to solve in context: in relation to the demands and traditions of carefully selected musical practices. By a musical challenge I mean an authentic and engaging musical work (or project) to be performed.... Progressive problem solving (Berieter & Scardamalia, 1993, p. 96) requires students to take more and more musical details into account during successive encounters with familiar and unfamiliar challenges. To engage in progressive musical problem solving is to work at the edge of one's musicianship. (pp. 72-73)

Viewing the process of teaching and learning musics as culture-related problem solving is an essential aspect of this rationale.

Authenticity

Authenticity, a term that shows up in most literature concerning the performance of world music, is similar to but not synonymous with the Western art music term performance practice. Barrett, McCoy, and Veblen (1997) define authenticity as "a fidelity between the presentation of the music and the music's meaning within a cultural context" (p. 249). This definition will work with a slight change. The word "presentation" is more related to an outcome than a process and reveals the Western bias of objectifying music. If we agree that world music education implies an emphasis on process, I would restate this definition as: a fidelity between the process of music-making and the music's meaning within a cultural context. Now—going back to Koskoff's boundaries analogy; that music which lies nearest the margin, and other music that is unfamiliar to us, is the music that is most likely to create fidelity issues for choral music educators.

With an understanding of these terms and their connotations for choral music education, they are revealed to be underlying components of world music in the choral setting. This rationale relies on (a) an acceptance that world music connotes praxis, (b) that the music of a culture or ethnicity is a method of problem solving within that culture, and (c) that matters of authenticity can be addressed through professional development activities that expand our margins and bring more music to the centre.

The Praxis of World Music

The praxis or practical application of world music in the choral classroom is best explored by considering content and pedagogy in relation to planning and preparation. Danielson (1996), in a book that "seeks to define what teachers should know and be able to do in the exercise of their profession" (p. 1), identifies six components of planning and

preparation (p. 61-78). Danielson's model will serve as a framework for exploring world music in the choral classroom.

Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy

Danielson (1996) lists three demonstrable elements within this component: knowledge of content, knowledge of prerequisite relationships, and knowledge of content-related pedagogy. Pre-service choral music teachers learn the content and pedagogy of the profession from two main sources: (a) through successful completion of a degree program leading to teacher certification, and (b) through experiences with choral musics. In-service choral music teachers expand on this knowledge through both formal and informal professional development experiences. Since you cannot teach what you do not know, the coursework leading to certification as a choral music teacher needs to provide opportunities for both depth and breadth of knowledge.

In a philosophical article raising issues about depth versus breadth, Jorgensen (1998) states: "Realistically, it is impossible to achieve an in-depth, working knowledge of all the musics of the world" (p. 78). In order for a teacher to provide in-depth instruction to students, the teacher must have an even deeper and broader personal understanding of that which is taught. As Jorgensen implies, it is not possible for a choral music teacher to achieve an in-depth working knowledge of all the musics of the world though it is essential for a choral music teacher to have an in-depth working knowledge of more than one music of the world. And, it is desirable to have an in-depth working knowledge of many musics of the world. Most importantly, it is essential to have an in-depth working knowledge of the repertoire one selects for use in the choral classroom.

What does an in-depth working knowledge of the content of music from a particular culture include? At the minimum, a choral music teacher should be able to (a) identify the particular culture or sub-culture from which the music comes; (b) obtain a word-for-word translation, poetic translation, and transliteration if the language is unfamiliar; (c) have access to authentic recordings from the particular culture; (d) have an understanding of the function of music within this culture and the setting where the particular music is performed; (e) identify vocal and instrumental techniques particular to this culture; and (f) know how music is transmitted within the culture.

Beyond this, the choral music teacher must have a working knowledge of prerequisite skills and experiences that the students will need to be successful. When selecting music, teachers must anticipate difficulties the students may encounter in the music-making process and determine whether the foundation has been laid for a successful experience. The pedagogical demands on the world music teacher are great. The standard methods and materials of choral music education must be expanded beyond vocal technique and performance practice of Western art music. Pre-service choral music teachers need hands-on experience making music from a variety of cultures paying particular attention to authenticity.

Demonstrating Knowledge of Students

Teachers demonstrate their knowledge of students by selecting music that is appropriate for their developmental level and by differentiating instruction based on the learning styles of individuals. Teachers also exhibit their knowledge of students by recognizing and respecting the cultural heritage of every student. A choral music teacher can demonstrate this element through the selection of repertoire and avoiding tokenism. For example, the Jewish sacred music tradition is one that can be traced back many centuries. Yet, choral music teachers seem obsessed with Hanukkah music. Some of the Hanukkah music performed is not composed by Jewish composers and is based upon a stereotype of Jewish choral music. This is tokenism and demonstrates a lack of respect for students, cultures, and musics. In an article on global classrooms, Skelton, Wigford, Harper, and Reeves (2002) remind us that "schools should be places in which students observe teachers, parents, and other adults discussing music from other parts of the world, reading authors

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from other countries, and eating food from different cultures on a regular basis, not once a year" (p. 55).

Selecting Instructional Goals

A choir teacher's instructional goals are revealed in their selection of repertoire. Questions the choir teacher should ponder when selecting repertoire for any choir are: At which level is my choir singing? Can the students learn significant concepts and curricular goals through this music? And, am I meeting the needs of all my students? Of course, every selection within the repertoire cannot meet the needs of all students, but through selecting a variety of musics this goal can be attained.

Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources

Considering the resources available for the choral music teacher and the students is an important step in the planning process. Resources include materials choral music teacher may possess along with those resources in the school district and community. Resources may be printed materials, CDs, videos, or musical instruments. Resources also include the culture bearers in the community and performing groups that may come to the school or community.

Designing Coherent Instruction

Planning for teaching and learning that is coherent yet not routinized is often a challenge for novice choral music teachers. Repertoire should be selected that provides for varied approaches to the music-making process (e.g., various groupings of singers, rote learning, note learning, etc.). Instruction should be planned so that students have multiple opportunities to be successful as this motivates learning. Daily lessons should reflect accepted instructional goals and standards.

Developing musicianship in students is the ultimate goal of school music programs. Elliott (1995) explains how a balanced curriculum is designed to develop musicianship skills from a world music perspective:

Since music is a diverse human practice, then music is inherently multicultural. Music consists in many musical practices or music cultures. Accordingly, music educators have a fundamental responsibility to induct children into a variety of musical practices during the long-term time period of a music program. Yet this responsibility must be carefully weighed against the necessity of developing students' musicianship deeply enough that they can attain the fundamental life values of music-making and listening. (pp. 134-135)

So, designing student-centred, coherent instruction in the world music choral classroom includes the ever-present goals of developing student musicianship and instilling lifelong values related to music-making in students.

Assessing Student Learning

Assessment in the choral music class is ongoing. Assessment should always be aligned with the instructional goals. World music education is best evaluated through authentic assessment. Elliott (1995) provides the following thoughts on assessment:

Conceived of as constructive feedback, assessments of musical achievement can be communicated via coaching, cueing, correcting, advising, discussing, modeling, approving, disapproving, and encouraging. Assessing is a natural aspect of progressive musical problem solving; it occurs continuously during the transactions of teaching and learning. It is (or should be) embedded in the processes of learning to make excellent music well as part of an ensemble and on one's own. (p. 264)

Planning and preparation in the world music choral classroom is circular. It does not begin with content and pedagogy, and it does not end with assessment. The process is dynamic. Each component of the framework continually impacts the others. The successful choral music teacher is able to track this process through reflective practice, maintaining a journal of day-to-day teaching and learning experiences.

Conclusion

The challenge is great. As is evidenced by the music heard at the start of this reading, the world is filled with choral musics. It is impossible for any one choral music teacher to be proficient in all choral musics. Many choral teachers avoid straying to far from the Western art music tradition. Bohlman (1999) acknowledges this fear of the unknown and he begs us to go beyond it. He is writing about the Western art music canon and uses the terms "thinking music" to describe music of the canon, and "rethinking music" to describe world musics:

"Thinking music" privileges one way of understanding music, the cognitive; it proceeds with the assurance that self is ultimately knowable. "Rethinking music" proceeds only nervously, lacking conviction that any ontological process is ultimately knowable; we rethink music out of the belief that we missed something the first time round. Rethinking music undermines thinking music, and moves beyond it. Far more important, however, rethinking music asks us to situate our understanding of music in other experiences of music-making, the human practices of bringing music into existence through ritual and belief, act and imagination, and, yes, through thought. (Bohlman, 1999, p. 34)

Through professional development opportunities, choral music teachers can proceed with conviction gaining in-depth knowledge of world musics. The World Music Drumming workshop developed by Will Schmid provides a good model for professional development in world choral music.

The success of World Music Drumming is due in large part to corporate sponsorship (Schmid, 1994). In choral music, corporate sponsorship is unlikely. An organized effort among choral music teachers to focus on the musics of specific cultures and provide professional development experiences in the music-making processes of those cultures is needed. Along with these experiences, more and better resources need to be developed for teachers and students.

In the area of research, of utmost importance is scientific research on vocal technique related to authentic performance of world musics. Many choral teachers avoid using CDs to model singing from world cultures for fear of damaging a student's vocal mechanism. I have found no scientific/medical research to confirm or refute this legitimate concern.

I will close with a quote from the Koskoff (1999) article cited above:

Our main responsibility as teachers is, I feel, to pass on our canon and our own canon's values without canonizing. Instead, we should be helping our students discover their own paths through the maze of all possible canons and values, past, present, and to come—with an underlying bedrock philosophy that all values, just like all people and all musics, have equivalent meaning to someone, somewhere. (p. 558)

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Endnote

1.Performer(s) and title of each piece are listed in order within this endnote. A full bibliographic citation can be found within the References section. Southern Harmony Singers, "Holy Manna;" Trio Bulgarka, "Prochula Se Moma Nedelya;" Tenores di Bitti, "Cantu A Ballu Seriu;" Shu-De, "Throat Singing—five styles;" Toby Twining Music, "Hotel Destiné;" Choir of St. John's College, "Recession;" Cantori Gregoriani, "Introitus—Da Pacem;" Tibetan Buddhist Monks, "Benza Guru;" Jitro, "Hojaja, hojaja;" Tamarii Pirae of Tahiti, "Himene Tarava;" Black Umfolosi, "Bazali Bethu;" Pearl Divers of Bahrain, "Ifijirie;" Sounds of Blackness, "Livin' the Blues;" and, Sweet Honey in the Rock, "Study War No More."