

**THE SELECT PERFORMING CHOIR IN THE
CURRICULUM OF THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

BY

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THE SELECT PERFORMING CHOIR
IN THE CURRICULUM OF THE
JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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by
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Joe Wayne Giles entitled "The Select Performing Choir in the Curriculum of the Junior High School." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music Education.

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INTRODUCTION

The select choir has been a part of the curriculum of the junior high school in many areas for some years. Since the onset of the space age, however, questions have arisen as to the relevance and desirability of certain aspects of the curriculum, specifically within the area of the arts. Indeed, the presence of music itself in education has been questioned and defended.

The purpose of this study is to examine the values and functions of the select performing choir in the junior high school music curriculum. Further, it is to suggest appropriate literature for use with such groups.

By definition, the select choir is one which exists primarily as a performing group. Its personnel is selected by audition on a competitive basis; and it necessarily involves those whose talents and abilities in music are above the average.

What is the place of such groups within the educational purpose of today's music programs? To answer this question two approaches have been followed. First, current literature has been examined to determine the thinking of those writing in the field insofar as the values and functions of these groups are concerned. Secondly, a survey was made of a highly select group of teachers to determine the thinking of those currently active as very successful practitioners in the field of junior high school vocal music.

The teachers surveyed were a group of twenty working in five states: Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Mississippi and Tennessee. In each case, the

teacher surveyed was recommended as being an outstanding music educator by a leading music education executive. Those who recommended teachers were: Dr. Ed Cleino of the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, Dr. Elizabeth Crook of the University of Delaware at Newark, Dr. Wallace Gause of the Pinellas County School System of Clearwater, Florida, and Miss Ernestine Ferrell of the Mississippi State Department of Education at Jackson.

Each participant answered questions regarding the select choir in the curriculum of the school in which he works, and listed the values of such choirs, along with providing a list of appropriate music literature for use with these choirs.

Of the twenty to whom questionnaires were sent, thirteen responded and contributed to this study. The content of their responses is presented in the section dealing with the survey.

A SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

"Most junior high schools schedule general music classes, but only recently has it been realized that boys and girls can sing fine music beautifully..."¹ So do Frances Andrews and Joseph Leeder express an opinion that is becoming more and more widespread as junior high school choral groups prove their abilities at performing music well. But even though they can learn to perform with accuracy and feeling, some educators have questioned the function of select performing groups in the learning process. In examining the curriculum some educators have asked, "How much music are students learning in these performing groups?" The suggestion has even been made that they be replaced with more "academic" classes.

Justification of Performing Groups

In his book Teaching Music in the Secondary Schools, Charles Hoffer has discussed the justification of such groups in today's curriculum. He states:

A performing group has several features that warrant its place in the curriculum. As the pragmatists point out, people learn by doing, by experiencing. A student who goes through the work of learning his part and rehearsing with the group knows the music in a way that someone who only listens can never know it. He has seen the music dissected and put together again; he has heard its thematic material over and over until it is a part of him. Many a teenager has had an initial dislike for a different and profound piece. As the weeks went by, he gradually began to comprehend its meaning and beauty. Had it not been for the intensive work required to perform the music, he would have been left with no understanding of it.²

¹Frances Andrews and Joseph A. Leeder, Guiding Junior High School Pupils in Music Experiences (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1953), p. 159.

²Charles R. Hoffer, Teaching Music in the Secondary Schools (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1964), p. 93.

In Secondary School Music--Philosophy, Theory and Practice, the authors agree that, "Choral singing is . . . the shortest route to experiencing great music first hand."³ Charles Leonhard and Robert House have stated firmly that, "Choral organizations . . . offer an unusual opportunity for effective musical development."⁴ While these people were not necessarily referring to select choirs as opposed to elective choirs, the statements are no less valid when applied there. We see the emphasis on the musical development of the student. Hoffer heartily concurs and further asserts that a strong justification for performing groups can be built on meeting students needs.

The students at this age need the recognition a performing group can provide. They want activity, they want things to happen. The thought of only studying about music is not appealing to most of them. Hence, the preparation of music for public performance motivates them very much.⁵

Writers in the field of music education overwhelmingly grant a place in the curriculum to the performing choir. Now let us observe its purposes and functions within the curriculum.

Purposes and Functions of a Select Performing Choir

One purpose of the select choir, say Andrews and Leeder, is

. . . to provide the musically talented pupils with a means of expression of strong emotional and social feeling. The choir affords an opportunity to acquire skills according to their ability, and provides for greater appreciation of fine music through richer experiences.⁶

³ Neal E. Glenn, William McBride et al., Secondary School Music--Philosophy, Theory and Practice (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 161.

⁴ Charles Leonhard and Robert W. House, Foundations and Principles of Music Education (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 211.

⁵ Hoffer, p. 93.

⁶ Andrews and Leeder, p. 159.

The phrase "according to their own abilities" is important here. As Hoffer has stated, "In American education all students have the right to be educated within the limits of their abilities and talents."⁷ A very valid purpose of the select choir is that of providing for the needs of gifted students who are capable of more than a general music class or elective (non-selective) singing group can offer. It is this purpose of providing for individual differences that Leonhard and House had in mind when they stated,

It is desirable to have at least two choruses, and more if possible, including a beginning chorus for singers with limited proficiency and experience, and one or more choruses whose members are selected on the basis of vocal quality and musicianship.⁸

Andrews and Leeder espouse the same philosophy of purpose when they state,

Most administrators and teachers accept the principle of individual differences, and the [select] choir is organized as a means of meeting those individual differences. The general music class must function in such a way that all levels of ability will have an opportunity for growth, but it is most difficult to use music which is challenging for the talented pupils in the class.⁹

A pertinent question is raised by Charles Hoffer when he asks, "What must a performing group do to merit its place in the curriculum?"¹⁰ His answer gives an indication of how the select choir should function to be of value. He states,

. . . it must do more than just present pleasing performances. As a part of learning to perform the music a member of the . . . choral group should gain, commensurate with his musical development and maturity, some understanding of:

1. the total work, not only his particular part;
2. the musical qualities and elements that go into the interpretation and overall design of a piece--tone, dynamics, phrasing, rhythm, counterpoint, harmony;

⁷Glenn, McBride et al., p. 91.

⁸Leonhard and House, p. 211.

⁹Andrews and Leeder, p. 159.

¹⁰Hoffer, p. 94.

3. the way in which the musical qualities and elements are used in the piece;
4. the historical significance of the work and its relation to other fine arts.¹¹

In Music in General Education, a publication of the Music Educators National Conference, the editors hold the teacher responsible for seeing that the choir functions for greater overall musical growth.

The secondary school music teacher who directs performing groups has the responsibility of organizing his rehearsals in a way which will permit his pupils to improve not only their technical skills, but to grow also in their understanding of, and attitudes toward music as an art.¹²

Andrews and Leeder believe the relation of the choir to the community is of value.

Choirs have a direct influence on the community, and gain communal support for the schools and the music department. Parents become interested in the fine performance of their children, and often their taste is improved as a result.¹³

In Developing and Administering a Comprehensive High School Music Program, Harry E. Moses points out that the primary function of the performing choir must be an educational one.

The highly skilled choir does, of course, have a place in the complete music curriculum. In its specialization, however, it must never get so big or exclusive that it becomes an appendage of the school program . . . The choir should become a school educational activity first, and an outside service organization second. No activity functioning for the general education should become an upended pyramid. When the choir loses its educational function, it no longer belongs in the school.¹⁴

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Karl Ernst and Charles L. Gary, eds., Music in General Education (Washington: Music Educators National Conference, 1965), p. 206.

¹³Andrews and Leeder, p. 160.

¹⁴Harry E. Moses, Developing and Administering a Comprehensive High School Music Program (West Nyack, N.Y.: Parker Publishing Co., 1970) p. 49.

The Importance of the Materials Used

One of the most important tools for developing a musically and educationally sound choir is the materials which are used.

Moses finds the use of proper materials so important that he states, " . . . choirs, no matter how inexperienced or underprivileged, can always meet the need if the music is rewarding and exciting."¹⁵

In Teaching Junior High School Music, Cooper and Kuersteiner set general criteria for selecting materials:

- 1). vocal range appropriate for singers
- 2). interest in supporting parts
- 3). appropriate text¹⁶

Leonhard and House agree that the choral program certainly must involve

" . . . the use of an extensive literature . . ."¹⁷

Writing in Music Educators Journal in 1963 Norman Phillips and John Scott concede that,

. . . it takes time and energy to find these materials, but it is time well spent and energy well used when you do locate a musically worthwhile composition that can help you to help your students become better part singers and quickly receive musical satisfaction at the same time.¹⁸

In outlining the type of material worth using, they further state,

If a composition is written within the adolescent vocal range . . . vocal range . . . has a suitable text, doesn't require a concert pianist to play the accompaniment, and is musically challenging, it might be considered worthy of further study.¹⁹

¹⁵Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁶Irvin Cooper and Karl O. Kuersteiner, Teaching Junior High School Music (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1965), p. 55.

¹⁷Leonhard and House, p. 211.

¹⁸Norman Phillips and John Scott, "Organizing a Junior High School Elective Chorus," Music Educators Journal 49 (April-May 1963): 109.

¹⁹Ibid.

Andrews and Leeder also commented on the importance of materials used when they said,

Many types of materials should be used to insure the interest of both pupils and audience. The repertoire should include folk and art songs, composed songs, operetta selections, and contemporary and classical music. Both sacred and secular songs have a place in the program, some with accompaniment and some a cappella.²⁰

²⁰Andrews and Leeder, p. 161.

A SURVEY OF PRACTICING TEACHERS

Of those responding to the survey, all but one strongly supported the select performing group in principle and practice. There were, however, differences, along with many similarities, in the way the programs are conceived and operated.

Organization and Function in the Curriculum

In 69 percent of the schools responding to the survey, the teacher selected outstanding students from the general music classes to audition for the select choir. Thirty-eight percent advertised for applicants throughout the school regardless of whether they were enrolled in other music classes or not.

In 38 percent of the programs, band students were automatically excluded from participation in the choir because of conflicts of rehearsal times. In the remainder of the schools band students could also participate in choir.

All schools used auditions of some type to select the choristers. Sixty-nine percent auditioned the students on an individual basis. Thirty-eight percent auditioned students in small groups, and the remaining number used auditions of large groups of students auditioning together because of the large number of applicants and the time involved.

Auditions involved one or more of the following procedures:

Interval tests	38 percent
Rhythmic tests	46 percent
Sightsinging	69 percent
Partsinging	38 percent
Individual singing of a song previously learned	23 percent

In 85 percent of the schools the select choir was scheduled as a regular part of the school day, though in some cases this was during an activity period in which the choir had to compete with other school clubs and activities; a procedure which the teachers found far too limiting. The other schools' select choirs meet on the teachers' and students' own time after the school day.

Slightly more than half of the choirs (54 percent) rehearse daily with the others almost equally divided between one rehearsal and two rehearsals per week.

The number of performances given by the choirs in a school year varied from a high of twenty to a low of three, with nine being the average.

Values Placed on Select Choirs by Teachers

Directors of these choral groups believe the select choir to be valuable for a number of reasons. Listed below are values teachers believe this type choir to possess:

- 1). It provides incentive for other music students by inspiring them to work toward being in the best group.
- 2). It gives the participating student knowledge, experience, enjoyment and a sense of accomplishment.
- 3). It provides a satisfaction of the 'drive for recognition' which is so much a part of the junior high student.
- 4). By performing, students are made aware of the problems of other performers and become better listeners and concert goers.
- 5). It provides performance experience for those who will pursue music in high school and college, and for that small percentage who will make music a career.
- 6). The close-knit feelings among the members of the group are beneficial to students socially.
- 7). The self-discipline necessary for participation in a performing group is good for junior high students.

- 8). The desire to be challenged on the part of gifted students is best met in a select group situation.
- 9). Early experience in small group performance allows the student to develop a sense of pleasure to be derived from the "getting-giving" relationship with the audience.

With all these values in mind, teachers did point to areas where care is needed to avoid problems. One teacher suggested that it is possible for the group to become "cocky", thinking themselves to be better than anyone else in the music program. This situation can be remedied by continually challenging the group to the extent that they know they must work hard to attain and retain the high standards of their group.

Another teacher pointed out the need to curb the number of performances so that the students have time to learn music rather than to feel the constant pressure to perform. The overall aim is, after all, the teaching of music.

One teacher surveyed felt that performing groups were valuable, but objected to the use of selectivity in determining the personnel of the group. In her school the choir is made up of all who wish to join, regardless of experience or ability. Her feeling is that those who have little experience and talent profit from the contact with those who are more experienced and talented, without harming the performance capabilities of the group.

List of Selected Choral Literature

We saw in our survey of the literature that the materials used with performing groups are important. It is for that reason that this selected list of choral literature is included in this study. The numbers shown here were suggested by the teachers surveyed as materials with which they had experienced success, and they recommend them for other junior high school groups.

TABLE I

Selected Choral Literature for Junior High Select Performing Choir

Title	Composer-Arranger	Publisher	Arrangement
Americana (Folk Song Suite)	Zaninelli	Shawnee Press	SAB, SATB
Carol of the Bells	Leontovich-Wilhousky	Carl Fischer	SATB
Climb Every Mountain	Rogers and Hammerstein	Williamson Music	SAB, SATB
Come Sing This Round With Me	Martini-Greyson	Bourne Co. ES32	SAB
Do You Hear What I Hear	arr. Simeone	Shawnee Press	SAB
Everything's Alright (Jesus Christ Superstar)	Webber and Rice	Leeds Music Co.	SATB
Flow Gently, Sweet Afton	Cunkle	Shawnee Press D-3	SAB
Fum, Fum, Fum	Shaw-Parker	G. Schirmer	SAB
God Bless America	arr. Ringwald	Shawnee Press	SAB, SATB
God Made Our Hands	Jackson and Miller	Shawnee Press	SSA
God of Our Fathers	Roberts-Warren, Johnson	Rubank	SATB
Greetings	Brahms	Schirmer 4302	SSA
How Excellent Is Thy Name	Eugene Butler	Broadman Press	SATB
I Believe	arr. Ades	Shawnee Press	SATB
I'd Like to Teach the World	arr. Ades	Shawnee Press	SAB
I Don't Know How to Love Him	Webber and Rice	Leeds Music Co.	SATB
I'll Praise My Maker	Lloyd Pfautsch	Abingdon Press	SATB
I Thank You, God	Lloyd Pfautsch	G. Schirmer	SATB
Jubilate Deo	Young	Shawnee Press	SATB
Let There Be Peace on Earth	Mitler-Jackson	Shawnee Press	SSA
Lord's Prayer	setting from "Songfest"	Shawnee Press	---
No Man Is An Island	arr. Ringwald	Shawnee Press	SAB, SATB
Praise We Sing to Thee	Haydn-Luvaas	Kjos Music Co.	SATB
Roundelay Noel	Young	Shawnee Press	SAB, SATB
Sing a Rainbow	arr. John Coates	Shawnee Press	SSA
Sing Alleluia for your Soul	Jerry Friend	WB Music Corp.	SAB
Speak Up (A miniature choral opera)	Zaninelli	Shawnee Press	---

Title	Composer-Arranger	Publisher	Arrangement
Sunrise, Sunset	Bock-Harrick	Sunbeam Music Co.	SAB
The Time Is Now	John Kinyon	Alfred Music	SATB
The Water is Wide	Zaninelli	Shawnee Press	SSA
This Is A Great Country	Simeon	Shawnee Press	SATB
This Is My Country	Guthrie	Shawnee Press	SAB, with Band
This Old Hammer	arr. Ehret	Shawnee Press	SATB
Walk On By	David-Bacharach	Shawnee Press	SAB
We've Only Just Begun	arr. Rogers	Hal Leonard	SAB
Which Way America	David B. Allen	Shawnee Press	SAB
With A Voice of Singing	Martin Shaw	G. Schirmer	SAB, SATB

CONCLUSION

The place of the select performing choir has been evaluated by those writing in the field, and its place in the curriculum has been justified. In addition, practicing teachers support its existence and its function in the curriculum of the junior high school on the grounds that it provides for individual differences by providing an area where gifted students might progress beyond that which would be possible in a more heterogenous group. Teachers also endorse the select choir as an agency of socialization and community spirit. The most important function of the select choir, however, is its potential for providing an atmosphere where greater musical growth and development may take place.

One means of assuring the musical growth for which the group exists is by the use of appropriate materials. A wide range of literature, chosen according to established criteria, should be employed in teaching select choirs.

If planning and care are given to its development and operation the select performing choir should continue to serve a valuable function in the junior high curriculum.

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