

East Tennessee Vocal Association Women's Chorus 2010

~Director's Notes~

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Introductory Ideas and Approach:

I am honored to be the guest conductor for this year's Honors Women's Chorus and I look forward to communicating with you, even prior to the event, in order to make the preparation smooth and interesting. Our goal is to ensure that, come November, the women will have three days of growth and exploration of wonderful repertoire while trying new ideas, sounds, and approaches.

This set of notes is designed to get you started as you study this music and help prepare the women. My hope is to give you a good deal of detail and to provide some helpful additional resources, such as recordings or links to YouTube videos that are good examples. Keep in mind that we want to leave our minds open to adapting—tempos, styles, vocal approaches, tone color, staging and body movement—so please reinforce this all through the process with the women so that they arrive in November ready for anything!

Repertoire Choice:

Repertoire is everything. It is our textbook, it is what sets the tone for the rehearsal, it is what creates momentum (or drags us down), it is what engages our brain, voices, and souls (or doesn't). So I take a very long time choosing and balancing repertoire as I gather whatever info I can on the performing group itself, in order to know its abilities and interest level, and as I play with balance and variety of repertoire within the time frame allotted.

I have been told many times that this women's group will be READY and well-prepared, so I have planned accordingly. You will see a balance of sacred and secular, various tempi and meters, as well as timbres, languages, and extra-musical challenges (such as body percussion, unusual vocal sounds, etc.) As you read through the notes below, please let your women know what to expect, even if you do not add these elements to your own performance, should you be programming any of these pieces prior to our November festival. There is no one "right way" – so please keep your students' minds open to trying new things once we all convene.

I will continue to communicate with you, likely through Chris Clift and/or the ETVA website, but if you have questions along the way, feel free to contact me at my school email:
rmwis@noctrl.edu.

Thank you in advance for your preparation and energy!

R. Wis

**ETVA 2010
Women's Chorus repertoire**

Dr. Ramona M. Wis, Guest Conductor

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General balance philosophy:

I prefer a rich Alto II sound, and envision the alto color as the foundation of the tonal pyramid for the women's chorus.

Balance should be progressively lighter as you go up to the Sop I voices.

Warmer, darker voices are best in Alto II and Sop II;
lighter, bell like voices are best in Alto I and Sop I.

Following are detailed notes for each of the pieces, including divisi information.

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Repertoire:

**Sanctus (David Rossow)  
Love is a Rain of Diamonds (Gwyneth Walker)  
La Lluvia (arr. Stephen Hatfield)  
Remember (Stephen Chatman)  
Veniki (arr. Feodosiy Rubtstov)  
Elijah Rock (arr. Clifton Noble, Jr.)**

~**Sanctus** (David Rossow) SSAA with 4-hand piano and percussion  
(Santa Barbara Music, SBMP 842)

*A wonderful contemporary setting of the traditional Latin text.  
The marking of dotted quarter = 80 is good. Don't push faster or the piece gets "chirpy."  
Work for a very long "sah" on all the Sanctus text and avoid going to the nasal "n"  
because this will take away from the open sound of the women's voices.  
Reinforce the need for a full, warm, mature, open women's sound on all text,  
despite the fast tempo ☺*

**\*Divisi info:** Traditional SSAA, strong and present alto line

Measure 1-35:

*The 3/8 will be conducted in "1" to the bar.*

*Release the "s" of Sanctus on beat 1 of the bar following the word (such as m. 4, beat 1, for sopranos).*

*"T" of "Sabaoth" on beat 1 of m. 19.*

*"S" on beat 3 of m. 25 for lower three voices; Sop I stagger until m. 35.*

*All voices release on beat 1 of m. 35.*

Measure 36-49:

*Sop I and II, take a catch breath at the end of m. 42. Breathe on beat 3 of m. 46.*

*Altos, do NOT breathe in m. 46.*

*All voices release on beat 3 of m. 49.*

Measure 50-55:

*Altos, this is low—use an open vowel and your best tone—don't growl.*

*The 8/8 will be conducted in "3" to the bar, following the accents (3+2+3 pattern).*

*Work for definite accents as indicated, getting this with crisp, front-placed consonants.*

*Alto I, breathe on beat 3 of m. 53.*

*Alto II, keep going!*

*M. 55—TRICKY MEASURE AND TRANSITION.*

*Alto I, release quickly on beat 3 of the 3/8 (which will be conducted in "1" to the bar).*

Measure 56-65:

*\*Sop II and Alto I, this is an important entrance. Nail it or it will sound like a mistake!*

**Sop I**—Release the "t" of "Sabaoth" on the last eighth note of the whole note in mms.

*58, 60, 62. Do NOT breathe in mm. 63-64; make one "t/d" consonant when you leap the octave from "Sabaoth" down to "Dominus."*

*Do NOT breathe going into m. 65.*

**Sop II**—Release the "t" of "Sabaoth" on the first beat of mm. 57, 59, 61.

*Do NOT breathe in mm. 63-64; make one "t/d" consonant when you leap the octave from "Sabaoth" down to "Dominus." Do NOT breathe going into m. 65.*

**Alto I**—Release the "t" of "Sabaoth" on the last eighth note of mm. 57 and 59.

*M. 62, quick release/"s" between "nus" and Do."*

*M. 64, quick release/"s" between "nus" and "Sa." Carry over into m. 65 with NO breath.*

**Alto II**—Release the “t” of “Sabaath” on the last eighth note of m. 56 and 58.  
 M. 62, quick release/”s” between “nus” and Do.”  
 M. 64, quick release/”s” between “nus” and “Sa.” Carry over into m. 65 with NO breath.

Note for all: the 9/8 of m. 64 will be conducted in “4” to the bar (3+2+2+2). Follow the accents.

Measure 65-79:

\*This whole page should sound like it is in one breath for sopranos. Our best bet is to have you breathe quickly at the end of m. 71, in which case do NOT put an “s” in that bar. Sing “Sanc-tu” and then catch a breath before the next downbeat.

Altos: Note the rhythm change in m. 65; be aware throughout this page of different rhythm from the sopranos.

Breathe on beat 3 of m. 71. Stagger the rest of the passage.

For all voices: Breathe on beat 3 of m. 79.

Note for all: We will see what works best for us on this page—there are a lot of options here so try what I have listed above but we will adjust when we meet.

Measure 80-103:

The 6/8 measures will be conducted “2” to the bar. We return to “1” on the 3/8 measures.

For all voices: Quick catch breath at the end of m. 82.

The next several phrases are sequences, each building excitement to the fermata.

Start m. 83 at about mp and build from there!

Breathe at the end of mm.88, 94 and the downbeat of m. 103.

\*Important: NO RITARD in this passage. Go at tempo right into the fermata at m. 103.

Measure 116-the end:

Let this build from mp to the end, with each phrase growing in excitement!

For all voices: Breathe at the end of mm. 121, 127, 131, 135.

Final release on beat 1 of the final measure, m. 141. Whew!

~**Love is a Rain of Diamonds** (Gwyneth Walker) SSA, piano, solo or soli group  
(ECS Publishing, Catalog No. 5023)

*A glorious piece for women's voices, showing off color, warmth, maturity and energy. I have known about this piece for a long time but only just recently programmed it with our North Central College Women's Chorale this past spring. It is truly one of our favorites and has a colorful piano accompaniment.*

*We want long, warm, womanly "ahs" on these soli and will want to match the color of the voices so that the first and second soli sound similar in color.*

**\*Divisi info:** Traditional SSA, strong and present alto line

**\*Solo info:** We will be auditioning for solos or a solo group to sing the "ah" passages so work with your women on this and we will determine how and when to choose voices.

Opening piano introduction:

*Should sound somewhat improvised but close to the actual tempo of the piece, which should "breathe" between half note=66-70. Tempo clearly needs to be established the two measures prior to the voices entering.*

Measure 4-24:

*I will conduct this opening in "2" to the bar.  
Love="Lawv."*

*For all voices: Breathe on beat 2 of m. 9 and 13.*

*Breathe on the "and" of 2 in m. 17.*

*Breathe on beat 2 in m. 20.*

*Carry the next phrase until you breathe on the "and" of 2 in m. 24.*

*\*(Note: M. 24 will accelerate. I will actually conduct this bar in "4" so you can think of the breath being on beat 4.)*

Measure 25-58:

*I will start this passage in "4" to establish the brighter tempo and then move back to conducting the half note once this new tempo is established. That means I'll conduct in "3" to the bar at the 3/2, m. 33.*

*Release the "s" on the rests in mm. 26 and 28 (beat 2, if you are thinking in half notes).*

*Release the "nd" on beat 3 in m. 34, at the same time the first solo comes in.*

*Release the "s" on beat 1 of m. 40. (In other words, eliminate the quarter note and cut off on "1.")*

*Release the "nd" on beat 2, m. 45; next release also on beat 2 of m. 49.*

*Release the “d” on beat 3 of m. 51.*

*Release the “t” on the “and” of 1 in m. 53. Think of “heart” as a quarter note, the release on the second quarter note, followed by “and all.”*

*Carry m. 54 through the end of m. 56. I will slow down slightly and show everyone the release at the end of m. 56.*

*\*Note: I will cue the release of “permanence” at the end of the fermata. Slight pause, then we move to the previously established tempo (the one we had starting at m. 25) at the a tempo in m. 58.*

*Measure 58-69:*

*Enter at m. 60 with energy (breathe!) but in the style of a “sigh.” Each successive phrase is a bit louder.*

*Release on beat 2 in m. 61 and 63.*

*Observe dynamic and tempo changes in this next passage.*

*Next release is on beat 3 of m. 69.*

*Measure 69-end:*

*The choral parts should start soft and build, gradually overtaking the solos so that the focus moves from the soloists to the chorus.*

*Breathe at the end of mm. 73, 75, 77, 79.*

*Observe the accents in mm. 80-82. I will conduct these measures in an accented “3” to the bar.*

*Breathe between m. 81 and 82.*

*IMPORTANT: No ritard at the end. Stay in tempo right through the release, beat 1 of m. 84. Energetic, IN TUNE release! Wow!*

~**La Lluvia** (Stephen Hatfield) Treble Voices (3-5 parts), a *cappella* w/percussion (we will use body percussion on this)  
(Boosey & Hawkes, OCTB6941)

*This is a “sound piece.”*

*La Lluvia means “the rain” and so we will be using the musical material (the written parts) as the basis for creating a kind of rainforest sound piece. We will precede what is written in the score with a “thunderstorm” created by vocal sounds, finger snaps, foot stomps, etc.*

*We will also continue rain and wind sounds (along with a few select rainforest animal sounds) throughout the piece and will either substitute or supplement the written percussion with body percussion. Our chance to improvise and create a piece that will be new, totally ours, and never captured again!*

**\*Divisi info:** Evenly divided throughout;  
be sure the top treble at all times “floats” well in tune.

You will notice there are no true words; rather sounds that create the energy and color we need. Teach the piece as melodic ideas, fragments that are very tonal but are turned upside down and used in different ways.

We will be using a very light “d” on the “doo” (closer to a “t”) so that we can sing a light and driving line, with a feel throughout the piece of “2” to the bar.

Observe all dynamic markings and strive for a noticeably different volume and edgier, brighter (no vibrato) tone color on the “la la” sections.  
A contrast to the smoother “doo” sections.

\*One specific note: the melodic fragment first heard in the Treble I part in m. 5 MUST be supportive, prepared and sung “from above” in order for it to sound wonderful instead of tired. If you Google this piece you will find various performances and virtually ALL of them sound “blah” on this line.

So go into the learning of this piece with that caution.  
We might change the vowel—perhaps to an open “ah”—to ensure the loveliness of this fragment.

Quarter note=160 is a good starting point. We may adjust it a bit brighter but it usually happens on its own as the piece progresses. We don’t want it to sound “chirpy”—rather to sound cool on the “doo” and edgy on the “la.”

Come ready to experiment with sounds, body percussion, timbres and the like. We will approach this as though we were a soundtrack to a film about the rain and the rainforest; if we had access to theatrical lighting, we would use it!

~**Remember** (Stephen Chatman), SSA(A), *a cappella*  
(ECS Publishing, No. 7.0476)

*Beautiful, lovely though a bit melancholy, and all about the voices and phrasing. There is no meter marking, but in general I will be conducting a half note feel and when we slow down or speed up, based on what the text requires, I will use additional gestures to move us along.*

**\*Divisi info:** Traditional SSA, strong and present alto line (take the optional Alto II parts where they exist) and somewhat fewer voices/lighter sound on top soprano throughout. Be sure the dissonance represented by the 4-part divisi at the “Slow=76” is heard well.

Be ready for lots of rubato—we don’t want a strict time feel here.

Markings throughout the piece are very clear—one specific request:  
please sing “rih-” member rather than “ree-” member.

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~**Veniki** (arr. Feodosiy Rubtstov; arr. for treble by Veronica Sichivitsa),
Treble Voices (6 parts)
(Musica Russica, FS002wc)

This piece is a good deal of fun and challenging text-wise, not only because of the language but because of the tempo and constant energy☺ It is, essentially, a Russian tongue-twister.

***Divisi info:** Generally speaking, all parts should be heard equally throughout so ignore the idea that there is a solo group at any point in the piece. Keep an equal balance in mind as you assign parts, noting that there is occasional doubling (m. 31, top sopranos in both the “choir” and “solo group,” for example). Low alto parts need to be strong. All voices should learn their respective parts at the beginning and then split off as the piece progresses.

I suspect there will be some adjustment on this piece once we get to rehearsal☺

BE SURE YOU GET THE VENIKI DICTION COACHING CD FROM MUSICA RUSSICA when you buy your scores or use what is in Dropbox. Musica Russica is wonderful to work with and you will get great service from this publisher.

We will add a yelp (“yah!) at the end of the piece on my cue
(likely the first beat of the final bar).

~**Elijah Rock** (arr. Clifton Noble, Jr.) SSAA, piano, optional rap section
(Treble Clef Press, TC-217)

*Yet another version of the classic spiritual “Elijah Rock,” but this one proving that women’s choirs are “not wimpy” as the Treble Clef Press site tells us 😊
A great closer and with some different elements in this arrangement that set it apart.*

***Divisi info:** Traditional SSAA, again with strong altos! Sop I must be able to sing clean without singing heavily.

Some general thoughts:

Tempo—not too fast! I would suggest half note=88 or thereabouts, a little under the recommended 92. The versions of this piece you can find on line are very fast and prohibit feeling some of the syncopations in the piece. What good is that? The faster we go, the “squarer” it gets so we have to find the sweet spot. A good test: the second “shout” – if you are not swinging that, and hitting it on the “and,” you are not feeling the syncopations!

We are going for a driving rhythmic feel throughout, with a brief release from this feel (I am sure it was intended to help voices rest) on the “Rock-a My Soul” passages. But overall, feel the syncopations, the accented rhythms, and the energy that builds with the volume and repetitions of text.

Specific notes:

Most of the releases/breath marks are self-explanatory. A few specific comments:

Measure 10-17:

The main theme as sung here repeats several times—use the releases of “rock” and “shout” as percussive elements, planting them on the appropriate beats as written. “K” on beat 4 of m. 10 (not the “and” of 3) and the first “t”(of the first “shout”) on beat 2.

Measure 41-67:

Carry m. 41 into 42.

Mm. 42-45 is one phrase; don’t breathe after “could” or “would.”

Carry m. 57 into 58.

Ideally, we will sing one phrase from “could” (m. 58) until the rest in m. 67.

Measure 114-129:

Rap section? Not sure if we will do it. Prepare your women for either option and we will see in rehearsal . . . If we do it, we will use a hushed, mid-range vocal sound, I suspect, as opposed to a manly, heavy color. And we will focus on using the consonants in a noisy way, so they stand out in the hushed texture. That is my thinking at the moment.

Measure 135-139:

One phrase, breathe on the rest in 139.

Measure 152:

Breathe after the last word, on my cue.

As for the very end, top Db for sopranos--

We will ONLY use a few sops that can nail this, consistently, and without sounding like it is the last note they will ever sing. You know what I mean. So this is not about vocal competition (I can hear them now: "Oh, I can sing that note!!!! No, REALLY . . .")

If you want to coach a few voices to try this, we are going for color, not power. If the note is in tune and placed forward (a brighter color), it will carry fine. It does not need to be over-sung or "muscled."

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***An impressive finale to what I know will be a wonderful, engaging,  
and  
exciting experience for all!  
I look forward to seeing you all in November and meeting these  
wonderful women!***

*~Ramona Wis*