



VOICE of WCDA

Summer Issue—July 2017

The 21st Century Choir

Upcoming Dates and Deadlines

Singing in Wisconsin
Registration— Sept. 1-Sept. 30

Composition Contest
Applications — Sept. 11-Oct. 14

All State Choirs
Nominations — Sept. 25-Oct. 20

WCDA Awards
Nominations— Oct. 1-Oct. 25

Conducting Contest
Applications — Oct. 1-Dec. 1

2018 State Conference
Early Registration — Nov. 6-Dec. 10
Early Bird Price \$125

Singing in Wisconsin
November 11, 2017

2018 State Conference
Registration — Dec. 11-Jan. 10
Registration fee—\$145

2018 All State Choirs
January 11-13

2018 State Conference
January 12-13, 2018
Wausau, Wisconsin

♪ In This Issue...

[Letter From the Editor.....2](#)

[A World without Weston.....3](#)

[Making Connections through Social Media....4-5](#)

[Creating a Space for All Singers -
Choir and Gender.....6-8](#)

[Can We Really Sing “Religious” Music.....8-11](#)

[The Challenge of Selecting Global Choral
Music.....12](#)

IMPORTANT INFORMATION!

Please visit our new website: www.wischoral.org
If you haven't already created a new username and password, you will need to do this in order to access registrations.

WCDA has a new mailing address. Please update this address with your school so that payments are sent to the correct location:

435 Sandstone Ter., Kiel, WI 53042

[Visit the Website](http://www.wischoral.org)

Wisconsin Choral Directors Association: Part of American Choral Directors Association

435 Sandstone Ter., Kiel, WI 53042

Email: wcd@wischoral.org / Website: WWW.WISCHORAL.ORG



VOICE of WCDA

[In This Issue...](#)

Letter from the Editor

A World without Weston

**Making Connections
through Social Media**

**Creating a Space for All
Singers - Choir and
Gender**

**Can We Really Sing
“Religious” Music**

**The Challenge of
Selecting Global Choral
Music**

Letter from the Editor

Zachary Durlam

Our world today is vastly different from the place we inhabited just 20 years ago. As someone in his mid-40s, I still consider myself fairly young, yet 20 years ago I had just attained my first e-mail address, and it would be another three years before I owned a computer. Mobile phones were large, bulky items that were the domain of the super-rich and super-important, and the idea of condensing our computers, phones, cameras, video cameras, books, audio libraries, and rolodexes onto a small, personal, portable device that was also capable of playing games and instantly connecting us with 800 of our closest friends seemed preposterous. The terms “white privilege” and “transgender” were not in the mainstream vocabulary, and even most liberal politicians were not proponents of gay marriage. 9/11 had not yet occurred, and the western world was still celebrating the recent collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. No schools held drills preparing for “active shooter” scenarios. People got their news from papers and from the daily national network news programs, and whiffs of presidential impeachment were in the air.

Whatever you think about all of these changes, they are now a part of the world we live in, and they affect our choral rehearsals and performances in very real and profound ways. This issue of *The Voice of WCDA* addresses just four of the new challenges that face 21st-century choral directors. Sam Wulterkens offers suggestions and guidelines for using social media as an effective tool for your choral program. Our WCDA president, Stephen Sieck, presents a discussion of working with transgender students in our choirs excerpted from his recently published book. James Kinchen explores the legal and ethical issues surrounding the use of sacred choral music in secular settings, and Eduardo Garcia-Novelli discusses the use and misuse of multicultural music in the choral world. In addition, I offer a tribute to Weston Noble, who passed away this past December.

I hope you enjoy and are challenged by the articles presented in this issue. Our fall issue of *The Voice of WCDA* will focus on “top ten” repertoire lists for a variety of choir types and musical styles. If you would like to share a list of some of your favorite choral pieces that you feel everyone should check out, please contact me. Otherwise, enjoy your summer!

435 Sandstone Ter.

Kiel, WI 53042

wcda@wischoral.org

WWW.WISCHORAL.ORG

[Visit the Website](#)



VOICE of WCDA



[In This Issue...](#)

Letter from the Editor

A World without Weston

Making Connections through Social Media

Creating a Space for All Singers - Choir and Gender

Can We Really Sing "Religious" Music

The Challenge of Selecting Global Choral Music

435 Sandstone Ter.

Kiel, WI 53042

weda@wischoral.org

WWW.WISCHORAL.ORG

[Visit the Website](#)

A World without Weston

Zachary Durlam

This past winter, the world lost one of its musical giants, Weston Noble. I was lucky enough to study with Mr. Noble at Luther College in the mid-90s, and to this day, I'm still realizing all of the lessons I learned from him and the many ways he influenced my life and affected my philosophy of teaching. He was an incredible musician, a brilliant rehearsal strategist, and a master at building ensemble. The most important lessons I learned from him were not musical, though; they were lessons in humanity.

Rehearsals with Mr. Noble were surprisingly non-technical. It's not that we didn't address technical issues, it was that his primary goal was to engage his singers' imaginations and to keep them mentally and emotionally invested in the rehearsal, and he was able to address technical goals within this framework. To Mr. Noble, the choir was not an instrument to be fine-tuned; it was a group of souls, each with unique needs and abilities, and capable of coming together with a unified sense of purpose to create something truly transcendent. This value for the human beings that comprised the choral instrument and ability to foster profound aesthetic experiences was not dependent upon the quality of singers. I watched Weston work magic with struggling high school choirs, top-notch collegiate ensembles, inexperienced adult singers, and professionals, and there was never any sense that he valued one singer or type of ensemble over the other.

I'm ashamed to admit that I did not fully realize how incredible this man was until I was out directing my own choirs. At one point during my first year at a new school, Mr. Noble came to work with my junior/senior choir. The group had some outstanding singers, but for a variety of reasons, attitudes were poor, discipline was a constant battle, and I was having a hard time connecting with the students. Within two minutes Mr. Noble had this group of somewhat defiant teenagers completely eating out of his hand – they were eager to sing well and did not want to disappoint him. During my entire time at Luther, I can't recall Weston ever raising his voice or uttering a sharp word, yet he was able to set high standards and easily manage behavior because you knew he personally valued you and you did not want to disappoint him.

Though he was a "giant" in the choral and band worlds, anyone that met Weston can attest to the fact that it was his humility and compassion that defined him. He never imagined himself to be better than anyone else, and he was the epitome of a servant-leader. Stories of him walking the campus picking up trash are, as Luther's orchestra director Daniel Baldwin noted at Weston's memorial service, "not apocryphal," and for busy students and faculty, watching this great man clean up other people's trash was a daily ego check.

There are so many other iconic stories about Weston, from his ability to name the hometown of nearly every student he had ever taught to the personal phone calls to high school musicians that thousands of us excitedly received to his love of particular choral "colors" (if he ever asked, the correct answer was always "lavender"). He was and continues to be an inspiration to so many of us who devote our lives to musical leadership. Choral music in the 21st century is both richer for his influence and impoverished because he is no longer here to help shape its trajectory.

Mr. Noble, I miss you. I miss your deeply spiritual, humanizing presence in our profession, and I miss the example of what it means to be a leader and a compassionate human being that you set every day of your life. The world is a better place because you were a part of it. I pray that the eternal part of you that lives on is somewhere relishing the lavender-hued sounds of heavenly music.





VOICE of WCDA

[In This Issue...](#)

Letter from the Editor

A World without Weston

Making Connections through Social Media

Creating a Space for All Singers - Choir and Gender

Can We Really Sing “Religious” Music

The Challenge of Selecting Global Choral Music

Making Connections through Social Media

Sam Wulterkens

Many of us are aware that a large portion of our population uses social media. However, the statistics of just how many people are using social media are truly staggering. According to statista.com, the percentage of the U.S. population using social media is a whopping 81% (up from 24% of the population, just 10 years ago). If you are reading this article, there's a great likelihood that you also participate on social media. Most people use social media to make contact with friends, to share photos, stories, recipes and more. However, businesses know that social media is an incredibly important marketing tool. As choir directors, we have an incredible opportunity to use social media to our advantage.

Social media can be very helpful to choir directors, in a variety of ways. Because so many people are connected to social media, it can be a great way to advertise performances. It is also a great place to keep your ensemble connected. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat (some of the most popular social media platforms) can be used as a recruiting tool, as well. With the right plan of attack, choir directors can use social media as strong tool to improve their ensemble's success.

Getting people to our concerts is an important part of leading a choir program. In the past, directors may have used posters, radio or television advertisement, signs, or announcements to get the word out about their concerts. Many of those methods are still useful, but getting the word out on social media is a new, highly important option. Social media marketing (that's what this is) is a great option for choirs because it's inexpensive, targeted (the people that see it are generally already interested in what you have say), and highly visible. Truly, a choir that is not using social media outlets to build their audience is missing out on a great opportunity.

Social media can be a great tool for keeping an ensemble connected and engaged, even when they are not in rehearsal. Many ensembles have their own Facebook group, where they can ask questions, post videos or recordings, share ideas and reminders, plan social gatherings, share photos, and more. Groups like this can also be a great way to stay connected to alumni and families of ensemble members. On Twitter, creating an account that speaks for/about the choir can be an excellent way to draw a following and open the lines of communication, as well.

Just as social media can be helpful in drawing an audience, it can be incredibly useful as a means to recruit for an ensemble. Promotional videos, memes (photos with short, usually funny, text comments on them), and announcements about auditions or calls for singers can be highly effective. The use of hashtags can also be a great way to build interest in membership (#joinchoir). The possibilities are as limitless as your creativity.

435 Sandstone Ter.

Kiel, WI 53042

weda@wischoral.org

WWW.WISCHORAL.ORG

[Visit the Website](#)





VOICE of WCDA

[In This Issue...](#)

Letter from the Editor

A World without Weston

Making Connections through Social Media

Creating a Space for All Singers - Choir and Gender

Can We Really Sing “Religious” Music

The Challenge of Selecting Global Choral Music

435 Sandstone Ter.

Kiel, WI 53042

wcda@wischoral.org

WWW.WISCHORAL.ORG

[Visit the Website](#)

Making Connections through Social Media (cont.)

As powerful as social media can be for your choirs, there are definitely ways to amplify the potential it provides. There are several important things to consider as you delve into using social media for your ensemble.

1. Know your audience.
 - a. Facebook is a great way to reach people who are over 25 years of age, but not necessarily the most effective way to reach high school students.
 - b. Twitter seems to be a good way to reach some of our younger audience, but that seems to be shifting more toward Snapchat (a medium I've not yet investigated).
 - a. Instagram and YouTube are also heavily used social media platforms that should be considered, especially for younger target audiences.
2. Most social media platforms will require you to be interesting, if you hope to be effective. Most social media is driven by followers. If you aren't interesting, many people will “unfollow” you in favor of more interesting content.
 - a. Sharing your content in a way that is clever or humorous helps keep people interested.
 - b. Use more than words in your posts: add memes, photos, and videos.
 - c. It's okay include some posts that are not about your ensemble.
 - i. If you are comfortable, you can share a bit about your personal life.
 - ii. Share something that's funny or cute, just because...
 - iii. Avoid political, off-color humor, and generally divisive posts.
3. Your ensemble members are incredibly important to the success of your social media efforts.
 - a. Ask your ensemble members to follow your social media profiles.
 - b. Encourage members of your ensemble to “share” your posts.
 - c. Interact with your ensemble members on social media, especially when they are posting things related to music or choir.
4. Be prepared to evolve and change/explore new platforms.
 - a. The way people use social media is used changes, and it does so quickly. If you need examples, look at Facebook posts from 5-10 years ago versus the posts we see today. Your posts have to change, too, if you want to remain relevant.
 - b. Groups of people (usually by age) will migrate from one platform to another, and you might want to consider following them if you want to continue to be seen/heard.
 - c. Not every social media platform will be a good fit for you or what you are trying to accomplish. Explore the various options and choose some that will work for you (both your personal style, and what you are trying to accomplish).
5. Social Media is not a magic wand.
 - a. You will need to put in some time and energy to have a positive outcome.
 - b. Respond to people that communicate with you on social media, and do so regularly.
 - a. Check your timeline and interact with your followers, especially when they are posting about choir or music.
 - b. After concerts, “like” and/or “share” positive things people are saying about it.
 - c. Leading into concerts, show your followers that you notice and appreciate their posts about the performance by liking and sharing.
 - d. Depending on your comfort level, it can also be fun/useful to make occasional comments on non-related content, such as congratulating someone on success in another endeavor.

The above thoughts are just an introduction into the use of social media with your ensembles. Social media has had a significant impact on my own ensembles, and my connection to my ensemble members, audience, and alumni. If used correctly, social media can be useful and fun way to maximize the success of your ensemble. If you would like to see how I use social media, check out my twitter account, by following @ochschoirs. You can also send questions to me by emailing s.wulterkens@ocfsd.org or sending me a DM on twitter or a message on Facebook messenger (Sam Wulterkens or Ochs Choirs).



VOICE of WCDA

[In This Issue...](#)

Letter from the Editor

A World without Weston

Making Connections
through Social Media

Creating a Space for All
Singers - Choir and
Gender

Can We Really Sing
“Religious” Music

The Challenge of
Selecting Global Choral
Music

435 Sandstone Ter.

Kiel, WI 53042

wcda@wischoral.org

WWW.WISCHORAL.ORG

[Visit the Website](#)

Creating a Space for All Singers

Stephen Sieck

This article is an edited excerpt from a longer discussion on working with transgender singers in the book, [Teaching with Respect: Inclusive Pedagogy for Choral Directors](#), published by Hal Leonard, written by Stephen Sieck. This excerpt is reprinted with the publisher's permission.

Perhaps no facet of civil and political discourse has changed as significantly in the last few years as the rights of people who identify as transgender. The rapid ascent of trans publicity and storylines, legislative protections, and educational policies has been significant progress for a group that had, up until now, barely been recognized as existent.

A productive conversation with directors who work with trans singers begins with some clarifying terminology. Many teachers feel supportive of their trans singers, but worry about which words to use. Music educators and conductors can find a *fantastic* list of resources at galachoruses.org/resource-center/singers/transgender-voices.

Here are some helpful terms:

Assigned Sex – what your birth certificate reads (male, female).

Biological Sex – what your body is born with. This may include male, female, or intersex (see below), and is defined by internal/external organs.

Gender Identity – how you see yourself

Gender Expression – how you show yourself to the world

For me, these four terms (assigned and biological sex, gender identity and expression) all line up as male. However, a person might have an assigned and biological sex of male, but identify as female. If she expresses herself as female (uses a female name, e.g.), that is an additional variable. In other words, you may teach singers who behave as male (assigned, biological, and expression) but secretly identify as female – they may not have yet made public their identity.

Cisgender – Using the Latin prefix “Cis”, meaning “on the same side of,” *cisgender* (or *cis*) refers to people who share the same biological sex and gender identity. For example, I identify as cis-male.

Transgender – Using the Latin prefix “Trans,” meaning “on the other side of,” *transgender* (or *trans*) refers to people whose gender identity varies from their biological sex. If someone was born with a biological male body but identifies as female, she might describe herself as trans, or trans-female, or MTF (see below).

Transsexual – This term specifies a person who typically *lives* in a different gender than the birth assignment gender, often with medical help (hormones, surgery, e.g.).

Intersex – Refers to people who have physical characteristics that do not fit typical male/female dichotomies. The term ‘hermaphrodite’ had been used in the past, but is no longer considered appropriate.

FTM and MTF – Some transgender people will identify themselves this way. The first letter stands for the birth-assigned gender (F for female, M for male), the T stands for “To”, and the third letter for the chosen gender. Hence, FTM would mean “Female-to-Male,” as in, “I was assigned the gender female at birth, but I identify as a male.”

Gender-fluid or Gender-queer – refers to people who do not define themselves in a male/female dichotomy.

Transition – refers to the process of changing one’s gender expression.

Dead-naming – refers to the harmful practice of calling a person by their original assigned -gender name, not their new gender-identified name. So, if a student had been given the name Joshua at birth, and, having identified as trans and chosen the name Janice, was still called Joshua, that would be dead-naming. In effect, by not acknowledging this person’s new name, the speaker does not acknowledge their transition. This is especially tricky in high school settings, when the student is still a minor and the parent(s) may not acknowledge the student’s trans identity.

There are many words that circulate today that should be put to rest as hurtful terms, including transvestite, she-male, and tranny. To demonstrate respect for our singers, we should use the term *transgender*. If we are not sure how a singer prefers to be described, then we should ask them.



VOICE of WCDA

[In This Issue...](#)

Letter from the Editor

A World without Weston

Making Connections through Social Media

Creating a Space for All Singers - Choir and Gender

Can We Really Sing “Religious” Music

The Challenge of Selecting Global Choral Music

435 Sandstone Ter.

Kiel, WI 53042

weda@wischoral.org

WWW.WISCHORAL.ORG

[Visit the Website](#)

Creating a Space for All Singers (cont.)

Working with Transgender Students - Recommendations

I believe our first responsibility in all choir auditions is to get to know the voice in front of us. I still stand by the basic range-tests in auditions, since I cannot steward a voice I do not know. Now, however, I pay more careful attention to ways in which a singer may be trying to communicate that they are gender-variant. One respectful way to gain clarity is to **ask singers which pronouns they prefer**. Put a sign up by your audition room or include a line in the sign-up sheet that asks for the student's preferred pronouns. For singers who identify as trans, this is a welcome invitation to clarify she/her/hers (MTF) or he/him/his (FTM), or they/them/their (if gender-fluid). Many of our adolescent singers are already acculturated to this question and have the answer ready. But if a singer has no idea what you're talking about, that's probably a sign that they identify with their assigned gender.

Now that I have more clarity about gender identity, I can choose the appropriate path. For cis-gender singers, I continue with the audition procedure I've always done – listening for the ends of the range, *passaggio* points, and comfortable tessitura. For transgender singers, I usually say something to the effect of: “I'd like to get to know your voice a little more. The most important thing for us today is that you and I find a place where you feel at home in choir. Before we jump into vocal exercises, I welcome you sharing any specific hopes or concerns about which section you would be placed in.” In other words, I create a space for the singer to make known their wishes. Then, I explore the range of the voice, but now I can listen attentively for how the singer navigates their preferred range (if one exists). If the singer prefers a range that doesn't fit comfortably in their voice at present, I do the reverse of what I would do with cis-gender singers: I work from a place of helping the singer use that range, not from a place of correcting the singer's preference.

There are, broadly speaking, four kinds of trans voices that we might work with in choir: MTF or FTM, and whether the singer has or has not begun hormone treatment. I should mention here that it is not our business whether or not a singer is taking hormones, or why they are or are not. Some cis-gender singers are also on some kind of hormone treatment, and we do not inquire about their medication decisions, either. The use of hormones is only relevant inasmuch as a singer volunteers that information to us to communicate that the voice is in a changing state.

Let's examine some of the possible strategies with each voice:

MTF: a singer who was biologically male and transitions to female may (or may not) choose to take estrogen as part of the transition process. When the vocal folds lengthen and thicken during cis-male adolescence, they remain longer and thicker (creating a lower sound) throughout that person's life, even with estrogen treatment. MTF singers who transition after (male) puberty will possess a 'changed male' voice. (In the event that a singer received hormonal intervention *prior* to cis-male pubescence, then her voice will function like a cis-female voice.) While this unchangeably low voice may be frustrating to MTF singers, the upside is that the changed male voice possesses the possibility of a beautiful head voice, or counter-tenor. By engaging the crico-thyroid muscle, changed male voices can stretch and thin the vocal mechanism to produce good 4th and 5th octave tones. With practice, this can be quite manageable and lovely. I recommend starting MTF singers on lip-trills in the 4th and 5th octaves, and then adding descending penta-scales on [u] and [i] from the 5th octave down. After several months of this strengthening work, she can use more power and agility etudes. Depending on the singer's *passaggio*, it may be easier for her to sing Alto I than Alto II. Alto II often hovers on the male *passaggio* (C-E4), and it is easier for the head voice to stay more consistent when it sits above *passaggio* than when it has to come through it often.



VOICE of WCDA

[In This Issue...](#)

Letter from the Editor

A World without Weston

Making Connections
through Social Media

Creating a Space for All
Singers - Choir and
Gender

Can We Really Sing
“Religious” Music

The Challenge of
Selecting Global Choral
Music

435 Sandstone Ter.

Kiel, WI 53042

wcda@wischoral.org

WWW.WISCHORAL.ORG

[Visit the Website](#)

Creating a Space for All Singers (cont.)

FTM: a singer who was biologically female and transitions to male may (or may not) choose to take testosterone as part of the transition process. In the event that he does, the choral director is now working with a newly changing male voice. As the testosterone promotes male pubescence, the vocal folds thicken and lengthen, and we would use all the strategies we employ with early adolescent cis-males. (See Freer, Leck, et al.) In the event that the singer is not receiving hormone treatments, both he and the director are in a more difficult situation, because there is no equivalent ‘expanded range’ technique for lower register in cis-female voices comparable to counter-tenor for cis-male voices. I encourage guided exercises in open belt register, sustained buzzing in lower register (consider a nasalized [o] on C4 for 20 seconds, e.g.), and, as with working with basses trying access low notes, give careful attention to the free and relaxed laryngeal position (avoid the larynx pushing down). Without the thickening of folds through hormone treatment, most cis-female voices will cease comfortable production around F3, though some can reach as low as D3. Hence a FTM with cis-female vocal folds will need accommodations when singing Tenor I to either skip or transpose the lowest notes. If he chooses to sing alto or soprano, he will have the same registration events as cis-female voices.

Can We Really Sing “Religious” Music

James Kinchen

At the risk of sounding like Jennifer Garner or Samuel L. Jackson in the popular, long-running credit card promotion seen on television, “What’s in *your* folder?” Would you be willing to let me see? Talk to me about the music there that your choirs are singing? Can you tell me why you chose it? As a work of art, why is it worth doing? Is it worthy of the time of you and your student singers to study and prepare it? Worthy for your audience to hear? As a learning instrument, what about the choral art in particular, about music more broadly, about the human tradition and condition, or, even more generally, about life will it help you teach your students? Maybe more *apropos*, could you have that conversation with an administrator? A parent? A member of your school board? A student?

For a while now I have turned my interest toward the matter of singing (or not singing) “religious” music in pk12 school settings. I have presented on this subject for WCDA and, most recently, WMEA. There is certainly historic and legal context that every choral educator ought to know that frames this question. But the more that I have thought about it, the more I think it comes largely down to the question that I raised above: *What’s in your folder and why is it there?*

One assumes that you have not chosen songs with the intent to proselytize. I hope that is a fair assumption. Persuading students to (or away from) certain religious beliefs is not the place of the tax-supported school and is, in a word, unconstitutional. Then, if it is not to “win converts,” what is it that you and I seek to do when we select the sacred-text repertoire that our choirs will sing? I am convinced that the more positive we are in this conversation, that is, the more affirmative and articulate we are about our selections, the more we can steer clear of the proscriptions and prohibitions that might be imposed on our literature choices by those who would accuse us of having a religious agenda.

I would argue that for most of our public school repertoire, “religious” music is taboo! “Religious” music is what we do at my church, and probably yours, too, if you attend a place of worship. I *want* “religious” music to be done at my church. It is one of my reasons for going. It is (rightly) intended to help foster feelings of faith and devotion to a Supreme Being. It’s what we do in church! But promoting religion is *not* our agenda in public schools! Rather, our discussion is and ought to be *not* about “religious” music, but, instead, about music with *sacred texts*.



VOICE of WCDA

[In This Issue...](#)

Letter from the Editor

A World without Weston

Making Connections
through Social Media

Creating a Space for All
Singers - Choir and
Gender

Can We Really Sing
“Religious” Music

The Challenge of
Selecting Global Choral
Music

435 Sandstone Ter.

Kiel, WI 53042

wcda@wischoral.org

WWW.WISCHORAL.ORG

[Visit the Website](#)

Can We Really Sing “Religious” Music (cont.)

Ultimately, the U.S. Constitution governs our lives, especially in the public sphere. What is or is not constitutional? Even though we may read the U.S. Constitution for ourselves, reasonable people may and do differ as to what it means for us in any given real-life situation. This is true along a broad spectrum of issues, including reproductive rights, campaign finance, due process, freedom of expression, and so on. It is definitely the case in what we broadly classify as “church-state” cases. So, over time, much of the law in this area has been “case law” – court decisions on the constitutionality of various church-state questions that have received legal challenge. As a result, there are several cases, landmark cases, that guide us (albeit sometimes indirectly) in our questions about the permissibility of singing music with sacred texts. Some of them include: *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), *Abington School District v. Schrempp* (1963), *Murray v. Curlett* (1963), *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), *Florey v. Sioux Falls School District* (1980), *Doe v. Aldine Independent School District* (1982), *Doe v. Duncanville Independent School District* (1995), *Bauchman for Bauchman v. West High School* (1997), *Stratechuk v. Board of Education, South Orange-Maplewood School District* (2009), and *Nurre v. Whitehead* (2010). A review of these rulings can perhaps help us understand what *not* to do. Yet, at the end of the day, I think it is our being firmly anchored in the values of our choral art, tempered by our understanding and acceptance of the role of public education, along with our reasonableness and sensitivity, that get us to the positive, affirmative place that we seek.

So, then, what is the answer to the question at hand? The weight of jurisprudence as well as the consensus in our professional organizations, such as ACDA, NAfME, WMEA, and others is unambiguously clear – we CAN sing music with sacred texts. In fact, *not* to do so would deprive our students (and audiences) of some of the greatest riches of our repertoire. I trust that for this readership, I need not defend that statement. It is virtually impossible to construct any listing of the very best choral music, whether extended masterwork or little octavo jewel, that does not contain substantial entries of compositions with sacred texts. We cannot really be true to our art if we systematically avoid such pieces. Our students will suffer the consequences. At the same time, are there some guidelines or suggestions that we might do well to consider as we choose music with both sacred and secular texts? I respectfully offer a few.

1. Remember, the main factors in any literature choice, not by any means the *only* ones, but, in my opinion, the *main* ones are, **artistic** and **educational**. What is there about this piece as a work of art that makes it worth doing? And what skills, concepts, competencies, and so on, does this song help me teach my people? How does singing this piece help them to grow?
2. Be able at a moment’s notice to articulate these two answers to anyone who asks – students, parents, administrators, school board members, or what have you. Might you be proactive and explain to your students why you chose the pieces that you have? Not a ten-minute deeply scholarly lecture before singing the first note, but a concise, appropriate tidbit here, an insight there helps your students to better understand the musical worth and pedagogic benefit of the piece.
3. Consider sharing a “position statement” with audiences. I saw this disclaimer on the back of a recent band/orchestra concert program at Case High School in Racine:

It is the position of the Wisconsin Music Educators Association that the study of religious music is a vital and appropriate part of the total music experience in both performing and listening. The omission of sacred music from the repertoire or study of music would present an incorrect and incomplete concept of the comprehensive nature of the art form. The compositions performed at this program were selected for their musical, historical, and/or cultural significance. There is no intent to convey a particular belief of any kind.

How can you be in alignment with your school administration (and they with you!) on this matter? And if your school or district has a policy regarding programming music with sacred texts, you should know it.

4. Make *rich* literature choices! Select music that you can situate in many contexts – stylistic, theoretical, textual, structural, vocal, historical, thematic, sociologic, philosophic, etc. Make cross-disciplinary connections when possible. Use your song choices to challenge thinking, deepen understanding, and broaden learning.
5. Always, always choose music that is *at least* good. There is too much good music for your students to experience and life is too short to get around to even a decent fraction of the good stuff. Don’t waste your time and theirs on junk!
6. Of course -- avoid patently “religious” music. Distinguish between music that is primarily “church songs” and pieces with sacred texts that have rich substance and broader appeal.
7. Tie your repertoire choices to the standards! Are you able to say succinctly how each piece that your choir sings meets various standards?



VOICE of WCDA

[In This Issue...](#)

Letter from the Editor

A World without Weston

**Making Connections
through Social Media**

**Creating a Space for All
Singers - Choir and
Gender**

**Can We Really Sing
“Religious” Music**

**The Challenge of
Selecting Global Choral
Music**

Can We Really Sing “Religious” Music (cont.)

8. Choose varied literature when programming. Think variety in as many ways as you can when and where appropriate – but try not to “bean count.”
9. Choose music that represents diversity. In some cases, such as African American music, the representation of diversity may trump whether the text is sacred or secular.
10. If students or parents object to your sacred-text choices, show sensitivity and respect. Avoid being confrontational. Talk with the student first – one-on-one and away from “the crowd” if possible. Listen and ask clarifying questions in as neutral and calm a manner as possible. Try to understand the objection. Sometimes a simple explanation or insight will help smooth things. After all, you are an *expert* in the field! Even if it doesn’t change the objection, civility is almost always a productive “high road” to take. Be willing to speak with parents – certainly if approached, but maybe even at your own initiative if a child has raised an objection. A calm, cordial chat between the two of you is almost always easier to have than a formal conference in the principal’s office. Defuse as much as you can. Again, do lots of listening. Your knowledge of some of the cases mentioned above shared in a non-threatening way could be helpful. *Always* offer the student the option of not participating *with impunity!* Never berate the student in front of others – or alone, for that matter! Be kind, mature, and professional!
11. Know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em. Stand your ground, if you are indeed on solid ground – i.e., if you have made valid repertoire choices for the right reasons and you can justify them to all concerned – unless, of course, you are ordered to do otherwise by someone higher on the food chain. Conversely, don’t feel embarrassed to pull objectionable repertoire if after honest self-examination you believe that you have not made the best choice.
12. Value other perspectives. Ask input from choral colleagues – friends, associates, mentors, former professors, WCDA Facebook, ChoralNet, etc.
13. And subject your programs and repertoire choices to the “Lemon/O’Connor Tests” – the former referring to the landmark case *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, which became a defining measure of church-state intercourse; the latter to former Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, who expanded the tripartite test that the Lemon decision established. If you are ever faced with a legal challenge, that is what the courts will likely do. To review,
 - Is your purpose in selecting the repertoire secular? Choosing pieces because of their high musical quality and pedagogic potential goes a long way here!
 - Do your choices have the effect of advancing or, just as important, being hostile to religion? In other words, are they neutral in that regard?
 - Do your programming choices (or how you decide to perform them) excessively entangle you in religion? Singing a concert at the Methodist Church is one thing; taking part in the Lenten Services there may be an entirely different matter!
 - Are you endorsing religion? Or does it look that way? Would a “reasonable person” from your town, community, school, or profession objectively consider what you are doing to be an endorsement of a particular religious belief?

In conclusion, again, I want to caution against assuming a “defensive” posture that seeks to avoid making the “wrong” choices. Instead, I hope that we will act affirmatively and will choose for our public school singers the best literature that is appropriate for our setting, sacred or secular – and all for the *right* reasons! So, I leave with the questions that I began with: *what’s* in your folder and *why* is it there?

435 Sandstone Ter.

Kiel, WI 53042

wcda@wischoral.org

WWW.WISCHORAL.ORG

[Visit the Website](#)



VOICE of WCDA

[In This Issue...](#)

Letter from the Editor

A World without Weston

Making Connections
through Social Media

Creating a Space for All
Singers - Choir and
Gender

Can We Really Sing
“Religious” Music

The Challenge of
Selecting Global Choral
Music

435 Sandstone Ter.

Kiel, WI 53042

wcda@wischoral.org

WWW.WISCHORAL.ORG

[Visit the Website](#)

Can We Really Sing “Religious” Music (cont.)

A SHORT, SELECTIVE LIST OF REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION STATEMENTS

http://www.acda-mn.org/sites/default/files/SacredMusicACDA_0_0.pdf

<http://www.nafme.org/about/position-statements/sacred-music-in-schools-position-statement/sacred-music-in-schools/>

http://www.wmea.com/about/relig_pos.html

ONLINE CASE LAW (COURT DECISIONS)

<http://www.findlaw.com/casecode/supreme.html>

<http://openjurist.org/>

<https://www.justia.com/>

<http://www.uscourts.gov/CourtRecords.aspx>

INTERESTING & INFORMATIVE READINGS

Celebrating Holidays or Holy Days? Perry A. Zirkel, *Phi Delta Kappan*.
Dec2010/Jan2011, Vol. 92 Issue 4, p76-77

[The Constitutionality of Teaching and Performing Sacred Music in Public Schools.](#) Faith D. Zasparian, *Duke Law Journal*. Mar1997, Vol. 46 Issue 5, p1111-1168. 58p

Does Music with a sacred text have a place in the public schools?; *MENC Music Educator's Journal*. 1996 Vol. 83 Issue 2, p2-4, 3p

Religious Music, the Public Schools, and the Establishment Clause: A Review of Federal Case Law. Jeff Cranmore & Richard Fossey, *UPDATE: Applications of Research in Music Education*, 87551233, Nov2014, Vol. 33, Issue 1

Shall We Sing? Shall We Sing Religious Music in Public Schools? Richard Colin Mangrum. *Creighton Law Review*. Jun2005, Vol. 38 Issue 4, p815-870. 56p.

OTHER POSSIBLE RESOURCES

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). 1993. *The Establishment Clause and Public Schools*.

Blanshard, Paul. 1963. *Religion and the Schools: The Great Controversy*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Brown, Steven P., and Cynthia J. Bowling. 2003. "Public Schools and Religious Expression: The Diversity of School Districts' Policies Regarding Religious Expression." *Journal of Church and State* 45 (spring).

Davis, Derek H. 2003. "Moments of Silence in America's Public Schools: Constitutional and Ethical Considerations." *Journal of Church and State* 45 (summer).

Drakeman, Donald L. 1991. *Church-State Constitutional Issues: Making Sense of the Establishment Clause*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood.

Levy, Leonard W. 1994. *The Establishment Clause: Religion and the First Amendment*. 2d ed. Charlotte: Univ. of North Carolina Press.

"Religion and Schools." 1994. *Congressional Quarterly* (February 18).



VOICE of WCDA

[In This Issue...](#)

Letter from the Editor

A World without Weston

Making Connections
through Social Media

Creating a Space for All
Singers - Choir and
Gender

Can We Really Sing
“Religious” Music

The Challenge of
Selecting Global Choral
Music

435 Sandstone Ter.

Kiel, WI 53042

wcda@wischoral.org

WWW.WISCHORAL.ORG

[Visit the Website](#)

The Challenge of Selecting Global Choral Music

Eduardo Garcia-Novelli

Reprinted from Wisconsin School Musician, January 2013, with permission of Wisconsin School Music Association

I love attending music conventions/conferences for a variety of reasons, and one of those is the chance to learn new and exciting repertoire. In my book, I feel that I can put a check mark in that box if I find at least **one** quality choral work that calls my attention and, therefore, that I would like to include in future teaching and/or programming. It is a great feeling, one that inspires me to study the work and share my newfound treasure with the world.

Luckily, I have found many works that way. Like most of us in that situation, I also look at countless other newly published pieces that, for one reason or another, don't find a place in my choice of literature. Occasionally, however, I have found a few works that also call my attention, but rather in quite a different way:

Our global 21st century music world finds us in an indisputable multicultural scene, one in which we express a deep interest in getting to know, study, and perform works from other cultures, near and far. But as wonderful as this wish is, the task at hand is challenging, and it requires true openness of mind and heart. A warning: it is easy to fall into the trap of conforming to what *we think* that music from other cultures should be. In this line of thought, then, it would be acceptable to make decisions about style, instrumentation, harmonization, interpretation, language, etc. based on *our* experience, *our* knowledge, and *our* opinion as people who live in the US in the 21st century and who carry a particular cultural baggage. In doing this, I would argue, we put ourselves in a position of superiority, a place from which we give ourselves the right to make decisions that were never in our area of domain in the first place.

As an example, a new work displaying a fun melody in 3/4 + 6/8 meters, including several percussion instruments, lots of hand-clapping, and a very doubtful text in a foreign language (even with some made-up words) does not necessarily create a good or bad choral work of any culture but, most likely, an exercise of rather pitiful and surely questionable music publishing marketing strategy. Basic principles of authenticity are being violated in this situation and, as music educators, we should all feel equipped to distinguish what could be perhaps an innocent interest in offering a cultural filter, or, much worse, an unscrupulous intention to make a name in the music publishing business, from something genuine: a work of art which truly represents a specific culture.

But what defines “authentic” or “genuine” in global choral music? The answer is very difficult, but a good start would be to understand that cultures define themselves, without the interference of outsiders. The idea is to develop interest, love, respect, curiosity, and understanding for choral music of other parts of the world, exposing the essence of what they are, where they come from, and how they are received by their own people.

We live in very fast times of instant gratification; hence, it is easier to bring global music to our comfort zone when selecting repertoire, rather than stepping out and making an effort to put together the pieces of the puzzle. Works from other cultures may or may not respond to the matrix in which we fit our art. In any case, that does not give composers the right to create a piece that tailors to a stereotype instead of a true culture, nor does it give choral directors, as well-intentioned as we may be, the right to present these works as good examples of a supposed cultural community.

Finding quality works from other cultures is indeed a fascinating journey of discovery that must be taken with profound respect. It takes time, and while the job will prove to be very challenging, it will indeed be immensely gratifying.