Beyond “Special Music”: The Church Choir’s Role in Worship

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A church choir’s work in worship usually follows a particular pattern: anthems at the offering, introits, hymn descants, and perhaps the occasional cantata. These contributions are often labeled “special music,” implying that choral music enhances, but is not integral to, worship itself. This session examines the church choir’s vital role as worship leader, teacher, and model for intergenerational collaboration. Particular attention will be given to the use and integration of choral music throughout the worship service. Lists of repertoire and resources will be provided, including repertoire for children’s choirs and music from non-Western traditions.

the challenges of the term “special music”
- Is choral music in worship more than decorative?
- Historical overview of vocal/choral music in worship

utilitarian arguments for choral music
- theological functions
- liturgical/communal functions
- leading “the people’s song”

integration opportunities
- hymns and other assembly songs
  - the concerto principle
  - teaching new hymns
  - introducing hymns
- proclamation of scripture
  - gospel motets
  - “near gospel” motets
- prayer responses
- benedictions and charges
- creating worship ritornelli

integration rationales (program goals)
- involving children
- singing intergenerationally
- sharing from other cultures and languages
- highlighting liturgical seasons
Featured Repertoire (score & recording links)

**A Universal Blessing** – Alice Parker

**Bwana Awabariki**

**Easter Introit** – John Ferguson

**Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song** – arr. Zebulon M. Highben

**Lumière de Dieu**

**Silence, My Soul** – Francisco Feliciano *(text by Rabindranath Tragore)*

**Stay with Us** – Egil Hovland

**Unity** – Glorraine B. Moone & Rev. Freddie Washington, arr. Daniel M. Cason II

**Words from Two Women** – Jane Marshall *(texts by Mechtild of Magdeburg & Teresa of Calcutta)*

Additional Hymn Concertati

**Balm in Gilead** – arr. M Roger Holland II

**Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation** – arr. Anne Krentz Organ

**Day of Arising** – Carl Schalk

**I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light** – arr. Kristina Langlois

**O God, Beyond All Praising** – arr. Richard Proulx

**The Church’s One Foundation** – arr. Dan Forrest

Choral Hymn Stanza Collections

**Choral Stanzas for Hymns, Volume 1 & Volume 2** – various composers

**Five Choral Stanzas, Set 1 & Set 2** – David Cherwien
Hymn Stanzas for Unison Choir, Set 1 & Set 2 – various composers

With Angel Choirs, Set 1 & Set 2 – Michael Burkhardt

Additional Gospel Motets

Come Unto Me – Victor Johnson

Dixit Maria – Hans Leo Hassler

Early Easter Morning – Jennifer Kerr Breedlove

Esto Les Digo – Kinley Lange

Feed My Lambs – Natalie Sleeth

Hosanna dem Sohne Davids – attr. Bartholomäus Gesius

I Believe This is Jesus – arr. Undine Smith Moore

In the Breaking of The Bread – Zebulon Highben

My Sheep Hear My Voice – Leland Sateren

Osanna filio David – Franz Schubert

Peace I Leave with You – Amy Beach

Whoever Would be Great Among You – Ronald A. Nelson

Anthologies, Songbooks, & Hymnals


Works Referenced


