

Book Reviews

Sacred Choral Music Repertoire: Insights for Conductors

Tim Sharp

GIA Publications, 1,119 pages

\$59.95 (hardcover)

Tim Sharp's "Sacred Choral Music Repertoire: Insights for Conductors" is an ambitious survey of six centuries of sacred choral repertoire. This comprehensive study is the first of its kind focused entirely on a large and diverse canon of sacred choral repertoire that remains in continuous worship presentation and performance. Sharp captures the impetus for the compilation beautifully

in the introduction, writing: "By all accounts, the faithful have used vocal music to freight their prayers, praises, celebrations, lamentations, affirmations, and beliefs as they model their images of the Creator, aspirations and beliefs of life and afterlife within God's creation, and life in communion as believers" (p. 21).

The book is noteworthy in length as well as weight; it has 1,119 pages and weighs 4 pounds and 10 ounces. It is a book that is meant for the bookshelf, not for the book bag! It is an outstanding resource for the practicing church musician that programs traditional music.

The music selected for the book is intended to be "an historical and analytical compendium to the music of progressive periods of sacred music" (p. 23). Surveys of practicing church musicians helped identify this canon of sacred works, music that is relevant, beloved, and in constant use in church, school, and community choirs. There are 167 works explored in this collection, diverse works beginning with plainchant and continue to Rosephanye Powell's "The Word Was God." A balance of historical periods exists with the following breakdowns according to a traditional delineation of music history:



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- Pearl Harbor Choral Festival | Hawaii**
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Chant (5), Renaissance (25), Baroque (22), Classical (17), Romantic (21). Music from the 20th/21st Centuries are divided according to geographical location and style: British/Canadian (25), USA (32), Europe (9), and Folk/Spiritual/Intentional (11).

After an introduction and overview, the book is organized by historical period. Each section includes historical background information, conducting insights specific to each period, and practical analysis of each composition addressing musical style, interpretation, text, additional resources, and rehearsal considerations and approaches. Each period is concisely analyzed for the conductor according to the following categories: Meter/Tempo, Counterpoint/Harmony, Expressive Qualities/Standards, Dynamic Concepts, and Sound Ideal. Tim Sharp provides the historical overview to most of the time periods but involved Jennifer Kerr Budziak and Kevin Padworski to cover plainchant (Budziak) and Relational/Intentional Worship Music of the Twenty-First Century (Padworski).

The bulk of the writing is formed from the in-depth analysis of each sacred piece of music, called "Resource Guides." These guides for each work survey their history, offer conducting insights, and provide appropriate and detailed information through charts and other modes of analysis. Each "Resource Guide" follows a similar style and outline. The technical information of each work (title/composer/liturgical usage/source) begins each analysis; a short biography of each composer is given, and each text appears with

translation (if needed). Each piece is also analyzed according to its historical context/perspective as well as its form/structure. A technical and style analysis of each composition is given with rehearsal considerations provided by the contributor. At the end of each analyzed work is a recommendation towards other works that the reader may want to consider, as well as listening recommendations and additional resources for study.

There are thirty-nine different contributors of the resource guides; each one is a practicing musician who works within a faith community. Some of the contributors are full-time church musicians, while others are employed as high school teachers and college music professors. Alicia Walker, the director of choral studies at the University of South Carolina, contributed the highest number of the Resource Guides where she is the sole contributor (9) and assisted seven others.

The book is an incredible resource for the choral musician, especially because it identifies a core set of works every church musician should know. Although there are 167 works that receive a detailed analysis, there are hundreds of other works mentioned in the "additional works for consideration" part of each Resource Guide. The mature church musician will recognize most of the works mentioned as well as find new works to explore. The emerging church musician will use this book as a resource for discovery.

For choral musicians who live primarily in the academic world, this compendium provides an excellent catalog of works that may be used

for study, both in conducting classes and courses in choral literature. In this book, the author gives us an outstanding model of the use of "crowd-sourcing" to create a valuable resource. The delegation of the authorship of most of the resource guides to other respected conductors in the field provides the reader multiple perspectives and differing approaches to musicing.

There are areas of the book that should be improved before the next printing. First, the organization has a number of inconsistencies and errors, most in the Table of Contents and in the Index of the Resource Guides. There are a couple of other additions that would add to the value of the book as a useful resource for church musicians. A liturgical index would be helpful for musicians who plan according to the church year. Every resource guide has a "difficulty" assessment; it would be helpful if this information was contained in an index for the conductor.

In many ways, "Sacred Choral Music Repertoire: Insights for Conductors" is a tremendous vehicle that reveals the considerable gifts Tim Sharp brings to our profession. His gifts of organization, networking, and scholarship are clearly evident in the execution of this vision, and in the creation of such a valuable resource. I am hopeful other similar resources are developed for the choral musician deeply involved in the study and performance of sacred music.

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