



SfP Pointers

#5: Programming and sourcing music

Programming concerts and sourcing repertoire for your choir can be an exciting and satisfying part of the vocal leader's job. At times it can also be expensive, frustrating and confusing. It would be impossible to offer a 'how to' that would be relevant to every group of singers, and part of the fun of finding repertoire and programming concerts is the exploration that you do yourself as a conductor. In this pointer, I hope to share some ideas that I have found really useful, and hope that they help to keep you sane in your planning.

Choosing repertoire for your choir

- ❑ **Identify the aim of your next set of rehearsals.**
 - ❑ Are you working towards a performance? Work backwards from the performance date and plan your rehearsals carefully before you choose your repertoire. This will help you to pick music that will challenge your choir without causing them (or you) too much stress.
 - ❑ Whether you're working towards a performance or not, it can be really useful to identify any areas that you're particularly wanting to work on with your choir (e.g. tuning, sight reading, learning by ear or building the social cohesion of your choir) and choosing repertoire appropriately.
- ❑ **Think carefully about the interests and experiences of your singers** but don't be bound by what the choir has sung before. If they always sing classical repertoire, programming some world music can be really eye opening. Similarly if they always sing pop arrangements, why not programme some classical music? Variety is the spice of life!
- ❑ **Theming your performances** can be a really effective way to allow variety of repertoire in a programme while giving you a thread to structure your concert/block of rehearsals around. You could include readings to help expand upon your theme, or even work with a local art class or instrumental group. This can also enhance your audience numbers.
- ❑ **Listen widely.** The Internet has revolutionised our existence in so many ways including the ability to explore relatively easily a massive selection of choral music from all over the world. Using search engines, YouTube, and online streaming/music download services such as Spotify or iTunes you can hear inspirational music from choirs of all shapes and sizes..

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Finding scores

While finding sound recordings of pieces is relatively easy, finding scores can be an entirely different story... Here are some useful tips.

Out of copyright/public domain material

The legal bit. There are several internet repositories allowing for free download and unlimited use of sheet music, but it is important to have a good understanding of copyright law to ensure you remain on the right side of it. The copyright for music composition (including arrangement) remains with the composer/arranger during their lifetime, and for 70 years from the end of the calendar year in which the last remaining author dies. In other words, this includes not only the composer/arranger but also whoever wrote the words. There are several internet repositories that offer freely available sheet music by both out of copyright composers, and living composers and it is important that you read carefully the details of any piece of music that you might be planning to use, to ensure you are meeting any copyright requirements, particularly by living composers/authors. The law also differs in the US (where many internet libraries are based) so some pieces which are freely available there, may remain under copyright here.

- ❑ **CPDL - The Choral Public Domain Library** (www.cpd.org)
This is a sheet music archive which focuses on choral music in the public domain or otherwise freely available. It runs on the Wiki format and is very easy to use. Sheet music is presented in PDF format as well as in other formats such as Sibelius and Finale files (associated with music typesetting software packages) and often midi files, allowing for playback. The scores appear in editions made by contributors to the repository, meaning they can include errors. It's therefore important to check thoroughly scores before using them with choirs.

- ❑ **IMSLP - Petrucci Music Archive/The International Music Score Library Project** (www.imslp.org)
This repository is not specifically for choral music but among its 300,000 scores are many thousands of choral pieces. Unlike CPDL, IMSLP scores are often out-of-print (and copyright) facsimiles which can mean they are more accurate but also that they can be rather old fashioned. It's important to read the copyright notification which appears before you download any PDFs to make sure the piece can be legally copied in your own country..

- ❑ **Internet Archive** (www.archive.org)
Internet Archive is a massive non-profit library including hundreds of free out of print books and including many music books. It can take some dedication to work out how to find items, but if you are looking for an item in an out of print book, it's always worth checking here!

- ❑ **Musopen** (www.musopen.org)
Another online library similar to IMSLP and CPDL. Musopen also raises money to produce freely available recordings of classical music.

Tip: Ask your choir to print their own music - this is a way of keeping costs down, and also means that any technologically-savvy singers who might prefer to use a tablet to access their score will be able to do so.

Sourcing affordable music that is not in the public domain

Thankfully choral composition is flourishing in the twenty-first century, and many choirs want to sing works by living composers. It's important that we continue to support living composers by singing their music, but it can be very expensive. Overleaf you'll find some tips for how to do it within budget...

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❑ **Buy photocopiable resources**

Some publications such as Oxford University Press's *Voiceworks* series allow you to copy music for your singers. While books of this nature can seem slightly more expensive, in reality you are getting many pieces of music, and often additional resources like learning aids and backing tracks.

❑ **Download music with a digital licence**

Many publishers sell music online with a digital licence. Canasg.org is one example of a website offering this service. You can view a full sample of the music and hear recordings online, and if you decide to proceed, pay for a full PDF. The cost depends on the size of your choir, making it a really affordable option. Many more mainstream publishers are also rolling out similar functionality on their websites.

❑ **Buy paper copies**

It can seem like a massive investment, particularly if it's a piece you're only likely to sing once. Why not team up with another choir and spread the cost - or if you know a choir has recently sung a piece that you're interested in performing, ask them if you can borrow their set.

❑ **Hire scores**

Hiring music can be an affordable way of performing larger works. Check out www.peri.co.uk/encore (Online Union-catalogue of sets of performance music in UK Libraries). This is a rather old fashioned website, but is invaluable in locating public libraries holding large sets of music. As mentioned above, you could contact choirs directly and gerontius.net have a great tool for finding scores (www.gerontius.net/findscores.shtml). Sing for Pleasure also has a library of scores available for hire. Please see the Publications and Resources section of the website for more details.

Can't find a score? If you can't find a score in print, particularly if it's by a less well-known composer, it's possible that it hasn't been published. Why not contact the composer or arranger directly (Twitter is often quite an easy way to get in touch)? Or if you particularly like a piece another choir has sung, email them and ask them where they got it.

DIY!

Still can't find the perfect piece? Here are a couple of suggestions for you...

- ❑ Why not have a go at writing or arranging a piece yourself? There's no one who knows your group of singers as well as you and doing a bespoke arrangement can be extremely rewarding. Or if you don't fancy doing it yourself, why not consider asking someone else to have a go?
- ❑ Commissioning new work: it can be very expensive to commission pieces from composers, but fundraising and premiering a new piece of music is a real thrill and there are several schemes like 'Adopt a Composer' run by Making Music that match up ensembles, including choirs with composers (www.makingmusic.org.uk/get-involved/projects/adopt-a-composer).

And finally...

Don't forget that SfP has its own huge back catalogue of choral music for choirs of all shapes, ages and sizes. You can hear samples online of many of our pieces; our music is reasonably priced and road-tested by our members.

Katy Cooper