

REPERTOIRE FOR THE SMALLER CHURCH CHOIR:
An Annotated List
by Zebulon Highben

Note to ALCM members: *This repertoire was originally presented in a workshop for the Twin Cities AGO Winter Tune-Up, February 23, 2008, at University Lutheran Church of Hope, Minneapolis. A similar reading session will be presented at the 2009 ALCM Milwaukee conference, focusing exclusively on 2- and 3-part mixed repertoire. While a handful of those pieces will be taken from this list, most will not. An annotated list of that repertoire will be available at the conference.*

A Canon of Praise – Natalie Sleeth. Three-part treble or mixed, keyboard, optional handbells. Choristers Guild, CGA-79 (1969/2002).

“A Canon of Praise” is an excellent festival anthem for any combination of three voice parts. Each of three complementary melodies are introduced separately then sung in 3-part canon. Finally, all three melodies are combined in one canon (one voice-part singing each melody), building to a fortissimo coda. Teach all three melodies to the whole choir before assigning parts. Mix them around as they learn it! This will build independence, and help you find the right grouping of voices.

A Vision of Peace – Ronald A. Nelson. Text: Isaiah 2:4b-5; 11:6. SAB, piano. GIA Publications, G-7007 (2007).

While this is not a canon, this piece contains three separate melodies which get layered on top of each other. (If you know Nelson’s perennial favorite, “Whoever Would Be Great Among You,” published by Augsburg Fortress, this piece is constructed similarly.) Teach all three melodies to the whole choir; this will help them understand the structure of the piece and remind them to listen for each new melody as it enters.

Behold the Lamb of God – Healey Willan. Text: John 1:29; Isaiah 53:4-5. SATB (or two-part mixed), keyboard. Concordia Publishing House, CPH 98-1509 (1960).

A simple but effective setting of John’s declaration of Jesus’ identity (“Behold the Lamb of God...”) paired with a portion of the suffering servant text from Isaiah. Really a 2-part mixed anthem, adding 4-part harmony only on the last three chords. Especially suitable for Lent.

Blessed Are They – Carolyn Jennings. Text: based on Psalms 1 & 119, and Ephesians 3:17-21. SATB, organ, optional flute. Choristers Guild, CGA-896 (2001).

This is a four-part anthem, but the parts are not too difficult and it can be performed quite successfully by a small choir if you have at least 4 or 5 men (and they can cover both tenor and bass parts.) Teach the anthem from back to front, beginning with the final stanza on page 5, which introduces the melody in unison, and then breaks into two parts doubled at the octave.

Bonse Aba (Zambian Song) – arr. Andrew Fischer. SATB, unaccompanied (or optional percussion). Alliance Music Publications, AMP-0626 (2006).

Do not fear foreign-language anthems! Simple ones can be great fun, and they provide a reminder to your choir and congregation that the church encompasses many lands and many tongues. “Bonse Aba” is a Zambian song whose text means, “All who sing have the right to be called children of God.” The text is quickly learned and easily pronounced, and the music is energetic and buoyant but can be effectively and rapidly taught by rote.

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice and Sing – GELOBT SEI GOTT, arr. W. D. Spurlock. SAB, piano. Augsburg Fortress 978-0-8006-7894-4 (2007).

This mixed-meter treatment of “Good Christian Friends” is straight-forward from a pitch perspective, but has enough rhythmic intricacies to challenge your choir. If they’re having trouble or you’re short on time, you can teach the rhythms by rote, (at least for the first, unison stanza) without the score.

In Thee Is Gladness – IN DIR IST FREUDE, arr. Daniel Kallman. SATB, organ. MorningStar Music, MSM-50-9058 (1992).

This piece can be challenging and certainly requires a very competent organist. However, the occasional challenge is good for every choir, and a balanced group of 15 voices (possibly even 12) could do this anthem. A little more than half of the piece is either in unison or 2-part mixed voicing. The women’s voices are scored in three- and four-parts on the closing alleluias, but these could be done by one or two voices per part, or the doubled notes could be left out. Kallman sets two stanzas of the hymn, separated by a delightfully whimsical “whistling stanza.”

Praise the Lord, God’s Glories Show – David Schelat. Text: Henry Francis Lyte. SAB, conga drums. Oxford University Press, 978-0-1938-6551-8 (2002).

This energetic 6/8 piece is particularly appropriate for Easter season, All Saints Sunday, or Ordinary Time. The scoring is unusual – the choir sings in the Dorian mode with conga drum accompaniment – and creates an interesting timbre different from most SAB anthems. Except for four measures in the second stanza and the final four chords of the last stanza, the women sing in unison throughout, making this essentially a 2-part mixed arrangement.

Prayer for Peace – David Cherwien. Two-part mixed with optional congregation, organ. MorningStar Music, MSM-50-9209 (2003).

The melody and counter-melody of this lovely two-part anthem flow smoothly, making the piece easy to teach, and the text lends itself well to ecumenical events and services. An option is also provided for including the participation of the assembly.

Psalm 117 – Timothy Shaw. Two-part mixed, keyboard. Concordia Publishing House, CPH 98-3928 (2007).

This is a new 2-part mixed anthem with lovely, lyrical lines – very simple, but very powerful. Change the alleluias to “Kyrie eleison” or “Lord have mercy” to use during Lent.

Then Shall the Eyes of the Blind – Felix Mendelssohn, arr. Ronald A. Nelson. Text: adapt. from Isaiah 35 & 60. SAB, piano. Choristers Guild CGA-927 (2002).

The music from Mendelssohn’s *Trio in D minor* (Op. 49, No. 1) is arranged here for piano and SAB chorus and paired with text from Isaiah – and it’s a perfect match. Usable at several points in the church year because of its text, this arrangement is an enjoyable yet very achievable challenge for smaller adult choirs or youth choirs.

Who at My Door Is Standing? – arr. K. Lee Scott. Text: Mary Slade. Two-part mixed with keyboard. Hinshaw Music, HMC-728 (1985).

Anthems with recognizable melodies are already partially taught before you open the score. This is a penitential/confessional text paired with a lovely, lyrical English folk tune that is fairly well-known. The arrangement includes a few measures of four-part harmony in the codetta.

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