

A CHOICE OF THREE

If you, as a director, have been conducting male singing organizations for any length of time, I'm sure you have found that there is not a lot of new music for men's voices which is interesting, challenging yet not out of reach, and very usable in different concert venues. Once in a while we find a composer that you need to stop and look at anything that has his/her name on it. One of those composers is Joseph M. Martin.

In the past three years I have had the opportunity of introducing a song of his to my male choruses – one in the Milwaukee Male Chorus, and two here in South St. Paul. I would urge every director to give these three pieces a very close look. Are these all he has published? No – but I am using these three as examples of his work because I have used all three very successfully.

The one thing that all three offer is a study in time signatures – with the ability to shift quickly from one to another. They look difficult, but when you master one set of changes, they fall easily into place. All three need a strong accompanist. Here are the three with their publication information and a brief statement about each.

COME TO THE MUSIC..... Words and Music by Joseph M. Martin
TTBB Shawnee Press, Inc. C 0307 \$2.05
Optional piccolo and percussion

You could call this a celebration of music. It uses the words “gloria” and “alleluia” but it is not a complete sacred text. The central theme of the music is stated thus:

Music is the sound of creation...
Crashing sea and mourning dove.
Music is the voice of worship...
Music lifts our hearts above.
Music is our common language...
Music is the song of love.

This pretty much gives us the philosophy of our participation in music as singers. I am presenting it this year with piccolo but not percussion. Give it a close look.

THE QUEST UNENDING..... Words from “Ulysses” by Tennyson, music by Joseph M. Martin
TTBB Shawnee Press, Inc. C 0330 \$1.60

A reduction of the text is this:

One equal temper of heroic hearts.....
Made weak by time and fate.....
But strong in will.....
To strive...to seek...to find...
We shall not yield.

A very powerful piece, dramatic, with dynamic extremes. Parts are not difficult, but very interesting for the singer as well as the audience. The only rhythmic difficulties are triples on two beats.* If you need something for a very serious event, this is it.

TOCCATA OF PRAISE.....Words and Music by Joseph M. Martin
TTBB Shawnee Press, Inc. C 0294 \$1.50

This will present some rhythmic problems of switching from 6/8 to 3/4 during the same phrases. Once you master this, it is not difficult to sing. The text is a celebration of life through music. And, Martin has given us two texts – one sacred, one secular. This is such a great idea because it doubles the usefulness of the song. I would like more composers to use this technique. The text expresses this:

I will lift up the voice of music..... (I will sing to the Lord most glorious.....)
Fill the world with a joyful sound.....
Nations now join as one.

Probably the most difficult of the three songs, but well worth a little extra effort. There are four measures near the end (M135-138) which make the song worth all the work – very simple but one of the most effective, simplistic examples of part writing you will find.

If you have performed these pieces, I would like very much to hear your reaction. If you have not, look at them to include at least one in your fall repertoire.

DWCrouch
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* As a conducting note: I always introduce any triplet as having 4 not 3 beats. You end on the 4th beat, which is whatever note or rest you have after the third triplet. I never teach triplets as a 3 count, but always as a 4 count.