BEYOND PROGRAM NOTES:

METHODS FOR ENGAGING AUDIENCES IN THE CHORAL CONCERT SETTING

by

LINDSEY BRUNER WOODCOCK

(Under the Direction of Daniel Bara)

ABSTRACT

Program notes and spoken remarks from the stage have long been the vehicle for informing and educating concert audiences. However, studies show that a more impactful way to connect audiences to a performance is by inviting them to participate (perform, create, or reflect) in ways that deepen personal responses to the music. Many museums, dance companies, theaters, and instrumental music ensembles have embraced interactive performance, but the practice is still largely absent from choral concerts. This document encourages choral musicians to adopt the practice of interactive performance to help all listeners find something meaningful and personally relevant in the choral concert experience. Using recent studies in audience behavior, instructional texts on teaching artistry, and interviews with experts in the field, this research explores the need for interactive and immersive concert elements and identifies principles for effective implementation. This document is designed as a resource for choral musicians and includes a catalog of interactive activities well suited for choral concerts and sample scripts using accessible choral works.

INDEX WORDS: Choral music, Music audiences, Concerts, Performance, Engagement

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DEDICATION

To Dr. James Rodde, whose teaching and mentorship set me on this path. When asked why he has committed himself to a life in choral music, Dr. Rodde will simply say that singing in choir increases the quality of our lives. I am forever grateful for this lesson and for a thousand others.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

This paper makes a case for using interactive concert elements to create impactful audience experiences in the choral concert setting. The term "interactive concert" refers to a performance where the audience is invited to participate (perform, create, or reflect) in a way that deepens personal responses to the concert program.[1] Interactive concerts are part audience education, part community building, and part curated path through the repertoire. In *The Participatory Museum*, Nina Simon defines a participatory cultural institution as "a place where visitors can create, share, and connect with each other around content."[2] A choral concert can become just that. The goal of an interactive performance is to prepare audiences for what they are about to hear in order to foster more meaningful listening, and therefore increase the emotional and intellectual impact of the concert.

When we as choral musicians assume that an entire audience has the tools, experience, and skills needed to process a performance of J.S. Bach, Frances Poulenc, or Caroline Shaw in a way that is personally relevant to them, we miss an opportunity to invite novice audience members into a meaningful concert experience too. In order to be relevant among a wide portion of the community, choral organizations must find a way to educate, entertain, and inspire

[1] Eric Booth, *The Music Teaching Artist's Bible Becoming a Virtuoso Educator* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 197.

[2] Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010), preface, accessed March 3 2021, http://www.participatorymuseum.org/preface.

listeners who bring diverse levels of musical expertise. How can choral ensembles engage the "outsider"—the listener who is new to choral music or the classical concert experience—while simultaneously drawing frequent patrons into deeper levels of musical satisfaction?

Interactive concert strategies have been used, refined, and written about by leaders in the field of teaching artistry as an effective solution to this problem. Teaching artists seek to give listeners a "way into" the music. This paper draws heavily on the insights and pedagogy of experts in this field. Some definitions describe a teaching artist as one who spends part of their professional life outside the concert hall, leading workshops in non-traditional settings such as schools, correctional facilities, hospitals, or homeless shelters.[3] However, it may be advantageous to take the methods, principles, and objectives of teaching artistry and bring them back into the performance space to excite audiences. The Association of Teaching Artists defines a teaching artist as "...a practicing professional artist with the complementary skills and sensibilities of an educator, who engages people in learning experiences in, through, and about the arts."[4] This definition can easily refer to the choral artistic director, conductor, or ensemble when they seek to engage concert-goers more deeply in the music.

An interactive concert uses an "entry point" to draw audiences into the music. This is an aesthetic-focused approach that seeks to connect listeners with the music itself. Our audiences may not view themselves as musically knowledgeable, but everyone who enters the concert hall possesses artistic capabilities that can be utilized on the path toward heightened musical perception.[5] The composer's biography alone does not often draw musicians into transformative

[3] Daniel Levy, *A Teaching Artist's Companion: How to Define and Develop Your Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2.

[4] Ibid., 2.

[5] David Wallace, *Engaging the Concert Audience: A Musician's Guide to Interactive Performance* (Boston, MA: Berklee Press, 2018), 14.

musical experiences, yet this (or similar historical information) is what we often offer audiences by way of program notes, leaving them to fend for themselves through the actual sonic experience. Interactive concert elements guide audiences to create, reflect on, or interact with a defining feature of the music in a way that helps make meaningful connections to the work.

Program notes and brief introductory remarks have long been the default vehicle for informing and educating concert audiences. However, master teaching artists are in agreement that a more effective way to emotionally and intellectually engage listeners is by helping them interact with aspects of the music before they receive information about the work.[6] It may be tempting to reserve these participatory strategies for pre- or post-concert talks, so as not to alter the traditional concert flow. However, the patrons who arrive early or stay late for these types of discussions are usually the ones who already have significant knowledge of the art form.[7] For maximum efficacy and in order to reach all audience members, this paper strongly advocates for interactive engagement during the performance.

Engaging concert audiences in this way may help mitigate several of the problems facing professional and civic choral organizations in the 21st century. Consumers are engaging with art and information in ever evolving ways, and their expectations for cultural experiences are also changing. The ubiquity of social media has made interactive learning and entertainment the norm. Arts administrators are subsequently noticing a growing desire among audiences to do more than simply "attend" an artistic event.[8] When classical music audiences are asked about their motivations for attending concerts, survey results show that people are seeking social

[6] Wallace, *Engaging the Concert Audience*, 12.
[7] Alan S. Brown and Jennifer L. Novak, *Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance*
[8] Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, preface.

connection and emotionally moving experiences.[9] For these reasons, researchers are recommending that music organizations shift the paradigm from a focus on selling repertoire to engaging people in experiences that help them create meaning from artistic works.[10]

A second challenge facing classical music organizations is declining audience numbers. National surveys have documented the steady decrease in Americans' classical music concert attendance for nearly three decades.[11] For choral music concerts specifically, audiences are currently made up largely of other choral singers.[12] Another significant portion of choral audiences is comprised of family and friends of the performers.[13] This illustrates a great divide between the musical familiarity and experience present among audience members at choral concerts. There is therefore a multiplicity of ways in which these listeners may find relevance in the experience. If choral organizations wish to create meaningful concert experiences for all audience members, it is time to consider how we connect with listeners who come from outside the choral realm. Are there additional ways we can help fulfill their search for social and emotional rewards? Are there aspects of our concert traditions or repertoire that seem welcoming to some groups but are seemingly inaccessible to others?

In recent years, a number of museums, theaters, dance companies, and instrumental music ensembles have taken up the challenge of engaging patrons through participation. Some

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[9] Francie Ostrower, *Motivations Matter: Findings and Practical Implications of a National Survey of Cultural Participation* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute and the Wallace Foundation, 2005), 8, https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/national-survey-of-cultural-participation.asx.

[10] Alan Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin, *Making Sense of Audience Engagement Vol 1* (San Francisco: The San Francisco Foundation and Wolf Brown, 2011), 2, https://www.wolfbrown.com/post/makingsense.

[11] Margaret E. Blume-Kohout and Sara R. Leonard., *When the Going Gets Tough: Barriers and Motivations Affecting Arts Attendance* (Washington, DC: National Endowment For the Arts Research Report #59, 2015), 1, https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/when-going-gets-tough-revised2.pdf.

[12] Alan Brown et al., *Assessing the Audience Impact of Choral Music Concerts* (San Francisco, CA: WolfBrown and Chorus America, 2016), 22-24, https://www.chorusamerica.org/sites/default/files/resources/Assessing_the_Audience_Impact_of_Choral_Concerts-FINAL_0.pdf.

[13] Ibid., 22-24.

have done so to connect with new audiences, others to present challenging repertoire without turning away their subscription base, or to turn first time audience members into repeat visitors. The positive results and activity archetypes from these examples will be discussed in later chapters. Although there are no studies proving that interactive concerts lead to returning patrons or increased ticket sales, there are data showing that even the most modest concert participation (such as clapping along or talking to a neighbor) elicits increased emotional impact and social connection.[14]

There exists a missed opportunity in choral performances to help newcomers connect to the music while simultaneously curating a stimulative path through the program for the experienced audience member. Participatory elements can be elegantly woven into our current choral concert norms without the need for extra personnel or technology. They can also be used to transform the traditional concert format if desired. This study presents a range of suggestions, encouraging choral organizations to adopt interactive concert elements at any level on this spectrum - from subtle to daring, or anywhere in between.

Need for Study

It is common for choral organizations across the country to host Messiah sing-ins or invite audiences to join in carol singing at holiday concerts. These are excellent examples of interactive performing, but there are a multitude of additional participatory options that are effective and manageable without reinventing our ensembles or what they do. Few choral organizations are currently implementing interactive audience engagement beyond the two models mentioned, but our peers in instrumental, dramatic, and visual arts have been for quite

[14] Kelsey Menehan, *Understanding Audiences: Takeaways from Intrinsic Impact Audience Project* (Washington, DC: Chorus America, 2016), https://www.chorusamerica.org/management-governance/understanding-audiences.

some time. There are lessons to be learned from these other art forms that can aid in developing participatory activities with choral music.

Eric Booth and David Wallace, widely considered leaders in the field of teaching artistry, say the time for interactive concerts has arrived. Both have created great resources for musical teaching artists who wish to engage audiences in this way. However, many of their examples are for instrumental music and not always directly applicable to choral repertoire or common choral venues. In order to be useful to choral ensembles, these strategies need to be converted into effective and elegant activity models that are easily implemented by choral musicians. There is also a precedent for children's and family concerts to employ interactive activities, but there is no reason to believe that the concepts at the core of these exercises would be any less valuable for adults. Many of the family concert archetypes need to be translated into sophisticated versions that are effective for adult audiences as well.

Research Goals

This study seeks to demonstrate that interactive concert elements have been effective in other settings and to make a case for adoption by choral organizations who wish to connect deeply with audiences. The first portion of this paper is devoted to summarizing what recent studies and surveys reveal about audience behaviors and motivations, and how interactive performances can meet the needs of patrons and organizations alike.

The ultimate goal of this paper is to synthesize the experiences of expert teaching artists and suggest a path forward for choral musicians. This research presents a set of core principles and best practices for engaging audiences through participation, together with considerations for application in the choral setting. These recommendations have been collected from the work of

Booth, Wallace, Cabaniss, Levy, other leaders in the field of teaching artistry, successful organizations in other art forms, as well as my own experience leading interactive performance.

Designed as a resource for choral musicians, this paper includes a compilation of engagement activity types from all arts forms, which have been converted into formats specifically applicable to choral performances. This will hopefully prove to be a convenient tool for choral musicians designing their next concert. The principles and best practices identified through this research have been applied to generate a collection of detailed example activities for specific choral works. Ensembles are welcome to use the materials from these activities directly and verbatim in performance.

Methodology

Three main types of sources have been consulted for this document. The first is published studies from the last twenty years which focus on the motivations and behaviors of arts audiences, as well as the measured effects of different audience engagement initiatives. Sources in this category come from Chorus America, the National Endowment for the Arts, Americans for the Arts, Wallace Foundation, Knight Foundation, Dallas Museum of Art, and others.

To incorporate the benefits of teaching artistry, this document will draw on instructional texts from teaching artists such as David Wallace, Eric Booth, Tom Cabaniss, and Daniel Levy. Articles, blogs, and lectures by arts administrators involved in the work of audience engagement will also be consulted. Commonalities in these sources will aid in the identification of core principles and best practices.

Lastly, this study is informed by interviews with musicians, ensembles, and arts administrators who utilize interactive concert components. These professionals offered solutions

to common concerns and practical advice based on their experiences. Interactive activity models were gathered from all three source types.

Since no choral organizations were found to be currently practicing this type of interactive audience engagement, this paper gathers and synthesizes the experiences of those implementing it successfully in similar settings. The original scholarship of this document includes the catalog of choral activity types and example activities based on the methodologies and practices of the experts consulted.

Delimitations

Although these strategies aim to bolster a choral organization's relevance among arts patrons, this paper will not discuss the wider need for substantial community engagement work among arts organizations. Community engagement involves partnering with other organizations, groups, or individuals outside the arts community.[15] This type of work often uses art to address community needs, create space for discussing specific issues identified locally, or with the intent to build new connections between groups of people. If used to connect with new parts of the community, the initiatives described in this paper could be considered a first step in that direction. I direct readers who wish to learn more about community engagement to the work of Doug Borwick.[16]

This paper will not take up issues of marketing and audience development. According to one 2011 arts engagement study, "The association between participatory arts practice and increased attendance is positive, but it is a byproduct of a fulfilling expressive experience, not a

[15] Doug Borwick, *Building Communities* (Winston-Salem, NC: ArtsEngaged, 2012), 14.

[16] Doug Borwick, *Engage Now: A Guide to Making the Arts Indispensable* (Winston-Salem, NC: ArtsEngaged, 2015).

direct result."[17] The research presented here therefore focuses on what can be done *in* the concert setting to potentially create more impactful audience experiences. Issues relating to engaging audiences through social media or other online content are not directly addressed.

Lastly, this document does not delve into discussion of repertoire choice. Diversifying the choral music canon is vitally important to the future of the field and plays a role in the continued relevance of our artform. However, it is not within the scope of this project. The choral examples chosen for demonstration here are from a diverse collection of composers, and effort has been made to select pieces that are within grasp of mid-level choral ensembles.

Review of Literature

The intersection of choral music and teaching artistry remains largely unexplored. The practice of interactive art appears to be currently limited to instrumental music, theater, dance, and museums. The publications that are most noteworthy and directly applicable to this study are those written by musical teaching artists. David Wallace's *Engaging the Concert Audience: A Musician's Guide to Interactive Performance*[18] (formerly published as *Reaching Out: A Musician's Guide to Interactive Performance*) defines interactive performance, presenting examples and recommendations. Similarly, Eric Booth's *The Music Teaching Artist's Bible: Becoming a Virtuoso Educator*[19] includes a section on interactive performance and bringing the practice of teaching artistry into the concert space. This portion of Booth's book was written in collaboration with David Wallace, and therefore has a significant amount of overlap. *A Teaching Artist's Companion: How to Define and Develop Your Practice*[20] by Daniel Levy establishes a

[17] Alan Brown, Jennifer L. Novak-Leonard, and Shelly Gilbride, *Getting in on the Act: How Arts Groups Are Creating Opportunities of Active Arts Participation* (The James Irvine Foundation and WolfBrown, 2011), 11, https://www.irvine.org/wp-content/uploads/GettingInOntheAct2014_DEC3.pdf.

[18] David Wallace, *Engaging the Concert Audience: A Musician's Guide to Interactive Performance.*

[19] Booth, *The Music Teaching Artist's Bible Becoming a Virtuoso Educator*.

[20] Daniel Levy, *A Teaching Artist's Companion: How to Define and Develop Your Practice.*

detailed framework for planning and implementing teaching artist workshops, but is focused on educational settings outside the concert hall. Each of these publications reads as a "how-to" manual for a career as a teaching artist and offers examples of successful activities along with an outline of their own guiding principles. However, the examples provided are entirely focused on instrumental music. To be immediately useful to choral musicians who are new to teaching artistry, this paper elaborates on many of their activity archetypes with real choral examples, showing how they can be modified to serve the forms and themes commonly found in choral repertoire and what this practice could look like in a choral setting.

Nina Simon, a former museum director and current CEO of the non-profit organization OF/BY/FOR ALL, authored two books that have informed this research. The first, *The Participatory Museum,*[21] argues that participation is vital to retaining the art institution's importance within a community. Although based on her experience at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, Simon addresses her advice to administrators of all types of cultural organizations. Her second book, *The Art of Relevance,*[22] explores the definitions of "relevance" more deeply as a key to unlocking a meaningful experience. Simon's understanding of how relevance is generated has significant implications for teaching artists considering musical points of entry for a concert audience.

Engaging Art: The Next Great Transformation of America's Cultural Life,[23] a collection of essays edited by Steven J. Tepper and Bill Ivey, also touches on aspects of interactive arts. Articles within this volume express the indispensability of participatory culture within art institutions in the light of recent changes in popular culture. There is also a discussion of the shift

[21] Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*.

[22] Nina Simon, *The Art of Relevance* (Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, 2016).

[23] Steven J. Tepper and Bill Ivey, eds., *Engaging Art: The Next Great Transformation of America's Cultural Life* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

toward "omnivorous" art consumption in America, and how arts organizations can reshape their practices to welcome audiences with eclectic tastes.

There are several case studies that explore the direct effects of audience engagement strategies across various types of performing arts. *Making Sense of Audience Engagement*[24] is a report commissioned by several non-profit foundations and carried out by WolfBrown, an arts research and consulting firm. This report explores eleven specific organizations and analyzes the effects of their audience engagement initiatives. An illustration of the "Arc of Engagement" as well as different typologies of audience members are included. These models are helpful in designing engagement activities that appeal to different types of listeners. *Getting In On the Act: How Arts Groups Are Creating Opportunities For Active Participation*[25] is another WolfBrown report that examines interactive audience engagement specifically. Here the authors state that participatory arts programs are likely the most effective way to retain new and diverse audiences.

Studies focusing on audience experience are used in this research to contextualize the value of teaching artistry in the concert setting. Stephanie Pitts has authored several articles exploring the experience of first-time attendees at classical music events in Great Britain, including "Classical Cult or Learning Community? Exploring New Audience Members' Social and Musical Responses to First-Time Concert Attendance"[26] and "What Makes an Audience? Investigating the Roles and Experiences of Listeners at a Chamber Music Festival."[27] The

[24] Alan Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin, *Making Sense of Audience Engagement Vol 1*.

[25] Brown et al., *Getting in on the Act: How Arts Groups Are Creating Opportunities of Active Arts Participation*.

[26] Melissa C. Dobson and Stephanie E. Pitts, "Classical Cult or Learning Community? Exploring New Audience Members' Social and Musical Responses to First-time Concert Attendance," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20, no. 3 (2011): 353-383.

[27] Stephanie E. Pitts, "What Makes an Audience? Investigating the Roles and Experiences of Listeners at a Chamber Music Festival," *Music & Letters* 86, no. 2 (2005): 257-269.

findings from these articles are included in the book *Valuing Musical Participation*[28] where Pitts sets her discoveries in the context of her wider research on live music attendance and personal fulfillment. Along with Karen Burland, Pitts edited a collection of essays on similar topics titled *Coughing and Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience*.[29]

A slew of white paper reports on similar topics have been commissioned in the last twenty years by large philanthropic agencies such as the Wallace Foundation, the Knight Foundation, and National Endowment for the Arts. Examples include an NEA report titled *When the Going Gets Tough: Barriers and Motivations Affecting Arts Attendance*[30] and *The Diversity of Cultural Participation: Findings from a National Survey*[31] from the Wallace Foundation. These two reports summarize national survey data on Americans' perceived barriers and motives for attending classical music concerts, suggesting that our "one size fits all" concert conventions may not be the most fruitful approach. WolfBrown has made significant contributions to this body of research, including *Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of Live Performance*[32] and A*ssessing the Audience Impact of Choral Music Concerts*.[33] The former sought to measure how pre-performance engagement affected audiences in different types of music, dance, and theater performances. The latter is a study commissioned by Chorus America that surveyed 14,236 audience members at 269 choral performances from 2014 to 2016. This study explored who is

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[28] Stephanie Pitts, *Valuing Musical Participation* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

[29] Karen Burland and Stephanie Pitts, *Coughing and Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014).

[30] Blume-Kohout and Leonard, *When the Going Gets Tough: Barriers and Motivations Affecting Arts Attendance.*

[31] Francie Ostrower, T*he Diversity of Cultural Participation: Findings from a National Survey* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute and the Wallace Foundation, 2005), https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/the-diversity-of-cultural-participation.aspx.

[32] Brown and Novak, *Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance.*

[33] Brown et al., *Assessing the Audience Impact of Choral Music Concerts*.

attending choral music concerts, which factors drive first time attendance, and how different programs affect different aspects of social, emotional, or intellectual impact. The study did explore correlations between impact and four different types of audience participation: singing along, clapping along, talking to a stranger, and moving to the music. Although these are less developed types of interactive activities than those discussed in this paper, findings from the Chorus America study demonstrate the effectual potential of the strategies presented here.

Organization of the Document

This document is split into two large sections. In short, the first section answers the question "Why?" and the second responds to "How?" To begin, Chapter 2 explores the types of listeners in choral audiences and their motivations for attendance. Understanding what draws people to choral performances can clarify how best to serve them. Chapter 3 centers on the audience experience, including factors that increase the impact of performances and the specific needs of novice listeners. Chapter 4 details the benefits of interactive performance and how this practice can compensate for the limitations of traditional performance models.

Part II of the document is designed as a resource for choral musicians as they begin incorporating interactivity into performance. Chapter 5 summarizes basic principles and best practices for designing effective interactive concerts. A catalog of possible activities can be found in Chapter 6, followed by sample scripts in Chapter 7. The scripts demonstrate how the selected activities might play out in concert, using repertoire by Felix Mendelssohn, William Grant Still, Marianna Martines, and Benjamin Britten. Chapter 8 concludes by suggesting directions for further study.

Chapter 2

WHO ATTENDS AND WHY?

Audience Typologies

Concert audiences are made up of people who prepare for and process the performance experience in different ways. Researchers at WolfBrown have found six major typologies among audiences across dance, theater, and classical music performances. These categories are: Readers, Critical Reviewers, Casual Talkers, Technology-Based Processors, Insight Seekers, and Active Learners.[1] Arts organizations are particularly good at serving the needs of Readers and Insight Seekers. The former, who prefer a light bit of reading to provide context for the experience, are well served with program notes. Insight Seekers, on the opposite end of the spectrum, tend to seek out pre-concert lectures or post-performance discussions.[2] One of the difficulties in seeking to engage all audience members is providing some amount of context and insight to the many listeners whose preferences fall between these two extremes.[3] Listeners who process experiences by informally talking with others (Casual Talkers) and those who wish to be involved in the shaping of their own experience (Active Learners) are left mostly to their own devices with the current concert model. A similar study of museum patrons found that about 20% of visitors, labeled "Independents," wished to know about the artists' materials and techniques, but were not particularly interested in being told about the story portrayed in the work.[4] The

[1] Alan Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin, *Making Sense of Audience Engagement Vol 1* (San Francisco: The San Francisco Foundation and Wolf Brown, 2011), 8, https://www.wolfbrown.com/post/makingsense.

[2] Ibid., 34.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Bonnie Pitman, *Ignite the Power of Art: Advancing Visitor Engagement in Museums* (Dallas: New Haven: Dallas Museum of Art; Distributed by Yale University Press, 2010, 68.

other 80% of visitors appreciated learning something new in a social or participatory way.[5] Although there are no comparable studies specific to choral audiences, it is easy to see the implications for choral music. The traditional concert format, with program notes or brief introductory remarks as the sole modes for sharing contextual information, is likely ideal for only a small portion of choral audiences.

Motivations and Barriers to Attendance

Arts organizations often assume, or perhaps hope, that the quality of the art they produce is primarily what draws patrons to their performances. Yet, surveys continue to show that arts attendance is also determined by social and emotional factors. One national study published in 2015 found that 76% of audiences at live performances said "socializing with friends or family members" was a major motivation for attending.[6] This is an especially powerful motivator for first-time attendance at choral concerts.[7]

Chorus America conducted a study in 2016 which examined the audiences of professional, volunteer, youth, and LGBTQ choruses. This investigation (hereafter referred to as the Chorus America Study) found that both frequent and first-time choral patrons consistently cited "to be emotionally moved or inspired" as a chief motivation for attendance.[8] This is not to say that the desire to witness high-quality singing and craftsmanship has been completely eclipsed. Rather, it demonstrates that both musically experienced listeners and novices place high value on the emotional rewards of live performance.

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[5] Ibid., 43-84.

[6] Margaret E. Blume-Kohout and Sara R. Leonard, *When the Going Gets Tough: Barriers and Motivations Affecting Arts Attendance* (Washington, DC: National Endowment For the Arts Research Report #59, 2015), 2.

[7] Alan Brown, Sean Fenton, Kyle Marinshaw, Rebecca Ratzkin, Jason Tran, and Mitch Menchaca, *Assessing the Audience Impact of Choral Music Concerts* (San Francisco, CA: WolfBrown and Chorus America, 2016), 6.

[8] Ibid, 26.

If the quest for emotionally fulfilling experiences motivates attendance, what barriers keep audiences from attending? There are both practical and perceptual barriers at play. Common practical barriers include ticket prices and lack of time.[9] In a study of orchestral audience behavior, the single biggest factor deterring return visits was, shockingly, difficulty parking.[10] However, when the enjoyment of the social and emotional aspects of concerts increases, the other practical barriers become less deterring, especially for first-time attendees.[11] To overcome these obstacles, choral musicians should seek to make all aspects of the concert experience impactful and fulfilling enough to render the other practical barriers negligible.

In the category of perceptual barriers, the perception of elitism in classical music continues to be problematic for those interested but lacking extensive knowledge or experience with the artform.[12] A focus group of college students underscored the widespread anxiety about possessing enough musical knowledge to be able to enjoy the classical music experience.[13] These students also noted a lack of intimacy in the traditional concert setting, program notes that were long and difficult to understand, and a lack of connection to the performers.[14]

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[9] Blume-Kohout and Leonard, *When the Going Gets Tough: Barriers and Motivations Affecting Arts Attendance*, 9.

[10] Adrian Slywotzky, "How Symphonies Grew Strong Audiences By Killing The Myth Of The Average Consumer," *Fast Company* (13 October 2011), accessed June 2021, https://www.fastcompany.com/1785985/how-symphonies-grew-strong-audiences-killing-myth-average-consumer.

[11] Karen Burland and Stephanie Pitts, *Coughing and Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 32.

[12] Lois Foreman-Werner and Brenda Dervin, "In the Context of Their Lives: How Audience Members Make Sense of Performing Arts Experiences," in *The Audience Experience: A Critical Analysis of Audiences in the Performing Arts,* ed. Jennifer Radbourne, Hilary Glow, and Katya Johanson (Bristol, UK; Chicago, USA: Intellect, 2013), 79.

[13] Alan S. Brown, *Engaging Next Generation Audiences: A Study of College Student Preferences towards Music and the Performing Arts* (Wolfbrown, 2013), 9, https://americanorchestras.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Student-Engagement-Study.pdf.

[14] Ibid.

Newcomers at choral concerts also perceive a higher level of risk than frequent attendees when turning up for a performance.[15] The uncertainty of whether or not they will enjoy the performance is elevated by several factors. Newly commissioned works correlate to a sense of risk, as do the number of pieces on the program. More pieces equates to uncertainty about "venturing into unfamiliar territory."[16]

Choral Audiences

The Chorus America Study identified a unique dichotomy in the makeup of American choral audiences. At the 136 choral concerts examined, 64% of audiences were former or current choral singers.[17] This number was highest at performances by professional ensembles.[18] Based on survey responses, the lead researcher of this study concluded that there is an unmet desire among this section of the audience to "go deeper into the music" since many already possess some familiarity with popular choral pieces and masterworks.[19]

Conversely, choral audiences are different from orchestra, opera, or ballet audiences in the way that attendance is driven by personal relationships. Choral audiences are composed largely of friends, family, and colleagues of performers.[20] Among adult choruses overall, 36% of audience respondents had some relationship to one of the performers.[21] 25% of audience members for professional choirs fit into this category, and over 50% for civic and volunteer choirs.[22] This dichotomy, friends and family alongside large numbers of musically experienced

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[15] Brown et al., *Assessing the Audience Impact of Choral Music Concerts*, 46.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid, 5.

[18] Ibid, 24.

[19] Kelsey Menehan, *Understanding Audiences: Takeaways from Intrinsic Impact Audience Project* (Washington, DC: Chorus America, 2016), https://www.chorusamerica.org/management-governance/understanding-audiences.

[20] Ibid, 6.

[21] Ibid, 5.

[22] Ibid, 23.

listeners, presents a unique challenge for choral organizations when trying to enhance the collective audience experience.

Choral Music and Relevance

A person's taste in leisure activities tends to depend on their level of knowledge and familiarity with that activity.[23] Growing competence in any area comes with repeated participation, even if the chosen mode of participation is some type of appreciation (e.g. attending, listening, or reading).[24] However, familiarity cannot be equated with relevance. Nina Simon, former director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, has written and presented extensively on what it means to make art "relevant" to the consumer. She writes that familiarity does not necessarily make art more relevant to someone, however it does reduce the effort required to find meaning or enjoyment from it.[25] Once someone has made a personal connection with choral music, they are much more willing to engage with it again because perceptual barriers now seem easily surmountable. This is the power of familiarity, especially for the singers in attendance at choral concerts.

Traditionally, relevance is thought of as a link connecting a person to a subject and is the source of their interest in it. To state another way: if the art is relevant to you, it matters to you. However, Simon prefers to define relevance as a key rather than a link.[26] This key unlocks the

[23] Kevin F. McCarthy, Elizabeth H. Ondaatje, Laura Zakaras, and Arthur Brooks, *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts* (RAND Corporation, 2004), 56, https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/gifts-of-the-muse.aspx.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Nina Simon, *The Art of Relevance* (Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, 2016), 37.

[26] Ibid., 29.

door to a powerful new emotion, experience, information, or value.[27] Simon states, "Relevance is a key that unlocks meaning."[28]

In this metaphor, one can imagine the ideal concert experience (one that is moving, meaningful, and inspiring to the listener) as a room on the other side of the locked door. Choral musicians, through their musical experience, have already put in the effort to acquire keys that unlock that door. They know that there is something valuable on the other side, and it is worth the emotional efforts and concentration required to attain it. Choral musicians, and other such musical insiders, can easily walk through the door again and again to enjoy the treasures found inside. Although familiarity has a lot to do with this phenomenon, Simon posits that "[t]he power of relevance is not how connected that room is to what you already know. The power is in the experiences the room offers...and how wonderful it feels to open the door and walk inside."[29] The listener needs to know that there is a valuable experience available to them and be confident in their ability to tap into it. Outsiders don't necessarily see the good stuff inside the room, but may only perceive the locked door.[30]

The lesson here is that one need not have familiarity with choral music, nor a unique relationship with the music's specific subject matter, in order for that music to become relevant to them. Conductor and composer Esa-Pekka Solonen once asked, "Why should we accept that the broader public won't care about a Stravinsky program? We shouldn't accept that. We should actually find a way for the public to care."[31] By engaging audiences in interactive experiences

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Nina Simon, "The Art of Relevance," filmed April 2017 in Palo Alto, California, TED video, 12:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTih-l739w4.

[29] Simon, *The Art of Relevance,* 29.

[30] Simon, "The Art of Relevance," TED video.

[31] Lela Tepavac, *Fearless Journeys: Innovation in Five American Orchestras*, ed. Catherine Marciariello (New York: League of American Orchestras, 2010), 18.

that connect them to the music and demonstrate that choral repertoire does in fact relate to universal experiences, choral organizations can inspire confidence in a listener's own artistic perceptions and work towards bolstering the relevance of choral music among all audiences.

The Chorus America Study noted that concerts of larger and more famous masterworks tend to bring in people specifically interested in that piece or composer. Eight out of ten respondents at a performance of Mozart's *Requiem* cited "to revisit a familiar work" as a primary motivation for attendance.[32] The lead researchers in this study concluded that this type of "ritual programming" of familiar works was therefore critically important for the life of choral ensembles and the fulfillment of their patrons.[33] However, what if this is just a symptom of familiarity and not relevance? The oft-performed masterworks no doubt hold enough musical value to entertain and inspire listeners through many hearings. However, perhaps we should consider the possibility that these familiar works draw in audiences because they are confident that they hold the metaphorical keys. There is no perceived risk. Perhaps choral organizations should be willing to build doors into other works for these patrons as well. The safety of familiarity can be replaced by one's certainty that they possess the tools needed to "get it."

When people decide what is relevant to them, they subconsciously ask themselves two questions: "How much meaning will I get?" and "How much effort will it take to get it?"[34] By helping listeners find a way into deeper musical awareness, music organizations can both increase the amount of meaning derived and reduce the struggle to attain it. Simon believes her success as an arts administrator comes not from selling the door that already exists, but by

[32] Brown et al., *Assessing the Audience Impact of Choral Music Concerts*, 6.
[33] Menehan, *Understanding Audiences: Takeaways from Intrinsic Impact Audience Project.*
[34] Simon, "The Art of Relevance," TED video.

building new avenues to meaningful experiences.[35] Imagine building doors that fit the keys people already possess.

One concern is that many insiders are fond of the way the experience traditionally exists and may wonder why other people cannot enter in the same way they have.[36] Building new doors can certainly be uncomfortable for some.[37] In these situations, it is important to revisit the mission of the organization. Building these new doors does not change the rewards of choral concerts, it just changes who is able to access them.[38]

Many music organizations have tried to create a sense of relevance in classical music by capitalizing on Americans' omnivorous tastes. There is nothing wrong with mixing what has traditionally been considered "highbrow" and "lowbrow" music. In fact, the democratization of all forms of music is a worthwhile endeavor. However, when an orchestra invites a well-known musician from jazz or popular genres to perform with the ensemble, the underlying message to curious newcomers could be that classical music lacks great substance on its own.[39] This is especially true when the role of the orchestra is to provide a fuller accompaniment to the guest artist's most popular songs. To make a real connection between the familiarity of the popular genre and the value of classical music, the concert organizers should demonstrate (or better yet, help the audience discover) how the musical and aesthetic features that they love in popular music exist in classical repertoire too. If audiences are invited to hear a performance of popular film music, the music organization can pair it with pieces from their own repertoire that

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 65.

[37] Simon, "The Art of Relevance," TED video.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Richard A. Peterson and Gabriel Rossman, "Changing Arts Audiences: Capitalizing on Omnivorousness," in *Engaging Art*, ed. Steven J. Tepper and Bill Ivey (New York: Routledge, 2008), 327.

exemplify similar musical rewards, asking listeners to identify, reflect on, and create inquiries into music that was previously unfamiliar to them.

Chapter 3

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE

The Arc of Engagement

The experience of attending a choral concert begins long before entering the performance venue, and ideally lingers for some time after. An illustration of what researchers refer to as The Arc of Engagement is reproduced in Figure 1.

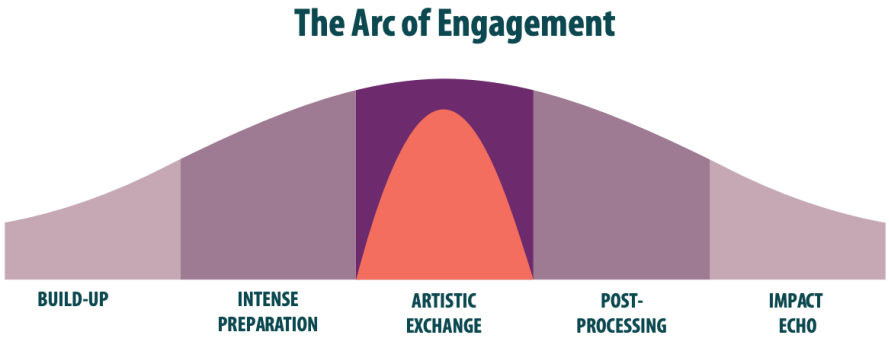

Figure 1. The Arc of Engagement[1]

The engagement experience begins the moment someone decides to attend a performance.[2] The Build-Up phase could include marketing materials from the organization or self-driven preparation, such as looking at the organization's Facebook page or website. Intense Preparation usually immediately precedes a performance and includes reading program notes.

[1] Alan Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin, *Making Sense of Audience Engagement Vol 1* (San Francisco: The San Francisco Foundation and Wolf Brown, 2011), 7, https://www.wolfbrown.com/post/makingsense. Reprinted with permission.

[2] Ibid.

These two phases represent the main window for contextualization before the show.[3] The performance, referred to here as the Artistic Exchange, is followed by a period of Post-Processing where the listener may reflect on the experience alone or with others. Post-performance discussion falls into this phase. The Impact Echo is of particular interest. This is the time following a performance, anywhere from hours to years, where the experience resonates with the listener. Especially impactful concert experiences "stick" with the listener in this way.[4] One goal of the strategies presented in this paper is to create a longer Impact Echo for as many of our listeners as possible by offering interpretive assistance, curatorial insight, and opportunities for collective meaning-making from the Intense Preparation through Post-Processing stages.

It is important to note that each audience typology, and each individual listener for that matter, experiences this arc differently. Some put in a lengthy amount of preparation by reading or listening online beforehand. Others seek insight in the form of optional pre-concert talks. For some, the Artistic Exchange is the only portion of the arc they experience. By providing a variety of engagement offerings, including both active and passive types of participation as well as community and solitary reflection, we are more likely to meet the needs of more listeners. Researchers agree that these efforts will likely result in higher levels of impact and lengthier Impact Echoes.[5]

[3] Ibid., 15.

[4] Ibid., 20.

[5] Alan S. Brown and Jennifer L. Novak, *Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance* (WolfBrown, 2007), 81, https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2008-12/apo-nid17240.pdf.

Creating Impact

The Intrinsic Impact program identified the following as the primary constructs creating impactful musical experiences: Captivation, Emotional Resonance, Intellectual Stimulation, Spiritual Value, Aesthetic Enrichment (sometimes called Aesthetic Growth), and Social Bonding.[6] In a choral performance, acquiring these benefits requires the listener's senses, emotions, and intellect.[7] Out of the categories listed above, Chorus America found Emotional Resonance to be the most consistent predictor of impact.[8] Following close behind were Captivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Social Connection.[9] High marks in these areas correlated with more satisfying overall experiences.[10]

As expected, audiences with higher levels of context reap more rewards from a performance.[11] This is the truism that has motivated all types of audience education for nearly two centuries. Context has been described as the "grease on the wheels of impact."[12] Even novice listeners tend to be enthusiastic about new works and willing to explore difficult repertoire when provided with proper context in an engaging way.[13] In fact, arts experiences

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Laura Zakaras and Julia F. Lowell, *Cultivating Demand for the Arts: Arts Learning, Arts Engagement, and State Arts Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008), xiv-xv, https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG640.html.

[8] Alan Brown, Sean Fenton, Kyle Marinshaw, Rebecca Ratzkin, Jason Tran, and Mitch Menchaca, *Assessing the Audience Impact of Choral Music Concerts* (San Francisco, CA: WolfBrown and Chorus America, 2016, 54, https://www.chorusamerica.org/sites/default/files/resources/Assessing_the_Audience_Impact_of_Choral_Concerts-FINAL_0.pdf.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Brown and Novak, *Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance*Assessing intrinsic impacts, 10.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Stephanie E. Pitts et al., "Views of an Audience: Understanding the Orchestral Concert Experience from Player and Listener Perspectives," *Participations* 10 no. 2 (2013): 83.

which include audience participation are more likely to lead to adventurous programming and listeners who feel more confident when encountering new music.[14]

Another strong predictor of impact is "anticipation," which includes the listener's excitement for the performance, their focus going into it, and their expectation for an enjoyable experience.[15] Anticipation can be cultivated anywhere in the Build-Up and Intense Preparation stages of the arc and may even continue to develop throughout the Artistic Exchange. In traditional models, anticipation is often derived from pre-concert marketing material sent to ticket holders, social media content, the general atmosphere of the pre-performance space, and again, the program book. The difficulty in relying on these methods to build anticipation is convincing all audience members to engage with them. What about audience members who don't visit the website or view the emails before arriving? What about those who don't read the meticulously crafted program notes or choose not to attend pre-concert talks? The data show significantly increased levels of anticipation and focus following an audience engagement event, especially in individuals who do not regularly attend pre-performance activities.[16] Therefore, by folding creative anticipatory programming into the performance itself, the kind that combines anticipation-building and context-setting, performers can set all listeners on the most promising path toward heightened impact.

Impact in Choral Music

The Chorus America Study identified several factors that hinder Cavitation. Aside from physical problems such as uncomfortable seats or difficulty hearing, non-captivated listeners expressed dissatisfaction with the musical selections (especially if they were different than

[14] Lynne Conner, "In and Out of the Dark: A Theory about Audience Behavior from Sophocles to Spoken Word," in *Engaging Art*, ed. Steven J. Tepper and Bill Ivey (New York: Routledge, 2008), 119.

[15] Ibid. 11-12.

[16] Ibid., 81.

expected), an inability to understand a foreign language, and a perceived lack of connection and emotion from singers.[17] Fortunately, interactive performance can address each of these concerns. When listeners have the tools to decode aesthetic features of music, they need not understand every foreign word to have a personal, reflective response. Additionally, seeing performers interact with each other and with the audience in new ways makes listeners feel more connected to them.[18]

The study also proves a connection between the simplest forms of participation and different intrinsic impacts. Clapping along to the music built social connection and talking to a neighbor was a predictor of multiple impacts.[19] When choruses encircled the audience or encouraged them to sing along to familiar songs, listeners reported feeling a connection to the performers which resulted in high marks for the Captivation category.[20] If these, the simplest of participation prompts, resulted in a notable increase in summative impact, then the potential benefits of the activities explored in this paper are innumerable.

Importance of the Social Aspect

There exists a close relationship between the social aspect of concert attendance and musical enjoyment.[21] The awareness of sharing an experience with others is one of the fundamental features setting live music performance apart from recorded listening and watching.[22] For many, discussing a live performance experience solidifies their responses to it,[23]

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[17] Brown et al., *Assessing the Audience Impact of Choral Music Concerts*, 32.

[18] James Blachly (Conductor, Experiential Orchestra), interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, July 2021.

[19] Brown et al., *Assessing the Audience Impact of Choral Music Concerts*, 11.

[20] Ibid., 33.

[21] Stephanie E. Pitts, "What Makes an Audience? Investigating the Roles and Experiences of Listeners at a Chamber Music Festival," *Music & Letters* 86, no. 2 (2005): 269.

[22] Karen Burland and Stephanie Pitts, *Coughing and Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014). 65.

[23] Ibid., 175.

and the ability to do so is empowering.[24] Arts audiences are no longer interested solely in an interpretation passed down by an "expert."[25] Indeed, this trend is reflected in the democratization of information on social media as well as changing models of best practices in teaching and learning.[26]

Extending musical content into a social space has been shown to enhance the concert experience.[27] Many music organizations attempt to do this by hosting pre-concert cocktail hours or post-performance receptions. Choral organizations must remember, however, that these sorts of social opportunities are most effective when they center around the musical content. Simply having refreshments in the lobby and time for mingling is not enough to generate new connections between attendees. Examples of strategies for bringing the collective act of reflection and learning into the social space can be found in Chapter 6.

Newcomers and Non-musicians

New audience members often perceive an "Us vs. Them" feeling, where there is a sense of separation from, and perhaps an inferiority to, veteran listeners.[28] Interacting with others in the concert space is complicated for those who feel they lack the vocabulary or expertise to make observations about music. Newcomers can also be intimidated by the implication that they are to give their full attention to the music for the entire duration of the performance.[29] This can be

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[24] Stephanie E. Pitts, "The Longer Experience: Theatre for Young Audiences and Enhancing Engagement," in *The Audience Experience*, ed. Jennifer Radbourne, Hilary Glow, and Katya Johanson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 105.

[25] Alan S. Brown and Jennifer L. Novak-Leonard, *Engaging Dance Audiences: Summary Assessment of Grantee's Engagement Practices* (WolfBrown, 2011), 5-6.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Burland and Pitts, *Coughing and Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience*, 160.

[28] Melissa C. Dobson and Stephanie E. Pitts, "Classical Cult or Learning Community? Exploring New Audience Members' Social and Musical Responses to First-time Concert Attendance," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20, no. 3 (2011): 372.

[29] Ibid., 364.

especially troublesome for a long piece of unfamiliar music.[30] These findings suggest the importance of demonstrating the countless ways of listening to a musical work. One need not be able to track the form or identify themes to be able to recognize the emotive power of choral music.

Audience responses tend to be most poignant when listeners make a personal connection to their lives or understanding of themselves.[31] According to a landmark study on the intrinsic benefits of the arts, "It bears repeating that individuals are attracted to the arts not in the hope that the experience will make them smarter or more self-disciplined, but because of the pleasure, emotional stimulation, and meaning the arts can provide."[32]

Summary

When examining the value of live performance, A 2014 study identified the following recurring themes as crucial to a high-quality concert experience: "The existence of and shared experience with other audience members; the proximity of the performers; and the opportunity to be thoroughly immersed in a performance."[33] Interactive elements can accomplish each of these. From the research summarized in this chapter, it is clear that choral organizations can better serve audiences by supporting their search for meaning, understanding, and connection. By interweaving small, multi-layered experiences that serve a variety of learning styles, performers can increase impact in a way that makes the experience worthwhile for all listeners.[34] After all,

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[30] Ibid., 365.

[31] Lois Foreman-Wernet and Brenda Dervin, "In the Context of Their Lives: How Audience Members Make Sense of Performing Arts Experiences," in *The Audience Experience*, ed. Jennifer Radbourne, HIlary Glow, and Katya Johanson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 69-82.

[32] Kevin F. McCarthy, Elizabeth H. Ondaatje, Laura Zakaras, and Arthur Brooks, *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts* (RAND Corporation, 2004), 53, https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/gifts-of-the-muse.aspx.

[33] Karen and Pitts, *Coughing and Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience*, 67.

[34] Lynne Conner, *Project Brief: Arts Experience Initiative* (Pittsburg, PA: the Heinz Endowments, 2008), 29, https://www.heinz.org/UserFiles/Library/ArtExperienceIniative.pdf.

attending a concert is a commitment, not just of money or time, but of energy and concentration.[35]

The Chorus America Study concluded that "[i]n situations where it makes sense, the research finds that different approaches to audience participation can amplify different kinds of impact, particularly social connection."[36] The following sections show how participation can make sense in nearly every choral concert situation.

[35] Stephanie Pitts, *Valuing Musical Participation* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 95.

[36] Brown et al., *Assessing the Audience Impact of Choral Music Concerts*, 11.

Chapter 4

A PATH FORWARD

The Challenges at Hand

Twentieth-century concert norms have unfortunately deepened a divide between classical music performance and everyday experience, as well as between the casual interested listener and the aficionado. Through the late nineteenth century, the classical concert was an event that assumed audience participation and exchange. People gathered to talk before the performance, often through it, and discussed interpretive ideas after.[1] Even non-musicians participated in arts appreciation clubs, cultural publications, and "audience leagues" that discussed arts experiences.[2] Perhaps nothing has separated performers from audiences, and listeners from each other, more than controlled lighting in concert halls.[3] With performers in the light and audiences in the dark, the listener's personal experience has been entirely insulated. The idea that the audience should be passive receivers of art is entirely a 20th-century phenomenon, due in large part to the impression that the events onstage are remote, esoteric, "highbrow," and removed from the realm of ordinary life.[4] Audiences have been conditioned by concert norms to believe that the right way

[1] Lynne Conner, *Project Brief: Arts Experience Initiative* (Pittsburg, PA: the Heinz Endowments, 2008), 10, https://www.heinz.org/UserFiles/Library/ArtExperienceIniative.pdf.

[2] Lynne Conner, "In and Out of the Dark: A Theory about Audience Behavior from Sophocles to Spoken Word," in *Engaging Art*, ed. Steven J. Tepper and Bill Ivey (New York: Routledge, 2008), 109.

[3] Ibid., 110.

[4] Kevin F. McCarthy, Elizabeth H. Ondaatje, Laura Zakaras, and Arthur Brooks, *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts* (RAND Corporation, 2004), 38, https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/gifts-of-the-muse.aspx.

to understand a musical work is to silently and passively consume it in stillness.[5] It seems implied that anything else might infringe on the purity of the experience.[6]

It is not difficult to imagine how this "highbrow" messaging evolved into a feeling among audiences of non-authority and lack of capacity to "understand" classical music. Somewhere in the last century, American concert audiences have lost the confidence to employ their own interpretive skills to a classical musical experience or to share those insights. One Knight Foundation study found that, of those interested in classical music, only 6% considered themselves "very knowledgeable" about it.[7] Over half identified as "not very knowledgeable," despite being interested in the artform.[8] This need not remain a barrier to the enjoyment of classical choral music. It is possible to combat the conditioned expectation that musical interpretations are only received from an expert, and to empower listeners with the tools and permission to interpret musical works on their own terms.

Audiences have lost access to the shared portion of the interpretive process, which some argue has contributed to a lack of widespread committed interest in the arts.[9] As already mentioned in previous sections, pleasure in the interpretive process is greatly enhanced when it is communal.[10] Consider the cooperative role that sports fans take in the experience and meaning-making surrounding American sports culture. Lynne Connor explained it as such:

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[5] Lynne Connor, *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013), 61.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Thomas Wolf, *Magic of Music Final Report: The Search for Shining Eyes* (The Knight Foundation, 2006), 31, https://knightfoundation.org/reports/magic-music-final-report-search-shining-eyes.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Connor, *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era*, 4.

[10] Ibid.

> Sports fans, unlike their arts counterparts, have been given societal permission to express their opinions openly and, importantly, can readily find the tools they need to organize and back up those opinions. The experiences that surround the sporting event—from talk shows to 10 pages of sports writing in the daily newspaper—help the audience to prepare, to process, to analyze, and thus to feel the sense of satisfaction that comes from learning and inference.[11]

Commenting, analyzing, and debating with friends or loved ones is expected in the rituals surrounding sporting events. In fact, it is so common that it is considered one of the easiest forms of small talk and a surefire way to make a connection with a new acquaintance.[12] Perhaps it is too lofty a goal to bring choral music audiences, non-musicians included, to the same level of participation, empowerment, and personal satisfaction as sports fans. However, there are steps choral musicians can take to make the concert more communal, communicative, and satisfying in a similar way.

The good news is that the continued decline in "high art" attendance, including at classical music concerts, is not due to a lack of interest or capacity for cultural connections with these artforms. People of all ages are still very interested in classical music, but are less interested in the passive nature of the concert experience.[13] Consumer expectations surrounding the arts have changed, and today's audiences are gravitating toward forms of art and entertainment that are either inherently participatory or encourage interpretative opportunities (e.g. spoken word, interactive museums, music festivals).[14] The proliferation of social media and

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[11] Ibid., 37-38.

[12] Lynne Conner, "Who Gets to Tell the Meaning?" *GIA Reader* 15 no. 1 (2004), https://www.giarts.org/article/who-gets-tell-meaning.

[13] Henry Jenkins and Vanessa Bertozzi, "Artistic Expression in the Age of Participatory Culture," in *Engaging Art*, ed. Steven J. Tepper and Bill Ivey (New York: Routledge, 2008), 176.

[14] Conner, *Project Brief: Arts Experience Initiative*, 7.

digital content creation, especially among young people, has created the perfect environment for immersive and participatory arts practices to flourish.[15]

Limitations of Traditional Approaches

Lynne Conner wrote, "[nonprofit arts producers] must acknowledge that the hierarchical idea of arts reception, in which great art will automatically find its true audience without mediation of any kind, is behaviorally inaccurate."[16] So too is the expectation that music is always powerful enough to speak for itself. One needs a key to open the door, so to speak. It is easy for musicians, arts administrators, and organizational leadership to take for granted that they possess the requisite keys.

Even when intended for newcomers, traditional methods of audience education usually end up benefiting only those already familiar with the artform.[17] The trouble with pre-concert talks, program notes, or even post-concert Q&A sessions, is that they are one-directional.[18] Information comes from an expert and is received by the humble arts observer. To shift the paradigm toward co-creation and co-authorship, organizations can opt for dialogue, reflection, and discovery rather than instruction on what should be heard and what specific messages should be derived from it.

The first annotated concert programs appeared in England around 1845, about the same time as travel guidebooks for tourists.[19] Traditional types of program notes have therefore created a kind of "touristic listening" where important features are described much like site

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[15] Alan S. Brown, Jennifer L. Novak-Leonard, and Shelly Gilbride, *Getting in on the Act: How Arts Groups Are Creating Opportunities of Active Arts Participation* (The James Irvine Foundation and WolfBrown, 2011), 4, https://www.irvine.org/wp-content/uploads/GettingInOntheAct2014_DEC3.pdf.

[16] Conner, "In and Out of the Dark" 119.

[17] Wolf, *Magic of Music Final Report: The Search for Shining Eyes*, 6.

[18] Conner, "In and Out of the Dark" 118.

[19] Christian Thorau and Hansjakob Ziemer, *The Oxford Handbook of Music Listening in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 218.

markers.[20] Recognition and analysis of these markers is implied to be crucial for musical understanding.[21] If a listener fails to recognize the markers, or to be emotionally or intellectually piqued by them, they are likely to equate this with a personal failure to "understand" the music.[22] Likewise, if listeners are not provided with the necessary tools to connect aspects of a new listening experience to something they already know, the resulting message is "I must not be smart enough to get it," which can transform into distaste.[23] Why would one choose to return to a place where they felt inadequate?[24]

Participatory and immersive experiences are ideally suited for introducing new or unfamiliar musical experiences.[25] Numerous studies have found that audiences are generally very open to engaging with art in new ways.[26] The following excerpt comes from a summary of conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen's thoughts on opening doors to musical experience:

> Successful innovation, says Salonen, rests on several core beliefs: People are innately curious, open-minded, and willing to experience new things if they can connect these experiences to their contemporary lives. If conventional prejudices, arcane rules, old-fashioned axioms, and social stigmas can be carefully peeled away, people are free to judge things on their own terms. It is not the job of the audience to do this for themselves, but rather the responsibility of the orchestra to create conditions that eliminate barriers and make the audience part of the artistic process. It's about creating reciprocity.[27]

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Connor, *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era*, 115-116.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Alan Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin, *Making Sense of Audience Engagement Vol 2* (San Francisco: The San Francisco Foundation and Wolf Brown, 2011), 71, https://www.wolfbrown.com/post/makingsense.

[26] Bob Harlow, Thomas Alfieri, Aaron Dalton and Anne Field, *More Than Just a Party: How the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Boosted Participation by Young Adults* (Bob Harlow Research and Consulting and the Wallace Foundation, 2011), x, https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/wallace-studies-in-building-arts-audiences-more-than-just-a-party.aspx.

[27] Lela Tepavac, *Fearless Journeys: Innovation in Five American Orchestras*, ed. by Catherine Marciariello (New York: League of American Orchestras, 2010), 17.

To effectively connect people to choral music, it is imperative to know the difference between a musical object and a musical experience, and seek to provide the latter.[28] Maxine Greene, one of the pioneers of what is called Aesthetic Education, championed the idea that meaningful arts experiences occur when people are empowered to notice what is there to be noticed.[29] Greene wrote:

> For me, teaching is not mainly a matter of informing people or enabling them to know *that* such and such is the case in one or another dimension of their lives. It is not of overriding significance for students to know that Aaron Copland grew up in Brooklyn, went to Paris, and wrote *Appalachian Spring*...or that Balanchine's abstract ballets depend crucially on mirroring and symmetries. Of course these pieces of information are meaningful, but teaching, for me, is fundamentally a matter of discovering what I can do to empower people to move into such imaginary worlds and to *achieve* them variously as meaningful, to realize them—in their own experience—as aesthetic objects, works of art. I mean enabling them to attend, to notice what is there to be noticed, to let their energies go out to the musical piece…If that occurs, it is highly likely that dimensions of experience will be illuminated that may not have been noticeable before.[30]

David Wallace, an influential teaching artist and educator, says that incorporating interaction into performance is more than a nice touch that adds variety to our concerts.[31] In Wallace's words, "...it is a vital component of the survival of live concert music."[32] The following are goals and benefits of concert participation.

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[28] Conner, "Who Gets to Tell the Meaning?"

[29] Maxine Greene, *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 202.

[30] Ibid., 203-204.

[31] David Wallace, *Engaging the Concert Audience: A Musician's Guide to Interactive Performance* (Boston, MA: Berklee Press, 2018), 5.

[32] Ibid., 5.

Connecting People to Music on a Human Level

If choral organizations are concerned about audience development, the focus should not solely be on ticket sales or increasing audience diversity. Rather, focusing on individual experience and creating more meaningful listening is at the heart of attracting and keeping patrons.[33] In addition to creative marketing and public outreach, demand for live choral music can be generated by facilitating musical encounters that are rich enough to bring people back for more.[34] This is only possible if the listener feels they have the capacity to respond to the artistic experience. The choral organization can work toward building those tools and instilling that confidence.

One of the most potent ways to democratize art is by valuing the feelings of experiencing art over the knowledge of it.[35] Perhaps our goal should be to help people be more reflective and think critically about their musical experiences, rather than to develop specific musical expertise. The goal of choral audience enrichment should be to provide the tools and reflective prompts needed to more effectively enter the total concert experience.[36]

With this approach, choral organizations are not bound to only the most audience-accessible repertoire. By connecting to music on a very basic human level, especially challenging and complex music, listeners are given a more direct path to lifelong musical

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[33] Stephanie E. Pitts, "What Makes an Audience? Investigating the Roles and Experiences of Listeners at a Chamber Music Festival," *Music & Letters* 86, no. 2 (2005): 269.

[34] Laura Zakaras and Julia F. Lowell, *Cultivating Demand for the Arts: Arts Learning, Arts Engagement, and State Arts Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008), xv, https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG640.html.

[35] Dennie Palmer Wolf and Jeannette Rodríguez Píneda, *The Teaching Artist Companion to* https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/TeachingArtistCompanion%20to%20Aesthetic%20Perspectives_final.pdf. (Washington, DC: Americans for the Arts, 2019), 8, https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/TeachingArtistCompanion%20to%20Aesthetic%20Perspectives_final.pdf.

[36] Zakaras and Lowell, *Cultivating Demand for the Arts: Arts Learning, Arts Engagement, and State Arts Policy*, xv.

enjoyment. As stated previously, when audiences possess these tools for listening to unfamiliar music with confidence, they are much more likely to support adventurous programming.[37]

Building Community

Previous sections of this paper have established the importance of the social experience of concert attendance. The value once placed on virtuosity and professionalism in the concert space are currently giving way to interest in connecting with people and contributing to vibrant communities.[38] One very effective way to build connectedness among audience members is by asking them to tap into their shared sense of creativity.[39] Such activities could include asking the audience to sing together, contribute ideas for manipulating musical materials, or share reflections. Other similar objectives might include starting a dialogue on a social or local issue, or building a relationship with the organization itself.[40]

In addition to building the audience community, interactive and immersive concert experiences create a powerful connection between listeners and performers. Interactions between musicians are quickly detected by audiences, especially candid interactions showing warmth and enjoyment of making music together.[41] Seeing musicians outside of the usual concert rigidity for a moment can be very powerful. As the music critic, composer, and educator Greg Sandow says, "People respond to *people*."[42] It is so powerful when listeners see a relatable person on stage.

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[37] Conner, "In and Out of the Dark," 119.

[38] Brown et al., *Getting in on the Act,* 7.

[39] Andrew Roitstein (Toomai String Quartet), interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, June 2021.

[40] Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010), Chapter 10, http://www.participatorymuseum.org.

[41] Karen Burland and Stephanie Pitts, *Coughing and Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 28-29.

[42] Greg Sandow, interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, September 2021.

Performer bios, or even intentionally silly blogs with personal info, have been shown to accomplish little by way of connecting listener to performer.[43] A surprising amount of intimacy can be created simply through close proximity to musicians and getting a sense of their performing persona.[44] It is very appealing for audiences to hear about an excerpt of music from the person who sings or plays it.[45] Stephanie Pitts found that musicians and audiences remain in two distinct groups unless ensembles make a deliberate effort to blur that line, since the traditional concert setting is designed to uphold it. Breaking "the fourth wall" creates for audiences a sort of assumed familiarity with performers, which often makes listeners feel more engaged throughout the performance.[46] This sense of closeness, however superficial, can lead to real affinity and sense of personal connection to one or more performers.[47] Pitts describes the phenomenon as such:

> A sense that these highly accomplished players are within reach, yet still at a professional distance, epitomises [*sic*] the experience of live listening, whereby all participants are connected during the performance, but take their separate responses away at the end of the concert. Knowing more about the players is therefore unnecessary to many listeners, and yet the explicit willingness to engage socially with the audience helps even those who do not take up the opportunity to identify with an open ethos and a sense that 'CBSO is your 'local team' and you are one of the family (!)'[48]

In the case of the Dallas Museum of Art, one board member described a significant shift in the community's perception of the institution once the museum's leadership focused on

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[43] Stephanie E. Pitts et al., "Views of an Audience: Understanding the Orchestral Concert Experience from Player and Listener Perspectives," 79.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Sandow.

[46] Burland and Pitts, *Coughing and Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience,* 28-29.

[47] Stephanie E. Pitts et al., "Views of an Audience," 80.

[48] Ibid.

cultivating optimal patron experience.[49] He noted that, by making the work accessible to all people, not just as a one-time outreach to Hispanic or African American patrons, the entire community began to feel a sense of ownership in the museum.[50] By adopting some of these same principles, a choral organization might be able to foster a "home team" sentiment within the community.

Creating Forums for Co-authorship

In 2009, the program director of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation said, "In the future, value will not be consumed: value will be co-created."[51] Not only can the right tools and prompts allow audiences to connect personally with musical works, but interactive performances can also grant to listeners the authority to co-author meaning. It is all too common for classical music to be characterized as relaxing, intellectual, etc. in an effort to convince people of its worth.[52] Empowering audiences to feel and identify with music on their own terms (e.g. electrifying, comforting, repulsive, nostalgic, unsettling) can lead to personal ownership of the musical work.[53]

Where program notes and unidirectional pre-concert lectures usually involve an expert telling the audience how to interpret the music by way of the composer's intentions, interactive and immersive strategies invite audiences to create and discover meaning together as a group of listeners. Co-authorship generally involves some aspect of free interchange between patrons, the

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[49] Bonnie Pitman, *Ignite the Power of Art: Advancing Visitor Engagement in Museums* (Dallas: New Haven: Dallas Museum of Art; Distributed by Yale University Press, 2010), 129-130.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Hilary Glow, "Challenging Cultural Authority: A Case Study in Participative Audience Engagement," in *The Audience Experience*, ed. Jennifer Radboune, Hilary Glow and Katya Johanson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 38.

[52] Jennifer Gersten, "All-too-easy-listening," *Washington Post,* November 30, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/11/30/feature/classical-music-is-sold-as-soothing-background-music-thats-a-problem/?utm_term=.1fb9a308c11f.

[53] Maxine Greene, *Variations on a Blue Guitar*, 92.

organization, or the performers. Examples could include open discussion with peers, anonymous commentary using online platforms or sticky notes, or voting on programming or performance decisions.[54] Opportunities for co-authoring grants individuals further ownership of the experience and invites musical enjoyment into their everyday lives.[55] When discussing the necessity of what she has deemed "Arts Talk," Connor wrote,

> Audiences are successful learners when they take charge of their own interpretive process and are happiest when that process of meaning making is social. But the history of sacralization of the serious arts has left us with a social structure for arts-going that readily discourages the formation of learning communities among individual audience members. This is a serious problem for the arts industry, for, without the capacity to learn together, a given audience community cannot sustain itself (since learning equals adaptation and adaptation is survival). In contemporary America, the dwindling audiences for the most sacralized forms of art make this fact painfully clear.[56]

The guiding principle here is that the presenter does not dictate the "meaning" of the work to the listener.[57] This redistribution of power goes hand-in-hand with convincing audiences that they already possess the artistic sensitivity needed to enjoy classical music. When the opportunity to interpret music as a community is extended to the listeners, audiences no longer need to rely on an "enlightener" to tell them what to listen for in order to enjoy the performance. This is not to say that mediation may not be beneficial, but the goal is for the artist or presenter to guide rather than to tell. People, in general, wish to talk through their reactions in order to process experiences.[58] Connor goes so far as to claim that if there is no opportunity to talk, there

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[54] William Stuart Sims, "Creative Change: Audience Development and Cultural Engagement in the Nonprofit Arts," (DMA thesis, Arizona State University, 2010), 33.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Connor, *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era*, 101.

[57] Conner, "Who Gets to Tell the Meaning?"

[58] Ibid.

are no real opinions formed.[59] This may not hold true for every individual in every situation, but for some, even hearing and considering others' contributions to a discussion can be helpful in processing.

Due to the conditioned behaviors and learned signals, our performance spaces are not ideal for dialogue. It is difficult for the audience to convert from being passive and silent to sharing personal reflections with the flip of a switch.[60] Strategies for mounting this hurdle are discussed in the Basic Principles section of this document.

Summary

It has long been believed that high-quality performance is enough to draw in sufficient audience interest and support. However, the research shows this to be fundamentally untrue. Solely focusing on improving our ensembles' technique, musical sensitivity, or intonation is not likely to fill empty seats in the concert hall.[61] In fact, even musical "insiders" are rarely satisfied by a concert experience where they simply hear a piece performed just like the recording they love.[62] A moving concert experience may start out with that expectation, but then it goes somewhere else. There is something that transcends the initial expectation; perhaps it is the experience of being in the hall with others, or maybe connecting to the eyes of a performer.[63]

To say that this transformation in the concert experience is enough to alleviate all the challenges facing choral organizations may be too simplistic. The most powerful approach would be to combine such interactive experiences with innovative programming choices, creative

[59] Ibid.
[60] Connor, *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era*, 134.
[61] Conner, "Who Gets to Tell the Meaning?"
[62] Thomas Cabaniss, interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, September 2021.
[63] Ibid.

marketing, and earnest community outreach. However, the component of meaningful audience engagement is essential to the effectiveness of this multi-pronged approach.

PART II

Chapter 5

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

In speaking with teaching artists and arts administrators who successfully utilize immersive and interactive concert elements, many provided advice on successful implementation. The following are fundamental principles echoed by multiple experts.

Experience Before Information

This rule is emphasized by Eric Booth, Thomas Cabaniss, David Wallace, and throughout many of the country's top teaching artist training programs. The idea is that leading with musicological or historical facts invites people to enter the music in a cerebral, often distant manner.[1] By giving the audience an experience first, by inviting them into a feeling, they connect on an emotional level that is more likely to inspire investment of the whole self.[2] David Wallace argues that, "unless information is grounded in an actual experience, it seldom helps a listener's ears."[3] James Blachly, Music Director of the Experiential Orchestra, has noticed that when a listener is told how to experience something, part of them shuts off.[4] Beginning with inquiry-based discovery can become what Blachly calls "a radical welcome" that hooks the listener and makes them want to experience more.[5] Information presented after is then more meaningful

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[1] Eric Booth, *The Music Teaching Artist's Bible Becoming a Virtuoso Educator* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 189.

[2] Ibid.

[3] David Wallace, *Engaging the Concert Audience: A Musician's Guide to Interactive Performance* (Boston, MA: Berklee Press, 2018), 12.

[4] James Blachly (Conductor, Experiential Orchestra), interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, July 2021.

[5] Ibid.

because they have an experience to provide context. As Thomas Cabaniss has said, "People are attracted to music, not from an armchair 'appreciating' it, but if they're really *in* it."[6]

Choose an Effective Entry Point

An entry point is a musical or textual element that is central to a musical selection in some way. A single focus point such as a motive, shape, sonority, timbre, emotion, etc., can serve as a compass for navigating a musical work.[7] A rich entry point can actually serve to tie together entire sets or programs. According to David Wallace,

> A purely musical experience of an entry point enables the audience to listen actively like a musician. An intellectual or metaphorical experience of an entry point can universalize and demystify musical concepts. Personal, emotional encounters with entry points allow listeners to establish individual connections with the musical work. The most comprehensive interactions use entry points to connect the audience musically, intellectually, and emotionally.[8]

Each expert that I spoke with reiterated the importance of choosing an entry point you are completely captivated with yourself. If you are not fascinated by it, your audience will not be either. When choosing an entry point, presenters should ask themselves, "What is this piece saying? What is important to me about it?"[9] It may be helpful to consider what originally drew you to the piece or why you chose to perform it. Performers should seek to let audiences in on the real reason that musicians love the work. Even if there exists some interesting formal structure (e.g., a cantus firmus or a recurring refrain) or unique biographical information (perhaps Mendelssohn composed it on his honeymoon, or Brahms was grieving the loss of his mother at the time), this is rarely the sole point of interest for a true admirer of the work. If these

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[6] Thomas Cabaniss, interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, September 2021.

[7] Wallace, 7

[8] Ibid., 32-33.

[9] Andrew Roitstein (Toomai String Quartet), interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, June 2021.

structural or non-musical elements are important to your understanding of the piece, consider guiding audiences to discover how these aspects are reflected in the emotionality of the music. For example, how does the structure lend to elevating the textual meaning? In the case of the recurring refrain, an audience could explore how the intervening music or text changes the way we experience each successive refrain. To take it one step further, are there life experiences that mirror this pattern?

When speaking about entry points, Blachly suggests: "Do that cadence that kills you every time…and do it six times!"[10] Consider selecting and examining portions of the music that are rich enough for multiple hearings.[11] Studies show that audiences do not mind when the "secrets" of the piece are given away. In fact, studies show that repeated hearings do not take away from the pleasure of art, but actually increase it.[12] One study illustrated this phenomenon using short stories, specifically mysteries with plot twists.[13] Some readers were given stories in their original form and others with "spoilers" in the preface. The results showed that people much preferred the "spoiler" versions.[14] That being so, do not be afraid to let the audience experience the climactic moment multiple times. When they recognize it in context, it will become even more meaningful for them.[15]

One might also consider what difficulties listeners might have when encountering the piece for the first time.[16] If the musical language will be largely unfamiliar to them, this may be a

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[10] Blachly.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Andrea Halpern, Chloe H. K. Chan, Daniel Müllensiefen, and John Sloboda, "Audience Reactions to Repeating a Piece on a Concert Programme," *Participations* 14 no. 2 (2017): 148.

[13] Lynne Connor, *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013), 113.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Greg Sandow, interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, September 2021.

[16] Wallace, 27.

worthwhile entry point. The chosen activities could sensitize the audience and prime them for making sense of the sounds they are about to encounter. For example, a piece by R. Murray Schaffer might be prepared by guiding the audience in creating their own small composition using similar procedures.

Audiences often wish to know the backstory of the program's design.[17] In fact, audience surveys have revealed that listeners are much more interested in why the artistic director chose a certain piece than in facts about the composer, ensemble, or soloists.[18] In essence, they want to learn to enjoy the music for the same reason the musicians do.

Finally, one should take audience experience into account when choosing an entry point. If the chosen repertoire, concert setting, or event is more likely to attract "musical insiders," make the focus on emotional entry points so that listeners who are familiar with the work have the opportunity to experience it in a deeper way. If the concert is marketed toward new patrons, be ready to build a bridge into hearing a work for the first time. Especially helpful in the latter scenario are activities that demonstrate the myriad ways to take in such a work or discuss what the musical experience is like for performers and listeners. In any of these situations, one must guard against "dumbing down" the music, but rather aim to "open it up."[19] We must honor the intelligence and life experiences that our audience brings to the table, even if they do not possess specific musical knowledge.

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[17] Alan Brown, Sean Fenton, Kyle Marinshaw, Rebecca Ratzkin, Jason Tran, and Mitch Menchaca, *Assessing the Audience Impact of Choral Music Concerts* (San Francisco, CA: WolfBrown and Chorus America, 2016), 9.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Nina Simon, *The Art of Relevance* (Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, 2016), 60.

Connect to What They Already Know and Can Do

The most effective interactive concerts focus on the feelings and experience of listening to the music, not specific musicological or technical knowledge.[20] To quote James Blachly again, "You're speaking to an audience that doesn't know what 'deceptive cadence' means, but that doesn't mean they don't know what a deceptive cadence feels like. Because they do, and ultimately, that's what matters more."[21]

Whether or not our audiences are themselves musicians, there are innumerable ways that listeners can interact with musical material. Examples include singing, humming, whistling, body percussion, keeping a steady beat, responding to conducting cues, making compositional choices, dancing or swaying, analyzing and reflecting, drawing shapes in the air, voting, playing games, or solving riddles.[22]

A wonderful example of this is asking the audience to squeeze their hands into fists when they feel musical tension and relax their hands when they feel musical release.[23] Similarly, the Experiential Orchestra encourages audiences to explore balance by connecting each component of a chord to an aspect of everyday life (family, work, exercise, romance, hobbies, etc.)[24] The ensemble then demonstrates how the experience changes when a portion of one's life overpowers the others. For example, the basses might represent one's time spent at work. They would demonstrate playing loudly enough to dominate the sonority and disrupt the ideal balance.

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[20] Dennie Palmer Wolf and Jeannette Rodríguez Píneda, *The Teaching Artist Companion to* https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/TeachingArtistCompanion%20to%20Aesthetic%20Perspectives_final.pdf. (Washington, DC: Americans for the Arts, 2019), 8, https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/TeachingArtistCompanion%20to%20Aesthetic%20Perspectives_final.pdf.

[21] Blachly.

[22] Wallace, 15-16.

[23] Wallace, 33.

[24] Blachly.

By simply asking listeners to identify and articulate their preferences, Carlos Andres Botero of the Houston Symphony taps into the audience's creativity and musical insight. He encourages listeners by emphasizing that there is no secret to appreciating music; only paying closer attention and noticing more intentionally.[25]

Connect People

As stated in the previous chapter, "people respond to people."[26] Audiences love feeling like they know the players onstage, not necessarily by their professional accomplishments or biographical information, but by their relatable personalities projected from the stage.[27] The audience's perception of the musician has a huge impact on their responses to the performance.[28] Having performers talk about the parts they play or sing can be especially effective.[29].

If the organization's goal is to connect individual listeners to each other, it often helps to make things social in a collective way first.[30] Consider these steps suggested by Nina Simon in *The Participatory Museum*:[31]

Step 1: Consume Art

Step 2: Interact with it

Step 3: Personal responses are solicited in the large group setting; could be by raising hands to reveal a personal preference or interest. This could also be collected with sticky notes or an online platform that shows real time results, such as Google Jamboard.

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[25] Carlos Andres Botero, Interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, September 1, 2021.

[26] Sandow.

[27] Roitstein.

[28] Wallace, 21.

[29] Blachly.

[30] Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010), Chapter 1, http://www.participatorymuseum.org.

[31] Ibid.

Even stopping at this stage can create a significant sense of connection between listeners. If your organization is flexible and willing enough to pursue more substantial personal connection, continue on to the final steps:

Step 4: Connect people with similar responses to have experiences that are meaningful to them; this may involve asking people to move out of their seats and gather in a different part of the space.

Step 5: Those people engage socially, discussing prompts and answering each other's questions.

Another important aspect of connecting people to each other is creating a shared sense of creativity and making people feel as though they are part of the music-making.[32] Asking audiences to suggest manipulations to musical elements or changes to a player's performance in a group setting (as mentioned in Step 3 above) can create for listeners a sense of being part of a team that is engaging with this musical work together.[33]

Provide Different Levels/Modes of Participation

An interactive concert can resemble the best types of teaching: both exciting and challenging with times for participation and quiet contemplation, and with multiple modes of engagement.[34] Presenters can offer strategic invitations to participate with different levels of risk. Thomas Cabaniss offers the example of teaching the audience to perform a musical excerpt made up of three different parts.[35] One part could be sung along with the chorus, offering a great deal of safety and support. A portion of the audience could then be taught another musical line and

[32] Botero.
[33] Roitstein.
[34] Thomas Cabaniss, interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, September 2021.
[35] Ibid.

challenged to hold their part without the help of the ensemble. Finally, the presenter could ask "Who knows a verse to this song? Here's the microphone." Cabaniss says we may be surprised how often someone in the audience is willing to take on this final option.

While choices for various modes of involvement can be offered simultaneously like this, the sequence of the concert can also allow for various modes of interactivity. There could be an activity that involves showing hand signs to reflect musical phenomena, then guided performance by the audience as described above, a prompt for personal reflection, and even opportunities for sharing responses or open discussion. By providing many levels to enter into the experience, presenters can increase the likelihood that each listener will feel comfortable taking the plunge at some point.[36] Each listener gets to decide whether to connect with the context of a musical work or not, but arts presenters can give as many opportunities as possible.[37]

Ask Good Questions

Audiences are generally not used to being asked to answer questions or share reflections in the concert hall and may show hesitancy at first. Luckily, there are several strategies for helping listeners feel safe and valued enough to respond candidly. It is often helpful to begin with what might be considered "softball" questions; those that anyone can answer and can respond to collectively.[38] A great way to begin this type of listener talk-back is to focus on reactions, especially feelings of confusion, disinterest, passion, pleasure, or disgust.[39] Remind audiences that they know what they like using prompts such as, "Was it too much of something? Or not enough?"[40] The presenter can then follow that line of inquiry and expand on audience

[36] Ibid.

[37] Botero.

[38] Wallace, 127.

[39] Lynne Conner, "Who Gets to Tell the Meaning?" *GIA Reader* 15 no. 1 (2004), https://www.giarts.org/article/who-gets-tell-meaning.

[40] Sandow.

comments ("Oh too repetitious! Yes, you're right it was repetitious - and you didn't like that. Did anyone else like the repetition? What did that experience feel like?").[41] In this way, facilitators are not transferring information, but are creating space for discovery.[42]

Successful questions draw on listeners' own knowledge and experience rather than institutional or musicological mastery.[43] A participant must feel confident that they are capable of answering.[44] Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is an interpretive method often used by museum staff to encourage discussion. The strategy revolves around three basic questions: "What's going on in this picture?" "What do you see that makes you say that?" and "What more can we find?"[45] These prompts could easily be adapted for music listening to achieve the same results. It is important to remember here that successful audience enrichment starts with what the audience already knows and ends with listeners identifying, labeling, or evaluating musical outcomes.[46] Try beginning transparently by revealing the intended outcome for the activity or discussion.[47]

In order to prompt rich responses, questions must be open-ended enough to solicit a variety of responses. As Nina Simon says, "If there's a 'right answer,' it's the wrong question.[48] In fact, when you want audiences to deliver a certain answer, they hardly ever do.[49] Remember, however, that just like any student, audience members benefit from scaffolding in their learning so they know how to be successful at the given task. Participants will respond better to prompts

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Lynne Connor, *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013), 103.

[43] Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Chapter 4.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Connor, *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era*, 103.

[47] Ibid., 128-132.

[48] Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Chapter 4.

[49] Blachly.

that have some sort of limiting constraint, rather than completely open invitations for self-expression.[50]

The presenter should, therefore, aim to use the chosen entry point to open a line of inquiry into the work, then enable audience members to ask their own questions as a way of noticing more and experiencing things in a personal way.[51] When posing these types of questions, one must be ready for any type of answer, even the undesirable kind (e.g. "I thought it was boring and didn't like it at all").[52] Be ready to embrace struggle, indecision, disagreement, and contradiction and invite them into the discourse.[53]

There are two kinds of great questions which fulfill all the requirements described: personal and speculative.[54] The first asks listeners to reflect on a life experience related to the musical content (e.g., "Take a moment to recall a time when you felt…" or "Think back to the first time you experienced…"). The second involves predictions and "what if?" questions (e.g. "What do you think might happen next?" or "What if the sopranos sang this line more smoothly? How would that change the character?"). Audience members can be linked to each other through the guidance of the presenter, where questions from participants can be turned out for other audience members to respond to (e.g. "That's a fantastic question - who has thoughts about this?" or "How does that comment strike you?").[55]

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[50] Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Chapter 4.

[51] Blachly.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Connor, *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era*, 128-132.

[54] Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Chapter 4.

[55] Bob Harlow, Thomas Alfieri, Aaron Dalton, and Anne Field, *Building Deeper Relationships: How Steppenwolf Theatre Company Is Turning Single-Ticket Buyers Into Repeat Visitors* (Bob Harlow Research and Consulting and the Wallace Foundation, 2011), 17, https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/wallace-studies-in-building-arts-audiences-building-deeper-relationships.aspx.

A discussion facilitator's job is to work themselves out of the discussion.[56] As much as possible, the presenter should not be viewed as an "expert" and should refrain from sharing any personal opinions or interpretations.[57] Again, the goal here is to get the group thinking collectively and building their own meaning.[58] When the facilitator shows that they really care about participant responses, audiences feel safe enough to share their reflections and ask sincere questions.[59] An important aspect of building this sense of belonging is validating each contribution.[60] Honor what each person has to say by verifying, clarifying, or rephrasing each response (e.g. "So you are saying…").[61] Then try to expand on the comment ("Why do you think that is?").[62] While the facilitator aims to stay out of the dialogue, they should not be completely invisible or impartial. Rather, they should work to be everyone's ally.[63]

"Not spinach"

Lastly, presenting organizations must respect audiences and understand why they came, yet invite them to do more.[64] You are not, as Cabaniss says, "making them have their spinach."[65] Interactive concert elements should not be an academic exercise, nor should they resemble a lecture recital.[66] You are not presenting a checklist of things they should listen for, but are empowering them to feel like they own the listening experience.[67] The presenter must be willing

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[56] Connor, *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era*, 118.
[57] Sandow.
[58] Harlow et al., *Building Deeper Relationships*, 17.
[59] Sandow.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Connor, *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era*, 128-132.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Cabaniss.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Blachly.
[67] Ibid.

to meet people where they are, effacing any hint of musical elitism.[68] The tone should be conversational, injected with the personality, warmth, enthusiasm, and natural persona of each presenter.[69] One should not read from a script, which means that some elements require significant preparation in order to project the desired spirit of inclusivity, belonging, and community empowerment.[70]

[68] Taylor Lockwood, interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, September 2021.
[69] Wallace, 21.
[70] Blachly.

Chapter 6

CATALOG OF INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES

Building Investment

The following are examples of activities that promote personal investment in the musical selection.

Emotional Framing[1]

This technique is used masterfully by Thomas Cabaniss and is shared with his permission. The basic notion is that you ask listeners to call to mind a feeling, experience, emotion, or life event before performing a portion of the musical work for them. By asking listeners to first put themselves in a certain emotional frame of mind, hearing the music can then amplify those feelings.

The prompts can be connected to a purely instrumental portion of the music (perhaps an evocative introduction or interlude) or could connect to the text itself. This activity is especially effective when it can demonstrate the duality of emotions within a musical excerpt. For a setting of text from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Cabaniss once used the prompt, "Think of a time that an opportunity came your way, and you passed it by." He then asked, "Think of a time when an opportunity came your way, and you seized it." followed by a second hearing of the same excerpt. Other effective prompts might begin with "Remember the first time you experienced…" or "Recall a time when you felt…"

[1] Thomas Cabaniss, interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, September 2021.

When the audience hears this portion of the music in context during the actual performance, they will be better able to connect to a personal experience, making it even more meaningful. This activity is a wonderful way to begin a concert, providing a low-pressure introduction to interactive experiences.

If your excerpt lends itself to multiple prompts, such as in the example above, the excerpt may be performed two to three times without concern. It is also very effective to perform the musical portion once with one very poignant emotional prompt. I have found the ideal excerpt to be between forty-five seconds and two minutes in length.

Sharing Anonymous Reflections

A reflective prompt related to the program's theme can be shared at the beginning of the concert (for example, "What gives you hope?"). Listeners can be encouraged to share their responses anonymously for public viewing, providing another opportunity for community co-authorship. The Walker Art Center had audiences write responses on sticky notes that were fixed to each program.[2] At intermission and at the reception, listeners were invited to place their sticky notes on a wall in the lobby for all to view. Additional pens and sticky notes were provided on the cocktail tables for those who wished to contribute multiple responses. Photos of the display were later used in the art center's promotional materials. Organizations could facilitate something similar electronically, using a google form or word cloud generator. For virtual performances, reflections and responses can be shared in real time using the chat or comment functions.

[2]Alan Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin, *Making Sense of Audience Engagement Vol 2* (San Francisco: The San Francisco Foundation and Wolf Brown, 2011), 63, https://www.wolfbrown.com/post/makingsense.

Make Their Opinions Matter[3]

There are many ways to empower audiences to share their opinions. During intermission, audiences can vote for their favorite piece from the first half of the concert, and the winner can be played as an encore at the end of the concert. It may add an extra layer of amusement to have listeners vote in the lobby by dropping tokens or slips of paper into the container representing their choice. Containers could be transparent to show the progress of one piece over another, or opaque to add some suspense. To further encourage voting, the organization can have the voting slips include the name and contact information of the voter and one could be drawn at the end of the concert for a special prize (perhaps free tickets to the next concert or some sort of merchandise). It may be enjoyable to host a discussion with the audience in the second half before the winner is revealed, using prompts such as "Which piece did you like?" and "What did you like about it?" Greg Sandow, a music critic and professor who often leads discussion in concerts, noticed an extraordinary outpouring of eloquent and insightful observations after one such voting activity. Since their opinions mattered, the audience members had listened more intently during the concert.[4]

Another option is to have audiences express their opinions with applause during a performance. Sandow tells of a letter that Mozart wrote to his father where he describes a portion of his new composition that he knew the audiences would love. Mozart was so confident that he reprised this section at the end of the work, knowing that it would cause a joyous commotion among listeners. Before a performance of this particular work in Pittsburgh, Sandow read Mozart's letter to the audience and encouraged them to applaud whenever they believed the

[3] Greg Sandow, interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, September 2021
[4] Ibid.

orchestra was playing the passage discussed. This challenge has two layers; the audience could predict what they thought the 18th-century audience loved or they could vote for the passage they personally loved. The mystery was revealed when the orchestra arrived at the final movement. Some of the event organizers feared listeners would not be able to hear the music through the applause, but they happily discovered that the audience was so primed to listen to every new thing, that they abruptly stopped applauding every time the music changed. They were in fact listening harder and hearing more now that their opinions mattered.[5]

An event organizer might consider "seeding" a few trusted people in the audience to get the applause going. Sandow sees this as a favor to the audience; giving them permission to do something out of the ordinary. There are pieces in the choral canon that might lend themselves to this activity (one is Felix Mendelssohn's *Psalm 42*), but a choral organization could also commission a new work to function in this way. The players and singers should certainly be encouraged to smile and react to audience applause. They may even perform differently in order to draw out audience response. It may be an interesting addition to include a talk-back with the audience and ensemble afterwards to discuss what the experience was like or any surprises, such as portions that performers thought would get a response but did not or vice versa.

Teaching How to Listen

Listeners can be empowered by an introduction to the many ways of approaching a listening experience. Activities such as these demonstrate how to "notice what there is to be noticed,"[6] a skill that makes music listening more enjoyable for both novices and experts.

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[5] Sandow.

[6] Maxine Greene, *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 6.

Listening to Layers[7]

Any way to direct listeners' attention to inner voices and layers in musical texture can invite deeper listening. The ensemble can sing individual lines separately, then together, and ask the audience, "Do you hear all of it? Did you really hear those altos/tenors/basses in the midst of all the other sounds?" If the audience does not respond confidently, feel free to enthusiastically say, "Let's hear that section alone again! Now this time, can you hear all of it?" This can even be done with an individual singer or instrumentalist. Discussion prompts for this variation could include, "Can you really hear that person in the back of the section? Maybe? Let's hear them by themself! Now can you still hear them within the entire ensemble?"

The ensemble could do a similar procedure using only one chord. The presenter can act as a mixing board, turning the volume up or down on certain pitches to help listeners cue into each component of the chord or to explore how it changes in balance and overall effect. Asking the listeners to respond with nonverbal cues, such as thumbs up or down, pointing, correlating hand height with volume changes, or a 1 to 5 rating scale on the hand can help encourage participation. Activities such as this can also be combined with aspects of a Perform-Along (listed in the next section). The audience can be taught to sing one of the lines or chord members along with the choir to maximize the effectiveness of the experience.

Another playful option, depending on the energy and willingness of the group, is to attach different aspects of everyday life to each musical layer.[8] One part could represent work, another family time, a third could be hobbies, and so on. Then, when exploring how changes in balance

[7] Blachly.
[8] Ibid.

and volume make the excerpt feel different, the audience can be led to connect to their own lived experiences.

Musician Coaching[9]

Invite the audience to coach the musicians on any aspect of musicality (e.g. dynamics, articulation, tempo, etc.) in order to attain a desired aesthetic. For example, the text of a passage could be read to the audience and they could suggest adjectives describing the general mood or effect. The musicians could then perform the musical passage in a way that intentionally does not match the text's aesthetic or composer's intentions. One example could be performing "And the Glory of the Lord" from *Messiah* slowly or legato and ask the audience to manipulate elements of the performance to make it more joyful and triumphant. This may also be accomplished with a soloist's aria, which one may find to be easier to coordinate. This type of activity can lead to great conversations about the conductor's artistic choices.

Musician Audition[10]

An especially evocative or iconic passage can be performed by different sections of the choir, soloists, or instruments. The audience can then vote, even informally through applause, for who they believe is best suited for that musical excerpt. This could be turned into a light-hearted competition with the audience deciding who sounds most like a certain extra-musical sound. There are great opportunities here to open dialogue, especially regarding timbre.

Listening Through Someone Else's Ears[11]

Invite audiences to imagine what it might sound like if they were listening from another person's position in the room. This can be especially effective in creative immersive setups, but

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[9] David Wallace, *Engaging the Concert Audience: A Musician's Guide to Interactive Performance* (Boston, MA: Berklee Press, 2018), 40.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Blachly.

also works well in a traditional concert space. This type of strategy can be successfully combined with aspects of a Perform-Along activity, where audiences may be asked to sing while simultaneously imagining what it might sound like from a different perspective.

Utilizing Hand Signs/Gestures[12]

By taking suggestions from the audience, the presenter can guide the group in creating hand gestures that represent certain themes or melodies, musical shapes, dynamics, emotions, or any other musical element. Audiences can be invited to display a certain hand sign when they recognize a familiar theme, or to explore the different options for performing a musical line. As mentioned in Chapter 5, making fists or stretching an imaginary rubber band can work well for simulating tension and release.[13] The presenter could teach the audience how to conduct a passage, perhaps even inviting a volunteer to come up and conduct the ensemble. Here lies another great opportunity to get that person talking about what the experience felt like.

Games[14]

There are a number of familiar games that can be adapted for an interactive learning experience. David Wallace suggests trying *Sesame Street*'s "One of These Things is Not Like the Others," Follow the Leader, Twenty Questions, Truth or Dare, or Simon Says. Red Light Green Light might also be used to explore layers of texture. An audience volunteer could be assigned to each section of the ensemble and equipped with a stop sign, traffic light, or remote control. The volunteers can then mute and unmute their section of the ensemble at will, revealing the roles that each part plays and highlighting features buried in the musical texture.

[12] Wallace, 35.
[13] Ibid., 32.
[14] Ibid., 49-50.

Group Composition[15]

With reasonable parameters, the audience can be guided in creating their own piece using the composer's musical materials. Unless you have a group of singers that are exceptional at improvising, this may work best with instrumentalists or collaborative pianists who have a collection of pitches or chords that the audience may manipulate. Consider presenting the musical elements of tempo, rhythm, texture, dynamic, timbre, and pitch range as if they were painter's tools. The audience can then give suggestions on how to make it sound sorrowful, busy, like a springtime breeze, etc.

Get Singers Talking[16]

As mentioned previously, audiences often enjoy hearing a musician speak about the part they play or sing. Have your singers or soloists speak about what the experience is like for a performer. Perhaps the audience is curious about what it feels like to sing those high notes or what is going through their minds during a particularly difficult passage. It may be especially effective for singers to describe the sensations of pieces that are slow, mystical, unchanging, or ethereal. In these instances, it might be interesting to invite the audience to reflect on what the listening experience is like for them and how that may differ from the performer's perspective.

Meaningful Demonstrations

Although not interactive in themselves, thoughtful demonstrations can lead to productive interactions with the audience. Perhaps the chosen entry point is a particularly difficult solo or instrumental part. Consider having the performer talk about and demonstrate the difficult passages and what makes them so. If possible, project images of the score. The audience will be

[15] Ibid., 37.
[16] Sandow.

on the edge of their seats during the performance of that passage, wondering if the performer can pull it off.[17]

Perform Along

Audience participation in the choral setting has, for many years, taken the form of Christmas carol sing-alongs and "bring your own score" community Messiah performances. These types of activities help break down the barrier between performer and listener in very direct ways.[18] Here are some additional strategies for developing ownership of the musical material by inviting the audience to perform alongside the ensemble.

Teach the Audience a Part

This may be the most intuitive way to get an audience involved in a choral performance, and many varieties of audience sing-alongs have been employed by David Wallace, Eric Booth, Thomas Cabaniss, and other expert teaching artists. If the piece has a recurring motive, teaching the audience to sing it greatly increases their ability to recognize it in the context of the performance. One simple example may be teaching the audience to sing the recurring hymn present in each movement of *Christ Lag in Todesbanden, BWV 4* by J.S. Bach. Choosing an excerpt where the audience can sing the hymn while parts of the choir fill in other parts could illustrate how the piece is constructed.

If a musical motive recurs with variations, the ensemble could guide listeners in singing one line of the musical texture (preferably one that is unchanging) and experience what it feels like to be surrounded by different harmonic variations. If a musical refrain changes slightly in

[17] Ibid.
[18] Wallace, 39.

each iteration, it may be beneficial for the audience to learn to sing the initial version, increasing the likelihood that they will notice nuanced changes when listening to subsequent repetitions in performance. The ambitious presenter may even wish to teach the audience a part to perform live with the ensemble in the actual performance with the use of a visual or musical cue.[19]

A conductor could teach a melodic excerpt to the audience and proceed to rehearse them until it is really perfect, demonstrating just how much thought and attention to detail goes into preparing a musical work.[20] Similarly, one could take a particularly difficult passage and demonstrate why it is tricky and how it has to be just perfect for it to work.[21] Giving the audience a chance to try aspects of it will ensure that they are engaged when that particular passage is performed.

Piece Simulation

Giving the audience a sense of the construction of a musical work can be very powerful. In an introduction to Ockeghem's *Missa cuiuvis toni*, conductor Scott Metcalfe had the Blue Heron ensemble demonstrate what it would sound like to sing "Happy Birthday" in different modes.[22] The next step might be to have the audience echo the first line of this familiar song in each of the three modes demonstrated and discuss the change in effect.

Similarly, the audience could be taught to perform a version of what they will hear.[23] For example, if the choir was performing a Latin-American piece with several rhythmic layers, the

[19] Ibid.

[20] Eric Booth, *The Music Teaching Artist's Bible Becoming a Virtuoso Educator* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 189.

[21] Ibid., 193.

[22] Blue Heron, "Blue Heron -- Introduction to Missa Cuiusvis toni by Johannes Okeghem (c. 1420-1497)," April 27, 2020, YouTube video, 11:46, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDxU4KmcBbE.

[23] Wallace, 34.

audience could be taught to perform either a simplified form of it or a newly composed example that illustrates the same concept.

Community Sing

This strategy is adapted from Ysaye Barnwell's practice of the same name. The conductor guides the audience in learning a multi-part piece by rote. The trick is to teach it in such an artful and organized way that the audience's performance is part of the concert program.

Commissioning Works[24]

Collaborating with composers creates an opportunity to design the desired type of audience engagement. Perhaps new choral works could be created for audiences to sing recurring melodies or contribute to the texture through ostinato. Pieces could also be designed to facilitate some of the suggestions discussed in the "Making Their Opinions Matter" section. Remember that these types of performance activities are optimized when there are multiple levels or modes of participation, allowing each listener to choose to enter the experience at their own comfort level.[25]

Get Them Talking

There are many creative ways to coax audiences into fruitful discussions in the concert setting, creating opportunities for co-authorship.

Audience Talk-back

Perhaps it is as simple as asking "Did you have a favorite piece? Why? What did you like about it?"[26] If we enter into a dialogue with audiences, it is important to earnestly seek their

[24] Cabaniss.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Sandow.

answers and be willing to use their responses to guide the direction of the discussion.[27] If the questions come from a true place of interest, listeners are more likely to answer honestly. Refer to the "Ask Good Questions" section in Chapter 5 for more on this topic.

Making Predictions[28]

Especially with the premier of a newly commissioned work, one could ask the audience "After this section, what do you think will happen next?" It is wise to come prepared with some suggestions if the audience is hesitant (e.g., "Do you think it will get louder or softer?" or "Do you think it will get more peaceful or busier?"). James Blachly, conductor of the Experiential Orchestra, often speaks with his audience about how rewarding listening involves remembering what has come before, noticing what is happening in the moment, and predicting what will happen next.[29]

Taking Requests[30]

The audience could be offered the opportunity to request to hear any aspect of the piece again (e.g., a favorite passage, the basses singing that low note by themselves, that interesting chord in the treble voices, or just the inner voices by themselves). Again, it is smart to have a few prepared suggestions if needed. Presenters could ask for requests out loud or listeners could submit via smartphone using a Google Form or similar software.

Share Your Listening Experience[31]

This method asks listeners to allow music to evoke scenes, images, or stories in their imaginations, then sharing with each other. Blachly has found success performing an excerpt,

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[27] Carlos Andres Botero, Interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, September 1, 2021.
[28] Sandow.
[29] Blachly.
[30] Wallace, 46.
[31] Blachly.

then asking the audience "What journey did that take you on?" He then hands the microphone to any brave listeners willing to share aloud. One could also consider adding more specific guidance by asking questions such as:

- What images does this draw to mind?
- What sort of setting does this music place you in?
- What was it like when the sopranos did (fill in the blank)?
- What color do you imagine being painted here with this chord?
- If this were a flavor/wine, what type would it be?

Asking the question before each hearing helps the audience know how to be successful. Summoning listener responses can be immensely gratifying for the musicians as well. When inviting people to the microphone (or inviting them to call out from their seats), be prepared to honor every answer, even any negative ones. If there were no responses from the audience, Blachly says he would then turn to the ensemble and joyfully say, "Well, then let's do it again!" If someone were to say the excerpt was boring (which is highly unlikely, but possible), Blachly would turn to the ensemble and say "What can we do to make it less boring then?" He might even ask the audience to help workshop the performance by manipulating dynamics or tempo.

Send questions home

Consider sending home a few questions for listeners to reflect on and discuss as they drive home.[32] This may aid in lengthening the Impact Echo. Listeners could even be encouraged to share responses later on the organization's website or social media platforms.

[32] Alan S. Brown, and Jennifer L. Novak-Leonard, *Engaging Dance Audiences: Summary Assessment of Grantee's Engagement Practices* (WolfBrown, 2011), 7, https://dance-usa.s3.amazonaws.com/page_uploads/WolfBrown_FinalGranteeReport_abridged.pdf.

Unconventional Concert Formats

First-Half: Workshop

The first half of the concert could be used as an interactive introduction to the performance with demonstrations and discussion, followed by intermission and an uninterrupted performance of the works. Eric Booth, author of *The Music Teaching Artist's Bible*, wrote about a performance where the audience arrived expecting a 7:00 pm start time, but the music did not begin until 8:00 pm.[33] The first hour was an interactive workshop where patrons could wander around a large space and visit a number of interactive stations.

One Performance as Warmup for Another[34]

A particularly challenging work could be preceded with a simpler or shorter piece that displays many of the same characteristics. The listeners' ears would be primed in the first half of the concert with the "warmup" piece and interactive activities, followed by intermission and the larger work.

Open Rehearsals

Provide curious listeners with a "behind the scenes" look at how an ensemble prepares by inviting them into a dress rehearsal.[35] The Des Moines Symphony has partnered with their city's Young Professionals Connection to present a less intimidating night of classical music. Drinks were served in the lobby, alongside photo booths and an "instrument petting zoo." Simultaneously in the concert hall, attendees could drop in to watch the orchestra rehearse. Hearing the conductor ask for musical changes from the players not only gives insight into the musicians' process, but can illuminate features to listen for in performance.

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[33] Booth, 187-188.

[34] Wallace, 45.

[35] Brown and Novak-Leonard, *Engaging Dance Audiences*, 7.

Preparatory Concert Series[36]

In preparation for the performance of a larger masterwork, a choral organization could hold a series of smaller interactive concerts to prepare audiences for something as large as an oratorio, mass, requiem, or passion. Preparatory concerts could include excerpts of the masterwork for closer investigation or smaller works by the same composer. For example, a performance of Bach's *Johannespassion* might be preceded by short performances featuring cantatas, highlighting solo movements, discussing historical context, or teaching audiences to sing the chorale melodies. The challenge to acknowledge here is that these concerts will easily draw in patrons who usually seek out extra enrichment before performances. It will require some creativity to market these preparatory performances to wider audiences. Offering these mini-concerts for free in unique venues could prove to be good advertisement for the larger performance, and if thoughtfully executed, could draw in new listeners.

Second Hearing[37]

There is certainly a precedent for giving audiences repeated hearings of challenging works. Beethoven once planned a concert consisting simply of two hearings of his String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132.[38] Webern's *Five Pieces for Orchestra op. 10* was once played for an audience three times in a row.[39] In 1954, Stravinsky premiered *In Memoriam Dylan Thomas* by performing the piece once before intermission and once after. The hearings were bookended by polyphonic works by Gesualdo, Gabrielli, Schutz, Purcell, and Bach. The objective was to

[36] Wallace, 81.

[37] Ibid., 45-46.

[38] Julian Anderson, "On the Practice of Repeating Concert Items in Concerts of Modern or Contemporary Music: Historical Precedents and Recent Contexts, "*Participations* 14 no. 2 (2017): 119.

[39] Ibid., 122.

provide context for the piece by demonstrating its aesthetic influences and perhaps, with the inclusion of Bach's cantata *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit*, give commentary on the theme.[40]

Once the brain is comfortable processing new sounds, it can focus on deeper meanings.[41] Consider giving a performance of a choral work, followed by discussion or interactive activities, then a second performance of the piece. The two hearings could be immediately consecutive or separated by other works without any significant decrease in effectiveness.[42] The two performances need not be identical either.[43]

Emotional Framing for Second Half

Opportunities to mull over reflective prompts could be presented during intermission in preparation for the concert's second half. Wooly Mammoth Theater Company in Washington D.C. held one such event called "Crack It Open." Audiences were offered fortune cookies during intermission, inside of which were questions about one's personal reactions to the play.[44] Responses were collected as handwritten notes at the theater or via email, and exceptionally creative answers were awarded with free merchandise and tickets.[45]

Phenomenon-based programming[46]

Themed choral programs are often tied together with texts on similar subjects or music of the same style period. Consider selecting repertoire based on a common musical phenomenon

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[40] Ibid., 124.

[41] Lynne Connor, *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013), 113.

[42] Andrea Halpern et al., "Audience Reactions to Repeating a Piece on a Concert Programme," *Participations* 14 no. 2 (2017): 149.

[43] Ibid., 148.

[44] Alan Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin, *Making Sense of Audience Engagement Vol 2* (San Francisco: The San Francisco Foundation and Wolf Brown, 2011), 62, https://www.wolfbrown.com/post/makingsense.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Roitstein.

(e.g., extreme dynamics or textural variety) and choose a few strong interactive activities to immerse audiences in that concept.

Unique Venues and Setups

Audience Inside the Ensemble

The Des Moines Community Orchestra opens their final dress rehearsal not only for viewing, but for an immersive experience from within the ensemble. Chairs are interspersed between the players, and patrons are invited to enjoy the sound of the orchestra from one of these spots on stage. The Experiential Orchestra does something similar, allowing audiences to stand among the ensemble during performance and inviting them to move towards instruments that are unfamiliar to them. The hope is that listeners will remember the thrill of those sounds and sensations the next time they are watching from their seats in the house.[47]

Smaller Spaces

The environment has a huge impact on the quality of audience discussion.[48] Using a well-lit and intimate space allows for eye-contact on nonverbal communication. If the presenter can see that someone has a quizzical look on their face, they may be able to prompt in a way that can invite that person to share.[49] Additionally, the soft-spoken attendee may be more willing to share thoughts at a regular volume rather than shouting down from a balcony. One option could be holding preparatory activities and discussions in the lobby before patrons find their seats, or even at the end of intermission. Practitioners I spoke with also suggested ballrooms, university recital halls, churches, urban lofts, and historic homes for interactive and immersive performances.

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[47] Blachly.

[48] Lynne Conner, *Project Brief: Arts Experience Initiative* (Pittsburg, PA: the Heinz Endowments, 2008), 27, https://www.heinz.org/UserFiles/Library/ArtExperienceIniative.pdf.

[49] Sandow.

Unconventional Venues

Choral organizations may wish to partner with bars, coffee shops, comedy clubs, or other businesses. In exchange for a unique venue and access to new audiences, a business can benefit from the ensemble's advertising and exposure to new customers.[50] Emily Isaacson, Artistic Director of the Portland Bach Experience, has used both a brewery and a bowling alley for choral performances. Isaacson recommends using an unconventional venue as an opportunity to upend expectations. She uses beverages, lighting, poetry, architecture, and opportunities for socializing to create events that are not just traditional concerts transported into new spaces. In an unusual performance space, Isaacson recommends that listeners be allowed to come and go as they please, ideally with short concert segments of 5-10 minutes in length.[51]

[50] Wallace, 34.

[51] Emily Isaacson, interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, September 2021.

Chapter 7

SAMPLE SCRIPTS

Interactive Script for *Psalm 42* by Felix Mendelssohn

Emotional Framing
Presenter: "I'd like you to take a moment and recall a time in your own life when you questioned if everything would turn out alright. You may even wish to close your eyes and sit with this memory while we play the following excerpt."

Turn to the orchestra and pause for a few moments. Perform measures 1-13 of Movement 1 (Example 1).

P: "Now I'd like you to think of a time when you hoped for something, longed for something, and that moment when you were convinced it would all work out."

Turn to the orchestra and perform measure 1 through the downbeat of measure 20.

P: "You just heard the text, 'As the deer cries out for fresh water, so my soul longs for you, O God.' In this next piece, *Psalm 42*, Mendelssohn takes us on a journey from longing and despair to hope, and ultimately to triumph. What you just heard was the very beginning of this journey, where Mendelssohn intertwines these two opposing emotions. This interlacing of conflicting emotions continues throughout the work, showing that they can sometimes occupy the same space. Mendelssohn shows us that it is not a straight line from desperation to optimism, but a winding road with many emotional ups and downs.

Musician Audition
P: "I'm curious: how many people in this audience are already somewhat familiar with this piece?" If some raise their hands, say, "Okay, then you will have a leg up on this next section!"

P: "Next, we'd like to perform for you an excerpt from the most hopeful section of the work. The text is 'Why do you trouble yourself, my soul, and why are you so restless in me? Put your hope in God! For I will thank him yet again.' We are curious which voices from the choir you would choose to set this message of hope. Here is that translation again."

Repeat the text translation.

P: "You have two options today. First, here are the sopranos and altos, the high voices, singing this passage."

Lead the ensemble in performance of Movement 4, measures 1-16, with the sopranos and altos singing the melody (Example 2). Be sure to prepare the singers well for this excerpt, encouraging them to commit to a convincing performance.

P: "I might describe that sound as 'trumpety,' bright, like a fanfare. Who else has adjectives that could describe their sound? Go ahead and shout them out."

Allow the audience to contribute their adjectives. If you wait several moments and are met with no responses, you have some options to help get the conversation going. You can say "No ideas yet? Then let's hear it again!" With a smile, turn to the ensemble and repeat the excerpt. You can also help the audience by offering versions of the question with more restrictions, such as, "If this sound were a color, what would it be? Bright or dark? Shiny or matte?" or "If this were a wine, what type would it be? What makes you say that?" You may even wish to consider planting a few friends or family members in the audience that are prepared to call out a response should no one else respond. A little nudge such as this usually does the trick by demonstrating that everyone has permission to break some concert hall conventions.[1]

P: "Next are the low voices, made up of the tenor and bass singers."

Lead the full ensemble in another performance of Movement 4, measures 1-16, with the tenors and basses on their own parts.

P: "It's different, isn't it? How would you describe this sound?"

Welcome audience responses. Be sure to validate each adjective by repeating it for the group. If you get any unexpected responses or adjectives that are vastly different from the others, feel free to follow up by saying, "Oh that is very interesting! Can you tell us more about that? Did anyone else feel that way?" Be prepared to accept all answers and demonstrate that you are truly interested in their honest reactions.

P: "Now would you please use your applause to vote for which type of sound you would choose for this section of text?"

As you call out the high voices or low voices, have the singers from that section wave and cheer to drum up more applause. Encourage your singers to smile and react to the audience!

If the audience chooses the low voices: "Mendelssohn agreed! He chose the low voices for all his moments of comfort in this work."

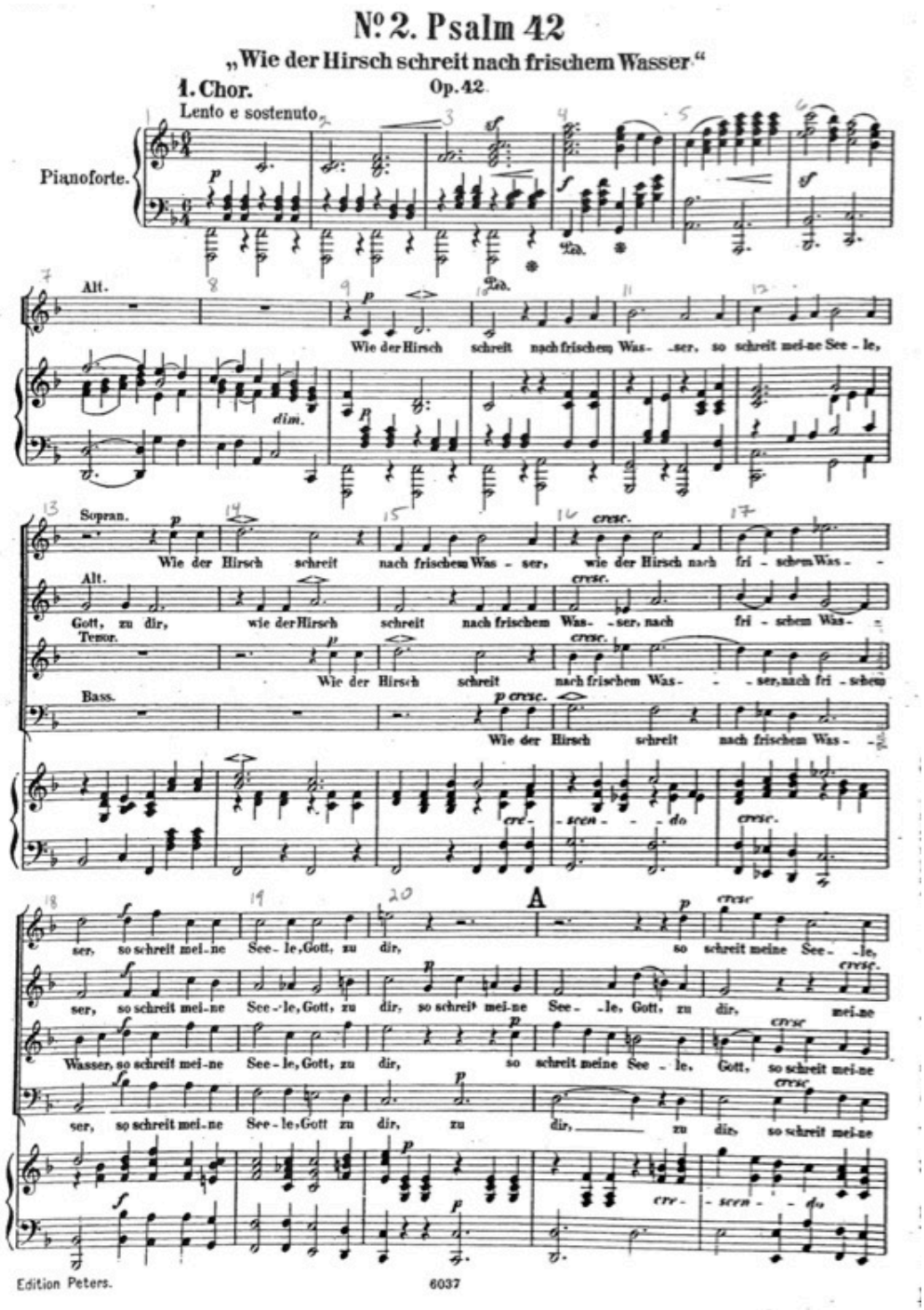
If the audience chooses the high voices: "Wow! You have just made the sopranos' and altos' day!" (Here is an opportunity, if you haven't already led much discussion, to ask the audience why they choose that timbre). "Mendelssohn actually chose the low voices for his setting of this text. The tenors and basses will really be trying to sell you on it in the performance!"

[1] Greg Sandow, interviewed by Lindsey Bruner Woodcock, Zoom, September 2021

Conclusion

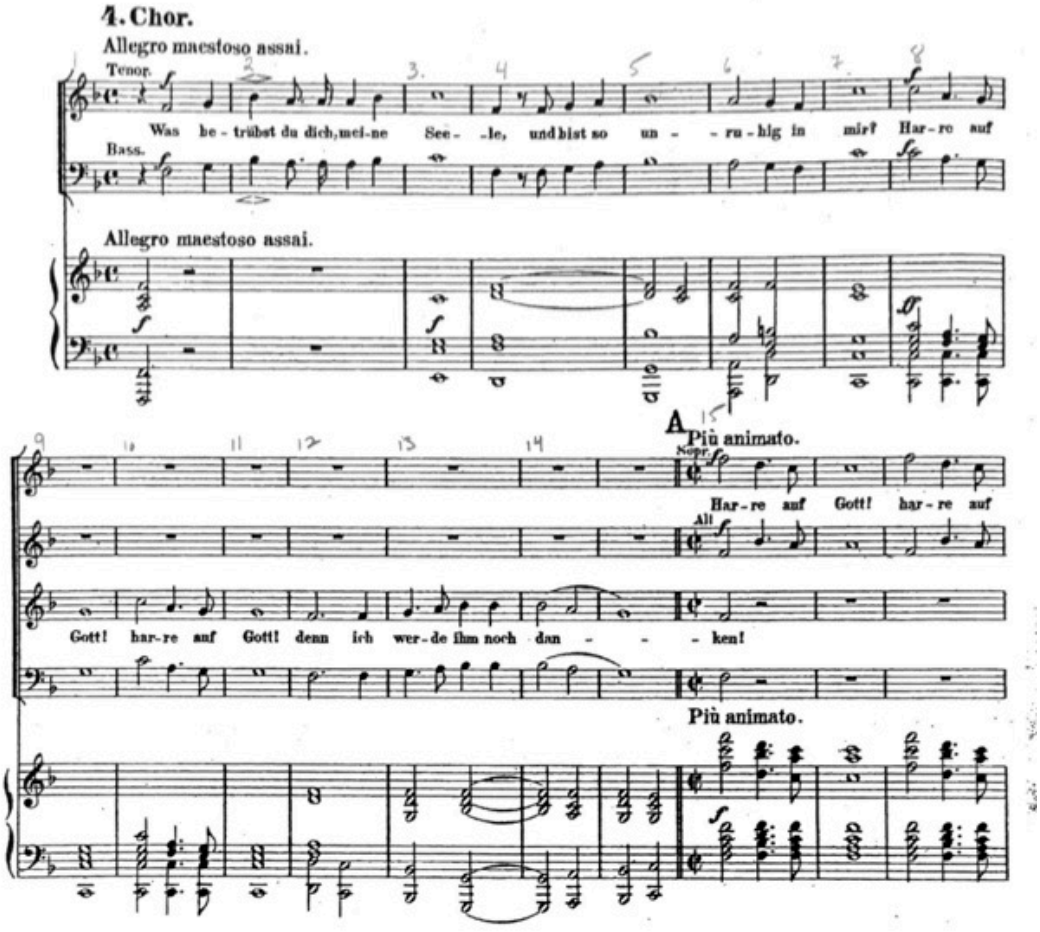
P: "Mendelssohn was so fond of this passage that it appears twice in this piece - once as a message of hope in the middle before descending into despair, and then again in the final movement. It is actually used almost exactly in another choral piece that he wrote. If you'd like to follow along with the translation of the text, it can be found in the program. Or you may choose to just be in the moment, noticing the color choices Mendelssohn made for each section of the work. Now we present to you in its entirety, *Psalm 42* by Felix Mendelssohn."

Example 1. Felix Mendelssohn, *Psalm 42,* movement 1, mm. 1-20.[2]



[2] Felix Mendelssohn, *Psalmen für Chor und Orchester im Klavierauszuge, Ed. 1759a* (Leipzig: C.F. Peters, n.d.), 26.

Example 2. Felix Mendelssohn, *Psalm 42,* movement 4, mm. 1-15.[3]



[3] Ibid., 36.

Interactive Script for *Dixit Dominus* by Marianna Martines

If possible, have the choir spread out around the audience, with each voice part standing together. If it is not possible to encircle the audience, try to find a standing arrangement for this demonstration where each section of the choir is somewhat separated from the others so that each can be perceived as a distinct entity.

Listening to Layers

Presenter: "We'd like to play a little excerpt of the next piece for you, but we'd like you to close your eyes first. While you're listening, if you find your ears being pulled in one direction or another, we'd like you to point to that part of the room. If the sopranos in the far corner catch your attention, point over there. If the orchestra does something that interests you for a moment, point to them here in the center. Perhaps there are moments when your ears are drawn in no place in particular. There are no wrong answers! Just follow wherever your ears lead you."

Perform the fugue of Movement 6, measure 23 through the downbeat of measure 48 (Example 3).

P: "Thanks everybody. Let's do this again, but with your eyes open. You may notice that you're not pointing to the same things as your neighbor, and that's ok."

Repeat performance of the excerpt.

P: "Not only were we all drawn to different things in different moments, but did anyone perceive that what you noticed this time was different from the first time you heard it? (Pause and let the audience raise their hands.) That's the beauty of layered music such as this: there is no right way to listen. One pleasurable way to enjoy music like this is to follow your curiosity and bounce between whichever layer catches your attention in the moment."

Meaningful Demonstration/Teach the Audience a Part

P: "Musicians who perform music of this style work very hard to make sure you can hear all the layers. This means that some notes are short, some are connected, some grow, and some decay. Here's what this section would sound like if we played without these little details."

Demonstrate measures 35-43 legato and sustained throughout, without appropriate phrasing or articulation.

P: "Learning to play this music stylistically is just like learning how to swing when playing jazz; it's a style that makes this music more elegant, charming, and makes the layers more transparent."

Demonstrate again with proper articulations.

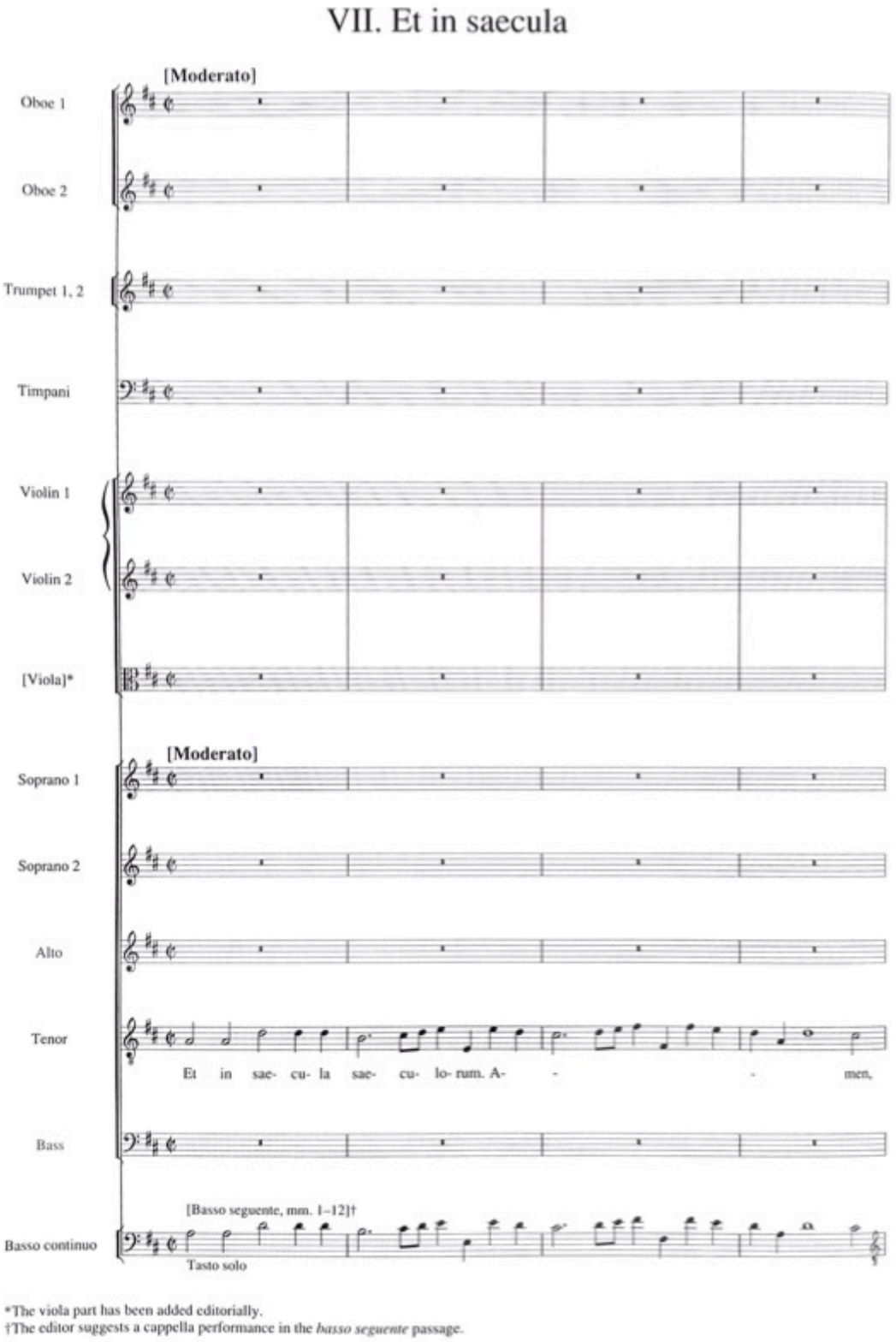
P: "It's your turn to try it now! Would you please sing 'Et in saecula.'"

Teach the audience a very small section of the fugue theme by rote. The section could be as short as “Et in saecula saeculorum” of the bass line in measures 35-36. Have the audience echo it in small chunks and coach them into implementing the desired articulations. If you think it would be helpful, you could make use of a whiteboard or projection of the words with symbols above (a dot for staccato, a pictorial representation of swell and decay, etc.). It may also be helpful to use your hand to illustrate when the pitches go up and down while the audience sings.

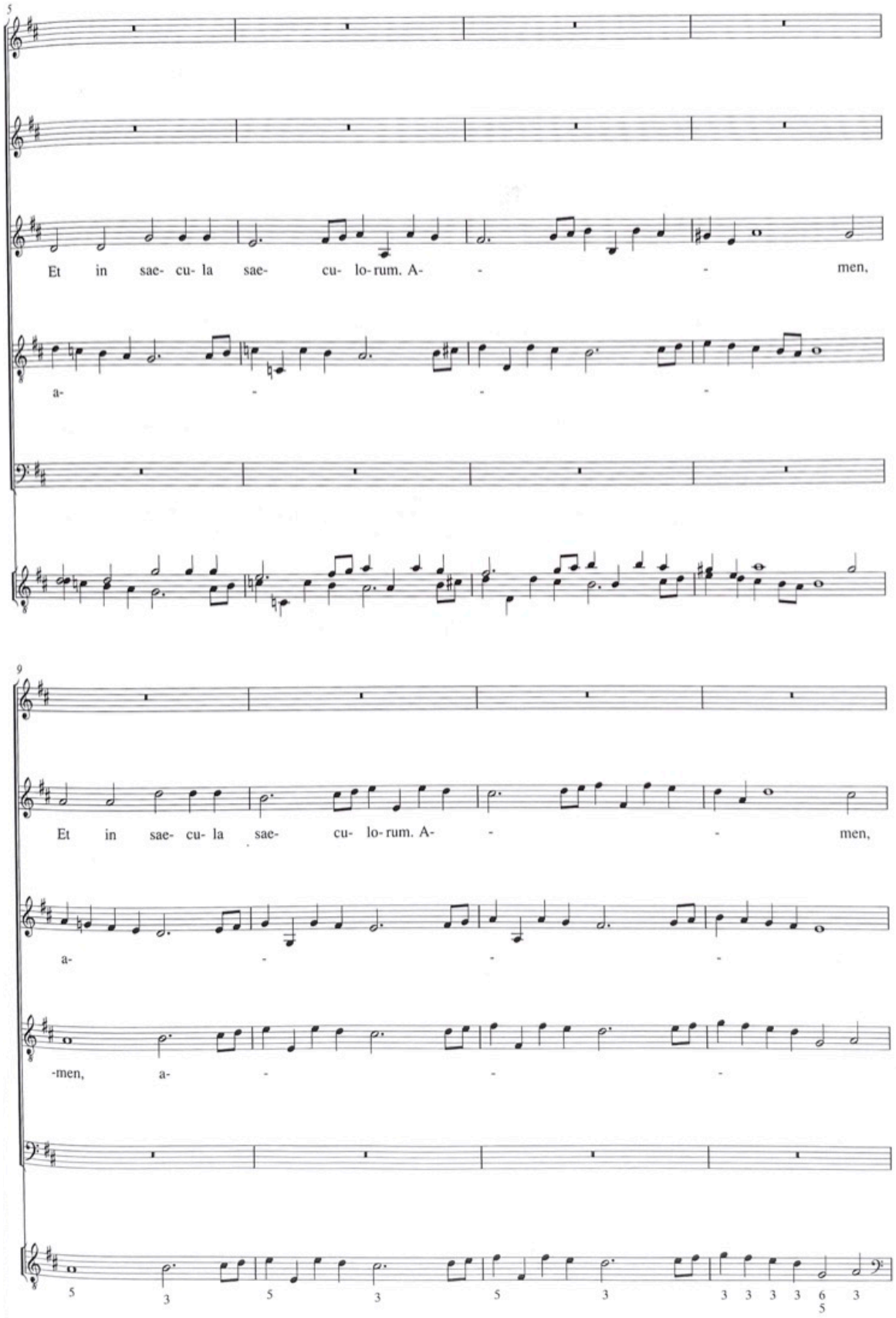
Conclusion

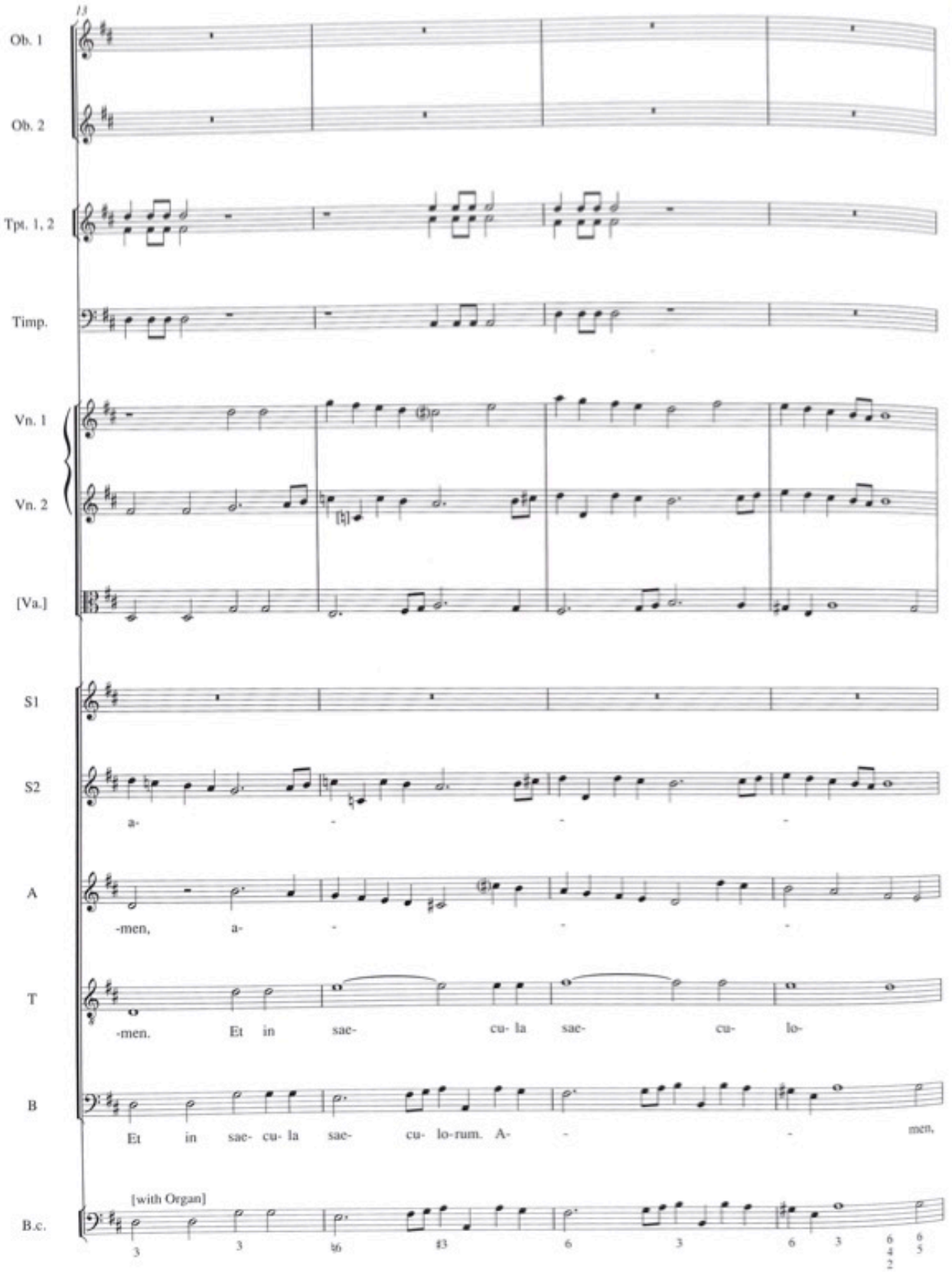
P: “Very good! We believe that this kind of singing makes the music dance. Listening to this type of busy and complex music can sometimes seem intimidating, but can also be an exciting opportunity to discover something new upon each hearing.”

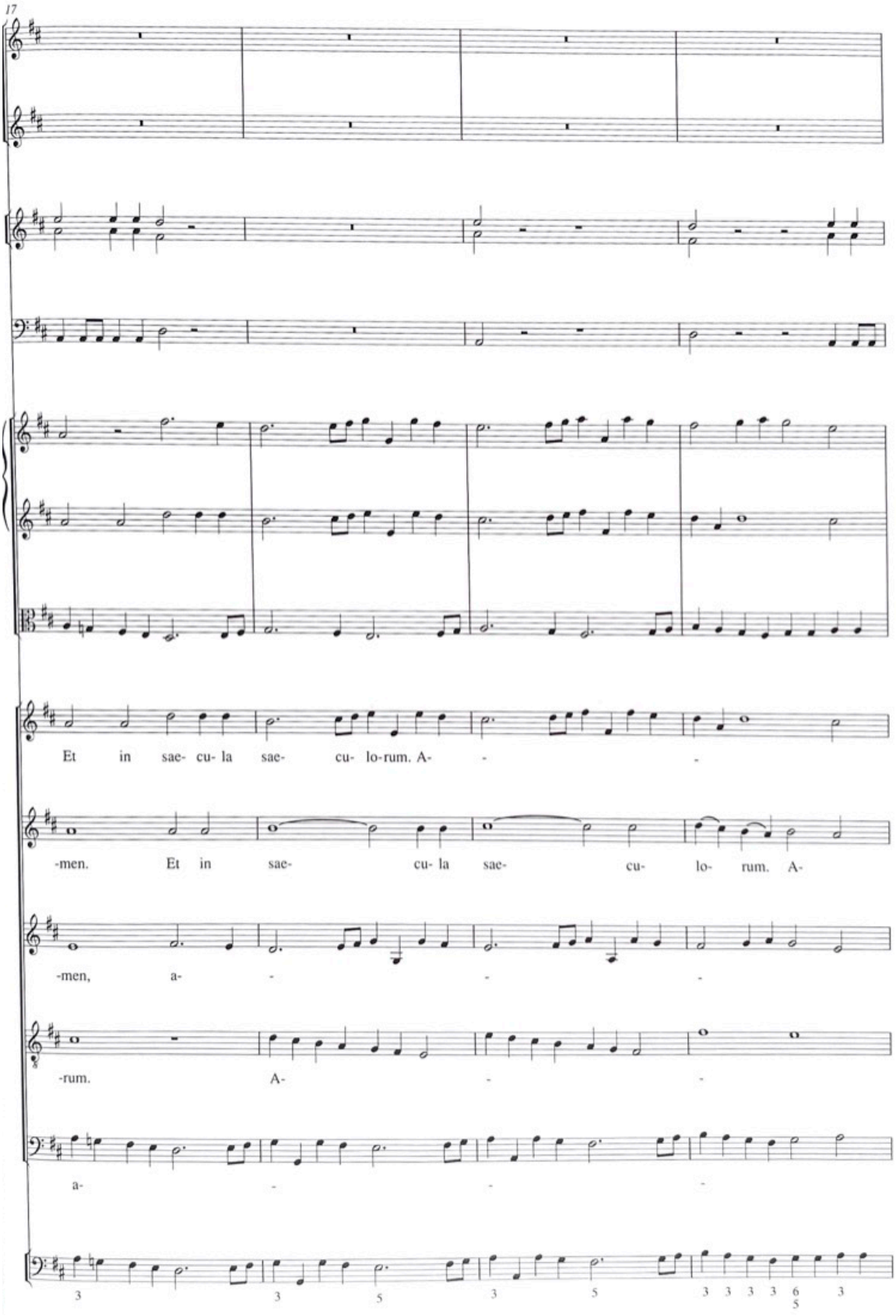
Example 3. Marianna Martines, *Dixit Dominus*, movement 7, mm. 1-26.[4]

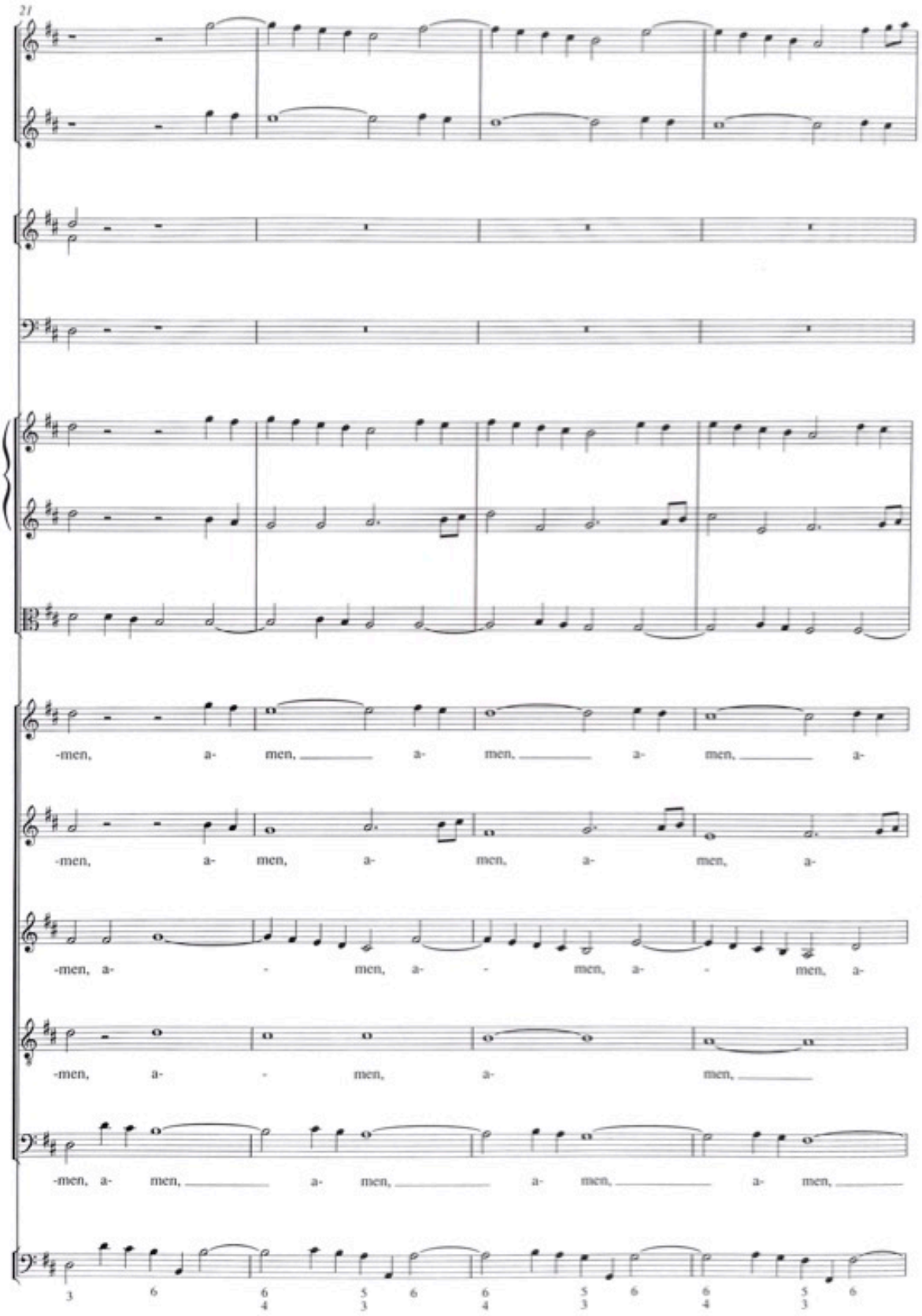


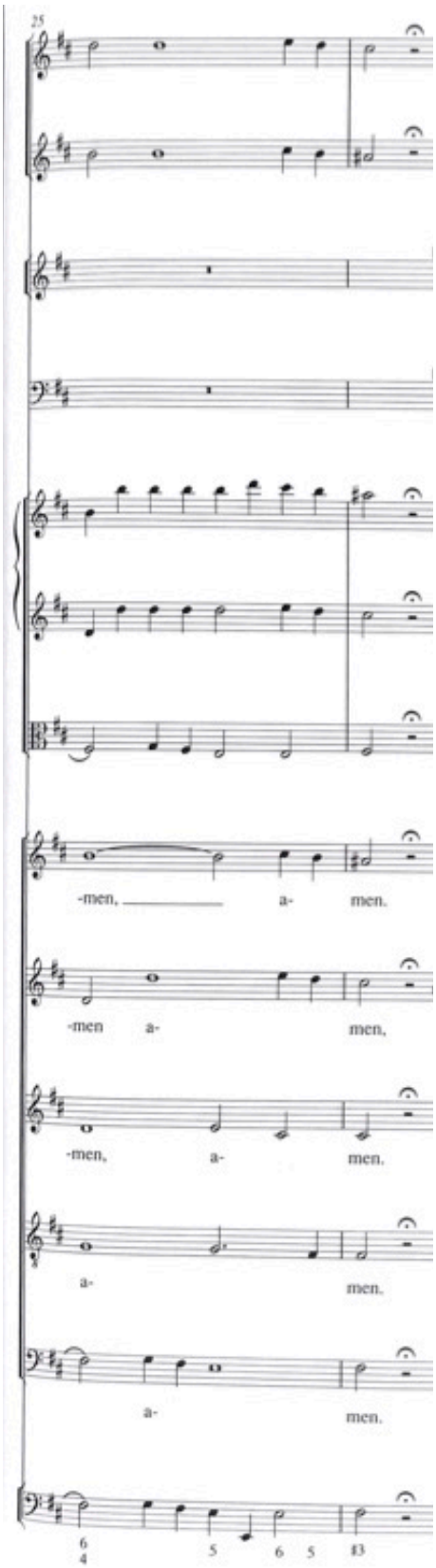
[4] Marianna Martines, *Dixit Dominus,* in Recent Researches in the Music of the Classical Era 48, ed. Irving Godt (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1997), 78-83.


5
Et in sae- cu- la sae- cu- lo- rum. A- - - men,
a- - -
9
Et in sae- cu- la sae- cu- lo- rum. A- - - men,
a- - -
-men, a- - -


13
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Tpt. 1, 2
Timp.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
[Va.]
S1
S2
a- - - -
A
-men, a- - - -
T
-men. Et in sae- cu- la sae- cu- lo-
B
Et in sae- cu- la sae- cu- lo-rum. A- - - men,
[with Organ]
B.c.


17
Et in sae- cu- la sae- cu- lo-rum. A- -
-men. Et in sae- cu- la sae- cu- lo- rum. A-
-men, a- -
-rum. A- -
a- -


21
-men, a- men, a- men, a- men, a-
-men, a- men, a- men, a- men, a-
-men, a- - men, a- - men, a- - men, a-
-men, a- - men, a- men,
-men, a- men, a- men, a- men, a- men,


25
-men, a- men.
-men a- men,
-men, a- men.
a- men.
a- men.
6 5 6 5 3
4

Interactive Script for *Ceremony of Carols* by Benjamin Britten

This activity could be led by the conductor, but would be very effective if led by the pianist or harpist.

Group Composition

Presenter: "We love performing this next piece because of how the composer uses the harp to set an evocative scene for each new section. In the movement titled 'In Freezing Winter Night,' Britten chose to use these notes."

Have the harpist play the pitches of the first measure (D, G, A-flat, B-flat) of Movement 8 in steady, ascending quarter notes (Example 4).

P: "If you were to make those notes sound like a freezing winter wind, would you choose to set them higher or lower?"
Have the harpist demonstrate what these pitches would sound like on the low and high end of the instrument. Continue to guide the audience through the compositional process by systematically offering them choices. Remember to let them hear the options. Some effective ones might include:

- Would you choose to have the notes played rhythmically or flowing?
- Loud or soft?
- Fast or slow?
- Do you think it works better if the notes jump around or if they go in ascending/descending order?"
- Should any of them be played together as chords or all separately? Any repeated pitches?
- Allow them the opportunity to offer any other ideas of their own.

Through this process of offering the audience compositional choices, help them create an ostinato one measure in length. You may use the pitches that Britten chose, as suggested here, or you may remove that restriction if your harpist is comfortable improvising. If your harpist is not as comfortable improvising in response to audience suggestions, be sure that they are prepared with figures that are rhythmic, flowing, chordal, disjunct, etc., according to the options offered. The goal here is not to recreate Britten's ostinato, but to help the audience create their own. If it ends up similar to Britten's, that is great. If it ends up quite different, there is another opportunity for meaningful discussion.

Have the harpist perform several repetitions of the newly composed ostinato.

P: "Wonderful! Here is how Britten chose to arrange those notes to help us feel that icy winter wind."

Have the harpist play the first few measures of Movement 8.

An optional discussion could begin here with, “Do you like his or do you think ours works better? What do you/don’t you like about it?” This could also be skipped depending on audience receptivity.

P: “Here is how Britten set the scene for a movement about springtime.” Harpist plays several measures of Movement 9, “Spring Carol.”

P: “Here is how Britten set the backdrop for the battle scene.” Harpist plays several measures of Movement 6, “This Little Babe.”

Piece Simulation
P: “In this movement, Movement 6, Britten has set the choir’s melody in canon. You might be familiar with this musical device. We often use it when singing ‘Row, Row, Row Your Boat.’ Let’s try it!”

Lead the audience, with the ensemble’s support, in singing “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” in unison. Assist them in singing it in a two-part round with the second entrance one measure later. Next, help the ensemble sing the two-part canon with entrances only two beats apart, then one beat apart. You may wish to split the ensemble to sing along with each group. You may even choose choristers to step out and conduct each group, giving big gestures for the beginning of each phrase.

P: “Did you find that hard to do? Let’s try it again, and as much as you can, try not to only focus on your own part, but try to hear (or at least be aware of) the other part as well.” Lead the audience through one more pass of the song in canon.

P: “In the movement titled “This Little Babe,” the choir sings the melody in very close canon like this. Here is the melody by itself.”

Have the choir perform the soprano line only of Movement 6, measures 37-50 (Example 5). This demonstration is most effective if sung acapella.

P: “The choir sings this in close canon, just like you did, but with the addition of a third part.”

Have the choir sing all three parts of measures 37-50 without accompaniment.

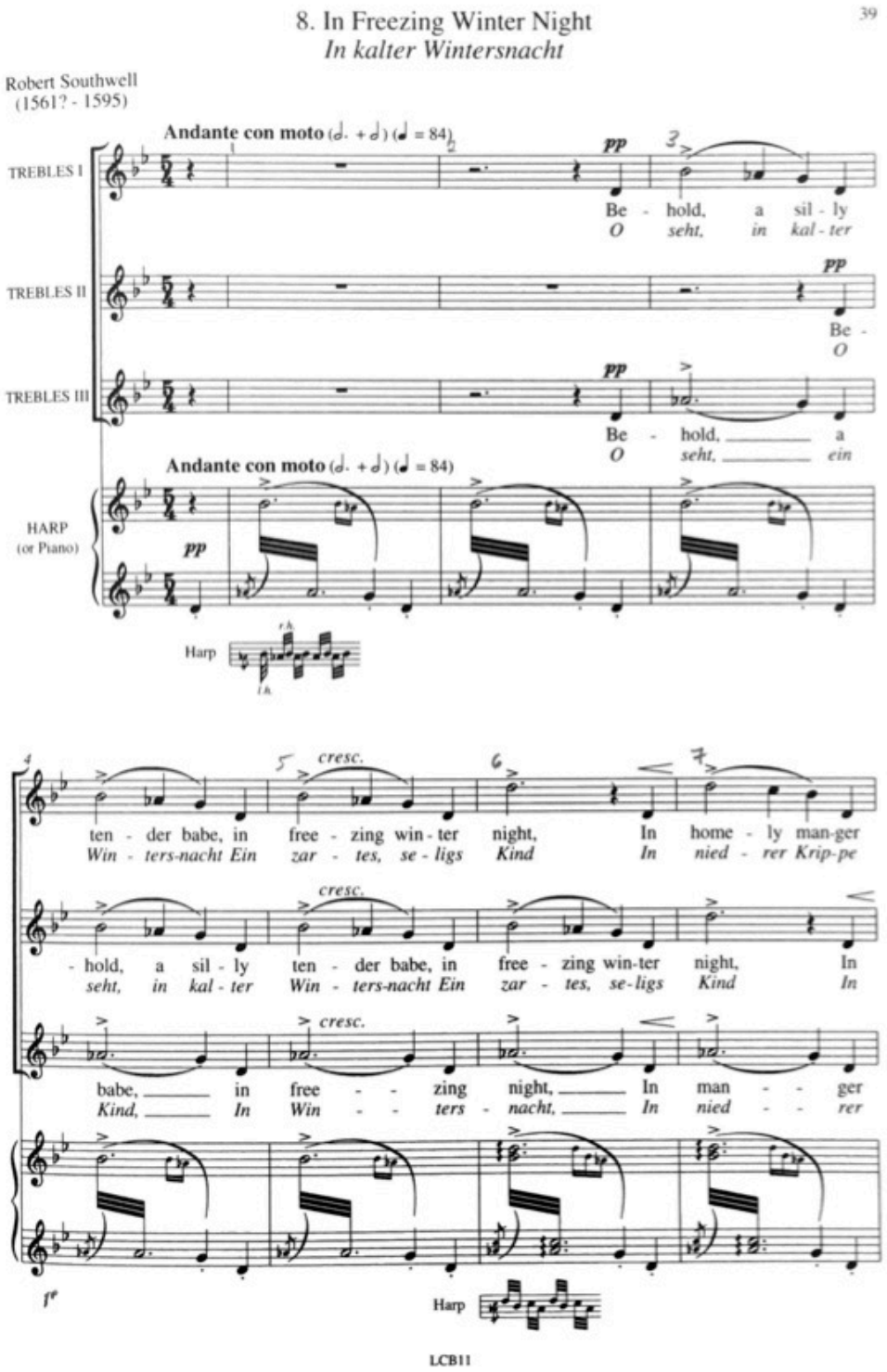
P: “It’s a strange effect, isn’t it? Almost like an echo ricocheting off the walls of a stadium, or perhaps in this case, maybe it’s the sound of cannons firing in the distance. Choir, what does it feel like to sing that section?” Have singers ready to give a few words about the sensations of performing this part, its difficulties, or what it reminds them of.

Conclusion
P: “Britten has made so many choices here. He manipulated the pitch, speed, volume, and combined notes in ways that make each movement sound completely different, even though he only used a choir of treble voices and one harp. That is like making a series of beautiful paintings

with only two colors of paint. You can dab or slather the paint on the canvas in different ways, you can mix them to make different shades, or you can layer them to make different textures.

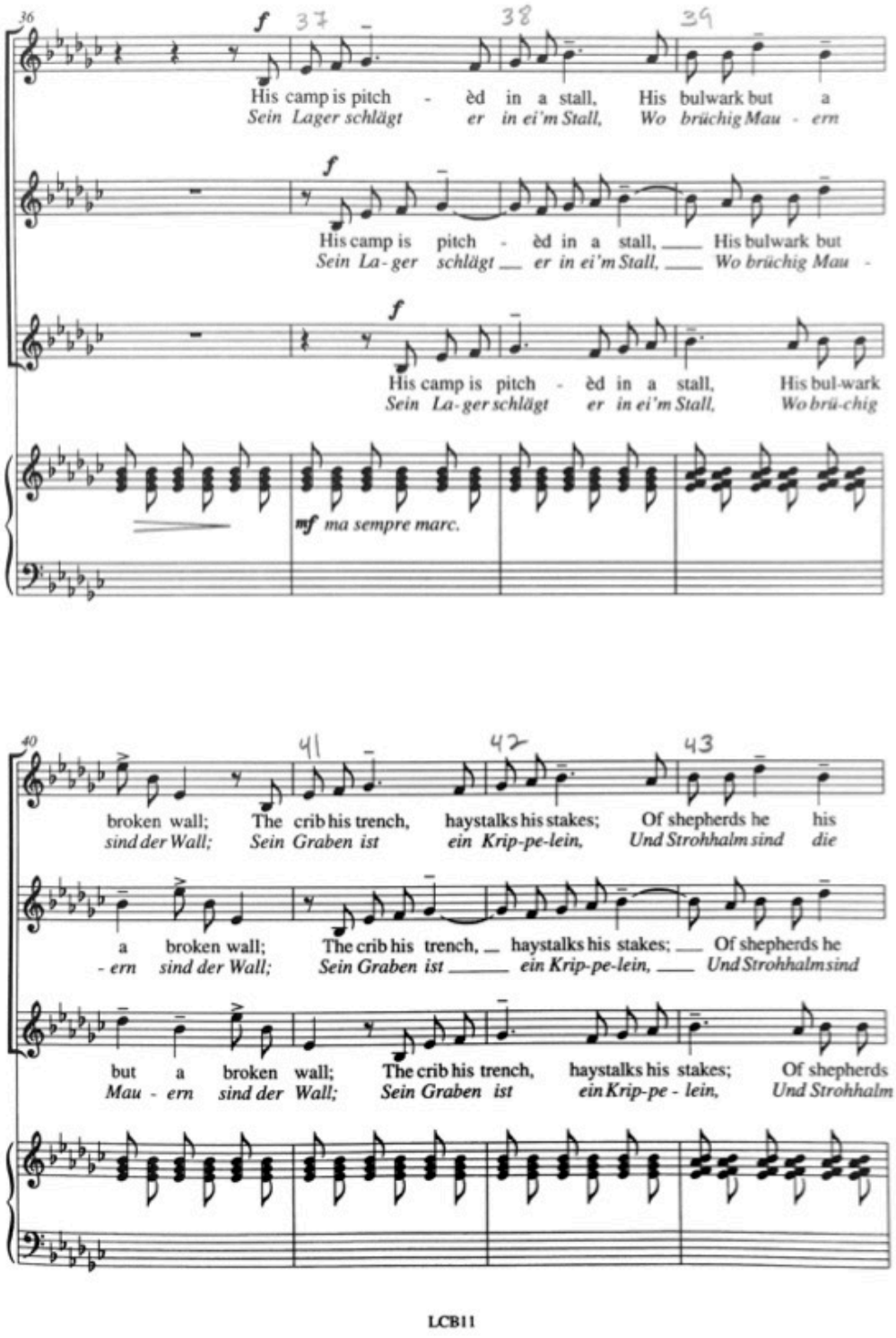
I think we all have our favorite movements in this piece, whether it's because of the vivid scenes set by the harp or the way this mystical text is set in the voices. We hope you'll be able to find a favorite too."

Example 4. Benjamin Britten, *Ceremony of Carols,* movement 8,"Freezing Winter Night," mm. 1- 7[5]

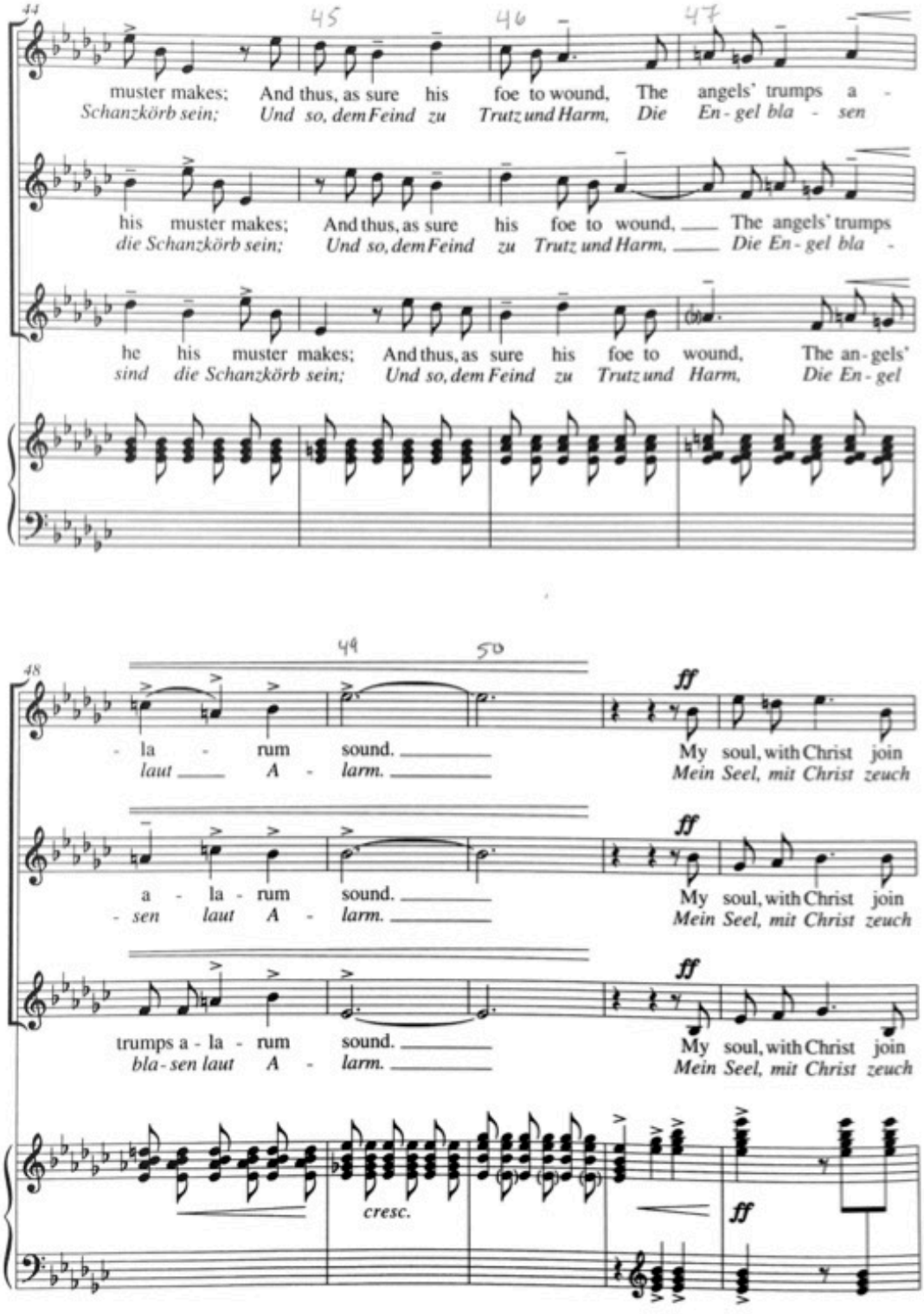


[5] Benjamin Britten, *Ceremony of Carols*, *Op. 28* (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1994), 139.

Example 5. Benjamin Britten, *Ceremony of Carols,* movement 6,"This Little Babe," mm. 37- 50.[6]



[6] Ibid., 33-34.


44
45
46
47
muster makes; And thus, as sure his foe to wound, The angels' trumps a -
Schanzkörb sein; Und so, dem Feind zu Trutz und Harm, Die En - gel bla - sen
his muster makes; And thus, as sure his foe to wound, The angels' trumps
die Schanzkörb sein; Und so, dem Feind zu Trutz und Harm, Die En - gel bla -
he his muster makes; And thus, as sure his foe to wound, The an - gels'
sind die Schanzkörb sein; Und so, dem Feind zu Trutz und Harm, Die En - gel
48
49
50
- la - rum sound.
laut A - larm.
My soul, with Christ join
Mein Seel, mit Christ zeuch
a - la - rum sound.
- sen laut A - larm.
My soul, with Christ join
Mein Seel, mit Christ zeuch
trumps a - la - rum sound.
bla - sen laut A - larm.
My soul, with Christ join
Mein Seel, mit Christ zeuch
ff
cresc.
ff

LCB11

Interactive Script for *Plain-Chant for America* by William Grant Still

Here is an example of a simpler interactive performance that may be less intimidating for audiences and presenters who are new to this type of concert. The goal of this presentation is to help the audience recognize musical and rhetorical nuance of the refrain's reiterations by teaching them to sing a portion of the melody. Not only will listeners gain ownership over this musical material in a way that enables deeper noticing, but the communal singing of the words "we" and "our" invites ownership of the message. In order to maximize the drama and solemnity of this work, the presentation of these interactive elements involves hardly any explanation from the presenter.

Meaningful demonstration

The first part of this presentation is a dramatic reading of the text by several singers. This recitation of the poem is important to the success of the following strategy, building familiarity with the text and providing context for the recurring refrain. Below is a sample script for three readers, but may be modified in any way that increases the drama or emphasizes the message of the work.

READER 1
Plain-chant for America,
by Katherine Garrison Chapin Biddle
Set to music by William Grant Still

READER 2:
For the dream unfinished
Out of which we came,
We stand together,
While a hemisphere darkens
And the nations flame.

ALL:
Our earth has been hallowed
With death for freedom;
Our walls have been hallowed
With freedom's thought.

READER 3:
Concord, Valley Forge, Harpers Ferry
ALL:
Light up with their flares..
READER 3:
Our sky of doubt.

READER 1:
We fear tyranny as our hidden enemy:
The blackshirt cruelty, the goose-step mind.

READER 2:
No dark signs close the doors of our speaking.
No bayonets bar the door to our prayers.
READERS 1 & 2:
No gun butts shadow our children's eyes.

ALL:
Our earth has been hallowed
With death for freedom;
Our walls have been hallowed
With freedom's thought.

READER 3:
If we have failed—lynchings in Georgia,
Justice in Massachusetts undone,
ALL:
The bloody fields of South Chicago—
READER 3:
Still a voice from the bruised and the battered
Speaks out in the light of a free sun,
Saying, "Tell them again, say it, America;
Say it again till it splits their ears:

READER 1:
Freedom is salt in our blood and its bone shape;
If freedom fails…
ALL:
we'll fight for more freedom—

READER 1:
This is the land, and these are the years!
READER 2:
When freedom's a whisper above their ashes
READER 1:
An obsolete word cut on their graves,
READER 2:
When the mind has yielded its last resistance,
And the last free flag is under the waves—
Let them remember that here on the western horizon
a star, once acclaimed, has not set;

READER 3:
And the strength of a hope, and the shape of a vision
Died for and sung for and fought for,
And worked for,
Is living yet.
(Long pause)

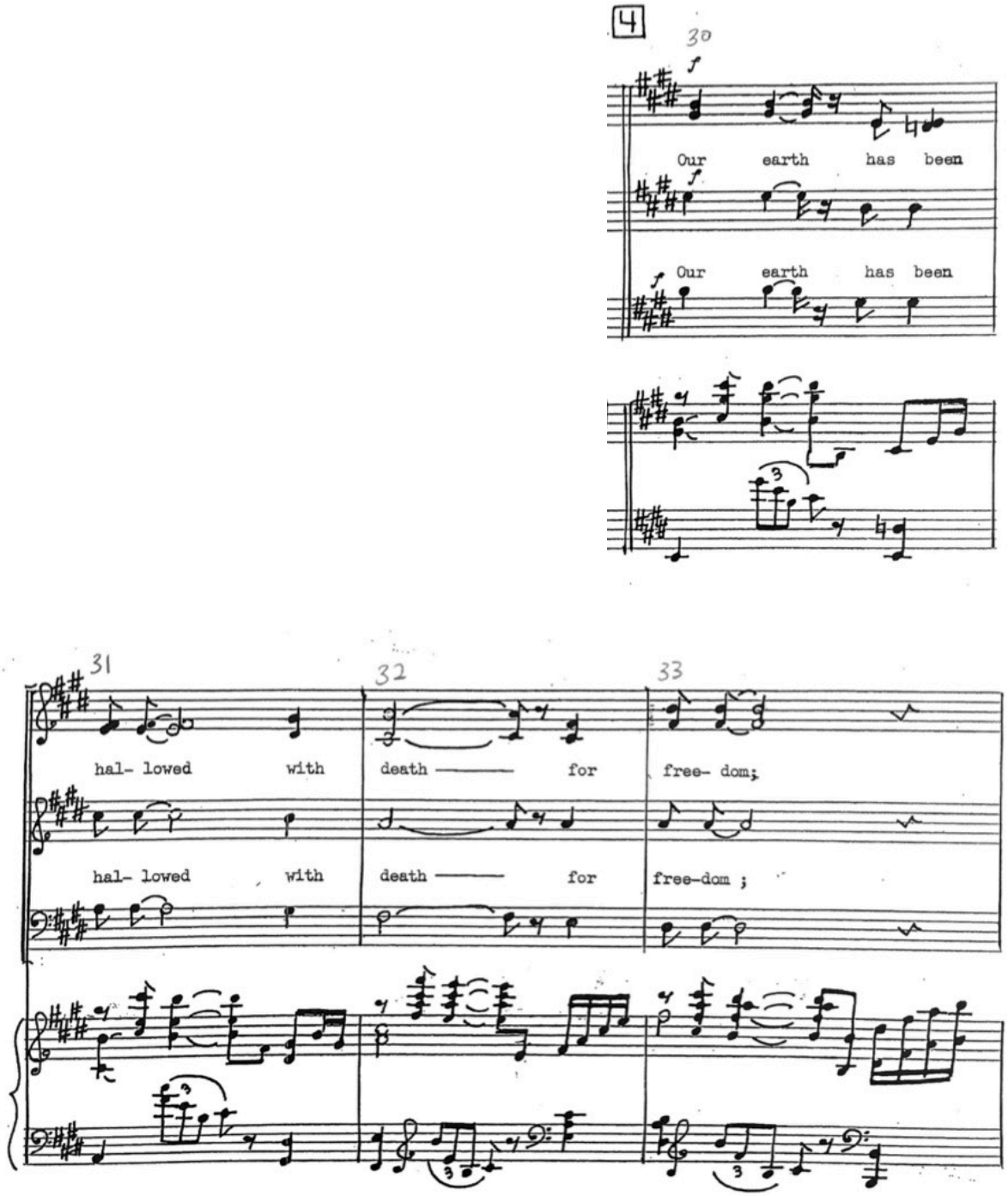
Teach the audience a part

At this point, either the presenter, conductor, or the readers will teach the audience the melody of the refrain by rote with support from the choir. There is no need for an introduction to this activity. Rather, launching into it with no preamble is effective. A successful teaching procedure is outlined below. Refer to Example 6 for an excerpt of the score.

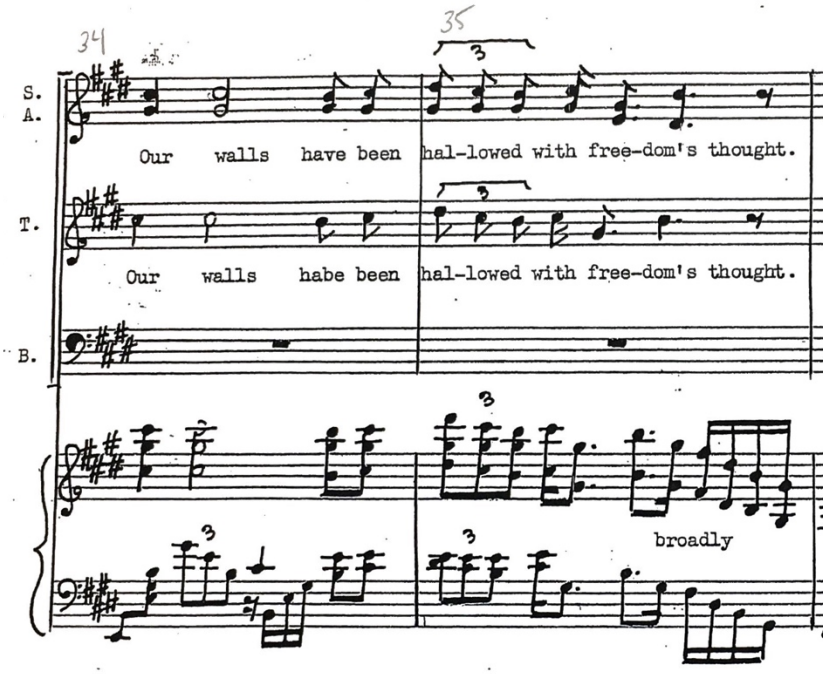
- Presenter sings the soprano line of measure 30 through "hallowed" of measure 31.
- **Presenter:** "Now it's your turn." Giving a large preparatory gesture, they invite the audience to join the choir in singing this measure.
- Presenter sings "with death for freedom" from measures 31-33. They gesture for the audience to echo.
- Presenter demonstrates measures 30-33 together, then invites the audience (and ensemble) to echo the entire phrase.
- Presenter sings measures 34-35, then invites all to echo.
- **Presenter:** "And now, the whole thing." The presenter may wish to intone the words "Our Earth" on pitch before giving the preparatory gesture. If you are performing for a more musically experienced audience, this may not be necessary.

If the audience stumbles with any of the phrases, simply have them echo it again. After the audience and choir have successfully sung through the melody in its entirety, turn to the ensemble, and begin your performance of the work.

Example 6. William Grant Still, *Plain-Chant for American,* mm. 30- 35.[7]



[7] William Grant Still, *Plain-Chant for America* (Flagstaff, AZ: William Grant Still Music, 1941), 3-4. Reprinted with permission.


34
35
S.
A.
Our walls have been hal-lowed with free-dom's thought.
T.
Our walls habe been hal-lowed with free-dom's thought.
B.
broadly

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION AND NEED FOR FURTHER STUDY

This research has hopefully demonstrated the benefits of interactive audience engagement and the multitude of forms it can take in a choral concert. This type of performance has growing support among museums, theaters, dance companies, and instrumental music organizations. It is time for choral ensembles to benefit from these practices as well. The strategies explored here fit well with changing trends and preferences for interacting with art, including a growing desire for more autonomy in the arts experience. They also combat the pervasive impression that the enjoyment of classical music is only for those who possess significant knowledge of the artform.

The ultimate goal of this practice is to open up music in a way that empowers listeners and creates impactful experiences; but how do we know if it is working? Successful practitioners of interactive and immersive performance note that if the musicians and the audience are having more fun, the endeavor has been a success. If the audience is being active, and especially if they are coming up with more insightful questions or making connections to other concerts they have been to, the strategies employed are effective. It is also encouraged to speak with audiences on their way out the door. Find out what resonated and what they found to be helpful or meaningful. Feedback can be collected with more formal written surveys as well.

The first concern that many choral musicians have with using interactive elements is the effect on concert flow. As previously noted, many of these activities do not require an introduction, but can be presented without preamble. There need not be an interactive activity for each piece on the program. Most of the practitioners I spoke with utilize 3-5 interactive elements

in each concert and spend time planning a logical and organic flow of events. However, one great interactive activity can effectively prepare the audience for an entire set, program, or even a concert series. For those sentimental about traditional performance customs, it is possible to elegantly weave interactive elements into a performance without sacrificing the benefits of a traditional concert. Interactivity does not change the riches listeners derive from choral performance; it simply enables more people to access them.

If the conductor does not feel comfortable leading such discussions and activities, it is perfectly fitting to recruit an enthusiastic chorister, instrumentalist, or board member to take on the role of presenter. In fact, in many ways this may be more effective. Audiences enjoy hearing about the music from the people who sing and play it. It can also seem less intimidating to be led into discussion by someone perceived as a peer rather than an expert. Utilizing interactive concert elements does not necessarily require extra personnel or resources.

The ideas compiled here are only a sampling of the effective strategies in practice and the possibilities for choral musicians. This research prepares choral musicians to practice audience engagement in the familiarity of the concert space before exploring the potential of interactive and immersive experiences outside the concert hall. There has yet to be a study of how choral organizations can use these strategies to create meaningful community engagement. The next steps in research could examine mutually beneficial partnerships with community organizations and choral events that bring memorable musical experiences to non-traditional settings.

When choral organizations commit to education and community building through interactive and immersive performance, they can change the perception of who is invited to classical music. By connecting listeners to choral music in aesthetic, emotional, and social ways,

ensembles demonstrate that their work is valid, defensible, and supportable. The value of choral music transcends the concert hall and goes with listeners in their daily lives.

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