COMPOSING PEDAGOGICALLY-INFORMED CHORAL LITERATURE FOR ADOLESCENT MALES

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COMPOSING PEDAGOGICALLY-INFORMED CHORAL LITERATURE FOR ADOLESCENT MALES

by
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Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of graduation requirements for University Honors

Music Education Department
Brigham Young University
June 2024

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Reader: Lane Johnson
Honors Coordinator: Neil Thornock
ABSTRACT

COMPOSING PEDAGOGICALLY-INFORMED CHORAL LITERATURE FOR ADOLESCENT MALES

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Music Education Department

Bachelor of Music

The “missing males” phenomenon, the disparity between males and females enrolled in choral ensembles in junior high and high school settings, has long been a concern among music educators (Koza, 1993). This gap in choral enrollment is often attributed to challenges associated with the male changing voice, prescribed gender roles, and a lack of suitable repertoire (Ayres, 2020, Lucas, 2011; Hawkins, 2015). The decline of male choral singers poses significant obstacles to fostering balanced and inclusive choral communities.

Through an extensive review of existing literature and pedagogical insights from choral experts, this paper reviews the physiological changes associated with voice change and its effect on students’ musical and vocal needs. Building upon this foundation, the research culminates in one choral arrangement and one original choral composition tailored specifically for junior high men's chorus and mindful of the developmental needs of young male singers.
The compositions, "Oh! Susanna" and "Sea Fever," exemplify the application of pedagogical principles in crafting engaging and accessible repertoire for adolescent male singers. This creative research project seeks to provide educators with a model for composing literature that navigates the challenges of the changing voice and the adolescent male choral experience. Ultimately, it hopes to inspire teachers and composers to continue creating accessible literature for young male singers.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Finally, a huge thank you to my parents, Ryan and Amy Olson, and my fiancé, Luke Johnson. From beginning to end, you’ve been there to brainstorm and problem-solve with me, listen to my worries, and inspire me to do hard things. Your belief and pride in me have been a great source of strength.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title........................................................................................................................................i
Abstract....................................................................................................................................iii
Acknowledgments..................................................................................................................vi
Table of Contents...................................................................................................................viii
List of Tables and Figures........................................................................................................x

I. Introduction..............................................................................................................................1

II. Characteristics of High-Quality Pedagogical Repertoire for Junior High Men’s Chorus........5

III. Project Implementation.........................................................................................................14

IV. Conclusion............................................................................................................................20

References...............................................................................................................................22

Music.........................................................................................................................................27
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1.........................................................................................................................3
Figure 1.........................................................................................................................4
Table 2.........................................................................................................................14
I. INTRODUCTION

Music educators have found decreased participation by adolescent males in choral ensembles. In choral classrooms, there is a “missing males” phenomenon, a wide disparity between female and male participation in choral programs. (Koza, 1993, 1993-1994; McBride & Palkki, 2020). Currently, the ratio of females to males in high school choral programs is seven to three (Elpus, 2014), and the same imbalance is present in middle schools (Beery, 2009; McClung, 2006a). The primary factors that contribute to the lack of males in the choral classroom include “the male changing voice, overly-prescribed gender roles, and a lack of appropriate pedagogical choral repertoire” (Ayres, 2020, p. 5; see also Lucas, 2011; Hawkins, 2015). These three factors are interrelated and directly impacted by individual teachers’ understanding of the adolescent male’s vocal development. An extended discussion on gender roles in the choral classroom is outside of the scope of this paper, but this literature review will address the first and third of these factors—the voice change itself and how composers and teachers can take vocal development research into account when writing and selecting music for junior high men’s chorus.

The changing voice, or the noticeable shift in the aural quality and the range of the male singing voice, can be a source of frustration for young singers. The vocal development process occurs as the vocal apparatus experiences rapid changes in size and shape, including growth in the lungs, larynx and vocal folds, pharynx, and oral cavity (Ayres, 2020; Cooksey, 1977-78; Cooksey, 1999). The enlargement of the larynx and elongation of the vocal folds by about 1 cm. in young males results in range expansion, the vocal range shifting to lower pitches (Barlow & Howard, 2002; Cooksey, 1977). Additionally, the change in shape of the oropharynx results in a change in timbre. While every individual experiences the voice change differently, a young
man’s vocal timbre usually progresses from a light boy soprano quality to a distinct, husky adolescent sound before reaching its rich, fully developed adult timbre (Barlow & Howard, 2002; Cooksey, 1977; Malde, 2020; Sweet, 2019).

Although the voice change is well-researched, teachers and authors continue to label this phenomenon as complex and confusing (Hawkins, 2015). For example, the vocal range may temporarily narrow as the voice deepens. Young men may experience a loss of the high notes in their range or develop a significant vocal break between their emerging falsetto and modal registers; singers may also notice a reduction in vocal agility (Cooksey, 1977). Further, the growing muscles of the voice may spasm during singing, leading to occasional voice cracks (Beery, 2009; Cooper, 1953; Freer, 2016). Additionally, singers may struggle to match pitch as their instrument keeps changing overnight, making it difficult to “train the vocal mechanism to perform the pitches they…perceive and are trying to match” (Pritchard, 2017, p. 52: Demorest, 2007). In other words, a singer may be able to perceive a pitch, but matching the pitch vocally may be more difficult for them, as landmark pitches may not feel or sound the way they used to.

The variety of changes in range, tessitura, vocal agility, and pitch concept can be frustrating for young singers. Adding to the confusion, each singer’s voice changes at a different time and rate than his peers, leading to social repercussions. Comparison with other singers in other stages of vocal development may lead singers to feel self-conscious or perceive themselves as less talented (Cooksey, 1977; Freer, 2007). This may lead to students avoiding singing if they are not provided with quality vocal education (Cooper, 1953; Rentz 2006).

Teachers can counter potential confusion about the changing voice by being well-versed in research and passing on that knowledge to their students. As they frame the voice change as a time of exploration and investigation rather than a frustrating enigma, teachers can improve
adolescent male retention in their choral programs (Freer, 2007; McClung, 2006a). As boys learn how their changing voice works, they will be more willing to sing through this difficult transition period (Cooksey, 1977, 2000; Freer 2015).

When seeking to understand the process of the changing voice, John Cooksey’s five-stage model remains the most widely accepted theory for the classification of changing voices (Ashley, 2013; Beery, 2009; Dame, 2019; Killian, 1999). While the rate at which individual voices go through these stages is variable, factors such as age, voice quality, range, tessitura, and register breaks enable teachers to classify which of Cooksey’s stages a young man’s voice is presently in.¹ Teachers should also consider the terminal pitches (the absolute highest and lowest pitches of a singer’s range) and register breaks when regularly testing their students’ ranges (Cooksey, 1977). Thus, understanding the stages of vocal development allows teachers to either select repertoire appropriate for their students’ emerging voices or adapt the music to fit their students’ abilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice Stage</th>
<th>Voice Classification</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Principle Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Premutational</td>
<td>Unchanged</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>Boy soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage I</td>
<td>Midvoice I</td>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>Beginning of change&lt;br&gt;Boy alto&lt;br&gt;Lowering of the upper limit of range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage II</td>
<td>Midvoice II</td>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>Middle of change&lt;br&gt;Standard alto parts sometimes too high, tenor parts too low&lt;br&gt;Narrowing of the singing range, loss of vocal agility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage III</td>
<td>Midvoice IIA</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>End of change&lt;br&gt;Lowering of the lower limit of the singing range</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Range is the entire scope of notes that an individual can sing while tessitura is the part of the range in which a singer can sing with the most ease and beauty (Cooksey, 1977). Cooksey defines timbre, or quality, as the “overall nature and color of the sound,” a subjective but important classification (Cooksey 1977). Finally, register denotes the pitch levels at which larynx adjustments occur for the particular demands of a range (Cooksey, 1977).
(voice slips down a minor third in range)
Register lift point (passaggio) begins to appear

| Stage IV | New Voice | 14-17 | Postmutational period
|          |          |       | New baritone
|          |          |       | Voice begins to settle
|          |          |       | Difficult to produce notes in transition area between full voice and falsetto registers (C4-F4)

| Stage V  | Emerging Adult Voice | 17-18 | Early adult phase
|          |                      |       | Tenor, baritone, or bass voice classification
|          |                      |       | Vocal agility, resonance, and power increase

TABLE 1: Cooksey Stages and Voice Classifications (Cooksey, 1977; 1999)

Despite the changing voice being well-researched, there remains a lack of choral repertoire that is pedagogically appropriate for adolescent men’s choruses, especially for early adolescence, or junior high (Ayres, 2020; Lucas, 2011; Hawkins, 2015). Men’s choruses have a long-standing presence historically, but the emergence of ensembles specifically tailored for adolescent boys is relatively recent (Collins, 2006; Crocker, 2000). Consequently, traditional TTBB scores are designed for more mature voices, with passages or ranges difficult to navigate for males in the middle of their voice change (McClung, 2006a). In recent years, there has been a noticeable expansion in the available repertoire tailored for adolescent males, but educators still struggle to find suitable music (McClung, 2006a; Shelton, 2016). To provide accessible music
for their transitioning male voices, many directors resort to regularly re-arranging and adapting music for their choirs (Barham, 2001; Crocker, 2000; Dillworth, 2012; McClung, 2006a, 2006b; Ramsey, 2008; Winslow, 1946).

The primary aim of this creative project is to address the deficiency in quality choral repertoire for adolescent males by crafting two choral compositions\(^2\) that take this demographic’s unique needs into account. These compositions draw on recommendations of various authors and researchers in choral arranging and pedagogy, as well as Cooksey’s stages of vocal development. This project aims to provide practical insights into effectively catering to this group’s varied vocal ranges and abilities by focusing on writing for unchanged, changing, and changed voices within a men's chorus ensemble. Through this pedagogically-informed music, I hope to facilitate the inclusion of adolescent males in middle and junior high school choral ensembles and inspire more choir teachers to arrange appropriate repertoire for their changing voices.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH-QUALITY PEDAGOGICAL REPERTOIRE FOR JUNIOR HIGH MEN’S CHORUS

Composers should be aware of various aspects of music when composing high-quality choral repertoire for adolescent men’s chorus, including the voicing, text, and other musical characteristics, such as melodic contour, part-writing, rhythmic activity, dynamics, and instrumentation.

A. Voicing Considerations: Number of Parts, Range, and Part Names

Many choral scholars suggest a three-part divisi as the most optimal voicing for junior high males, agreeing that more part options are preferable to fewer (Freer, 2007; Hower, 2006; 

\(^{2}\) one arrangement and one original composition
McClung, 2006b; Ramsey, 2008). Three and four-voice settings meet the needs of changing voice choirs over unison or two-part singing because they provide more options for boys at various stages of vocal development (Barresi & Russell, 1983; Cooper, 1953). One researcher, Braden Ayres, analyzed how well the Cooksey stages’ ranges and tessituras fit into frequently programmed men’s chorus repertoire parts. Ayres wrote that two-part octavos did not provide enough options for singers at various stages of development due to singers’ narrowed ranges during the voice change (2020).

Ayres also found that four-part octavos were not ideal. While the ranges of each part in four-part octavos were usually appropriate for Stage 2 (Midvoice II) and Stage 3 (Midvoice IIA) singers, four parts did not meet the vocal needs of Unchanged, Stage 1 (Midvoice I) and Stage 4 (New Voice) singers. For these stages of vocal development, the four-part split created tessituras that rested too high or too low for Stage 2 and Stage 3 voices. Young students may also be musically unprepared to sing repertoire with a thick, four-part texture. Thus, three-part octavos are the “most optimal voicing for early adolescent males, due to the employment of ranges which generally allow for comfortable phonation for males in all stages of the voice change” (Ayres, 2020). Crocker also advocated for three-part voicings such as tenor 1, tenor 2, baritone/bass (TTB) or tenor, baritone/bass 1, bass/bass 2 (TBB) (Crocker, 2000).

However, composers do not always take into account the ranges of each stage of vocal development, even when writing three-part music. This requires teachers to often adapt repertoire to suit the vocal ranges of their students (Freer, 2007; Hower, 2006; McClung, 2006b; Ramsey, 2008). Range is the most critical factor to consider when selecting or writing repertoire, especially for Stage 2 and Stage 3 singers (Beery, 2009; Collins, 2012; Crocker, 2000; McClung, 2006a; Ramsey, 2008; Rentz, 2006; Shelton, 2016). These inner voices have extremely narrow
ranges, sometimes limited to a perfect fourth. Since they are in the middle of vocal development
their voices may also be less flexible (Beery, 2009; Crocker, 2000; Ramsey, 2008). Additionally,
students singing the inner parts may struggle to match pitch vocally as their vocal mechanism
changes, whether or not they can accurately perceive pitch (Pritchard, 2017). For this reason, it
may be helpful to give the inner voice the melody to support in-tune singing. While unchanged
and recently changed voices are more flexible in terms of range, most authors still cautioned
against selecting repertoire with extremely high or low ranges or tessituras (Beery, 2009; Collins,
2012; Crocker, 2000; McClung, 2006a; Ramsey, 2008; Rentz, 2006; Shelton, 2016).

Composers, arrangers, and teachers can avoid creating and programming music with
unsingable ranges by implementing the ranges of Cooksey’s vocal development stages. While
there will always be variation between individuals in how and when the voice develops, these
stages (found in Figure 1) provide a necessary and well-researched foundation for well-written
music for changing voices.

Another important consideration when writing or selecting repertoire for adolescent
men’s chorus is voice part names. While Stage 1 and Stage 2 voices are essentially sopranos and
altos in terms of range, most authors write in favor of using more historically masculine (tenor or
bass) or gender-neutral part names (Ayres 2020). For example, some publishers may use neutral
terms like Part 1, 2, and 3. Cambiata Press uses the term cambiata to describe unchanged or
changing voices in its repertoire. While not widely used by other publishers, this term is
beneficial by capturing the unique timbre and range of a changing voice in its definition (Ayres
2020). Ultimately, part names should be used as a tool to make rehearsals easier, or as Barham
put it, “a person’s voice part is a flexible shorthand for their role in music-making, not an
immutable characteristic of their identity” (Barham, 2001).
In short, the voicing of choral music for junior high males represents a crucial aspect of repertoire selection, with many scholars and composers advocating for three-part divisi arrangements to accommodate the diverse vocal needs of changing voices. By integrating the stages of Cooksey's voice change model, composers and educators can ensure the creation and selection of repertoire with singable ranges. These considerations, along with using gender-neutral part-names, can help teachers foster a supportive and enriching choral experience for adolescent male singers.

B. Textual Considerations

When composing pedagogical choral music, most composers use text as the foundation of their music (Rentz, 2006; Shelton 2016). Text determines the subject matter and emotion of the music, directly impacting its appeal to the singers and audience.

Traditional gender roles have historically influenced the subject matter and emotional quality of choral music for adolescent men’s chorus. Most researchers and composers write in favor of music with overtly masculine themes for this group. Phillips (2015) summarized this when he wrote, “Literature choice for boys is critical; it must have masculine appeal” (p. 48). Similarly, Beery wrote: “Texts that appeal to middle school boys will help keep them interested in the music they are singing. Those that are overtly masculine are certainly a good choice. Sea chanteys and other work songs are traditionally a rich source of music for men’s choruses.” (Beery, 2009, p. 41) Many authors maintain that young men most enjoy pieces that reflect masculinity, songs with strong rhythmic swing and energetic themes of outdoor life, strength, independence, defiance, and action (Koza, 1993, 1993-1994; McBride & Palkki, 2020, Winslow 1946). Berg expands this definition of masculinity, writing young men “want to sing music that
encourages nobility, purity, courage, and spirit. They want to be men, and so want to sing of manly things” (Collins, 2012, p. 38).

Historically, authors not only supported masculine texts, but discouraged overtly feminine themes. For example, composer Amy F. Bernon wrote that she “avoided setting texts about flowers or birds, despite her personal preference, for fear of alienating adolescent males with feminine subject matter” (Ayres, 2020; Shelton, 2016). Koza (1993-1994) summarized twentieth-century literature on the subject: “The underlying message was that big boys should sing, but they still should not cry; tender emotions repeatedly were deemed feminine and, thus, undesirable” (p. 61). This trend continues into the twenty-first century despite shifts in how scholars view and discuss gender, with many authors continuing to write in favor of masculine themes (McBride & Palkki, 2020).

However, other authors have advised against overly masculine texts that perpetuate harmful stereotypes or present a narrow representation of masculinity, which may alienate students (Palkki, 2015). Texts should be diverse, inclusive, and affirming, and reflect a broad spectrum of male experiences. Palkki in particular wrote on the influence that text choice can have on young males, reminding directors that “words and phrases that seem insignificant to a heterosexual male may make a positive impact on (or be devastating to) a transgender and/or gay male” (Palkki, 2015, p. 33). Palkki encouraged directors to focus on creating a welcoming classroom for all kinds of boys rather than prioritizing repertoire that reinforces stereotypical masculinity. In the context of educational settings, it's essential to recognize and challenge gender norms enforced through repertoire choices (Palkki, 2015, p. 33). Other authors and composers have emphasized the need for a greater variety of styles and subject matter for pedagogical literature for adolescent males, expressing that boys enjoy a wide assortment of
music, from quirky or humorous works to serious, uplifting, or inspirational pieces (Collins, 2012; Palkki, 2015). Rentz advocated for gender-neutral themes, writing that lyrics should be “encouraging, fun, truthful, and generally relevant for middle school students” (2006, p. 61). Additionally, texts should sometimes challenge students and allow them to use their growing capacity for complex and nuanced thought (Collins, 2012; Crocker, 2000; Ramsey, 2008; Rentz, 2006; Shelton, 2016).

While there are a variety of thoughts on best practices for text selection when composing or choosing repertoire, ultimately, texts should add to the variety of men’s chorus music available, thus not defining masculinity narrowly. Through sensitivity to the diverse needs of young men, text selection can aid in fostering an inclusive and enriching choral experience for all boys.

C. Musical Considerations

The composition and arrangement of music for changing voices requires attention to various musical facets, including syllabification, basic melody contour, tonality, part-writing, rhythmic activity, dynamics, accompaniment, and the integration of percussion. Each element influences whether a piece is singable, as well as the piece's educational value, and overall appeal to young singers. Composers and researchers agree on the importance of prioritizing simple and memorable melodies, musical learning, and challenge or fun in pedagogical repertoire.

First, syllabification plays an important role in how singable a piece is. Long, melismatic passages (in which several pitches are sung on a single syllable of text) are difficult for inexperienced singers to manage, especially for students in the middle of their voice change
(Cooksey, 1977-78, Cooper, 1953). Beery (1994) and Barressi and Russell (1983) advocated for syllabic text settings in which there is one pitch per syllable.

Perhaps the most important characteristic in creating singable music for changing voices is the basic melody of a piece. Pieces for this age group should remain tonal, using conventional keys and harmony (Cooper, 1953). In terms of melodic contour, melodies and harmonies should be singable and well-crafted for each vocal part, with simple stepwise patterns and occasional diatonic skips (Cooper, 1953, Crocker 2000, Rentz, 2006). Melodies should mostly sit in the most comfortable part of a young singer’s range, avoiding high tessituras (Beery, 1994). Various authors discouraged melodies with excessive chromaticism, wide leaps, rapid pitch changes, and rapid shifts between vocal registers due to the changing voice’s slower rate of articulation, narrow vocal range, and difficulty navigating between registers (Barressi & Russell, 1983; Cooper, 1953; Crocker 2000). In general, the consensus of researchers, composers, and arrangers is that an ideal melody is simple, singable, and memorable.

Regarding part-writing and harmony, several authors advised composing contrapuntally, rather than homophonically, giving each part their own individual, interesting, and interweaving melodies. (Barresi & Russel, 1983; Beery, 1994; Cooper, 1953). This not only ensures that each vocal line has a satisfying musical experience but the distinctness of each vocal line ensures that students do not accidentally sing in unison, which young students may do when singing thick, homophonic-textured pieces. Additionally, good voice-leading, each voice part moving smoothly from one chord to the next, promotes students’ success in part-independence (Collins, 2012; McClung, 2006a; Shelton, 2016).

Another consideration is each part’s rhythm. Rhythms should be simple, mostly half, quarter, and occasional eighth notes in order to accommodate the changing voice’s loss in agility
Tempo is closely related. For example, excessively fast tempi should be avoided, also due to minimized vocal agility. Researchers also discourage composers from writing music with excessively slow tempi and long phrases due to adolescents’ limited breath support (Barresi & Russel, 1983; Beery, 1994, Cooper, 1953).

When discussing dynamics, most authors write that the best route is keeping dynamics within a moderate range. Avoiding dynamic extremes ensures that students sing with proper technique as their voices develop. While mezzo-forte is the primary recommendation, singers can most successfully sing with dynamic variation in the middle of their vocal range and within a narrower span of dynamic contrast than adult singers (Beery, 1994; Barresi & Russel, 1983; Collins, 2012; Hines, 2001).

Although much of the above counsel suggests keeping things simple, there still is room for creativity. The interrelated nature of musical elements leaves room for composers to write pieces with challenge and interest for young singers. For example, if a composer writes something rhythmically difficult, they can make it appropriate for young singers by avoiding vocal and/or melodic challenges (Crocker, 2000). This is important because researchers have found that junior high male singers enjoy pieces with strong rhythmic drive and moderate to fast tempi (Beery, 1994; Hines, 2001). Conversely, a composer may write something vocally difficult, for example, a piece with long phrases that gives students a chance to develop breath support, but write simpler rhythms and melodies (Cooksey, 1983).

As teachers program music with a variety of meters, time signatures, and tempi, repertoire can be used “as a vehicle to help educate young people into well-rounded musicians” (Ayres, 2020, pg. 117; see also Beery, 1994; Cooper, 1953). Composers can aid in producing
quality pedagogical choral music by balancing the melodic and rhythmic difficulties of a piece (Crocker, 2000).

One final musical consideration is accompaniment. While there are benefits to a cappella singing, accompanied pieces are particularly appropriate developmentally for young choirs with changing voices as they provide a necessary aural foundation (Beery, 1994). Accompaniments with predictable, straightforward chord progressions can support and guide singers (Crocker, 2000; Collins, 2012). One notable composer, Andrea Ramsey, said of the piano’s supportive role: “When I write for the piano, I like to explore independent ideas, but I also try to build in a ‘safety net’ by strategically placing supportive chords or notes every so often to encourage and keep the singers on track.” (Ramsey, 2008, p. 74).

Additionally, percussion can be implemented in pieces for young singers. Percussion enhances a piece’s rhythmic drive, a consideration already discussed as appealing to adolescents (Beery, 1994; Crocker, 2000; Hines, 2001, Winslow, 1946). In Ayres’s survey of the current body of repertoire for junior high men’s chorus, he found that 13% of regularly programmed pieces called for a percussion instrument, (Ayres, 2020, pg. 202). Additionally, directors can delegate percussion parts to students in their classes, providing students with extremely narrow ranges with musical learning opportunities despite their limited vocal abilities during their voice change (McBride & Palkki, 2020).

As shown, the physiological constraints of vocal development directly influence the composition of musical aspects, establishing clear guidelines for pedagogically-informed compositions and arrangements. Within these parameters, however, is a creative space where composers can engage young singers while fostering their musical growth. Through thoughtful consideration of these musical elements, composers and educators alike can continue to enrich
the current body of pedagogical repertoire, providing young singers with music that is both accessible and musically rewarding.

III. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The heart of my thesis is the creation of two works for junior high men’s chorus based on the research and recommendations of choral pedagogy experts. After extensive reading on best practices for writing music for this group, I began the arranging and composing process.

For both the arrangement and original composition, I decided to write for a three-part choir based on Ayres’s analysis of range suitability. I based my part divisi on Cooksey’s stages of voice development, with Part 1 covering unchanged and Stage 1 voices, Part 2 covering Stage 2 and 3 voices, and Part 3 covering Stage 4 and 5 voices. In other words Part 1 is for unchanged voices, Part 2 for changing voices, and Part 3 for changed voices. These part pairings group singers with similar ranges together, and allowed me to use Cooksey’s well-researched ranges for each stage of development as a guideline. The table below shows that each part stays within its developmentally appropriate range and with only occasional notes outside of the tessitura (common/comfortable range).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cooksey Stages Terminal Pitches</th>
<th>“Oh! Susanna” Ranges</th>
<th>“Sea Fever” Ranges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooksey Stages Tessituras</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unchanged // Part 1</td>
<td>A3-F5</td>
<td>C#3-A#4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1 (Midvoice I) // Part 1</td>
<td>Ab3-C5</td>
<td>B3-G4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2 (Midvoice II) // Part 2</td>
<td>F3-A4</td>
<td>G#3-F4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3 (Midvoice IIA) // Part 2</td>
<td>D3-F#4</td>
<td>F#3-D4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stage 4 (New Voice) // Part 3
B2-D#4 D#3-A#3 (Bb2)D3-Bb3 (A2)C3-B3

Stage 5 (Emerging Adult Voice) // Part 3
G2-D4 B2-G#3 Bb2-Bb3 A2-B3

Table 2: Cooksey Stages Terminal Pitches and Tessituras & Original Composition Ranges

When choosing part names, I felt that Part 1, Part 2, and Part 3 would work best for my music. I avoided calling my pieces Tenor Tenor Baritone/Bass (TTB) because these traditional voice types usually reflect adult male ranges and do not accurately reflect the ranges for unchanged and changing voices used in my work. I also avoided using the term alto to describe Part 1’s range in favor of gender-neutral part names. In this way, part names become a tool for rehearsal rather than an identifying characteristic with various stereotypes.

I started with my arrangement of “Oh! Susanna,” a popular American folk tune by Stephen Foster. I chose to arrange this specific song on the recommendation of my faculty reader and choral arranging professor, Lane Johnson. The text is nonsensical and fun, which would be enjoyable for a junior high men’s chorus (Rentz, 2006). For example, in the second verse, the song’s speaker contradicts himself with, “It rained all night the day I left, the weather it was dry” and “the sun so hot I froze to death.” While the text is about a romantic relationship with the speaker traveling to Louisiana to see his true love, the catchy melody and the text’s innate humor can appeal to many young male singers.

For this arrangement, I decided to give Part 1 the melody, writing in the key of B-flat major which ensured that both unchanged voices and Stage 1 singers could successfully navigate the melody in this key. My goal was to write in a mostly contrapuntal texture with countermelodies in order to avoid singers accidentally singing in unison and to keep students
engaged (Barresi & Russel, 1983; Beery, 1994; Cooper, 1953). I also tried to include fun moments, like the allusion to the nursery rhyme, “Rain, rain, go away!” at measures 32-33.

In my part-writing, I focused on writing melodic parts with a syllabic text setting and mostly stepwise motion. One exception to this is the ostinato section, measures 17-32 in Part 2, where a perfect fourth jump is followed by a step in the other direction. Still, this phrase, “Oh! Susanna! Don’t cry, Susanna!” is melodic, singable, and repeated. I originally imagined this phrase for Part 3 because it sounds like something basses would sing, but in the key of B-flat these pitches felt too high or too low (depending on the octave) for Stage 4 and 5 voices. I ended up keeping the phrase, but gave it to Part 2 singers instead, giving the changing voices a fun, interesting phrase that worked in their higher, but small range. At other points, Part 2 is a pitch anchor for when Part 1 or 3 are more difficult, such as at measures 37-38, where Part 2 remains on B-flat while Part 3 has a difficult descending chromatic scale.

One risk that I took in this arrangement was writing the verses in the 7/8 time signature, which can be difficult to perform. I felt that students would enjoy a rhythmic challenge, as recommended by Beery (1994). Since this piece is difficult rhythmically due to the asymmetrical meter, I tried to temper vocal and melodic difficulties by employing narrow ranges and stepwise motion (Crocker, 2000). Additionally, the chorus in 4/4 is a foil to the complex and rhythmic verse: simple, with staggered entrances for a new part every four measures. Although Part 1 and Part 3 are in homophonic harmony, I felt that their staggered entrances and the space (a sixth) between their parts would help them maintain part independence. Throughout this section, there is rhythmic interest in the syncopation of the piano accompaniment and Part 2, with building energy as each part joins. Still, the dynamics stay at a moderate level, usually mezzoforte with an occasional contrasting mezzopiano or forte in an effort to keep singers from oversinging.
When I was planning my arrangement, I decided to use the guitar as the accompanying instrument, text painting the “banjo on my knee.” After my first draft I felt that the piece needed piano in addition to the guitar to support the singers with their entrances, especially Parts 2 and 3 with their interjections at measures 9, 11, 13, and other like places. I also felt that the piano’s support would be helpful for the two measures of chromaticism, measures 37-38. While I considered adding body percussion, like claps and stomps, I eventually decided against it because the piece felt too busy. Overall, my arrangement of “Oh! Susanna” came together as a lively, rhythmically challenging piece accessible to junior high vocalists on the spectrum of voice change.

For the original composition, I chose to set the poem, “Sea Fever,” by John Masefield, to music. I initially found this poem through the art song of the same name by John Ireland. Ireland’s music is slower, lyrical, and longing. I enjoyed that the poem was in a singable meter, and that the text was gender-neutral. Ultimately, due to all of the sea imagery of this text, I decided to pair the poem with a sea shanty-like melody and accompaniment as recommended by Beery (2009). I made one change to modernize the text, changing the line, “And the flung spray and the blown spume,” to “And the flung spray and the waves’ foam.” This change preserves the original meaning, but is a little more understandable for young singers.

The compositional process was similar to my arranging process described above. After selecting the text, I created a sea shanty melody with mostly stepwise motion in order to keep it simple. I made this piece less difficult rhythmically with the intention of writing a piece that allows directors to focus on ensemble sound and vocal technique with this piece. The rhythms are mostly quarter notes, half notes, and occasional eighth notes. I chose to write this piece in
cut-time for ease of music reading. The simple meter, moderate tempo, and short phrases are ideal for a young choir Barresi & Russel, 1983; Beery, 1994, Cooper, 1953; Hines, 2001).

After notating the melody, I designed the structure of my piece, deciding where I wanted piano interludes and taking audio recordings of ideas for countermelodies that popped into my head. I worked on writing in basic chords in the piano accompaniment and part-writing for the choir parts interchangeably, occasionally substituting chords to mix up the chord progressions in later verses.

I chose to write this in three-part with the same part divisi as “Oh! Susanna,” with Part 1 for unchanged voices, Part 2 for changing, and Part 3 for changed. This time I gave Part 2 the melody to support in-tune singing, which can be difficult for those singing the middle-most part. I originally wrote the piece in B minor, but moved the key center to A minor in order to keep Part 2 and 3 in a lower tessitura. With the melody in the middle range, there are some moments where Part 1 sings in unison with Part 2, like measures 20-21. Part 3 also sings in unison occasionally with Part 2, such as beginning the phrase at measure 9 together. I also gave Part 1 the melody for the third phrase of each verse (for example, at measure 13) to allow more singers to sing the melody and to keep Part 2 in an appropriately low range.

When part-writing, I looked for opportunities to text paint, such as the dissonant chord portraying the word “breaking” in measure 21. At measure 61, the music slows to text paint the “sweet dream” sung about. Using the text as inspiration also helped me find places to work in the contrapuntal texture and break up sections with homophony, as recommended by choral experts (Barresi & Russel, 1983; Beery, 1994; Cooper, 1953). For example, at measures 32 and 36, Part 1 sings a countermelody on “oo,” characterizing the “clear call” sung about by Part 2 and 3. While there were more stacked harmonies, or homophony, in this piece than in “Oh! Susanna,” I
often began phrases with all parts starting on the same note before departing from each other (e.g. measures 8, 19, 54), as Beery suggested to make entrance pitches easier to find (1994).

I wrote the piano accompaniment last, finally bringing my plan into shape as I incorporated various moods through various accompaniment patterns. These included block chords, both sustained and a staccato oom-pah figure; strong countermelody octave-doublings in the bass; and wistfully repeated eighth-note arpeggios. Implementing a variety of styles in the accompaniment helps the piano tell the story of the piece, taking singers on a musical journey and allowing them to focus on singing with good vocal technique. I also used the piano accompaniment to support singers by including “safety net moments” for difficult sections (Ramsey, 2008). For example, the piano usually plays each part’s starting note at each entrance. The piano also doubles most countermelodies in Parts 1 and 3 to help singers come in with confidence.

Through this compositional process, I crafted “Sea Fever” to embody all the masculine energy of a sea shanty with contrasting moments of sensitivity and longing. Each part plays a significant role and is in an appropriate tessitura for young singers. Additionally, the energetic piano accompaniment supports young singers, assisting them with part independence.

After revising the arrangement and original composition, I recorded each piece with the talented Mountain Ridge High School Men of Note ensemble, accompanied by their director Kelly DeHaan in these recordings. Teaching each song to this high school choir in a class period together was enlightening. Although Part 1 of my compositions is intended for unchanged voices, the Tenor 1s in this high school ensemble managed the higher tessitura well. Tenor 2s sang Part 2, and Baritones and Basses sang Part 3. I was also pleasantly surprised at how quickly the choir picked up the 7/8 time signature in “Oh! Susanna,” after I spoke through the first line
with them. We spent the most time rehearsing non-melody parts, such as Part 2 and 3’s interjections throughout “Oh! Susanna,” and Part 1 and 3 in “Sea Fever,” especially when they sang on a neutral vowel like “oo” or “ah.” After targeting the most difficult sections, all parts learned the music quickly, within two to three run-throughs and with some support from the piano. From my time with Men of Note, I found that the music is at an appropriate difficulty level for middle school or junior high men’s chorus, who would take longer to learn each piece since they generally have less choral experience.

IV. CONCLUSION

The process of researching the adolescent male voice change and experience in choir validated to me the importance of all teachers going through a similar process. As an educator, I feel much more prepared to teach young male students how to sing in a way that makes them comfortable in the choral classroom and excited to learn.

One shortcoming of my project is that I wasn’t able to test my music’s efficacy with junior high students. In the future, I would like to teach a younger choir this music and study my students’ ability to learn the repertoire quickly and sing with part independence, how well the music works for them in terms of range, and, finally, their engagement and enjoyment of the repertoire.

However, one success was my growing confidence as a composer. When writing “Sea Fever,” I noticed that I was beginning to feel more intentional as a composer and that I noticed and solved compositional problems with greater ease. I started to think about music differently. My experience as a budding composer shows that arranging and composing music for groups with specific needs, such as a junior high men’s chorus, is a viable option for music directors.
Teachers who are concerned with the “missing males” phenomenon in choral classrooms can directly address this by being well-versed in research about the changing voice and making creative adjustments to repertoire or learning to arrange or compose themselves (Koza, 1993, 1993-1994; McBride & Palkki, 2020). There is ample research regarding the male changing voice and a growing body of well-written repertoire for this demographic. However, it will take individual teachers' and composers’ contributions to translate known best practices into effective choral communities where young men thrive.
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MUSIC
Recordings:

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFg9jnKEsDdZ1xZd556OKa_SG_NFlhrXO&si=IPCMKkPa7JexMWVw
Oh! Susanna

for TTB choir, piano, and guitar

Stephen Foster
arranged by Rachel Olson

Part 1

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<th>Vivace</th>
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<td>mf</td>
<td>Oh, I came from Alabama with a banjo on my knee,</td>
<td>I am goin' to Louisiana, My true love for to</td>
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Part 2

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Part 3

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see; Oh! Susanna, oh! Don't you cry for

me, I've come from Alabama with a banjo on my knee.

Don't you cry. Singing Oh! Susanna! Don't
It all night
Don't you cry
Oh

It
Don't you cry

Oh

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It

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Oh! Susan-na! Don't cry Susan-na! Oh! Susan-na! Don't

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Oh
day I left, The weather it was dry, The
go away!

sun so hot I froze to death; Susanna don't you cry.

sun so hot I froze to death; Susanna don't you cry.

sun so hot I froze to death; Susanna don't you cry.
Oh! Susanna, oh! Don’t you cry for me, I’ve__

Oh! Susanna Don’t cry for me. I’ve__

Oh! Susanna I’ve__

come from Alabama with a banjo on my knee. cresc.

come from Alabama with a banjo on my Oh! Susanna! Don’t cresc.

come from Alabama with a banjo on my Oh__

Pno.
Don't you cry

Sea Fever
for TTB choir and piano

John Masefield

Part 1

Part 2

Part 3

Piano

mf detached

mf

A

And

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky.

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And the all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by; And the

all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by; And the

wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shak-ing,

wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shak-ing, and a grey mist on the

wheel's kick and the wind's song with the white sail's shak-ing,
I must go down to the seas again, for the

call of the running tide is a wild call and a clear call that

Oo_
Oh, and all I ask is a windy day with the wind a flying, the white clouds flying, and the flung spray and the waves foam and the white clouds flying, Oo-
I must godown to the sea-gulls crying.

seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,

seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life, to the gull's way and the
And all I ask is a
whale's way where the wind's like a whetted knife;
And all I ask is a
where the wind's like a whetted knife;
All I
merry yarn from a laughing fellow rover,
merry yarn from a laughing fellow rover,
and
ask,
Oh

\textit{Oh, where the wind's like a whetted knife; And all I ask is a
merry yarn from a laughing fellow rover, and
ask, Oh,}

Pt. 1

\[ \text{rit.} \quad \text{mp} \]

quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's

Pt. 2

\[ \text{rit.} \]

sweet dream ah

Pt. 3

\[ \text{rit.} \quad \text{mp} \]

sweet dream ah

Pno.

\[ \text{rit.} \]

pt.

\[ \text{p} \]

mm.

\[ \text{p} \]

mm.

\[ \text{p} \]

mm.

\[ \text{p} \]

mm.