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Looking for Multi-Cultural Pieces? Ten Recommendations

Ten world music pieces for all levels

by Brian Hoskins, WA ACDA multi-cultural perspectives chair



1. "Adiemus" by Karl Jenkins (SSA, Boosey & Hawkes). "Adiemus" is one of a collection of pieces by Karl Jenkins called Songs of Sanctuary. It was also featured in an airline commercial years ago. The part I enjoy about this piece is that the text is non-sense; it is various syllables meant to create a mood. The music grows with a great sense of harmonic direction and leaves options for solos, small groups and possible movement. I have done this piece with students from 6th to 8th grade quite successfully. There is a lot of room to fit the harmonies to your choir. Changed voices can double the melody without is standing out, harmonies can be thinned out if they seem too difficult, and many sections can be done in unison if the harmonies are too much. All adjustments still leave the piece complete. I strongly recommend "Kayama" from this collection as well.

2. "Beneath the African Sky" by Caldwell/Ivory (SA, Caldwell and Ivory). This piece was recommended to me by a colleague and I have not yet performed it with one of my ensembles. I am, however, haunted by the text and beautiful melody and cannot wait to have the perfect ensemble to perform this with. The tessitura gets a little high at times, and it is accompanied by piano and oboe which creates some challenges, but it would be well worth the effort. Please check out a listen on the JW Pepper website.

3. "Chinese Mountain Songs" by Chen Yi (SSA, Theodore Presser Co). Again, a set of pieces I have not yet done with one of my ensembles, but on my "will do someday" list. The piece is a collection of five Chinese folksongs.
4. "North Country Folk Songs" by Philip Wilby (SATB, Banks Music Publications). I did mention this piece at the reading session simply because I do believe multi-cultural music does not always have to come from another country, but from another experience. These pieces represent a time that most of our students do not know about and can learn from. They are challenging, beautiful, full of great rhythm and fun to perform. The middle piece, "Marianne", is one of my personal favorites.
5. "Ngana" by Stephen Leek (SATB, Musical Resources). Having performed and conducted this piece, I can't think of one more exciting and challenging. Stephen Leek takes aboriginal Australian (Ngana=shark) words and weaves them into interesting rounds, smooth lyrical sections and layers of rhythm, clapping and shouting. For a more advanced choir and well worth the challenge.
6. "Misa Paquena Para Ninos" by Francisco Nunez (SSS, Boosey & Hawkes). This liturgical setting in Spanish was composed when Francisco was a teenager and after the loss of his father. There are some very simple compositional techniques present that provide you opportunity to teach form and structure while learning interesting, passionate music. The "Gloria Dios" is one of my favorites sections as it has a triumphant melody matching the text, Glory to God, with an accompaniment that reveals the complete opposite emotion, dissonance and possibly the anger of loss as a youth.
7. "Africa Celebration" by Stephen Hatfield (SATB, Boosey & Hawkes). A wonderful combination of several African Folksongs. This is a longer piece, coming in around 8 minutes, but it is full of stylistic and harmonic changes that will keep your audience listening. You can also add in movements to keep your singers loose and relaxed. Stephen Hatfield is a wonderful arranger with a unique

take on descriptions and effects. If you want something big, this is the piece.

8. "Desi" by Brent Pierce (2-Part, Brent Pierce Choral Works). I have really enjoyed this piece with my younger singers. It is an Indian Raga with some great rhythms and melodies. Sixth graders grab onto the uniqueness of it immediately and find the melodies that overlap and combine fun to sing. Add in percussion instruments to brighten it up even more.

9. "La Lluvia" by Stephen Hatfield (SATB, Boosey & Hawkes). If you like pieces without words, here's your chance! Stephen takes a melody from Ecuador, performed originally on panpipe, and creates beautiful textures that capture the sound of the rain. I have performed this with beginning and advanced ensembles. There is a lot to teach through this piece, texture, style, articulation and blend. With all the moving parts of the composition, it make the learning fun and exciting for all involved.

10. "Guayacanal" by Francisco Nunez (SSAA, Boosey & Hawkes). Challenging, yes, exciting, yes, a blast to perform, YES! Based on the Mangulina dance, and written in the 50s by Dominican composers, this piece lends itself to be a closer. Add in percussion, clapping and movement to really make this an exciting showstopper.

Of course, there are many more pieces out there that are diverse and quality for all levels. Remember to share those titles with your colleagues and spread quality literature around.

If you need help selecting literature or making it work for your ensemble, never hesitate to email me with your questions.