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The Seasons

By Marcia Patton, President, Wyoming ACDA

We know that when Haydn composed his famous oratorio “The Seasons,” it was a great musical painting of nature and her seasons of the year.

As a choral director I organize my life by the musical seasons, which for me begin with summer.

Ah, summer...the time for leisurely study, workshops, reading sessions, recertification, music selection, planning, and travel!

Fall is always here far too soon. It’s time for football games and national anthems, ordering costumes, All-State auditions, district clinic rehearsals, junior high school run-outs, All-Northwest auditions, fall clinic, fund-raising, and the fall concert.

The beginning winter is marked in our state by selection of all-staters and then the rehearsals begin, along with basketball games and national anthems, Christmas concerts, more fund-raising, All-State conventions, All-Northwest rehearsals, the winter concert, musical auditions, Jazz Festival, choir tour, and finally All-Northwest convention.

I always know when spring is here because it’s time for choir auditions, Chamber Choir, festival concert, solo and ensemble festival, the All-School musical, the All School Talent Show, Children’s Chorale tours, more fund-raising, soccer games and national anthems, elementary school run-outs, Spring Concert, Awards Banquet, Baccalaureate, and (finally) Graduation!

How was Haydn able to paint such a vivid picture of the beauty and tranquility of nature in “The Seasons?” He could well have been the first “Type A Music Director.” In addition to Kapellmeister duties he had to “direct the orchestra, compose music for weekly concerts, be the librarian, take on all administrative duties pertaining to music, hire and fire personnel, be the copyist, and arbitrate disputes.” (Yes, I too own a copy of the “The Lives of the Great Composers.”) Sounds all too familiar, doesn’t it?

I’ve been wallowing in work and self-pity lately, wondering when my engagement calendar will finally self-destruct and where my next dose of inspiration can possibly come from.

Returning home from a music festival on a 2 a.m. bus ride, I decided to leave the solitude of the “shot-gun” seat and join the students in the back of the bus.

My students were listening to their favorite CDs, talking about what groups and songs they liked, and just quietly singing along with the music.

I remembered the first time I ever sang a harmony part. It was to the song “The Old Lamplighter” and we were on a bus trip. There were three other girls and we made up a high part to go with the melody. I remember the song. I remember the setting, and I remember the way the harmonizing made me FEEL.

Now, I know that right now you are thinking, “The Old Lamplighter?” Gee, she must really be *old*. But *I* was thinking that I had found my next dose of inspiration!

We are singing the song “Witness” in my A Cappella Choir. After two weeks of notes rhythms, dynamics, etc., it hit me that my students didn’t have a clue about the story of Samson and Delilah. (If you don’t know the song, take my word for it...you need to have the point of reference!)

The next day, one of my students brought a children’s big picture book Bible. We all sat on the floor, and two students read us the story, complete with pictures, dramatic interpretation and a question and answer time. (All this based on “the Bible as literature,” of course!)

This took about twenty minutes “out of” rehearsal, but when we sang the song again we shared the experience, and it was a “different” piece of music!

We all have to remember to take the time to tell the story, communicate the feelings, and make the most out of these seasons in our musical lives!