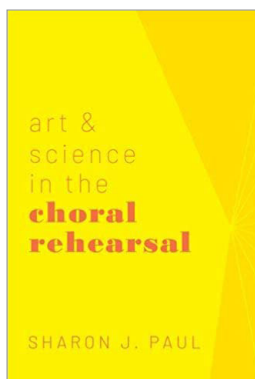


Book Reviews

Andrew Crow, editor



Art & Science in the Choral Rehearsal

Sharon J. Paul

Oxford University Press,
2020

240 pages, \$99.00
hardcover; \$24.95
softcover

ISBN: 978-0190863777

With one cautionary phrase, Dr. Sharon J. Paul sums up the impetus for her book: “It is easy for any of us to have moments in our rehearsals where we teach counter to our brain’s natural instincts for learning” (150). *Art & Science in the Choral Rehearsal* condenses a plethora of research on educational pedagogy and cognition into a digestible and highly applicable form for the choral conductor. Paul draws on her experience as former artistic director of the San Francisco Girls Chorus, and on her extensive collegiate teaching in the classroom and ensemble, to demonstrate how her work has evolved to embrace this science.

Each chapter begins with a conversational summary of relevant research, as well as some (usually wry) anecdotes illustrating how it has applied in her life. The remaining pages provide examples of tested rehearsal techniques that embrace this cognition-driven approach. In the book, Paul strongly advocates for a flipped classroom approach and she questions the model where “the all-knowing conductor stands on the podium, imparting their great musical insights

to the ignorant choristers”(xiii). Paul centers the students’ learning, rather than the conductor’s ego, and provides creative activities to foster deeper musical connection and growth. Her ideas are simple, practical, fun, and manageable by choirs of any age or experience level. They frequently involve extra-musical activities such as writing, conversation, or acting, but never supplant the place of singing during rehearsals. For the early-career conductor, particularly one from a performance background, these recommendations are welcome information.

The greatest success of Dr. Paul’s book is to take many of our traditional rehearsal practices and examine them through a scientific lens. Some of her recommendations require simple adjustments, such as “wait[ing] ten seconds after we pose a question before we fill in the answer”(20) (all the more apropos during an era when many lead classes in a remote format). Other changes seem more radical. For example, Paul examines the oft-heard practice habit, to play a passage correctly ten times before moving on. Instead of aiming for perfect repetition, she advocates for a rehearsal technique called *Interleaving*, where practice is intentionally varied. Paul cites research on batting practice for professional baseball players, which showed that “hitting random pitches in no pre-determined order (for example fastball, curveball,

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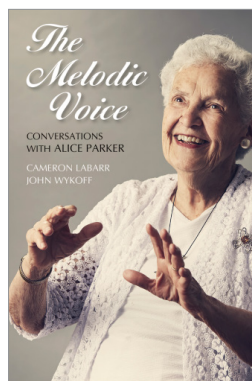
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fastball, changeup, another changeup, etc.) yields superior results to blocked-practice hitting” (43). This research convinced her to restructure rehearsals, where she now alternates between different pieces to keep the brain active.

In line with Paul’s ensemble-driven rehearsals, her discussion of score study frequently involves the choir. Traditionally, score study is viewed as a pre-rehearsal process of learning, interpreting, and preparing to teach the music, so Paul’s recommendation is a new take on that idea. While the chapter’s content may not be best suited for pre-rehearsal preparation, it does reimagine the role of the ensemble in score study and could be reframed as ‘Involving Your Ensemble in Score Study.’ I was also surprised that Dr. Paul requires her choirs to sing from memory, but was disappointed to find that the book does not provide any examples of research about memory or memorization. I would have liked to know more about her memorization process and in a second edition, an expansion on this topic would be welcome.

Dr. Paul should be applauded for her combination of scientific insight and choral art. This book is ideal for early-career conductors and choral educators, but also for seasoned professionals who have been teaching for several years and want to challenge their assumptions. The application of cognition research to best-practices for choir rehearsal both affirms strategies that conductors may already be using, and questions ones that we have taken for granted. In addition to the excellent research in the book, Dr. Paul’s candid description of her own professional growth affirms for all—experienced conductor and novice alike—that the pursuit of self-betterment requires mistakes, persistence, and openness to change. Her refreshing ideas and honesty provide just that motivation.

—Matthew Abernathy



*The Melodic Voice:
Conversations with Alice
Parker*

Cameron LaBarr and
John Wykoff

GIA Publications, 2019

243 pages; \$29.95
hardcover

ISBN: 978-1622773572

Alice Parker is perhaps one of the most influential American choral composers and arrangers. Although she claims to be retired, she is still at work with her organization Melodious Accord and composing at age 95. Despite a prolific career with significant contributions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we have few resources to illuminate her life and career beyond a smattering of dissertations and her own writings available in books and blogs. *The Melodic Voice: Conversations with Alice Parker*, though not exactly a biography, helps fill that void with a detailed look into the life and career of this remarkable composer, educator, and conductor.

The book contains a series of interviews that the authors, Cameron LaBarr and John Wykoff, conducted with Alice Parker in her home in Hawley, Massachusetts, over the span of three days in March, 2016. Each of the twenty-five chapters organizes Parker’s responses to interview questions that relate to a particular theme or time in Parker’s life. The subject matter spans the gamut, from her early childhood memories, to her academic studies, to her professional career, to her personal life, to her compositional process.

Authors LaBarr and Wykoff write in the Prelude that anyone who is acquainted with Parker’s teachings will find many common threads through

the book's pages. For instance, certainly anyone familiar with Parker's own books on composition (*The Anatomy of a Melody* and *The Answering Voice*) will recognize many of Parker's positions, beliefs, and practices when it comes to the art of composition. If you have had the pleasure of attending her workshops through Melodious Accord, reading portions of this book will drop you right back in the middle of her Hawley studio with reminders of her quiet, commanding voice as she preaches the gospel of melody and expounds on the marriage of text and tune. Many of the chapters focus on her compositional style, methods of score study, and educational philosophies. Those who have read Parker's books or any of the dissertations written about Parker's compositions or career will recognize common themes. It certainly reiterates that which is most important to the composer and establishes that her long-held beliefs hold firm even today.

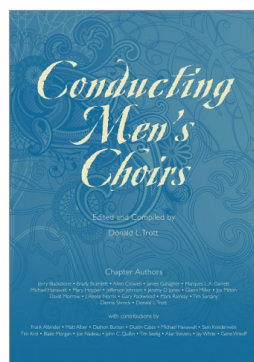
However, the authors boldly claim that this book offers new insight and information from Parker herself that cannot be found elsewhere. I found their assessment to be mostly true. The most significant, revelatory material in this book is found in Parker's stories from her childhood and early career. Parker talks about her experience as an undergraduate student in composition and details the factors that led her switch to conducting in her graduate studies at Julliard. She tells stories of her work with Julius Herford, Vincent Persichetti, and, of course, Robert Shaw. The chapter "Life and Death in New York City," I found particularly compelling. Parker talks about her life with her husband and then his untimely death. As an academic, so much of what we are interested in is the process of the artist in creating their art, but such stories of love, family, and sorrow make the artists human and relatable.

Formatted like a collection of short stories, each chapter is relatively brief and easy to read, yet

full of story and sentiment from Parker. With such self-contained chapters, one could easily pick it up and put it down at one's convenience. A reader can easily skip around, finding chapters that most interest them at the moment and coming back to other chapters later. Of special note: purchasing the book includes access to over three hours of video interviews with Alice Parker.

Readers seeking an extensive biography of Alice Parker will not find it in *The Melodic Voice*. However, those looking for an enjoyable introduction with short, insightful chapters on a variety of topics ranging from personal to professional on the life and career of American treasure, Alice Parker, will surely find satisfaction. In the Postlude, Parker shares her thoughts as she read over the book and her life depicted therein. She concludes, "I am the result of all the notes I have ever heard, plus all my life experiences. And I shall enjoy this countrified coda for as long as it is given me" (236).

— Sally Kelley



Conducting Men's Choirs
Donald L. Trott, editor
GIA Publications, 2020
448 pages, \$45.95,
hardcover
ISBN: 978-1622774005

Inspired by *Conducting Women's Choirs* (2012) by Debra Spurgeon, Donald L. Trott has published a companion book, *Conducting Men's Choirs*. In three major sections, the book consists of eighteen chapters, each written by an experienced choral musician.

The first section, comprised of five chapters, presents essays on various types of male choirs in the United States. Among the most informative are Jeremy D. Jones's comprehensive overview of the history of Glee Clubs and the development of collegiate men's choirs; Jos Milton's interview with seven former and current members of *Chanticleer* and *Cantus* about their unique experiences; and the emeritus director of the U. S. Army Chorus, Major Allen Crowell's story of his career and the development of that chorus. These chapters provide insightful information about distinctive career paths in the field of choral music.

The second section, with seven chapters, offers practical advice from experienced conductors about successful leadership of male choirs. Particularly resourceful are J. Reese Norris's chapter about management of middle school boy choirs; Jerry Blackstone's chapter sharing teaching techniques to create beautiful sound; and Jefferson Johnson's pedagogical chapter introducing ideas for intonation, formations, and warm-ups. Norris shares effective rehearsal techniques including classroom management and recruiting tips, especially beneficial for novice teachers of any choir. Blackstone's advice from his rich experience underlines the use of breath, falsetto, vowels, and rehearsal techniques and points out a fundamental element of great conductors, "those with the greatest imagination" (188). Jefferson Johnson shares his pedagogy to build a good male choir sound. In particular, Johnson's passages about intonation include crucial knowledge about tenor/bass (TB) voices, and examples easily applied in rehearsals. Another interesting chapter by Marques L. A. Garrett shares basic principles for arranging and composing for TTBB voicing. Garrett affirms that "many of the same guidelines for choral composition apply to those for men's choir" (251), but his effective tips for re-voicing are particularly useful for those who have limited experience in arranging.

The last section, comprised of six chapters, provides repertoire suggestions for men's choir. The section starts with a chapter by Dennis Shrock, who shares an extensive list of repertoire for men's voices from the Renaissance era, covering about thirty-eight composers and their works. Other resourceful chapters include Mark Ramsay's introduction to repertoire from Canadian composers, James Gallagher's selected repertoire for high school and collegiate male choirs, and Donald Trott's extended repertoire list. In addition to the useful information about contemporary Canadian composers, Mark Ramsay provides a helpful list of websites for Canadian choral music.

While the lists and instructions provide significant value, what makes this book unique is the inclusion of personal experiences from conductors and choral singers with diverse backgrounds. David Morrow shares his story and highlights the legacy of the Morehouse College Glee Club, one of the historic African-American male collegiate choirs. Glenn Miller, a world-class octavist, shares his vocal maturation process and a selected list of repertoire for the voice type. Brady Bramlett, a professional baseball player for the Boston Red Sox, shares his singing experiences and the influence of choral singing on his athletic career and life. Mary Hopper's thoughtful chapter reflects on hurdles and myths that women conductors may face, and provides wisdom from her experiences.

A few chapters, however, could have been more informative or balanced within the rest of the book. Gary Packwood's chapter "From Entertainment to Social Justice: Examining Men's Community Choruses in America" shares interviews with seven conductors. Despite the title, we find few specifics about the reflection of social justice in men's ensembles. Some directors mention the inclusion of LGBTQ members in ensembles. However, considering potential readers of the book, it would have been more helpful to

learn how each ensemble reflects social justice issues in programming and performances. In the third section of repertoire suggestions, Tim Sarsany and Michael Hanawalt share detailed analyses on a limited number of works: Robert Schumann's part-songs and Veljo Tormis's works, respectively. Although informative, these offerings seem oddly specific when set among the rest of the chapters, which introduce broader groups of composers and works.

Overall, *Conducting Men's Choirs* is an excellent and informative resource for any choral music library. It is highly recommended for young conductors or anyone who would like to learn about the nature of men's choirs, fundamental teaching techniques for tenor/bass voices, and repertoire for male choirs.

— Minji Kim



Focus: Choral Music in Global Perspective

André de Quadros

Routledge, 2019

256 pages; \$160
hardcover, \$49.95
softcover

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Choral conductors approaching André de Quadros's *Focus: Choral Music in Global Perspective* should be aware that it is first and foremost an ethnomusicology text, published as part of Routledge's *Focus on World Music* series. De Quadros argues that the contemporary global choral phenomenon is primarily a product of European colonialism, and he profiles choral organizations around the world that are actively

grappling with this legacy and shaping what he terms the "New Normal" of choral practice: organizations that "deploy the choral instrument to give voice to oppression and marginalization, to build community in diverse contexts, to envision new models for power-sharing and collaboration in rehearsal and performance, and to construct multiple manifestations of exceptionality" (4).

The book comprises three large sections. In Part One, "The Chorus: Traditions, Evolutions, and a New Perspective," de Quadros offers an historical and theoretical account of the choir as a social institution (Chapter 2), followed by a rapid-fire survey of choral organizations that exemplify different facets of the "New Normal" (Chapter 3). Part 2, "Choirs in Context," features ethnographic portraits of selected choruses in Indonesia (Chapter 4), the Arab World and Israel (Chapter 5), colleges in the United States (Chapter 6), and prisons in Thailand, Germany, Argentina, the United States, and Indonesia (Chapter 7), highlighting these choruses' public missions, performance practices, and principal repertoire. Part 3, "Focusing in on Choruses," is methodologically identical to the preceding part, although each chapter now takes a thematic focus including choral touring activities (Chapter 8), gender and sexual identity in the chorus (Chapter 9), women's leadership of choral organizations (Chapter 10), and youth and children's choirs (Chapter 11).

As an ethnomusicological study, de Quadros primarily emphasizes the social activity of choral singing, the meanings that conductors and singers ascribe to their work, and the ways by which those meanings emerge through artistic choices in performance. De Quadros includes only minimal analytical discussions of repertoire, although he references many pieces of music throughout that the discerning reader could pursue. Most chapters

begin with an overview of cultural or theoretical scholarship that contextualizes the case studies that follow—for example, the political history of Israel in Chapter 5, or gender performativity and queer studies in Chapter 9. One wishes occasionally for greater connection between the theoretical and empirical portions of de Quadros’s writing, as his case studies of individual choirs are frequently more descriptive than analytical.

If the book has a principal weakness, one finds that in his effort to highlight a balance of choral organizations from around the world, de Quadros inevitably cannot go into equal detail on each of them. Some choirs and geopolitical regions receive greater attention than others, while de Quadros’s accounts of individual choirs often mirror their own consciously crafted public images as presented through publicity materials and interviews with their conductors, rather than questioning how these public portrayals are produced or received. Conversely, de Quadros writes most vividly when he makes room for the voices of choral participants as interlocutors in his research, such as when he relates the experiences of two participants in a prison choir in Thailand, or his own difficulties mediating tensions between audience members during a concert he conducted in Israel. These

more extended vignettes gesture at future possibilities for focused ethnographic studies on musical transmission, inter-cultural contact, and the multiple meanings of social justice in specific choral contexts; one hopes that this book serves as an inspiration for such research.

Focus: Choral Music in Global Perspective is an ambitious and timely book, and de Quadros makes up for the occasional cursory nature of some sections through the breadth of choral organizations that he profiles for the first time in academic print and his sincere advocacy for these organizations. Conductors considering portions of this book as course readings will find its opening chapters particularly useful for discussing current activist approaches to choral practice, as well as evolving directions in choral pedagogy driven by choral leaders working directly with issues of culture, class, and identity. Throughout, de Quadros offers a model for ethnographic research by conductors in the service of broadening our field’s knowledge of current choral practices worldwide. That is reason enough to read this book.

— *Patrick Murray*