

Guidelines for the Schola Cantorum Project Composer

Dear Composer,

In addition to the Composition Criteria Summary set forth on our website, and the Composer's Contract page also found on this website, we have found a need to give some general guidelines that aren't really criteria, but rather suggestions. Some composers being chosen to write for the Schola Cantorum Project may be totally familiar with the Middle School Title 1 Choral genre; but some may not, and it might be helpful to see what general expectations the Project authors have in mind!

Text Considerations

- ❖ Lyrics should address the interests of the contemporary adolescent (the Project spans grade 6-9, but generally focuses on 7-8). They should be relevant to the understandings and concerns of this age student, such as self-identity and self-worth, acceptance of others (peer relationships), kindness toward others, family dynamics, navigating bullying (and cyberbullying) dealing with stress, etc.
- ❖ Should avoid being politically charged.
- ❖ May use foreign languages, but with a limited number of new words to have to grasp, so singers aren't overwhelmed and discouraged by the challenges.
- ❖ Should be set with logical syllabic stress, regardless of language.
- ❖ Should be applicable to both the TB and the SA singer, since you will be writing it in both settings.

Accompaniment Considerations:

- ❖ Should support, but not necessarily duplicate the vocal lines. For example, a more difficult harmonic spot, intervallic leap or entrance place might have a piano lead-in that assists the singer in finding it.
- ❖ Should only be demanding of moderate pianistic skills for the classroom teacher.
- ❖ Instrumental parts other than keyboard should be optional, if used. Those should be of moderate difficulty to perform as well. They are not discouraged, though!
- ❖ Excessively long instrumental breaks for the purpose of lengthening the piece are discouraged. Please make all instrumental breaks integral to the piece. Some can work quite well.

Vocal Melodic Considerations:

- ❖ Voice lines should be essentially diatonic, with moderate intervallic leaps.
- ❖ Dissonances need to be approached in stepwise motion (and moved away from as well).
- ❖ Cross voicing should be avoided.
- ❖ Let harmonizing part have an interesting line, whenever possible!
- ❖ Tessitura should avoid overuse of the break/passaggio area and of extreme ends of the vocal range. For example: passaggio areas as Sop: C₅-D₅; Alto F₄-G₄, some G₄-A₄; Ten: can vary widely, depending on stage of change; Bass: Particularly B₃-C₄ and C₄-D₄.

Vocal Range Considerations:

This is not hard and fast, but should by and large be a part of the composers' thinking in writing for middle school singers:

SOPRANO/ALTO RANGES:

Soprano: C₄-E₅ (limited use of F₅, if provide optional alternate lower pitch). If lower than C₄, should be in unison with Alto.

Alto: A₃ to C₅ (if going higher, usually should be unison with Sopranos or provide an optional alternate pitch. If singing below A₃, provide an optional higher pitch also).

TENOR/BASS RANGES:

Tenor: F₃-F₄ (some tenors in second change may have an E₃ or even D₃ but try not to keep them there overlong; or provide optional higher pitch. 1st tenors, especially those newly changed, may still have G₄ comfortably. That could be provided as an optional higher pitch, if desired.)

Bass/Baritone: Generally, C₃ to C₄, but some have rather limited range at first, so D₃-B₃, is a safe bet! Again, optional/alternate notes are possible. It may be good to note that lower notes for the new bass/baritone voice may not always be negotiated well in fast moving passages yet!

Harmonic Considerations:

Suggestions: I, IV, V (and V7) with occasional ii or vi chords. Cautious use of deceptive cadence but it can be very effective if the voice leading is helpful!

Intervals within the I, IV and V choirs. 3rds, P4 and P5 all work. Octave leap might work, but sparingly. A glance at Texas UIL Sightreading Criteria for C and CC levels will give some more specific ideas. See Level 1 and Level II at

<https://www.uil texas.org/music/concert-sight-reading/choir-sight-Reading-criteria>.

General Considerations of Difficulty, Length, Form:

- ❖ Part singing is introduced or often strengthened by use of:
 1. Partner-songs,
 2. canonic writing,
 3. echoing phrases, &
 4. unisons with descant or a ground lower part.

Sometimes, giving variety through use of these makes the song engaging to singer and listener alike. If canon is used, please make the final cadence include everyone!

- ❖ Straightforward harmonic writing is certainly also acceptable.
- ❖ ABA and AB forms are often used successfully in music for this age.
- ❖ The music should generally be simple, but SUBSTANTIVE. Avoid frequent key and/or meter changes. Simple meters are best, but not required.
- ❖ We suggest limiting Key Signatures to no more than 3 #'s or 3b's. Of course, in Texas, the keys of F and G are golden!
- ❖ Best length is between 2 and 3 minutes, but this is not hard and fast!
- ❖ Provide Piano reduction of parts for an a cappella piece.
- ❖ Try to avoid score that looks cluttered or crammed together.
- ❖ Please try to avoid awkward page turns, when possible.

These are just guidelines to consider! We want to encourage composers to write specifically for middle school and think some may not have tried it yet who could add many needed selection choices to that genre's available repertoire!

Thanks for your interest in the Schola Cantorum Project and welcome!