

CHOOSING LITERATURE FOR BEGINNING AND NON-VARSITY TREBLE CHOIRS

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- 1) In my opinion, treble music increases in difficulty in this order – unison, rounds, partner songs, 2 parts that move in mostly contrary motion, 2 parts with homophonic motion (lots of parallel thirds and sixths).
- 2) **Unison music is your friend.** Beautiful tone, blend, vowels, intonation, phrasing and musicality can be mastered when singing in unison.
- 3) 6th, 7th and 8th grade beginning treble choirs tend to have a comfortable range from D above middle C to D above treble C. Any piece that stays outside of this tessitura for any extended period of time will create breathing and intonation issues.
- 4) Changing treble voices do not have a lot of flexibility. Large leaps are very fatiguing for young treble choirs and have inherent intonation issues.
- 5) **ACCOMPANIMENTS MATTER.** The simplest melody paired with an unsupportive accompaniment will be far more difficult than you initially can imagine. Look for pieces where the accompaniment supports the singers.
- 6) Major keys are easier for young singers to hear than minor keys. Minor keys are **much** easier to hear than modes. If choosing a modal song for a beginning choir, be sure the accompaniment is very supportive and does not include large leaps or homophonic texture.
- 7) **STAY OFF THE GRADE 3, 4 AND 5 PML LIST WITH BEGINNING OR NON-VARSITY CHOIRS.** It is not appropriate for your youngest treble singers. The Grade 2 list is only for a very few really good non-varsity treble groups.
- 8) If your UIL Concert and Sightreading Contest is in late February or early March, **strongly** consider learning a UIL-worthy piece for your fall or winter concert and bring it back for UIL.
- 9) My 6th grade beginning and 7th and 8th grade non-varsity treble choirs sang mostly unison songs, rounds and partner songs for 29 years. If singing in “real” two parts, the accompaniments were supportive and the 2 parts used lots of contrary motion. I stayed away from parallel thirds and sixths for any extended period of time. They almost always sang in 2 parts.
- 10) Shorter is better for young choirs. If your UIL acapella piece lasts for more than 45 seconds, it's too long!
- 11) Do not choose literature based on your ego or what you sang in college. **Just because your choir CAN sing something does not mean they SHOULD.** Correct notes and rhythms are not the same thing as making music with beautiful tone, vowels, phrasing, musicality and intonation. I'm allowed to say this because I'm retired! 😊

TREBLE SONGS FROM THE PACKET RANKED FROM EASIEST TO MOST DIFFICULT:

- 1) **Dormi, Dormi arr. by Goetze**– This beautiful song is in unison with a supportive piano accompaniment and very singable stepwise melody. The challenges come from meter changes, Italian diction and creating lovely phrases. I have sung this piece at UIL with an NV treble choir even though it is not on the PML – it is that good.
- 2) **The Mending Song by Kallman** – This song is in unison. The melody includes large ascending leaps, changing meter and cool but unsupportive (and DIFFICULT) piano and clarinet accompaniment. Great opportunity for singing musical phrases with an interesting text. This piece is on the PML Grade 1 list.
- 3) **Tarantella by Howard**– This song is in unison, but also has an optional descant part. The melody is mostly stepwise but in a minor key. Piano and optional piccolo accompaniment is fun. It is a bit longer than the first 2 songs, but repetitive. This piece is not on the PML list, but is UIL-worthy.
- 4) **May Joyful Music Fill the Air by Tallis/arr. by Robinson** Great first baby step into singing in parts. All students learn the famous Tallis Canon melody with secular words. Breath support in 4 measure phrases with a < > shape should be emphasized to all singers in unison. Then, singers can be divided into 2 equal parts.
- 5) **Housetop Carol arr. by Bennett**– Great true partner song that includes the familiar “Up on the Housetop” melody paired with another melody with some interesting harmonies that support the singers in the accompaniment. Very simple, short phrases. Teach all singers both melodies in unison first. Then, divide into 2 equal parts and combine.
- 6) **A Distant Shore arr. by Donnelly and Strid**– This wonderful partner song includes the familiar folk song “The Water is Wide”. Great opportunities for long 4 measure phrases with < >, pulling tied notes across the bar lines, controlled breath support and some intonation challenges. First, teach all singers both melodies in unison, then divide into 2 equal parts and combine.
- 7) **Let Everyone Shout and Sing by Poorman**– A great first “real” 2-part treble song. Much of the song is in unison. The parts tend to move in contrary motion and repeat several times. Piano accompaniment is very supportive and bouncy and fun. Great opportunity for teaching dynamics. It sounds much more difficult than it actually is.
- 8) **Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? arr. by Emerson**– Very singable melody, but in a minor key so it includes some intonation issues. Piano accompaniment is supportive. Lots of unison singing, mixed with echo singing and parts moving in contrary motion. Even though this piece is not on the PML in this voicing, it is a UIL-worthy choice.
- 9) **Give Thanks and Praise by Handel/arr. Kihlken**– This song is the most difficult piece in the treble packet. A fantastic introduction to the Baroque period. Singable melody with supportive piano accompaniment. Lots of unison singing, with parts in contrary motion and a few homophonic portions in parallel thirds and sixths. Great opportunities for teaching Baroque terraced dynamics, tone and beautiful vowels. This piece is on the PML Grade 1 list.