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DOSSIER
A CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON MONTEVERDI'S MISSA IN ILLO TEMPORE

COMPOSER'S CORNER:
REVIVING THE MUSIC OF A FORGOTTEN AMERICAN

INTERNATIONAL CHORAL BULLETIN

COVER

Claudio Monteverdi on score cover. Published Venice 1644 in memory of Monteverdi. 'Fiori Poetici Raccolti nel Funerale del molto illustre; e molto reverende Signor Claudio Monteverde Maestro di Cappella della Ducale di S. Marco.' Italian composer. 15 May 1567 - 29 November 1643

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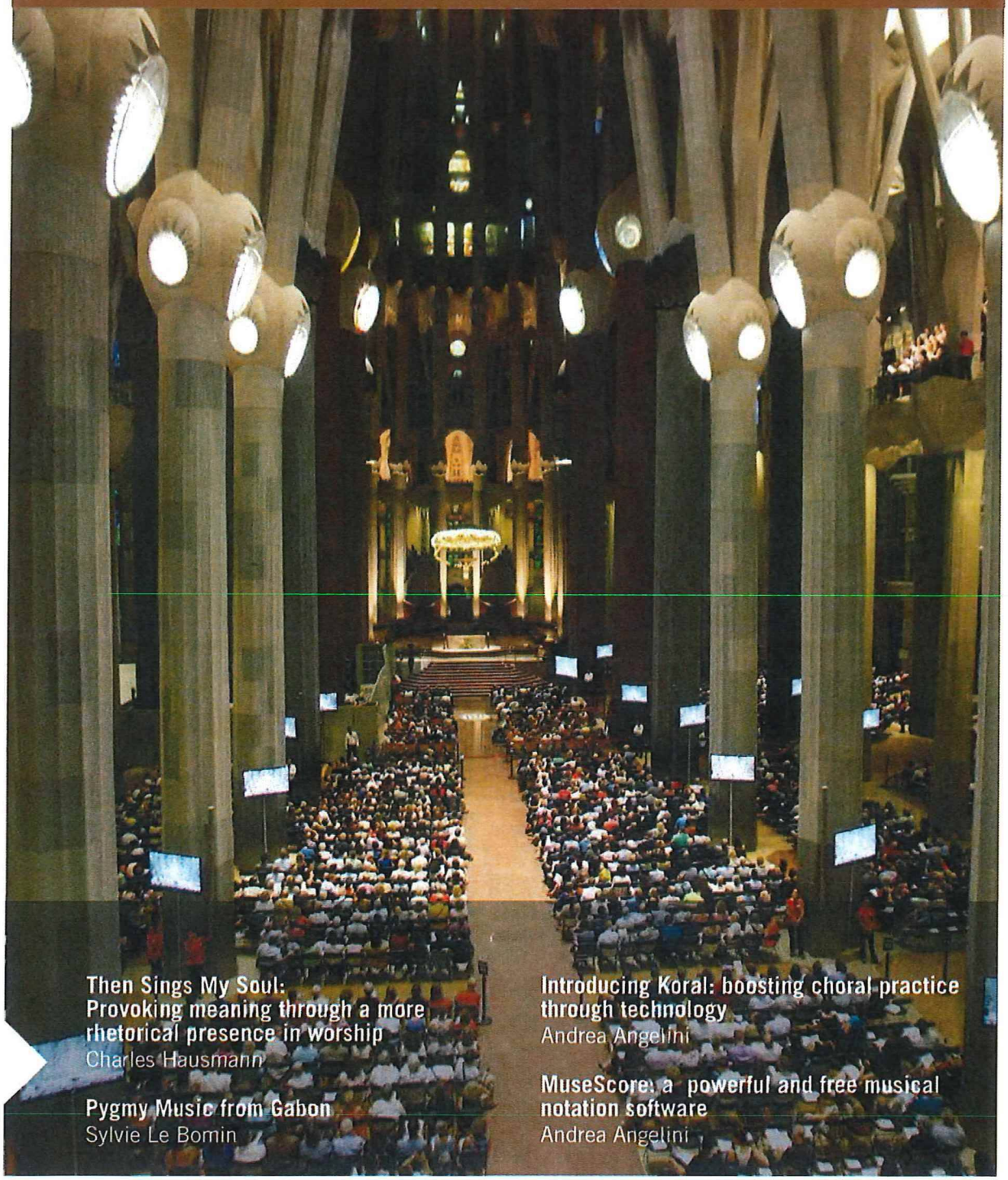

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11th World Symposium on Choral Music, special concert at la Sagrada Familia (26 July 2017) © FCEC

THEN SINGS MY SOUL: PROVOKING MEANING THROUGH A MORE RHETORICAL PRESENCE IN WORSHIP

CHARLES HAUSMANN
choral conductor and teacher

Why are great preachers and actors so compelling and convincing, even when they are saying words that someone else wrote? It is because they are believable; their words, vocal tone, and body language are congruent and convey the same message. Psychologist, Albert Mehrabian has called these, the three "V's" of communication: the verbal, the vocal, and the visual, a dynamic and rhetorical way to convey meaning.[1] This corresponds to Cicero's three purposes of rhetoric - *docere, movere, delectare* - to teach, to move, and to delight, later adopted by St. Augustine as the principals of Christian oratory.

Biblical prophets also used rhetoric. Their three main tasks were to capture attention, rebuke sinful ways, and inspire reform. And today's charismatic preachers use expressive musical devices and even movement to convince their congregations. Changes of vocal pitch, volume, and pace including dramatic pauses, and exaggerated pronunciations are often used to compel the listener to feel the message.

The fields of philosophy and musicology have shown that music as rhetoric can further enhance these principals. And the connection of text and music in choral singing provides a significant opportunity for rhetorical delivery. Yet, eminent British conductor, Simon Carrington has stated, "choral singers do not use rhetoric enough of the time. They may sing well but convey little."[2] Does the choir give meaning to the music through textual believability? Are the singers kinetically and expressively involved with the music in a way that provokes meaning, much the same way great preaching can? This is often not the case as John Dickson has observed: "Choral directors and singers suffer from a kind of 'tonal agnosia' when they assume that comprehension of words is sufficient and dismiss the expressive qualities of Language."[3] The purpose here is to explore how choirs in the church can have a powerful dynamic impact in worship using a more rhetorical model. We want to give meaning to the music through the text we sing, creating a kind of "high definition" approach to choral singing. To assist the singers in becoming more believable and congruent in their delivery we will explore a threefold process: 1) hermeneutical analysis (exploring the verbal), 2) text mapping (the mechanics of vocal projection), and 3) rhetorical delivery (using kinetics to enhance the visual).

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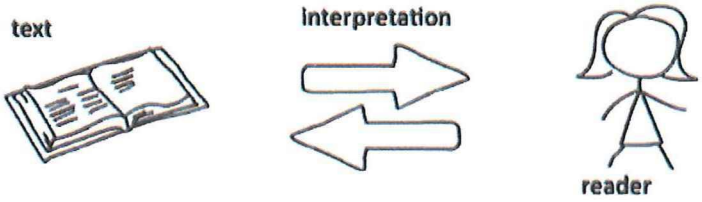
1 The Three V's of Communication. "*Successfully Speaking*." 2015. Web. June 29, 2013.

2 Simon Carrington. "Choral Conducting Masterclass at the Three Choirs Festival". YouTube video, 4:03. Posted [March, 2012]. https://youtu.be/9sZo2m0Rcs!

3 John Dickson, "Musical Pride and Textual Prejudice: The Expressivity of Language in Choral Music," *Choral Journal* (September 1993): 15.

HERMENEUTICS AND CHORAL SINGING



Robert Shaw has said: The voice is not the end it is the servant of the music. The music is not the end it is the servant of the text. It can also be said that the text is not the end it is the servant of meaning.[4] In fact it was Shaw's belief that the ideal choral sound is dependent on the interpretive feeling one derives from the text. And conductor Morris Beachy refers to the "feeling tone" of a word and defines it as the summation of a person's living experience of what the term has come to mean to the individual.[5]

To discover meaning in the text the process of hermeneutical analysis serves as a helpful tool. Hermeneutics can be defined as the theory of interpretation and the art of understanding. It has long been a component of seminary education where it becomes a link between the study of scriptural interpretation and preaching. It is therefore relevant for church musicians where our interpretation of scripture and verse can bring greater meaning to the music we present in worship.

When we read a text we have begun the interpretive process. But it is important that we pay primary attention to the author's idea. As Peter Gomes states in *The Good Book*: "A text may have a life of its own, but that life depends upon the author who gave it life, investing it with an intention, a purpose, and a meaning."[6] The relationship between the text and the author can be seen in this comparison.[7]

Text ←——————→ **Author**	
Vocabulary	Motivation
Grammar	Intent
Syntax	Purpose

As Gomes notes, "the text, therefore, already participates in, and at least initially gives expression to, the intent of the author . . . [but] there is also whatever the reader brings to and finds in the text, and eventually takes from the text."[8]

Then, there is an additional step that we as musicians must take – the discovery of how the composer has interpreted these words and what compositional devices have been used to bring meaning to the text.

CHORAL HERMENEUTICS

The process of analyzing a text using the elements of hermeneutics can be understood in the following five steps.

1. Situate the text

Who wrote the text? What is the proper context for the text from the author's point of view?

2. Parse the text

How does the syntax contribute to the meaning? What are essential and non-essential words? Which are the colorful and descriptive words in a phrase?

3. Exegete the text

What is the meaning that the author is trying to convey? To exegete is to find meaning from the words rather than imposing our own meaning on them.

4. Integrate the text and music

How has the composer interpreted the text? What is the composer's point of view? Does it agree with the author's ideas?

5. Engage the text rhetorically

What does it mean to me? What life experiences does it bring out? How can we make it clear, believable and convincing?

If we look at the first chorus from Handel's *Messiah* there are four phrases of text, each set in a distinctive manner.

> 1) And the glory, the glory of the Lord, 2) shall be revealed, 3) and all flesh shall see it together, 4) for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Situate: The text is from the prophecy of Isaiah proclaiming the coming of the Lord.

Parse: A syntactical analysis reveals the important and words.

Exegete: Here the author is attempting to prepare us for the coming of the Lord.

Integrate: Handel emphasizes the words he feels are important giving them greater impact (glory, Lord, revealed, flesh, together, mouth, spoken).

Engage: For believers, these words create anticipation and excitement and are important tenets of the faith.

TEXT MAPPING

After discovering meaning through a hermeneutical analysis it is important to decide how the text will be delivered technically. This

4 Gerald Custer, "Provoking Meaning: Some Thoughts about Choral Hermeneutics," *Choral Journal* (November 2001): 25.

5 Morris J. Beachy, "Marriage of Words to Music," *Choral Journal 6* (November-December 1966): 10.

6 Peter J. Gomes, *The Good Book: Reading The Bible With Mind and Heart* (New York, NY: Avon Books, Inc. 1996), 26.

7 Custer, op. cit., 26.

8 Gomes, op. cit., 36.

is the vocal process. How do we project words with maximum impact and understanding? How do we deliver them over an organ or instrumental accompaniment?

Diagramming how the phonemes, syllables and words are delivered can be shown in what I will term, "text mapping," a process to reveal their relative importance. Then, note grouping and musical gesture create a dynamic curve that places impulses in context specific places. Donald Barra explains the process further: "Typically, tonal actions begin with an anacrusis, or growth phase of increasing energy, reach a focal point of highest intensity, then end with a concluding phase, a release or relaxation."[9] This can be seen in the two levels of arcing that appear above the words in the mapping example below.

The following steps (forming the acronym SAVED) can be helpful in text delivery.

Sing all the micro-sounds of every word. Allow the individual phonemes to have color and clarity. Here we discover the micro-rhythmic structure of the words.

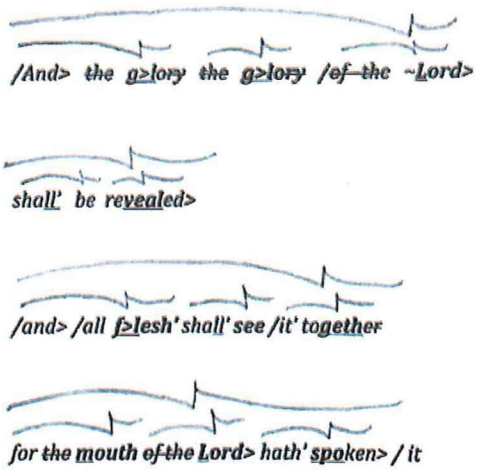
Amplify the vowels giving vibrancy and nuance to the sound. This "*messa di voce*" ideal is from the early teachers of singing and the art of bel canto. It is singing on the vowels using dynamic motion.

Vocalize the consonants. This would include a) singing shadow-vowels where needed, b) strengthening weak consonants, c) sounding double consonants, and d) giving pitch to voiced consonants.

Emphasize important syllables and words while de-emphasizing weak ones. Bring out the micro-dynamics of the words themselves. No two syllables or words are ever the same.

Deliver the words with rhetorical conviction, giving them color, emphasis, and meaning.

Applied Text Mapping

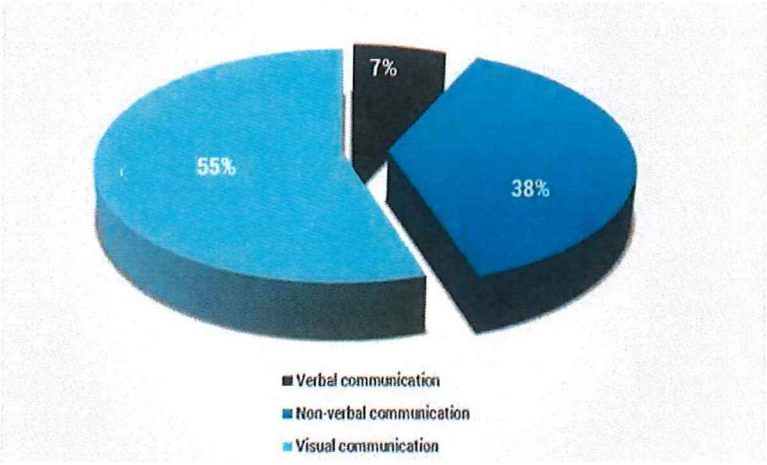


MAPPING KEY

*Shadow Vowel = **[>]***
Consonant contraction = [']
New glottal attack = [/]
Strengthen consonants = [__]
Emphasize weak consonants = [~]
De-emphasis = ~~[abc]~~
*Emphasis = **[bold font]***
Note grouping and dynamic motion = [arcs above the text]

RHETORICAL DELIVERY

It is significant that in the rhetorical process (verbal, vocal, and visual) the visual has been found to convey the most meaning. According to Abraham Mehrabian's theory, which is still widely accepted today, there is a 7 – 38 - 55 communication ratio. That is, 7% of what we communicate comes from the literal content of the words. The use of our vocal tone and technique provides 38%, and our non-verbal or visual communication contributes as much as 55%.



9 Donald Barra, *The Dynamic Performance: A Performer's guide to Musical Expression and Interpretation* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1983), 19.

While no previous research has examined the relationship between the visual aspects of a performer and the individual elements that create a musically expressive performance, the results of Jay Juchniewicz's study is profound. It revealed that the addition of physical movement amplified the listeners' perception of these elements. The results found that a pianist's physical movements significantly increased participants' ratings of the performances. Additionally, as the pianist's physical movements increased so did the participants ratings of phrasing, dynamics, rubato, and overall musical performance.[10]

How then can movement be used in choral performance? Gestures that we use most often when speaking can be referred to as rhetorical gesture. Well known opera directors, Marshall Pynkoski and Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg have discussed six categories of rhetorical gesture that people use: 1) emphatic, 2) indicative, 3) affective, 4) imitative, 5) preparatory, and 6) terminating.[11] When singing in a chorus, these can be used in much the same way to project meaning. I have adapted these rhetorical gestures into the following techniques for projecting musical and textual ideas. They form an acronym appropriate to the topic, PRAISE.

PRAISE

Prepare: Show mood, pace, and dynamic intent through your breath. Use your entire body including face and eyes to project your feeling.
Recite: Know where you are going with the text and show the forward momentum. Never just words but word-to-word and phrase-to-phrase. This can be seen in the animation given in your face and body.
Affect: While you are singing the words show the emotion in your eyes and face and body. What do you feel about the words you are singing?
Indicate: Use your eyes and body to indicate that you are starting a phrase and where you are directing it.
Stress: Be emphatic with your stressed phonemes, syllables, and words. Refer to the word mapping to bring important emphasis.
End: Give closure to the music. Make it impact-filled like you would end a rhetorically delivered sentence. Maintain that feeling and pose.

Choral singing in the church can enhance the worship experience by bringing dynamic impact to the music presented. Using the principles of rhetorical delivery we can teach, move, and inspire a congregation in much the same way great preaching can. The following two aphorisms can summarize this entire process:
If it is not in your mind it will not be in your voice, and 2) Your message goes where your voice goes, but your voice goes where your eyes send it.

Edited by Louise Wiseman, UK

10 Jay Juchniewicz, (2005). "The Influence of Physical Movement on the Perception of Musical Performance," (Masters thesis), 26.

11 Marshall Pynkoski and Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg. "Rhetorical Gesture," YouTube video, 8:26. Posted [April, 2011]. https://youtu.be/el3yGfhDm9o

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