

CHAPEL SINGING FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS - Alan Collyer

Some random thoughts

- Some quotable quotes to begin with from a site called *Singing Changes Your Brain*.
- *Some research has shown that singing allows for the release of the very same chemicals as sex and chocolate that gives you that sense of calm and relaxation that we enjoy. It also gives you a boost in energy with the release of endorphins.*
- *Spending time singing will give your lungs a good workout. When we sing, we breathe more deeply which allows for an intake of more oxygen and the release of muscle tension.*
- *Singing in a group has great mental benefits. It provides empowerment, confidence and wellbeing (or to use a trendy term today – wellness!). It helps to lower the feeling of isolation, depression and anxiety.*
- The situation in many Lutheran schools is that the primary schools, singing is received with a fair amount of enthusiasm, but when they graduate to the secondary sector, they feel intimidated by some of the senior students and therefore they won't sing because it is not cool to do so even if they sing at worship at their local church on Sundays.
- Today in many Christian churches and including many Lutheran churches and schools, the music and voice of the community has been linked to one basic genre in style – the Worship Band / Hillsong approach which is a very narrow expression and experience considering global experiences in worship and in some instances questionable theology. It is a very parochial approach and does not represent a fuller ecumenical and global attitude which ought to be the focus of Lutheran schools. I am NOT suggesting that we cannot use the Worship Band / Hillsong repertoire, but as in all school subjects, we do aim to apply as much breadth as we can. Why should worship and its music be any different?
- A lot of our students aren't practising Christians, and while the flavour of the times suggests that we ought to sing *heart* songs only, a lot of these songs do NOT teach the faith. Songs / hymns chosen should have a healthy balance of *heart* and *head*. Many of the *heart* songs have very little content.
- Employment and expectations of music staff. From some of my observations from a number of schools, the music staff have little or no involvement in the chapel program. This is regrettable. If I was employed in a Catholic school, it would be expected that I would support and teach the sung liturgies and the songs for Mass. Likewise in an Anglican school, music staff support the worship programs such as Chapel choir, massed singing etc. Why doesn't this happen in many of our Lutheran schools? As a Lutheran school, it seems that this should be given a much higher priority, including a time allowance for at least one of the music staff to have such a portfolio, particularly in the area of massed singing in chapel. Perhaps what I have written needs to be an essential discussion with the Principal of the school.
- Likewise, music staff and school pastors/ lay chaplains should meet regularly to discuss and plan the chapel program for each month or term.
- When regional conferences are held for chaplains, why not allocate a half day session where music directors or those responsible for chapel music meet with the chaplains and also have a meeting on their own? This can only enrich the worship life of each school, some who tend to work in isolation. Music educators always need further enrichment and education.
- Using some of the main ensembles in the school can enrich the worship experience by an ensemble accompanying the song/hymn. Encourage the music staff to have their various ensembles play in and out of chapel including an arrangement of the song/hymn about to be

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From Together in Song – Australian Hymnbook II

Psalmody

- # 9 Psalm 22 Christopher Willcock (Holy Week). Cantor and Assembly
- # 11 Psalm 23 Gelineau
- # 16 Psalm 27 Willcock
- # 19 Psalm 31 John Bell (Iona Community)
- # 32 Psalm 51 Willcock (Ash Wednesday)
- # 43 Psalm 81 Willcock
- # 48 Psalm 91 Joncas
- # 60 Psalm 100 Deiss
- # 74 Psalm 118 Willcock

Hymns and Songs

- # 100 All creatures of our God and King. Initially try soloist/school choir for verses with whole school joining in the Alleluias. Best in C major for morning chapel.
- # 103 A mighty fortress – it is surprising how many non Lutherans love to sing this melody!
- # 129 Amazing Grace
- # 135 All things bright and beautiful (Aust. Text). Best in C major
- # 152 and 158. Beethoven's well known tune. Best in F major
- # 156 / 319 / 627 Morning has broken tune. B flat major?
- # 161 / 411 Well worth learning in the key of C major
- # 181 Come O God of all the earth. Responsorial style.
- # 183 Sing of the Lord's goodness. Is in 5/4 time. While cantor or choir sings the verses, the assembly can make soft vocal percussive sounds resembling cymbals. Easy chorus for all to learn. Brubeck's Take Five as in and out music would be most apt.
- # 203 Fairest Lord Jesus A golden oldie. Strings or woodwind ensemble?
- # 256 The Servant King Kendrick. Goes without saying!
- # 265 O come, o come Emmanuel. Cantor and assembly (refrain)? Mode of D rather than E?
- #268 / 299/ 301/ 303/ 304 (but not this text)/311/312/316/318. Well known Carols.

- # 279/283 Easy refrains to learn. Use of cantor.
- # 339 O Sacred Head – play a CD or DVD of this chorale. Good YouTube versions available.
- # 342 When I survey Has not completely died out. Try it in C major
- # 345 Were you there? Not easy to sing but worth a try.
- # 357 When his time was over. A Robin Mann classic. Worth reviving.
- # 362 or 370 Traditional but worth it.
- # 382 Now the green blade rises. Simple tune to learn. Try it in D rather than E.
- # 411 (see TIS 156 above)
- # 455 For all the saints. Not particularly easy to learn, but there are some majestic YouTube clips of this hymn.
- # 474 Here in this place. Well known by Catholic students! Lutheran author and composer!
- # 491 Father welcomes. A baptism / welcoming song. In past years it was overused, but sadly is now underused. Needs to be used 2-3 times each year.
- # 535 I am the Bread of Life (John 6). Verses are difficult (cantor?) but has a rousing chorus.
- # 547 Be Thou my vision A must!
- # 560(i) All my hope on God. There is a sad but wonderful story about this beautiful hymn and some beautiful clips on YouTube as well
- # 579 Good fun for some light relief!
- # 585 I heard the voice of Jesus. A haunting and beautiful English/Irish melody.
- # 593 Lord, take my hand and lead me. An important Lutheran hymn which is often used at Confirmation services.
- # 607 The prayer of St Francis
- # 607/626 and 547. A great melody and very singable.
- # 627
- # 629 Social Justice
- # 643 I want to walk as a child of the light (Maranatha Music). Great chorus.
- # 644 Safe in the shadow (Psalm 91). Very easy to learn. Works very well with strings.
- # 650 Brother, sister, let me serve you. Perhaps a little old hat.
- # 658 I the Lord of sea and sky. (Catholics love this!). Magnificent choral versions on YouTube
- # 665 Jesus Christ is waiting (Matthew 25). Social Justice.

- # 666 Freedom is coming. Needs a good a capella choir to lead this.
- # 675 Shine, Jesus shine. Worth singing once or twice a year. Chorus gets rather high causing a thin sound.
- # 689 Lord hear my prayer. Great for the “down” times in a school community.
- # 699 A new commandment ??
- # 703 As the deer pants. Has been done to death previously.
- # 730 Jesus remember me Taize (Holy Week)
- # 732 Lift up your hearts Sturdy melody sung as a 2 part round.
- # 734 Kyrie Eleison (Ghana)
- # 736 Kyrie Eleison (Ukranian Orthodox). Can be taught as soprano and bass very easily or as SATB.
- # 738 Shout to the Lord (Hillsong). Possibly on its way out!
- # 745 Seek ye first with Alleluias
- # 779 Christmas Blessing
- # 781 Father bless us as we go. Easy 3 part round.

sung. Most extra curricular music programs can boast of 15+ ensembles, and some of these could be chosen to match the character of the hymn/song. String Orchestra, String Quartet, Full Orchestra (to the tune *Jerusalem!!*) would provide a wonderful support for singing, Concert Band, Symphonic Band, Brass Ensemble with Tympani (to sing *This is the Feast*), Jazz Ensemble (see TIS 183!), Woodwind Ensemble etc. etc. This approach would avoid the worship band always being the prominent or only form of accompaniment for worship. Now all of this would require a lot of extra organisation and administration, but the benefits for all in the school community would far outweigh the extra work involved, and hopefully would be organised by a member of the music faculty who has a time allowance for this. Now just imagine when prospective families visit the school and attend morning chapel when this happens? A big WOW factor.

- What is it that kills good singing in our chapel services? I won't be popular for saying this, but LOUD bands do NOT encourage singing, nor do loud vocalists and sometimes their dominating physical appearance. The ordinary person sitting in the chapel can't compete against this and usually just give up and if they are a boy, they will put their hands in their pockets as we all know!! We now have a new *prima donna* these days and that can be the vocalist(s) in the worship band. Yes I know, organists can be *prima donnas* too, but at least most of them can't be seen!! Songs which are too complicated rhythmically, such as excessive syncopation, causes constipated singing! Never introduce a song/hymn as an old one – the NT is 2000 years old! Always be positive, enthusiastic and encouraging in your approach. Allow a bit of a competitive streak every now and again, such as boys v girls or house v house. While this may seem a little irreverent, it does work. Allow enough time for the teaching of the song –do we need to have an address every chapel service? In teaching a song, I have always used the following format – Invocation / Bible Reading based on the song / Teaching of the Song / Prayer based on the song and Blessing. NO address!
- What constitutes a good song? – In the morning before the students become chatty for the rest of the day, their voices have not had a chance to warm up. Because of this, most will struggle with high notes above C. It is possible these days with many music technology programs to set the music a tone lower if need be. When I used to play for chapel on the piano and organ, I was constantly lowering the pitch to make it more comfortable for the students to sing. The texts need to have good theology and not to be too complex as it might be for mature Christians. Where possible the texts should avoid archaisms. Use a variety of songs and hymns. Many are made possible by having a choir or soloist sing the verses and everyone join in with the chorus. Good examples might be *Christ be our Light, I want to walk as a child of the Light, O Come, O Come Emmanuel etc. etc*
- Responsorial Psalmody – it might be good to have a psalm for the month which may be sung once each week. The refrains for the assembly are usually easy to pick up.
- This is a little off the topic – I am all in favour of using CD's and DVD's (preferred) as part of the worship service. Allegri's – Miserere on Ash Wednesday. Agnus Dei – Samuel Barber. And in particular Bach's Mass in B Minor *Crucifixus and Et Resurrectus* . Over the last number of years I have shown these 2 sections on returning from the Easter holidays. I have asked the students how many of them enjoy *Heavy Metal* music. Then I tell them that I am going to play/show them something very, very, heavy classical music telling them that I don't expect them to enjoy it if they don't want to! I have been pleasantly surprised by the large number of students (many of them non musical) who commented how much it meant to them. YouTube is a wonderful resource to play hymns by choirs etc, so they can follow the words while listening to the clip. This is good for more difficult hymns which they may not prefer to sing.

- The use of the Church Year (a lot of evangelicals are ignorant of this), is a wonderful way to introduce students to Jesus.
- The use of Saints days, minor festivals such as the Annunciation can enrich worship and instruct students (including staff!) on how the whole story of salvation fits in. Given that most schools worship on weekdays gives a number of possibilities to discover this.
- In closing, the year of 2017 with the 500 years celebration, is going to be a wonderful opportunity not only for Lutheran parishes worldwide to renew and rediscover our Lutheran heritage, but also for our Lutheran schools globally. This will be a good year to renew our commitment to congregational and school singing.

Alan Collyer