

## Silver Linings

By Michael J. Goede



As choral educators, it is easy this school year to think about all of the things we cannot do right now. However, my students and I have also discovered what we *can* do since we no longer have the same level of performance pressures. The "tyranny of the concert" is, at least temporarily, gone. With that in mind, we now have time to create space for conversations specifically about decentering whiteness in our rehearsal and performance space. This summer, in the midst of the racial reckoning and the consequences of the pandemic, I embraced the opportunity to try something different.

One change I made is to focus our listening activities solely on non-Western European choral music. The goal is not to check off our "diversity" box. In fact, quite the opposite. I have been intentional in each class to explain that Western choral music is but one tradition that exists, and it is *not* the gold standard to which we compare music from other parts of the world. We are listening to better understand the quality and deep history of music that exists in non-Western cultures. Our guiding objective this year is to dig deeper rather than broader. We are not skipping around the globe like tourists. Instead, we plant roots in one culture and remain there for some time.

For example, we have spent the past several weeks only listening to music from Hungary, specifically focusing on the tonal concept, harmonic language, and vocal production. The students share what they notice, what they hear, and what musical ideas they recognize. During this time, they have come to find natural connections both within the Hungarian music we have heard and also between the repertoire we have done in past years. In a few weeks, we will transition to the tradition and importance of throat singing in various indigenous cultures around the world and observe how geography influences timbre.

I certainly will be grateful to resume normal rehearsals in the future, but I also recognize I must better and more intentionally incorporate the activities that especially focus on creating an enhanced awareness and appreciation for music that is not inherently rooted in Western traditions. And for that, I am grateful.

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