



PLAN for SUCCESS

AN ANTHEM LESSON PLAN FOR "WALK AN EXTRA MILE"

by Jayne Southwick Cool

How One Composer/Director Approaches the Teaching of an Anthem

Order *Walk an Extra Mile*, CGA-519, by Jayne Southwick Cool
www.choristersguild.org/catalog or 1.800.444.1144, ext. 1

This article is intended to give an example of how to develop a friendship between the singers in your choir and the anthems they meet in rehearsal. As a composer, I have always made it part of my teaching plan to introduce a piece of music as I would introduce a person. The parallel is quite simple, really, like that song that Anna sings to the children in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, "The King and I": "Getting to know you, getting to know all about you..." Let's follow the relationship that develops as a choir meets for the first time the anthem, Walk an Extra Mile (CGA-519).¹

THE FIRST REHEARSAL:

How do you do?

Choir members enjoy meeting new songs and anthems. It peeks their curiosity, and they become eager to learn more than just the title. When introducing people who have never met, just mentioning their names is not enough to continue a relationship. Questions that follow, like "That's an interesting name; what's the background?", "Where are you from?", "How did you happen to come here?", "Tell me about yourself and your job." All require further conversation.

Name and Background

"Walk an extra mile" is a phrase that Jesus used when teaching his followers to go beyond that which was required by the laws of the day. Jesus' way of being in the world was different from anything the people of his day had ever known.

Origin of the Text

Sometimes song texts are poetry set to music. Sometimes they are based on stories. Still others are direct quotations from the Bible. For *Walk an Extra Mile*, ask your choristers to look up one of the well-known chapters in the Bible: Matthew 5, verses 38 through 48. (Help those who can't find it.) Read the passage out loud. Also, be sure to look up the verse used in the optional introduction: Matthew 7:28.

The Story

People often followed Jesus to hear him teach and preach, as well as to ask him to heal their sickness and disease. One day, there were so many people who came to see him that he went up a mountain with his disciples and began to speak to everyone. We call this the Sermon on the Mount. Some of the things Jesus talked about had to do with the laws that his followers needed to obey. He gave a new interpretation of the ancient laws and pointed out some additional things the people should do. The text of *Walk an Extra Mile* lists several of these new ways for God's people to fulfill their responsibilities. The Bible verse quoted in the optional introduction to the anthem actually concludes the story of the Sermon on the Mount.

The Content of the Text

Have the choir members read through the words of the anthem and find what Jesus said that day on the mountain.

Someone could write the list on a chalkboard as each saying is discovered:

- "Do not take revenge."
- "Turn the other cheek."
- "Pray for those who hate you."
- "Walk an extra mile."
- "Give to those who ask."
- "Don't refuse to lend."
- "Give of all you have."
- "Love your enemies."

Start a discussion of what each of these instructions means for us today. (See footnote for a commentary on the rest of the text.)²

The Author/Composer

In preparation for telling your choir a little bit about the person(s) who wrote an anthem they've just met, find out as much as you can from various available sources. When you don't know or can't find anything, call the publisher for information. In the case of *Walk an Extra Mile*, the same person wrote the words (based on a Bible story) and the music—Jayne Southwick Cool. That's me! When I started directing the children's choir at Bethel Lutheran Church in the Cleveland, Ohio suburb of Middleburg Heights, I often wrote songs for the children if I couldn't find something that was appropriate for a certain Sunday. I had been an instrumental teacher in the public schools and loved to write and arrange brass and organ music for church services, too. Now I write hymns, music for adult and children's choirs, and continue to arrange for many types of instrumental ensembles.

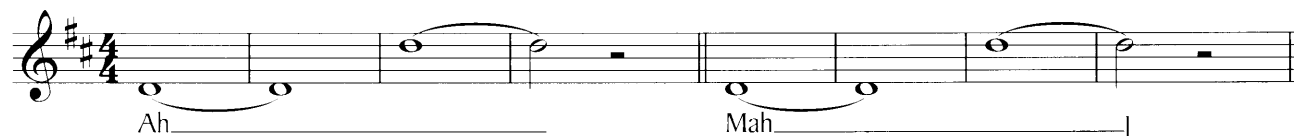
THE SECOND REHEARSAL:

Let's chat.

By now, your choir should be anxious to continue getting to know the anthem that was introduced last week. It's time to get on with more conversation - that is, to start making music. Find a rhythmic or melodic theme that recurs throughout the piece and create a warm up from it. *Walk an Extra Mile* contains a syncopated rhythm that can be used for such a purpose. Clap it, tap it out, snap your fingers to it, assign nonsense syllables to it, etc. Do this in a call and response fashion with each choir member until, finally, everyone can speak the actual words in rhythm.



For a vocal warm up, perhaps choose a part of the melody that contains an element of difficulty. If given proper attention before the singers realize that it's "hard," you will save yourself a lot of "repair work" later. There are two places in *Walk an Extra Mile* that present such a challenge. Look at measures 12-15 and 38-41, where you will see a divided part. The upper part provides a wonderful opportunity to work on breath control, pitch accuracy, and vowel production. First, sing those measures on the syllable "ah" (eight beats on the lower D, 6 beats on the upper D). Second, add the "m" at the beginning of the "ah" and the "l" at the end. You might even want to try a little contest to see which singer(s) can sustain the correct number of beats, make a clean slur while staying on pitch, and produce a pleasant and relaxed open vowel sound. (Make sure to have a positive comment ready for everyone.)



There are times when, in conversation, we find it necessary to try to make ourselves better understood by consciously making an effort to pronounce our words clearly and distinctly. Likewise, in performing a song, we need to be aware that some words can be misunderstood or come across as muffled or garbled if we're not careful. And so, it's very important that you teach your choir to overemphasize and exaggerate beginning and ending consonants for the sake of clarity, even if it sounds strange. Also, uniformity in the pronunciation of vowels is critical in creating a singleness or constancy among the individual members of the choir. Now is the time to read through the words of the entire anthem in unison. Stop when enunciation problems occur. Fix things immediately, before bad habits become hard to break. In *Walk an Extra Mile*, for example, make sure that the "s" at the end of the word "Jesus" is separate and distinct from the "s" at the beginning of the word "said". Likewise, the "d" that finishes the word "said" should not elide with the "D" that begins the word "Do". Otherwise, the first three words of the anthem become one long, unintelligible word, "Jesusaido". At this time, you or your accompanist should play through the entire anthem. For a trial run, sing along with your choir members; it gives them confidence. Talk about introductions and interludes and familiarize the choir with what happens in the accompaniment when there's no singing.

THE THIRD REHEARSAL:

Get personal.

Finally, everyone is eager to spend time with what has, by now, become a good friend. From the day of introductions through the time of learning and dialog, we've anticipated the time when we could freely express ourselves and really connect with what is meaningful in this relationship. In preparing for this intimate time, try to secure a tape or CD of a performance of the anthem you're working on. If none is available, make a tape with piano accompaniment and your solo voice. Concentrate on the things that make the music come alive—expression markings, changes in tempo and dynamic levels. Then have the choir listen carefully to the recording. After that, just sing, sing, and sing some more! At each successive rehearsal, continue to refine the details until that day when everyone is ready to introduce the piece to others outside the rehearsal room doors.

I guarantee that your choristers will hardly be able to wait until they get to meet their next new anthem.

Note

The three-rehearsal schedule described in this article was based on the assumptions that there would be other anthems to practice in those time periods and that there would still be more rehearsals following the third one in which the children can continue to improve. Directors can adjust this lesson plan to suit their own situations.

Footnotes

¹ *Walk an Extra Mile* is based on the appointed Gospel reading for 7 Epiphany (year A) in the Revised Common Lectionary. It also closely parallels the Gospel reading for All Saints Day and 7 Epiphany (year C).

² *All of us have been born into a family, and our family name indicates a lot about who we are. There are family rules to follow, and it's natural for children to want to please their parents. Acting as children of our heavenly Father is not only a requirement of bearing the name of Christian, but it is a natural response to His love for us.*



Jayne Southwick Cool is Director of Music at Bethel Lutheran Church in Middleburg Heights, Ohio, where she serves as organist and choir director, and oversees all instrumental ensembles. She has directed bands and choirs in both public and parochial schools. Her compositions and arrangements include hymns, works for brass, woodwinds, handbells, organ, and mixed and children's choirs. Jayne is published by Augsburg Fortress, Choristers Guild, Concordia, G.I.A., Hope, Live Oak House, and Selah. She is active in Choristers Guild, The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada, The Association of Lutheran Church Musicians, and is available as a resource person in the area of "Small Choirs and Use of Instruments" for the Northeastern Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Jayne lives with her husband, Marty, a trumpet player, in North Royalton, Ohio, and has two married children and two grandchildren.