



# Changing Voices...Changing Score

It was happening again, as it often did in choral reading sessions. Every time a really appealing anthem was presented, several directors appeared more frustrated than pleased. I overheard one saying, "It must be Murphy's Law. The magic anthems never fit **my** youth choir. My tenors can't come close to singing those low notes, and those higher notes for my basses... you've got to be kidding!" Another youth choir director commented, "Why do children's choirs always get the magic pieces?" Eventually both directors settled for pitch ranges that fit, but my, oh my, what dull music!

Never settle for a dull anthem! There's no need. When you go to your next reading session, trust your instincts. If an anthem really grabs your attention, touches your emotions and pulls you along with its innate excitement or expressiveness, take a closer look. It doesn't matter if it is an SAB anthem with ranges beyond your choir's capacity or perhaps a gorgeous children's choir anthem. You just may be able to "stretch" that magic piece into a winner for your youth choir.

Before, we look at how to stretch two so-called "magic" anthems, let's talk about typical vocal ranges for youth boys (let's face it... the boys are the problem in finding repertoire that works). The only way to know what pitches your boys can actually sing is to listen to them individually twice a year if possible, and maintain records of their ranges. In 34 years of working with thousands of youth singers, I have found that there are four basic categories of 7-12th grade boy singers (excluding completely unchanged boys who would normally continue to sing soprano or alto). *Almost every youth choir I have directed has had all of these categories represented among the boys.* These four categories are listed below, indicating for each both total vocal range and comfortable vocal range.

Half-changed Tenors	Tenors
Baritones	Bass-baritones
Shared ranges of the combined boys	Baritone range in a typical SAB anthem

The problem is now easy to see. The intention of SAB music is to make music more accessible for choirs, and this is true for many smaller adult choirs. But it is not the case for most youth choirs because of the wide variance in vocal ranges among the boys. The typical baritone range of most SAB anthems is either uncomfortable or impossible for many. But it is possible to use such anthems effectively by "stretching" the boys' parts. Let's take an excellent SAB anthem included with your journal this month, Hal Hopson's new "Carol of the Holy Family" (Choristers Guild CGA826), and show how to make that baritone part accessible to all our boys. In the following examples, the original part is notated above, and the changed part immediately below.

*Example 1:* Often a melodic phrase is conducive to a second part running above or below in parallel 3rds or 6ths to provide a second part with a more usable pitch range. Follow your instincts to write in some 3rds, and then try the new part out by singing the notes against the accompaniment, and then against the original part. Note the optional high f's for changing voice tenors that gives them their "moment in the sun!"

Example 1: measures 9-10

*Example 2:* Sometimes you can pull a second part right out of the accompaniment, even if you have to adjust some words, as in this case.

Example 2: measure 12

*Example 3:* When the baritone part lies around middle c, it is uncomfortable for most high school baritones. Look again at the accompaniment and see if a lower second part can be lifted out, as in the beginning of this example. Note the parallel 3rds in several places. Give those parallels some relief or variety by occasionally leaving them in contrary motion, as in measure 13, beat 4. The changes in this example should also be made in measures 18-20, 29-36 and 45 to the end.

**Example 3: measures 13-17**

*Example 4:* Here the tessitura is high for baritones and also too low for young tenors. The suggested changes fill out the harmony with logical voice leading and some parallel 3rds.

**Example 4: measures 21-24**

*Example 5:* If the harmony allows them, open 5ths always sound good between young tenors and basses. Notice more use of parallel 3rds and the contrary motion in the cadence of measure 28.

**Example 5: measures 25-28**

*Example 6:* Again, parallel 3rds with some contrary motion for variety. Also notice that a 7<sup>th</sup> added to the last beat of measure 38 allows for smooth voice leading.

**Example 6: measures 37-38**

*Example 7:* Note the contrary motion in the cadence.

**Example 7: measure 40**

*Example 8:* This is similar to example 1, with parallel 3rds leading to special notes for the changing tenors.

**Example 8: measures 41-42**

*Example 9:* Again, contrary motion in the cadence.

**Example 9: measure 44**

Now let's think about those beautiful children's choir anthems we wish our youth choirs could experience. Of course they can, so here is how to "stretch" Helen Kemp's (I know that lady) magical "Prayer Litany" (Chorister's Guild CGA747). This is a two-part children's anthem which could very well become the most popular youth choir anthem of the season! Most of you probably have a copy of this anthem, so the examples do not notate the original part above. The first section should be sung by girls alone as written. Except for that first example, all changes occur in the 2nd original part, which is being assigned to the youth choir basses.

*Example 1:* Since the girls sang the first section, begin in measure 13 with the boys singing all the melodic notes of the first phrase. This is a combination of the top part for a measure and a half, and continuing the melodic flow into the bottom part "day by day" in the middle of measure 14. The girls join in measure 15 singing the top voice part and remaining on the upper part throughout. Note the parallel 3rds again.

Lord, make me an in - stru - ment, \_ day by day. \_\_\_

**Example 1: measures 13-15**

*Example 2:* Sometimes the best option is to stay where you are (repeat the same note). Do the same in measures 32-33, 46-47 and 64-65.

of thy peace, \_\_\_ day by day.

**Example 2: measures 17-19**

*Example 3:* The leap up to a "d" in measure 22 is easy for children but tough for youth boys. Baritones stay on the "g" which is the root of the chord (always a good choice for stretching). Here are more parallel 3rds and contrary motion for variety; but when you do this, always check to make sure it will work with the harmony. Again, contrary motion in the cadence. Make these changes also in measures 37-39. For variety, girls should sing the preceding measures 35-36, since the boys sang that material before.

Where there is ha-tred. let me sow love, and where there is des-

pair. may I sow hope. \_ hope. \_ hope. \_ hope.

**Example 3: measures 21-25**

*Example 4:* This is the same as example 1(also make these changes in measures 41-42 and 59-60).

Lord, make me an in - stru - ment, \_ day by day.

**Example 4: measures 27-29**

*Example 5:* Note the contrary motion (within the given harmony) ending with parallel 3rds and then more contrary motion at the cadence.

To see thee more clear - ly, love thee more dear - ly and

fol - low, fol - low, fol - low thee more near - ly, near - ly,

**Example 5: measures 53-57**

*Example 6:* Use the implied harmony to create an accessible bass part, ending with a marvelously strong open 5<sup>th</sup> for the boys at the end.

love, hope, light, \_\_\_ joy!

**Example 6: measures 66-68**

There you have it, two dynamite "stretched" anthems for your youth choirs that you might have overlooked before... but never more! The point of this article is that when working with changing voices, it is often necessary to change the score. These are tips that you can use as you review anthems for your choirs. With instinct and imagination you can "stretch" many of those magic pieces you've coveted at reading session and make them your own. Remember that when you "stretch" anthems, you still must purchase copies for your whole choir and then pencil in the changes on original copies.

All the best to you and your youth choir, and may these ideas help you to never settle for dull anthems, but always go for the "magic!"

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