

Top 10 Gospel Anthems

by Cameron F. LaBarr

One of the most important jobs of a youth choir director is choosing the right music that will not only make the youth love singing in the choir and want to come back, but will provide them with rich, educational musical experiences that lead them to a stronger relationship with God. In this new series of articles, Cameron LaBarr will list his top ten anthems in various categories to help you to instill in your youth "a soundtrack for life."



10. Praise His Holy Name by Keith Hampton

earthsongs S-85 (SATB)

Sing till the power of the Lord come down! Shout hallelujah, praise his holy name!

Praise His Holy Name has become a standard in the repertoire of youth choirs across the country. The accompaniment requires a skilled pianist, but the vocal lines are very learnable for the average singer. Youth truly enjoy singing this piece, which incorporates the text of the familiar hymn, *Amazing Grace*. It can also work well with a small combo (piano, drums, bass, and guitar). This was one of the first pieces I introduced at Christ UMC (Plano, TX) to ensure energetic recruiting from within the ensemble.

9. My Everything by Keith Hampton

Choristers Guild CGA1233 (SATB), order form on page 19

You are my God, you are my king, you are my portion, my everything.

My Everything is written in a slow gospel style and the beginning features a soloist followed directly by the choir. The simple text in this piece speaks deeply to youth. Dr. Andre Thomas used this piece at the 2011 Youth Choir Festival at St Andrew UMC (Plano, TX), sponsored by the Dallas Chapter of Choristers Guild.

8. Comfort Ye, My People by Taylor Davis

Choristers Guild CGA1201 (SATB), order form on page 19

Comfort ye, my people, speak ye peace, saith our God. Comfort those who sit in darkness, mourning 'neath their sorrow's load.

Comfort Ye, My People is an interesting combination of an old text with a new, gospel accompaniment and vocal style. It allows the chance to highlight an outstanding female soloist. The addition of drums and bass will also enhance the effectiveness of this piece.

7. My Life is in Your Hands arr. Carol Cymbala

Word Music 080689949272 (SAT(B))

I know that I can make it, I know that I can stand. No matter what may come my way, my life is in your hands.

This anthem speaks directly to the soul of each young singer. The arrangement was originally created for the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir and includes creative and soulful harmonies in the accompaniment, complimented by learnable triadic harmonies in the vocal parts. It also allows for the opportunity to feature a soloist or small group of singers. At Christ UMC, we used this as the "senior song" for the class of 2009, with the seniors performing the solo line as a group, surrounded by the rest of the choir.

6. *Let Everything That Hath Breath* by Jeffrey L. Ames

earthsongs S-248 (SATB)

Sing unto the Lord a new song, sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Declare his glory among the nations. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord!

This anthem is written in a similar style to both *Praise His Holy Name* and *Celebrate!* Youth love singing this piece as a concert opener or closer, using a soloist, drums, bass, and piano. It's fully of energy and life.

5. *Praise You* arr. Carol Cymbala

Word Music 080689068690 (SATB)

Lord I come to you today with a simple prayer to pray. In everything I do let my life, O Lord, praise you.

Praise You is a reflective anthem that worked well as our "senior song" in 2010. The seniors (as a group) sang the first verse and the solo lines, and the rest of the choir joined in with the seniors at various points throughout the song. The text speaks of living a life of praise to God, and that that is what we were made to do. It is the perfect sentiment for youth in all steps of life's journey. This piece also works for confirmation and/or graduation.

4. *Draw the Circle Wide* by Mark Miller

Abingdon Press M300600024 (SATB)

Draw the circle, draw the circle wide. No one stands alone; we'll stand side by side. Draw the circle wide.

Draw the Circle Wide is an anthem with an incredibly moving, yet simple text, speaking of reconciliation and acceptance of others. It is a fairly simple chorus that can be used as an anthem or as a congregational song. We have used this anthem on Youth Sunday as well as on summer choir tour. It would also work well for Martin Luther King, Jr. celebrations and on World Communion Sunday.

3. *Celebrate* by Keith Hampton

earthsongs S-292 (SATB)

Oh, why don't you celebrate the blessings of the Lord! Oh, why don't you celebrate what God has already done! Celebrate the goodness of the Lord, celebrate!

This piece is a perfect sequel to *Praise His Holy Name*, although the vocal parts are considerably more challenging. Once learned, this anthem is very effective and exciting for both the choir and the congregation. Drums and bass may also be used.

2. *My Help* arr. Carol Cymbala

Word Music 080689922275 (SATB)

I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord.

My Help is another anthem that was popularized by the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir. It requires an outstanding and soulful soloist who sings throughout the piece, creating a great opportunity to feature a stand-out singer. The piece builds throughout, reciting the beautiful text of Psalm 121.

1. *Christ Has Broken Down the Wall* by Mark Miller

Choristers Guild CGA1224 (SATB), order form on page 19

Christ has broken down the wall. Let us join our hearts as one. Christ has broken down the wall.

If you haven't discovered *Christ Has Broken Down the Wall* yet, it is a must! This anthem was the favorite anthem of our youth choir at Christ UMC. It must be sung thoughtfully and not be taken too fast – slower is better for this anthem. Its text speaks of acceptance of all people and teaches numerous valuable lessons to the singers and the listener. This anthem can be used in worship, on choir tour, or as a congregational song.

A native of Richmond, Missouri, **Dr. Cameron F. LaBarr** is assistant professor of choral music at Lee University (Cleveland, TN). He has served at various churches, most recently at Christ United Methodist Church in Plano, Texas, where he conducted the youth and college choirs. This year, Dr. LaBarr will serve as middle school clinician for the Mabel Boyter Choir Camp, sponsored by the Atlanta Chapter of Choristers Guild, and the Youth Choir Festival, sponsored by the Dallas Chapter of Choristers Guild.

