

CMAA Virtual Colloquium 2021

Presentation: Sacred Music Youth Programs

Friday June 25, 5:10–6:25pm EDT

- Presenter: Mary Ann Carr Wilson. B.M., M.M., Executive Director of Canticle, a Catholic apostolate, 501(c)3 nonprofit, dedicated to teaching people how to sing prayer.

Three types of programs to be covered:

1. Parish/Cathedral
2. Chant Camps (Catholic school adaptation)
3. Independent Choir

About me

- Catholic wife and mom to four boys.
- B.M. Vocal Performance, M.M Vocal Performance, SDSU - Nine years, extra coursework in areas of interest: Pedagogy, Conducting, Composition.
- Opera track-- cantor, music director, encouragement from Bp. Cordileone
- Music Director for 3 parishes over 15 years, EF and OF, Latin, English, Spanish choirs
- 35+ Chant Camps in 7 dioceses, 2 in parochial schools
- Over 90 young students in 3 San Diego choirs

Philosophy of Teaching Young People

- Constant Recollection of Purpose
 - Sacred Music- Glorify God, to edify and sanctify the faithful
 - Always prayerful or missing the point
- Challenge Young People!
 - Avoid tendency to underestimate the spiritual lives and learning potential of kids
 - 1st Grader responses- “Chant is like looking into the face of God.”
 - Teach to different levels, and put more experienced and/or bored kids to work (use social AND musical aptitude to engage individuals and build team)
 - Challenge through Inspiration, “I know you can do it and I’ll give you the tools”
 - Singing with the saints and angels, “cloud of witnesses” is REAL
- Be prepared/ know material
 - Saves rehearsal time
 - Anticipate difficult spots
 - Always keep the prayer in mind
 - Separate skills- speak in rhythm, sing on [u], etc.
 - Speed chant- ONLY a tool to force brain to process in phrases

- Make it doable for families
 - Students will come from families, so make it easy on busy parents
 - Choose good times, give notice, send reminders
 - Ask families which is best communication, and adjust as needed
 - Make it affordable (my personal policy is to set low price but a price that gives “skin in the game” \$100/child, free after two, encourage larger families)
 - Intergenerational- like the Church- you’ll be teaching entire families through your work
- Teacher Authenticity
 - Teaching Music is a Vocation - check yourself for burnout and take breaks, adjust your attitude first as needed
 - Teacher NEEDS to have and/or desire
 - Faith in God and Love for the Church- JOY- nourish these gifts, pray for them
 - Ability to love and nurture young people
 - Affection reminders- always with people around, wait for student to hug first, etc. Smile abundantly
 - “You can’t give what you don’t have” Most kids spot a fake and don’t respect it.
 - Rebellion and uncooperation if kids sense the teacher doesn’t like kids!
 - Musical preparedness - no more “you can’t sing” from teachers who don’t have vocal pedagogy skills!
 - REFER to a colleague and/ or increase your skill set
 - Set aside time for one on one or small group assistance
 - Number one issue- finding “head voice”- ask *singer* colleagues how to help induce
 - Know breath cycle and how to reinforce it, phrasing and comfort key for singers
 - Sophia - chant camp- couldn’t match pitch consistently until third year, now a cantor
- Physicalize
 - Sensory learning through posture and games
 - Movement is really important, helps build neural pathways and engage breath energy > support > management
- Visualize- God-given imagination
 - Meditation while singing
 - Cornerstone of vocal pedagogy
- Consistent training- approaching from the *mind of the singers* and how they learn
 - Vocal- Three T’s- tone + timing = tuning
 - *Do not skimp* on warm-ups/ exercises- voice building
 - Listening exercises- rounds, half the class sings something, etc.
 - Modeling

- Should sound good- record yourself, esp men (falsetto limited and different mechanical action than larynx of young singers, use sparingly)
- Play recordings with EXCELLENT tone and tuning
- Learn through contrast- “ you want to sing it this way or that way?”, etc. Guide towards ways sound more regal, prayerful, etc.
- Beware of overuse of modeling with your own voice- my mistake, treble voices were hesitant without me so I now sing along less, and ask others to cantor
- Diction/ speaking through in rhythm and as text (Prayers!)
 - Always discuss translation and connect to imagination/meditation
 - Students learn well by being responsible for at least some of their translation work- especially older students, Latin students, etc.
- Vary order of learning, but wait until singers are secure before skipping steps for time
- General musicianship
 - Solfege (chant camp, leaving Claire to solfege through Gradual)
 - Rhythm training- counting in rhythm, exercises in warmups
- Rehearsal technique- Teaching Persona is OK
 - Changing repertoire every 10’ or less for young people (also adults...)
 - Vary volume level and pace of instruction
 - Often helpful to rehearse a piece from different starting points, in phrases whenever possible
 - Movement for all- stand up, sit down, run in place, walk and sing, etc.
 - Fun- yes you should be entertaining enough to keep attention
 - Consistent director signals (change as needed, then keep what works)

Sacred Music Programs - Three Examples and their benefits

Parish/Cathedral

- Sunday and other Feast Day Sacred Liturgy
- Servers singing, vice versa
- Expenditures not typically incurred by families
- Time for musicianship, esp sight reading, insist on enough time!
- Gift to parish life
 - Consistently nourishes spiritual life of young people in parish
 - Attracts families
 - Attracts financial support

- Good way to introduce “upgrades” in sacred music, as children are generally disarming
- Some outreach possibilities
- Substantial interdisciplinary instruction
 - Music literacy
 - Language (s)
 - Religion
 - History
 - Applied math
- Can be taken for class credit

Chant Camp

What is that? Generally, a one-week immersive, experiential program in which campers prepare to divide repertoire and learn music for a Sung Mass in a fun, faith-filled, and supportive environment. Sometimes Mass is too much to start with, try Vespers or a Holy Hour.

- One week impact? “Get resourceful” - inservice week from counselor in 6th grade
- Wider range of student
 - Fixing “I can’t sing”, with listening, small group and one-on-one instruction
 - Pick 2-3 favorites to sing, agreed upon by director
- Fun association with chant, not foreign
 - Campers grow up to be supporting parishioners
- Mix chant repertoire with hymns, rounds, polyphony as possible- do not underestimate ability to learn quickly
- Breaks down barriers in parishes, helps with “Latin allergy”, etc., as it is a special Mass, also not so threatening for some
- Recruits for year-round program
 - CAN NOT replace year-round instruction
- Launch a program OR build repertoire of existing program
- Addition to or comprehensive substitute for VBS
 - Comprehensive Bible study of Scriptures used in Mass prayers
 - Sanctus, Agnus Dei examples
 - Theme- attached to Feast
- Singing servers- respect for choir
- Liturgical catechesis through applied study (preparation for Mass, Vespers, Holy Hour)
 - Structure of Sung Mass and its parts
 - Young people appreciate learning this!
 - How to pray the Mass
 - Intentions- bulking up spiritual life, entering a phase of being able to help!
 - Some children don’t know the meaning of what an intention is- teach them

- Have a white board/ chalkboard where campers write down their own intentions
 - “More Faith”, encourage them to pray for themselves as well
- Rote learning with some solfege scales is ok and more doable
 - Key is to vary repertoire with more and less challenging
 - Able to utilize and/or develop peer leadership and teach different levels
- Involve seminarians, religious, priests for prayer times and social times, teaching on certain prayers if time
- Show sample schedule
- Show beginning, intermediate, experienced lineups
- CAN BE MODIFIED for Catholic schools, like an inservice week
- Overview of interdisciplinary instruction in a Catholic team environment
 - Music - very basic literacy
 - Language (s)
 - Religion
 - History
 - Applied math- basic patterns and ratios
- Teamwork- “everybody sings something, nobody sings everything”- even out egos while teaching to levels
- A small sampling of comments filling out the statement: Gregorian chant feels, moves, sounds like...
 - Moving from cloud to cloud
 - Hangliding note to note
 - A feather on the breath of God
 - A group of butterflies
 - Ice-skating
 - Angels descending from heaven
 - Swaying trees on the beach
 - A wave of communication
 - Cosmos resounding
 - Flying in a flock
 - All flying on the same hang-glider
 - Praying with Jesus and Mary
 - Moving with the breeze
 - A winding river stirring in my soul
 - Singing along with your guardian angel
 - Rivers in slow motion
 - (I weave these into the teaching, as it connects with the singers)

Independent Choir

- Catholic, cooperative with diocese and respectful of bishop
 - MAJOR benefit of removing liability for diocese
 - Much more freedom and flexibility
 - Common sense safety and liability protocols
 - OK to use diocesan templates
 - Work with general liability insurer
 - Ground rules for parents, students
 - No individual access to students or campers at any time
 - Parent volunteers are key, can rotate to make it easier for them
- Working with families in multiple parishes, connecting families strong in Faith
- Select and audition singers, repeat placement audition every year
 - Multiple levels and groups
 - Familiarity with individual voices
- Students able to sing for various forms of sacred liturgy
 - EF
 - OF
 - Ordinariate
 - Eastern Rite and/or field trips
- Outreach made possible by FAMILIES
 - Good Shepherd Retirement Home
 - St. Joe's Villages
 - Evangelization
- Can be taken for class credit
- Substantial interdisciplinary instruction in a Catholic team environment

Music literacy

- Language (s)
- Religion
- History
- Applied math

Games

- Solfege- interval training
 - Red Light/ Green Light
 - Football
 - Dice
 - Glowsticks
 - Keyboard
 - Ball pass
- Metered and free rhythm, ANTICIPATE, don't wait for beat
 - Jumping rope
 - Parachute
 - Leaps

- Opposite motion
 - Inner circle/ Outer circle rounds to show and feel proportion
- Breathing
 - Bubbles
 - Long straws with baked seeds (check for allergies)
- Move together
 - Caterpillar
 - Bungee races
 - Three legged race

In Conclusion

Musician friends and colleagues, I urge you to please do what you can for young people and make your efforts doable for yourself, students and for families. May God reward you in handing down the Faith through your efforts.

Especially in these unusual times, we need to prioritize the spiritual lives of our Catholic young people, give them tangible ways to invest in their heritage, and retain and spread time-honored treasures of the Faith. Teaching Gregorian chant to children and teens assists with all of this. God bless you in all your endeavors to praise Him!

In Cor Jesu,

Mary Ann Carr Wilson
Canticle Executive Director

Please reach me for questions at
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