

# Compassion and Contemporary Choral Music

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What is compassion?

Paul Gilbert defines compassion as "a sensitivity to suffering in self and others with a commitment to try and alleviate and prevent it." Gilbert's co-contributors, Christopher Germer and Thorsten Barnhofer researched the impacts of practicing compassion-focused training on groups. They discovered that "Compassion is frequently associated with positive emotions. Compassion is also likely to generate positive feedback cycles in which positive emotions lead to positive interactions with others which reciprocally reinforce well-being in all concerned." (Gilbert, Paul, et al. *Compassion: Concepts, Research and Application*. Routledge, NY, 2017).

What is contemporary music?

At one level, contemporary music is anything composed recently. At a more focused level, contemporary music can represent music composed recently that asks new questions and presents new creative opportunities for performers, expanding boundaries and requiring renewed approaches to realizing its potential. There are pieces that sound like other pieces we know and pieces that have elements that are fresh and curious to us. They may be familiar to other people, so this definition can be fairly personal. Neither are better or worse, but to illuminate the potential of something new can present specific challenges to self and to one's musical identity.

Why contemporary music?

The human voice is alive with vast potential, much of which we are only beginning to learn how to write for and ask new questions of. Contemporary composers who inquisitively seek out new questions about the voice find fascinating entries for vocalists to bring new tools into their vocal vocabulary. Contemporary composers respond to contemporary social, political, and poetic voices thereby giving us current topics. Contemporary composers are often available to us, creating the opportunity to build relationships and work together to realize new visions in co-creative ways. And mostly, creating something brand new with an ensemble is uniquely fun and rewarding.

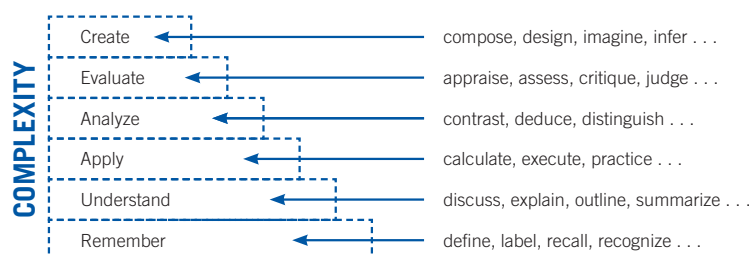
Why compassion and contemporary music?

Learning brand new ways of exploring the voice requires curiosity, creativity, and a willingness to try new things, which means that learners need to feel safe and motivated to try. Compassion-focused leadership acknowledges the challenges inherent in creating something new, it recognizes the suffering that people carry with them and that can develop when we involve new identities, and it serves as a motivation to ensure that all participants feel engaged and creative. Compassion-focused leadership involves leading without judgment, which opens leaders into a new tool kit for shaping and guiding people's discovery process that is tailor made for the discovery and realization of contemporary vocal music. A compassion-minded leader creates spaces in which other people co-create music.

How do we spend most of our time learning?

David Sousa's "How The Brain Learns" offers a revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy (below image). In traditional choral rehearsals, the leader is tasked with analysis, evaluation and creativity and the singers are tasked with remembering, understanding, and application. Compassion-motivated rehearsals lean on tools that open all participants into the upper rungs of learning as often as possible. Through repetition, measurable/non-judgmental language, feedback, and play, singers are regularly invited into creative spaces where decision making and collaborative sharing is valued.

**FIGURE 2.8** Bloom's revised taxonomy places creativity at the top. Next to each level are some terms that describe the type of processing occurring at that level. The dotted outline suggests that an individual may move among the levels during extensive processing. *Source:* Anderson et al. (2001).



## Resources

**VoiceScienceWorks.org** for tools and explanations drawn from science to illuminate, clarify, and stir curiosity.

**Underground Ictus podcast**, an ongoing conversation about today's topic with Laurel and David  
<https://www.voicescienceworks.org/underground-ictus.html>

**See-a-dot publishing Inc.** <https://www.seeadot.com/> for exciting, curated contemporary choral music, and visit Fahad at his booth at Western ACDA.

**N.E.O. Voice Festival** <http://www.neovoicefestival.com/>, a week-long summer festival in Los Angeles led by Laurel, David and Fahad that expands on the application of voice science, compassion, and vocal exploration in composition and vocal practice. The week ends with the premiere of a new major work written and performed by participants.

**Compassion Meditation** drawn from "The Book Of Joy" and slightly amended by us.

"May you avoid suffering, may you be happy, may you be healthy, may you have music and art and dancing, may you be heard, may I hear you, may you know peace and joy."

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Abrams. *The Book Of Joy*. Lasting Happiness in a Changing World. Avery, New York, 2016.

## Score samples courtesy of See-a-dot Publishing Inc.

### "Hymn To Aethon" by Fahad Siadat

Timbral notation: how would you interpret the sounds based on noteheads?

The image displays a musical score for "Hymn To Aethon" by Fahad Siadat, featuring timbral notation and vocal instructions. The score is divided into two main sections, 86 and 48.

**Section 86:** This section consists of three staves. The first staff is marked *mf* and includes the instruction "With a retroflex 'R' emphasis, producing overtones". It shows a melodic line with noteheads and a vocal line with the lyrics "nurnur nurnur" and "nirnir". The second and third staves are marked *mf* and include the instruction "Short ingressive bursts, shrieking". They show a melodic line with noteheads and a vocal line with the lyrics "ah ee" and "ah ee".

**Section 48:** This section consists of four staves. The first staff is marked *f* and includes the instruction "Bright, with a wide vowel". It shows a melodic line with noteheads and a vocal line with the lyrics "Wah" and "woah". The second staff is marked *f* and includes the instruction "Bright, with a wide vowel". It shows a melodic line with noteheads and a vocal line with the lyrics "Wah" and "woah". The third staff is marked *mf* and includes the instruction "Bright, with a wide vowel". It shows a melodic line with noteheads and a vocal line with the lyrics "Hn dun di-ga di-ga di-y - a" and "Hn dun di-ga di-ga di-y - a". The fourth staff is marked *f* and includes the instruction "Bright, with a wide vowel". It shows a melodic line with noteheads and a vocal line with the lyrics "Hn dun di-ga di-ga di-y - a" and "wah".

“Demon” by Matt Brown

Improvisation: how would you interpret the sounds based on images?

④ ⑤ ⑥

*p* *p* *f* *ff* *fff*

inhale accel. individually → exhale

“crazed pterodactyl” inhaling, rough, guttural

“[ɔ]” [a] “[ɔ]” [a]

t t t t t t [i] [o] ([i])

d d d d d d

“American Breakfast” by Saunder Choi

Yodel technique: how would you interpret the alto and tenor parts?

Slower ♩ = 92

S1 *p* 1

A - no - ther mour-ning. A child grieves

S2

A1 *pp*

ah ah

A2 *hard belt sf* *head voice sub. p* *sim.*

woah\*ooh woah ooh

\*yodel break

T1 *hard belt falsetto sf* *sub. p* *solo A*

woah\*ooh

\*yodel break

# “My Son My One” by Molly Pease

Ingressive and Whisper techniques: how would you interpret the arrows and “x” noteheads?

22

25

*whispered*

Ha Hi Ha Hi Ha of - is be-

*whispered*

Hi Ha Ha Hi Ha - lief

*whispered*

Hi Ha Hi Ha Hi Ha un- la-

*whispered*

Ha Ha Ha uh di- -der -a-

Aleatoric boxes: how would you interpret the soprano lines?

7

**7** ♩ = 60, *dream-like*

*mf* Each singer alternate between cells at will

*p* S1 cues next section, last time only

In - vis - i - ble Im - poss - i - ble Him all a -

*mf* Each singer alternate between cells at will

*mp* S1 cues next section

In - vis - i - ble, Im - poss - i - ble In - vis - i - ble, Im - poss - i - ble

*mp* S1 cues next section

In - vis - i - ble, Im - poss - i - ble In - vis - i - ble, Im - poss - i - ble

“Am I” by Molly Pease

Aleatoric boxes and spoken improvisation: how would you interpret the instructions?

57

*Gradually transition to just singing "Am I?" over and over, independently from one another*

Voice 1

Am I a bird,\_\_\_ Am I?

Voice 2

Am I a bird,\_\_\_ Am I a but - ter - fly?\_\_\_

Voice 3

6

*out of time*

*mf*

*three soloists speak the words "Am I..." and fill in the rest of the sentence with anything they can think of (an expectation someone has of them, an insecurity, a career their parents want for them, questions about who they want to be, etc.) independently from each other*

Solos

Am I...

Voice 1

*mp*

*Gradually transition to just singing "Am I?" over and over, independently from one another*

Voice 2

Am I?

Voice 3

## “Neque Diliges” by David Harris

Overtone technique: notice the three separate approaches to overtone (one sung with prominent overtone, one solo overtone in T1, one choral overtone), how would you interpret each one?

82

S. *um tu - um tu - o*

A. *tu\* - um tu - um tu -*

T. 1 *stagger breathe*

T. 2 *tu\* - um tu - - - o*

83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91

18

133

S. *ip - sum [o] po - te - rit nos se - pa - ra - re*

A. *ip - sum [ɹ][a]*

T. 1 *ip - sum*

T. 2 *ip - sum [ɹ][a]*

Bar. *ip - sum [ɹ][a]*

B. *ip - sum [ɹ][ɔ]*

134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142