

Exploring Composer Diversity in Texas Secondary Public School Solo Vocal Curriculum



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Abstract

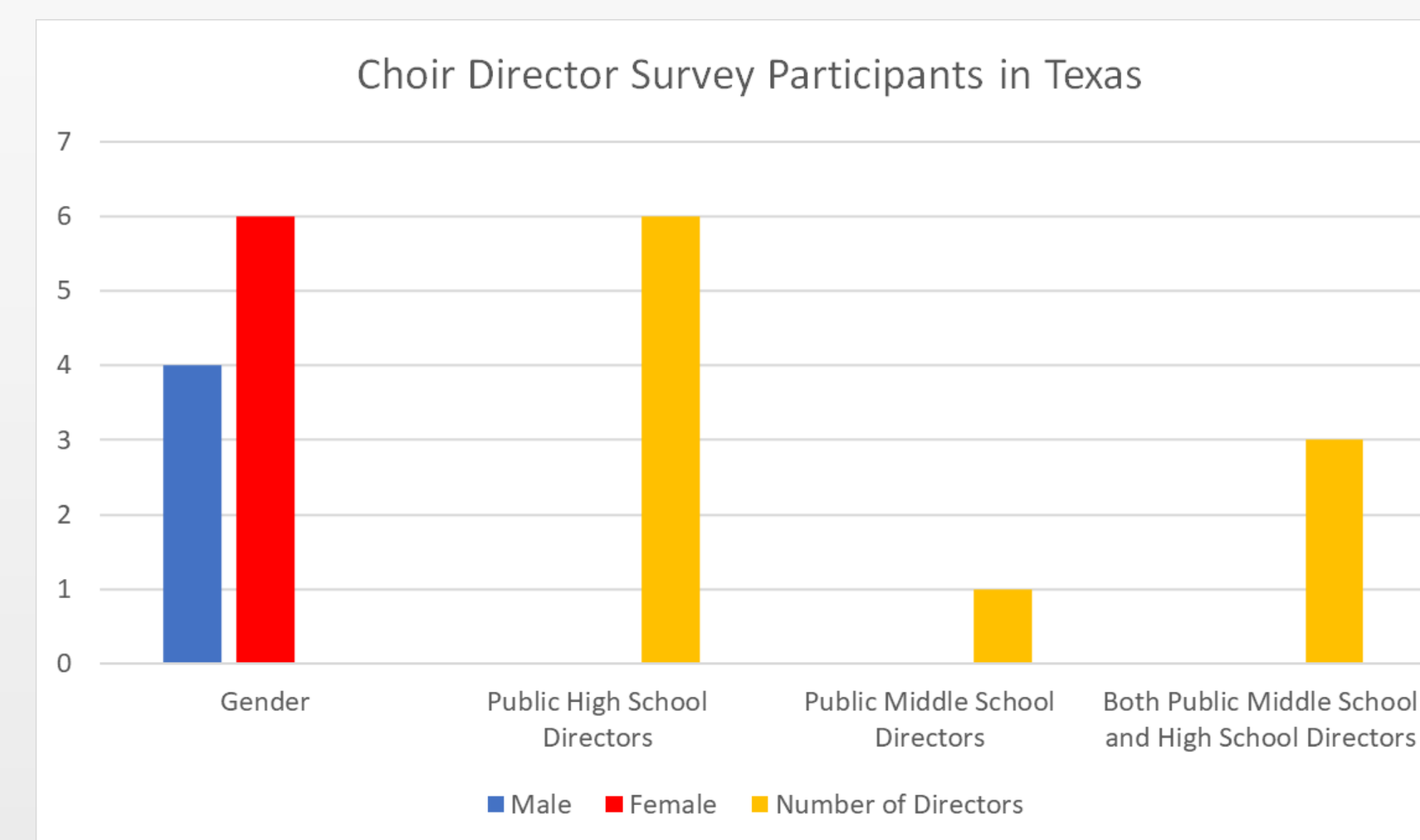
For centuries, the primary classical composers that have been studied, performed, and elevated above all others have been white males from Western cultures. Current research indicates that there is a lack of composer diversity in commonly used vocal anthologies and vocal solo competition approved repertoire lists that continues this exclusionary culture. The topic of composer diversity has not been substantially addressed in Texas, a highly competitive state at annual, prestigious contests at the secondary level. The purpose of this qualitative study is to strengthen the understanding of composer diversity in Texas secondary school solo vocal choir curriculum from the perspective of choir directors. This research emphasizes gender diversity of composers to further explore differences between choir directors' music curriculum for choir class and the University Interscholastic League (UIL) solo vocal competition students partake. A survey consisted of providing the choir directors' point of view regarding composer gender diversity and as well as the facts about diversity inclusion in the UIL Prescribed Music List (PML) and their classroom curriculum. Results reflected that secondary level choir curriculum and solo vocal UIL competition in terms of gender diversity lack the incorporation, knowledge of gender diversity, and are limited in resources to expand their knowledge on composer diversity to integrate in their music curriculum.

Introduction

- Competitions such as the Texas UIL State Solo-Ensemble Contest take place at the secondary level in which the PML of repertoire is provided.
- UIL, being the largest music organization, provides educational extracurricular academic, athletic, and music contests, and influence other competitions both nationally and internationally, and UIL Solo and Ensemble is a yearly Texas competition that provides students the opportunity to learn an art song, bloom as singers, express their musicality, provide education regarding composers, and enhance the interpretation of the piece assigned.
- Few studies have examined the importance of composer diversity in secondary level classroom and UIL competition choir curriculum in Texas, but the issue of gender diversity has not been addressed extensively.
- Through the lack of information on the benefits of a diverse solo vocal curriculum on secondary-level students, an issue that rises in the future is the insufficiency of education regarding the lack of insight on marginalized groups' who struggle to be represented in the music curriculum. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following questions:
 - Are there differences in choir directors' music curriculum for choral class versus solo vocal UIL competition in terms of gender composer diversity?
 - What collective attitudes do Texas choir directors have towards composer diversity in their music selection or curriculum?

Methodology

Participants for the online survey were public high school and middle school choir directors who have experience assigning repertoire to their students. There was a total of 21 participants who consented to fill out the survey; however only 10 people completed the survey



Results

Teacher's personal considerations	Barriers
<p>Vocal Technicality of Student</p> <p>When assigning solo vocal repertoire to students (i.e. for UIL Solo and Ensemble or college music major auditions), what factors do you consider when selecting music?</p> <p>1st response: I mostly consider their personal vocal skills, strengths, ranges, and styles. I also let students search to find appropriate repertoire that appeals to them.</p> <p>2nd response: Range, level of technique, personality, and what the student may need the most technical help with.</p> <p>3rd response: level of difficulty, vocal range, language</p> <p>5th response: Language, range, tempo, UIL grade, historical period</p> <p>6th response: Ability, strengths, weaknesses, text students can connect with</p> <p>7th response: ability of student, language (is student able to learn the language and perform it accurately), difficulty level (beginner, mid, advanced), challenge factor (push the students to do something a little out of the comfort zone, but will help them in the long run)</p> <p>What resources do you use when assisting students in learning their solo vocal repertoire? (Examples include accompaniment CDs/mp3s/recorded accompaniment apps; International Phonetic Alphabet; translations; composer biographies, etc)</p> <p>2nd response: lessons, demos + accompaniment mp3s, I have them research the composers and time periods, we work on pronunciation together using IPA or sample from someone who speaks that language.</p> <p>3rd response: Acc. MP3s, translations</p> <p>IPA, accompaniment recordings, translations, program notes on piece and composer</p> <p>6th response: Accompaniment tracks, you tube videos, phonetic alphabet, and translations. Vocal lessons one on one with students.</p> <p>7th response: accompaniment recordings, vocal recordings, IPA, translations</p> <p>8th response: Finale notation, (all songs are in English). Do not usually cover composer biographies.</p> <p>9th response: Composer research, rehearsal tracks, IPA, and translations.</p> <p>What resources or information would you need so that you can include more vocal solos by women composers in your teaching?</p> <p>3rd response: Resource of titles</p> <p>4th response: Send emails with demonstrations!</p> <p>5th response: List of songs by female composers from the PML</p> <p>6th response: A list of books/anthologies would be a great starting point.</p> <p>7th response: I guess go out and actually seek anthologies that contain music by women. Like I said, I don't look at gender, just the songs themselves, so this would be a challenge to start looking for gender.</p> <p>8th response: None- gender is irrelevant. I don't care who the composer is, so long as the solo fits the singer. If I find a solo that works well with a student that happens to be written by a female, that's fine-but I won't specifically seek out songs based on composer gender alone.</p> <p>9th response: Books and exposure</p>	<p>Lack of Time</p> <p>Which anthologies/solo vocal repertoire books do you find yourself most often assigning music from for your middle school or high school students? Please name the top 5 anthologies you draw your solo vocal repertoire from.</p> <p>3rd response: 24 Italian Songs and Arias, The Sacred Collection, New Imperial Edition, Schirmer's The First Book, Folk Songs for Solo Singers</p> <p>6th response: 24 Italian..., The Spanish Anthology, 30 Spirituals, The Sacred Collection, 26 Italian...</p> <p>7th response: 24 Italian, Songs of Travel (Vaughan Williams), Roger Quilter 55 Songs, 50 Selected Songs, Folk Songs for Solo Singers vol. 1 & 2</p> <p>8th response: 24 Italian Songs and Arias, 50 selected songs by Schubert, Strauss, etc., First Book of Soprano Solos, First book of Tenor Solos, First book of Bass Solos</p> <p>9th response: 24 Italian, French Song Anthology, Anthology of Spanish Songs, First Book of (Voice Part), German Lieder Anthology</p> <p>Limited Budget</p> <p>What anthologies might I find on your shelf that have repertoire by women composers?</p> <p>2nd response: I wouldn't be surprised that there is not many women composers in my library. Mostly because that's what's been in the library where I teach since I've been teaching there. I just completed my 5th year. If there are any female composers, I would not know for sure.</p> <p>4th response: Not many. I'm not really concerned about the songs being written by a man or woman. I judge a song on if I like it. Nice melody etc.</p> <p>5th response: I'm not sure!</p> <p>6th response: Honestly, limited.</p> <p>7th response: I, honestly, don't look at the gender of the composer, just the content of the songs.</p> <p>Lack of Resources</p> <p>What, if any, has prevented you from assigning repertoire by women composers?</p> <p>2nd response: Nothing has prevented me. I have not taken the time to look for more rep. in general. I simply add a new title or two every year from the books I already own.</p> <p>3rd response: Availability, Limited number of selections on the PML</p> <p>5th response: I have less knowledge and familiarity with these solos</p> <p>6th response: Not many songs on PML that are also published in anthologies</p> <p>7th response: Nothing, I just assign songs based on abilities of singers and their desires for competing.</p> <p>9th response: Lack of representation on the PML. Judges also tend to be harsher critics with repertoire they're unfamiliar with</p> <p>10th response: I don't believe anything has prevented me, but I definitely stick with what I know, and enjoy teaching. I am always open to being exposed to new useful material.</p> <p>Lack of Knowledge</p> <p>Lack of Women Representation</p>
<p>Resources Provided for Student Assistance</p>	<p>Lack of Knowledge</p>
<p>Familiarization of Repertoire</p>	<p>Lack of Knowledge</p>

Conclusion

In conclusion, this qualitative study sought to explore composer diversity in Texas public secondary schools, particularly in the music curriculum and UIL solo and ensemble selections of choir directors. The survey responses of 10 choir directors in Texas were coded and analyzed using a thematic approach. The research questions that lead this study were:

- Are there differences in choir directors' music curriculum for choral class versus solo vocal UIL competition in terms of gender composer diversity?
 - The findings suggest that the repertoire within the music curriculum and the repertoire for students in the UIL solo and ensemble competition lacks gender diversity.

- What collective attitudes do Texas choir directors have towards composer diversity in their music selection or curriculum?
 - The findings suggest that the teachers' attitudes are contingent upon their own perceptions of gender diversity and the barriers they face to include diverse curriculum. For instance, the findings show that teacher's personal considerations were vocal technicality of student, resources provided for student assistance, and familiarization of repertoire. Choir directors also face barriers that were identified, such as the lack of time, limited budget, lack of resources, lack of knowledge, and lack of women representation.

This research study contributed to the choral community at the secondary level by providing insight about gender diversity from choral directors in the state of Texas.

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