



January 12, 2023

Dear Choral Musicians,

Thank you in advance for the opportunity to work with you in March as part of our Maryland Treble Demonstration Chorus at the Baltimore Convention Center. I look forward to our collaboration and journey in music together.

As you prepare for our day together March 4, I wanted to share with you the background and context for each of the three pieces we will perform.

An overarching idea linking all our songs is “A World of Music.” Our opening selection, *Aeyaya Balano Sakkad*, was written by Manamadurai Balakrishnan Srinivasan (1925-1988), a composer from India famous for creating film music for many Bollywood movies. He also founded the Madras Youth Choir in 1971, an ensemble still making music today from its home base in Chennai, India. This song is sung by children in India, particularly around Diwali, the festival of lights. The text is in the Konkani dialect, spoken in the Goa region of India facing the Arabian Sea. The literal translation of the text:

Come, children, listen to the secrets of life. Childhood is a gift to us, when we can learn all that is taught.

This arrangement of *Aeyaya Balano Sakkad* comes from an American studying Indian music, John Higgins. To be more in keeping with Mr. Srinivasan’s heritage, we will not use piano as indicated. Instead, we will have someone play a hand-held drum to the rhythm given on the inside cover, and we will add wind chimes.

Next, we will sing two of the five Chinese Mountain Songs arranged by Dr. Yi Chen, professor of music at the University of Missouri in Kansas City. What I learned the hard way when I interviewed her recently is that her name is listed last name first, customary in China. Dr. Chen spoke to me about studying music at the college level in China, and for part of that experience, notating and arranging folk songs from the country was part of preserving her Chinese heritage while also expanding to learn about western art history of which we in America experience more than others. Scholar trees have a mild fragrance and are often found in Chinese and Japanese pagodas. Naked oats are similar to white rice. One song anticipates the coming of spring and the blooming of the tree. The other happens during a time of harvest. In the second song, Dr. Chen creates opportunities for our chorus to imitate in song some of the sounds of what the harvesting of naked oats with a sickle, or a knife specifically designed to cut those crops.

We close with “I am a Voice that Sings” by Michael Bussewitz-Quarm, a composer who will make her conducting debut on the stage of Carnegie Hall in New York this spring. In my work with Strathmore Children’s Chorus in North Bethesda, Maryland, I had opportunity to join a group of conductors and children’s choirs from around the country in commissioning Michael to write this piece, one of the first many choirs were able to sing live and in person following the restrictions and distance-learning that happened when covid19 first became a global pandemic.

Use the video and audio guide tracks provided to learn the notes for all the songs; there are also tracks to help with pronunciation for the Chinese Mountain Songs and Aeyaya Balano Sakkad. I hope to have my interview with Dr. Chen shortened for you to watch in the coming weeks; I will share it with you and your audience when we put together our demonstration of work at the end of our time together.

See you in March.

With appreciation,

*Michael*

Michael Wu