**Musical Diversity: Integrating Gospel Music into the Music Classroom**

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**Context for Gospel Music in the Music Classroom**

1. Diversity in Musical Experience

* Students explore the musical characteristics, cultural background and social context of this African-American musical tradition
* Students perform repertoire from this genre in an authentic way, applying stylistic nuances and making connections to similar characteristics in other musical forms

*Curriculum Strand Connections:* ***Grades 1-8:*** *C1 – Creating and Performing; C3 – Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts;* ***Grades 9-12:*** *B1 – The Critical Analysis Process; B2 - Music and Society; and C2 – Characteristics and Development of Music*

1. A Different Type of Musicianship

* Students develop and strengthen their aural musicianship skills through rote learning and playing or singing by ear
* Students participate in music making in a free and accessible manner without having (what is sometimes considered) the barrier of needing to be able to read music notation
* Develop vocal improvisation skills through “call and response” driven repertoire

*Curriculum Strand Connections:* ***Grades 1-8:*** *C1 – Creating and Performing;* ***Grades 9-12:*** *A1 – The Creative Process; A2 – The Elements of Music; A3 – Techniques and Technologies; and C1 – Theory and Terminology*

1. Equity Pedagogy, Inclusion and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

* Banks’ (2006) **Equity Pedagogy** – modifying teaching in ways that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, language, and gender groups by drawing on their cultural and language strengths
* Gospel music is very much inclusive – Characteristics of can be found in a number of popular music recordings (e.g. “[Man in the Mirror](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljpl0neGk2Q)” and “[We Are The World](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2H6mpUnsLI)” by Michael Jackson, “[Call the Man](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dL3-RExDlU4)” by Celine Dion, “[I Believe I Can Fly](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIQn8pab8Vc)” and “[The World’s Greatest](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgcovIu3k9o)” by R. Kelly), in music industry award shows (e.g., what’s a Grammy Award show without at least one performance featuring a gospel choir?), and in movies (e.g., Sister Act I and II, Blues Brothers 2000)

* Post-secondary credit gospel music programs exist at York University and Humber College – Both programs have experienced strong growth in enrolment and are very diverse in the student population (Burke, 2015) – University of Toronto added a credit gospel choir course to its curricular offerings in Fall 2019.
* **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy** (*also known as* ***Culturally Responsive Teaching***) – “Using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2010, p. 31 in Wiens, 2015, p. 20)

**Brief Gospel Music History**

* Gospel music has roots in the American slavery period
  + Slave songs (or work songs) while slaves worked on the field
  + Spirituals/hymns birthed during worship services slaves held in secret places on plantations
* Spirituals had dual purposes
  + Religious or scriptural texts citing messages of faith and hope
  + Hidden meanings that only African American slaves knew at the time – e.g. “Wade in the Water” or “Steal Away”- expressed social commentary
  + Dual purpose/meanings function similar to parables (stories) Jesus told in the Bible
* Gospel music became more popular in the late 1920’s / early 1930’s as hymns, spirituals and other religious songs were mixed with characteristics of blues and jazz styles, including instrumental accompaniment (piano and Hammond organ)
  + **Thomas Dorsey**, gospel composer, often recognized as the “Father of Gospel Music”
  + **Reverend James Cleveland** is another notable gospel music composer and pioneer
* Gospel music has evolved greatly over the last century, but one of its most recognized characteristics—the three part harmony gospel choir sound—was established between 1940’s to 1960’s by **Dr. Mattie Moss Clark**
  + This sound was carried over into small vocal ensemble groups such as **The Staple Singers** and **The Caravans**
* The Modern era (1960s-1980s) saw expansion of instrumentation beyond the piano and Hammond organ to include the bass guitar and drums; vocally, harmonies became more dissonant with seconds (or ninths) and sevenths being used
  + Notable composers were **Andrae Crouch**, **Edwin Hawkins**, **Walter Hawkins**, **Richard Smallwood**
* The 1980s saw electronic keyboards and saxophones added to instrumentation as well as the emergence of rap and hip-hop elements appearing in gospel performances
  + Notable composers/artists/choir leaders were **John P. Kee**, **Hezekiah Walker**, and **Elbertina “Twinkie” Clark**
* The 1990s is considered the urban era of gospel music with even more hip-hop influences due to new trends set by popular gospel artist/composer **Kirk Franklin**
  + Additional notables include **Kurt Carr** and **Fred Hammond**
* From 2000s to present day, gospel music has been taking a more global sound; expansion in “styles of gospel” as well as artists who combine gospel and praise and worship with African, Middle Eastern, and South American influences such as **Israel Houghton** and **Travis Greene**
* Key themes present in gospel music: faith, hope, trust, freedom, joy, salvation, overcoming difficult situations, unity, encouragement and self worth

(Wise, 2002; Walker, 2003; Feyen, 2007; Turner, 2008; Feyen, 2013; Burke, 2015)

**Characteristics of Vocal Gospel Music**

* Arrangements and harmonies can be free flowing (as in congregational singing) or very strict and formal (as in choir or vocal ensemble singing)
* Can be sung a cappella or with a wide range of instrumental accompaniment configurations
* Arrangement often incorporates a combination of unison and harmony parts
* Harmony parts are usually sung in 3 parts (soprano, alto, tenor or SAT; from gospel choir tradition), however 4 part harmony (soprano, alto, tenor, bass or SATB) also exists through hymns, spirituals and gospel quartet music
  + Female Tenors, Male Sopranos and Altos, use of the Male falsetto voice
* Uses a wide range of vocal tones, colors and articulations: “belt voice” or chest voice, nasal resonance, head voice (light, falsetto sound), vibrato, diphthongs, swells, humming, ooo’s, “the gospel growl”, mid-voice singing,
* Vowels are usually stressed, sometimes “slang” is used
  + Sometimes words ending with “e” vowel are replaced with “a” vowel (e.g. glory, lily) 🡪 purposeful text distortion
* Arrangements often incorporate modulations (raising keys by a semitone or full tone) or vocal inversions (switching who sings which harmony part—usually “upwards”—e.g. tenors take over the previous alto part, altos take over the previous soprano part, sopranos take over the previous tenor part an octave higher than where the tenors were singing)
* Demands development of aural musicianship skills
* Lots of repetition and syncopated rhythms
* Calls for good enunciation, especially for fast songs with wordy lyrics
* “Call and response” repertoire that often demands vocal improvisation from the soloist
  + Melismatic Singing based on the Pentatonic Scale or the “Gospel Blues”
* Some repertoire calls for vocal interaction with each other within the group (e.g. in a “cheerleader” type of way, like saying “Amen!!”, “You betta saaang!!!”) or with the audience

**Gospel Song Form**

* **One Part** (strophic form) – Congregational Song (A)
* **Two Part** (binary form) – Verse (A), Chorus (B)
* **Three Part** (ternary form) – Verse (A), Chorus (B), Vamp (C)

Gospel songs can sometimes have Pre-Choruses, Bridges, and Musical Interludes as well.

Often song sections are comprised of an **antecedent** (i.e., “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine” repeated 3x) and **consequent phrase** (i.e, “Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine”).**Considerations for Teaching Gospel Music in the Music Classroom**

1. Be careful not to promote religious indoctrination, rather use gospel music repertoire to teach musical concepts in addition to historical and social context. Select repertoire that is appropriate for grade level and that provide “good teaching opportunities”. Gospel music and inspirational popular music that has been influenced by gospel music often provides opportunities to discuss issues surrounding music and society.
2. Teach vocal parts by rote to be most authentic. You may need to transcribe vocal parts from recordings to have a frame of reference for yourself, but use your voice or an instrument to teach parts to students – remember they are developing their aural musicianship skills
3. Pick repertoire that is suitable for the experience level of your class or group. Sometimes modifying the vocal arrangements might be necessary to make the piece manageable for your group.
4. When making the transition to gospel music, you may consider teaching popular songs that contain gospel music elements. Do this with the intention of leading to more providing more authentic gospel music repertoire experiences. I refer to these as “Inspirational / Transitional songs in the suggested repertoire list provided.
5. Singing in harmony will likely be a challenge for some groups. Use warm up exercises that develop your classes’ ability to hear parts and remain on this given part.
6. Be prepared to use recorded instrumental track when starting out. It is very unlikely that you will have a strong student accompanist to play for your class or extracurricular group. If you have a student or staff accompanist available, that is a bonus!
7. Listen, listen and listen some more! To build your comfort level with this music, listen to as much of it as you can. Pay attention to enunciation, phrasing, dynamics, articulations, complex rhythms and vocal embellishments. Some of these musical elements can be difficult to notate, so you need to study them thoroughly with your ears so you can teach them (in addition to the notes of the melody) to your students.
8. With experience, you may begin to deviate from the original recording and modify vocal arrangements.
9. Be sure to practice any movement or choreography as early as possible, both in isolation of singing and while singing.
10. Black History Month provides an excellent opportunity for introducing gospel music in your classroom. Spirituals are most suitable during this time of the year as you can use them to teach about the beginning of gospel music (e.g. slavery).
11. Community relationship building for your music program can occur through performances of gospel music repertoire in local area churches and/or community music festivals.

**Strategies for Teaching Gospel Music**

1. Plan vocal warm up exercises carefully! Use exercises that develop vocal technique needed for the repertoire.
2. Incorporate a wide range of warm up exercises to develop the various vocal tones and characteristics found in gospel music (e.g. nasal resonance, chest voice, diphthongs, swells, bent notes, etc.)
3. Use rote teaching (“call and response”) to introduce repertoire.
4. Approach repertoire in small sections.
5. Start by teaching the entire group the words and rhythm (you might also include expression at this point).
6. Proceed with teaching the melody line to each section of the class (the harmony part for each section of the “choir”).
7. Rehearse section with all harmony parts singing together.
8. Teach and rehearse any movement or choreography as early as possible.

Suggested Repertoire List

| **Song Title, Artist/Songwriter, Link** | **Description** | **Grade Level(s)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [This Little Light of Mine](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-l840g5G2M)  *Performed by Toronto Mass Choir* | Traditional gospel folk song; appropriate for anytime of year | All – Can be sung in unison for Primary/Junior grades, parts for Intermediate/Senior grades. |
| [Wade In The Water](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeLur5K_Hwo)  *Performed by the Jeemies* | Spiritual. Good Black History Month piece. | All – Can be sung in unison for Primary/Junior grades, parts for Intermediate/Senior grades. |
| [Swing Low Sweet Chariot](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Thz1zDAytzU)  *Performed by Etta James* | Spiritual. Good Black History Month piece. | All – Can be sung in unison for Primary/Junior grades, parts for Intermediate/Senior grades. |
| [Down By The Riverside](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xzr_GBa8qk)  *Performed by Sister Rosetta Tharpe*    [Down By The Riverside](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKkOXNIyDC0)  *Performed by Eisenhower School –* ***2-part arrangement*** | Spiritual. Good Black History Month piece. | All – Can be sung in unison for Primary/Junior grades, parts for Intermediate/Senior grades. |
| [We Shall Overcome](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aor6-DkzBJ0)  *Performed by Morehouse College Glee Club*    [We Shall Overcome](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIx_3VvSAy8)  *Performed by Paul Morton and Greater St. Stephen Mass Choir -* ***Uptempo Sunday morning church choir feel*** | Spiritual. Became protest song during Civil rights movement. Good Black History Month piece. | All – Can be sung in unison for Primary/Junior grades, parts for Intermediate/Senior grades.  Paul Morton version is definitely for Intermediate/Senior grades, more advanced |
| [Go Down Moses (Let My People Go)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2DqOz51_SM)  *Performed by York University Gospel Choir* | Spiritual. SATB arrangement. Solo opportunities. | Intermediate/Senior. |
| [Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26a_pUQfkDc)  *Performed by Howard University Gospel Choir* | Spiritual. SATB arrangement. | Intermediate/Senior. |
| [I Know The Lord Has Laid His Hand On Me](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyW8YD6f5rQ)  *Performed by York College Choir* | Hymn. SATB arrangement. Solo opportunity. | Intermediate/Senior |
| [Ezekiah Saw The Wheel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfdMftXRpeM)  *Performed by Morgan State University Choir* | Spiritual. SATB arrangement. Solo opportunity | Intermediate/Senior |
| [O Happy Day](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihGHltBuBBI) (Edwin Hawkins)  *Performed by Edwin Hawkins Singers*  [O Happy Day](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr7wcHTzcTg) (Edwin Hawkins)  *Performed by St. Francis Academy Choir (Sister Act 2 movie)* | 20th Century hymn. SAT arrangement. Solo opportunities. | All – Can be sung in unison for Primary/Junior grades, parts for Intermediate/Senior grades. |
| [Lily In The Valley](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Db20xNLzDtA)  *Performed by the John P. Kee and the VIP Seminar Mass Choir* | A cappella. SATB arrangement. Solo opportunities. | Intermediate/Senior |
| [I Believe I Can Fly](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIQn8pab8Vc)  *Performed by R. Kelly* | Inspirational (transitional piece). SAT arrangement. Solo opportunities. | Intermediate/Senior |
| [The World’s Greatest](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgcovIu3k9o)  *Performed by R. Kelly* | Inspirational (transitional piece). SAT arrangement. Solo opportunities. | Intermediate/Senior |
| [We Are The World](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2H6mpUnsLI) (Michael Jackson)  *Performed by U.S.A. for Africa* | Inspirational (transitional piece). SAT arrangement. Solo opportunities. | All – Can be sung in unison for Primary/Junior grades, parts for Intermediate/Senior grades. |
| [Man In The Mirror](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PivWY9wn5ps)  *Performed by Michael Jackson* | Inspirational (transitional piece). SAT arrangement. Solo opportunities. | Intermediate/Senior |
| [Heal The World](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWf-eARnf6U)  *Performed by Michael Jackson* | Inspirational (transitional piece). SAT arrangement. | All – Can be sung in unison for Primary/Junior grades, parts for Intermediate/Senior grades |
| [Lean On Me](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEXQkrllGbA) (Bill Withers)  *Performed by Bill Withers*    [Lean On Me](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mR6sQDkK6nY) (Bill Withers)  *Performed by Glee cast* | Inspirational (transitional piece). SAT arrangement. Solo opportunities. | All – Can be sung in unison for Primary/Junior grades, parts for Intermediate/Senior grades |
| [Lean On Me](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXBKaOkmQhw) (Kirk Franklin)  *Performed by Kirk Franklin & The Family, featuring Bono, Crystal Lewis, Mary J. Blige, R. Kelly and Tamela Mann* | Modern gospel / Inspirational. SAT arrangement. Solo opportunities. | Intermediate/Senior |
| [Imagine Me](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I66SDeRQSJ4) (Kirk Franklin)  *Performed by Kirk Franklin* | Modern gospel / Inspirational. SAT arrangement. Solo opportunities. | Intermediate/Senior |
| [Wavin’ Flag](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nB7L1BIDELc) (K’naan)  *Performed by Young Artists for Haiti* | Inspirational (transitional piece). SAT arrangement. Solo opportunities. | Junior/Intermediate/Senior. Can be sung in unison if parts are a challenge for younger grades. |
| [Joyful, Joyful](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaEH1e_DLm0) (Henry van Dyke / Beethonvan)  *Performed by St. Francis Academy Choir (Sister Act 2 movie)* | Inspirational (transitional piece). SAT arrangement. Solo opportunities. | Intermediate/Senior |

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Post-Secondary Credit Gospel Music Programs

**York University**, Toronto, Ontario - <http://music.ampd.yorku.ca/>

* York University Gospel Choir (100-voice) – Performance course, multi-level (Years 1-4)
* History of Gospel Music – Studies course, Year 3

**Humber College**, Toronto, Ontario - <http://creativearts.humber.ca/programs/music/>

* Humber College Gospel Choir (40-voice) – Performance course, multi-level (Years 1-4)

**University of Toronto**, Toronto, Ontario - <https://music.utoronto.ca/>

* University of Toronto Credit Gospel Choir (15-voice) – Performance course, single-level

Gospel Music Conferences and Training Opportunities  
  
**Power Up Gospel Music Conference** – Thursday, February 20 – Sunday, February 23, 2020

*Annual Gospel Music Conference hosted by Toronto Mass Choir at York University*  
<https://powerupgospel.ca/>

**City Youth Gospel Project** – Wednesday, April 29, 2020

*Workshop for Elementary and Secondary Schools hosted by Karen Burke at York University*

[https://youtu.be/nWoQj\_JQ4gM](https://youtu.be/nWoQj_JQ4gM" \t "_blank)

**Gospel Music Workshop of America, Inc.**

*Annual Gospel Music Conference founded by Reverend James Cleveland*  
[http://www.gmwanational.net/](http://www.gmwanational.net/" \t "_blank)

**National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses**

*Annual Gospel Music Conference founded by Thomas Dorsey*  
[http://www.ncgccinc.com/wp/](http://www.ncgccinc.com/wp/" \t "_blank)  
  
**Edwin Hawkins Music and Arts Seminar**

*Annual Gospel Music Conference founded by Edwin and Walter Hawkins*

[http://hawkinsgospelconference.org/](http://hawkinsgospelconference.org/" \t "_blank)