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# TEACHING CHORAL MUSIC



Don L. Collins



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Don L. Collins

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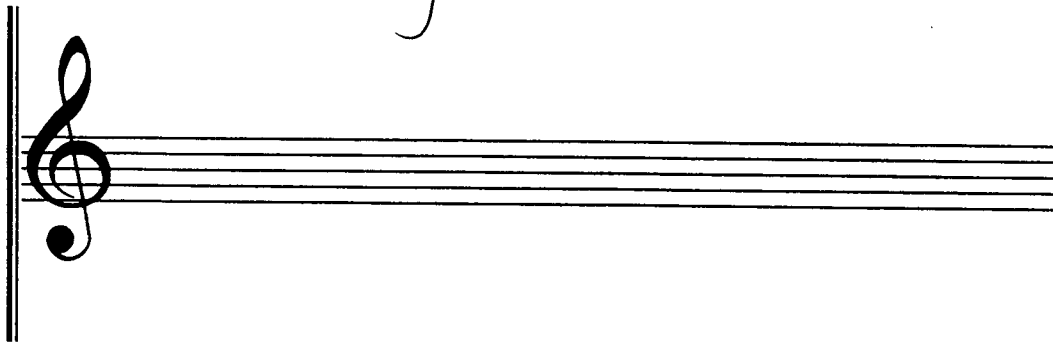
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# Teaching Choral Music

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**Prentice Hall  
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# Preface

This book has been written for choral music teachers in secondary schools and for those who are studying to become part of our noble profession. It is written in textbook format with features that enhance that purpose, but its value to the practicing professional was constantly on my mind as I wrote. In fact, I tell the traditional students in my secondary choral methods classes that the book will be much more helpful to them after they have taught for a year or two than it is as their current text, because at this point in their lives, they really understand very little about the magnitude of skill and information necessary to be successful master teachers.

The book is divided into three parts: The first helps you to build strong foundations for success; the second relates to the nuts and bolts of the profession (how to teach) and the third aids you in structuring your responsibilities so your tenure as teachers will be long, complete, and satisfying (administration and organization).

At the end of each chapter you will find some *Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion* that are questions for which there may be no specific answers in the chapter but which provide kindling for the fires of meditating, pondering, contemplating, reflecting and discussing. Some of them may be sources for major research projects.

Finding enough time to teach all the information students need to know to be prepared to be choral directors is always a problem for professors of choral methods. Part I and Chapter 15 and 16 of Part III are appropriate for separate introduction to music education courses for both choral and instrumental majors. If all the information in the text must be covered in one semester, due to limited class time, professors may desire to devise ways (reading, special research projects and so forth) to cover some of the material outside of class, possibly that in Part I. Chapters 15 and 16 have basic information about how to organize the choral curriculum. Students will have a better perspective for understanding the information in Part II and the remainder of Part III if those two chapters are studied before approaching Part II.

Each chapter has a comprehensive bibliography to be used for further reading and research. Each bibliography includes current books about information in the chapters and

those books which have served as war horses of the profession for years.

Choosing the exact word to communicate a thought or concept is always a challenge to a writer. I must clarify my concept of one word which is used throughout the text. When many music educators read or hear the word *adolescent*, they think about a student who is pubescent. That is a common understanding of the word. Although I deal with adolescence in detail in Chapter 7, I must reiterate here that my use of the word is much more encompassing. I think about adolescents as being from pre-pubescence (fifth or sixth grade) to those in their first year or so in college. Experts cannot agree as to exactly when adolescence ends, but there is a basic consensus of opinion that students are no longer adolescents when they take on adult responsibilities such as marriage, full-time employment, and so forth. In this book, I differentiate between early adolescents (middle-junior high school students) and older adolescents (senior high school students). The book addresses the needs of all adolescents.

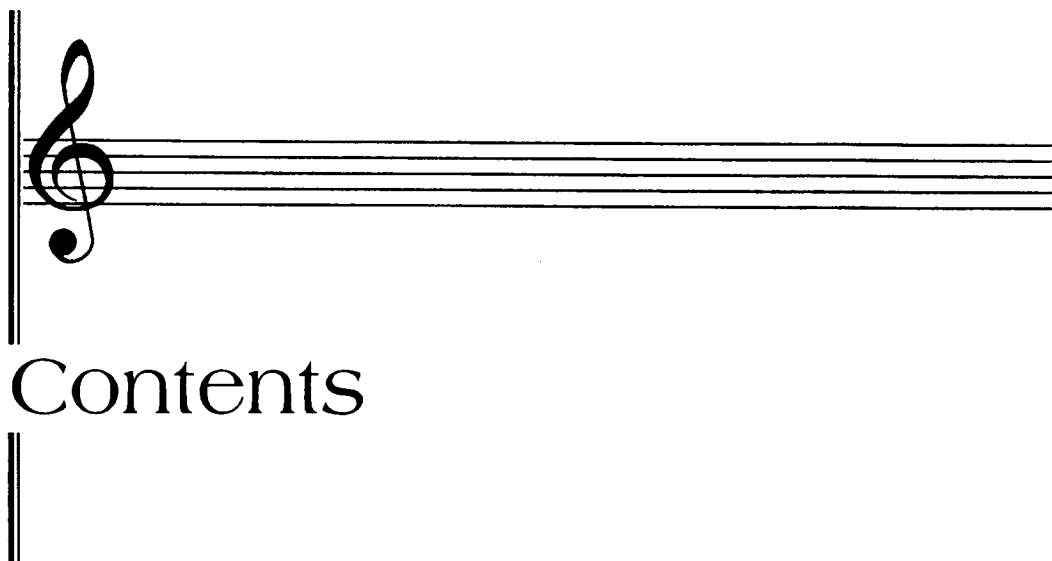
It is easy to understand the frustration Tevye experienced in *Fiddler on the Roof* when at the marriage of each of his daughters, in giving his permission, it became necessary for him to choose between "tradition" and "change." Tradition is important. Change is inevitable. One of the most difficult considerations when one writes a book is the choice of writing style. Traditionally, textbooks have been written to share information and to teach. When writing for college or university students and practicing professionals, it is expected practice to write in the third person, be direct and to the point, choose words which mean exactly what the author desires to say, be relatively formal, and not be overly flamboyant or decorative in the language. It is important for the author to set a good example of legitimate writing style so that aspiring student-writers may follow suit. Such is the importance of tradition.

I have been a teacher of choral music and related subjects on the university level for over twenty years. I have stood semester after semester in front of classes of real students, a few of whom were frustrated, others naive, some bored, many excited, and all desiring a degree. To turn these students on to the wonderful profession of music teaching has been my constant challenge and in most cases one of my greatest satisfactions. When I think about the students who will be using this text, I realize they, too, are real students with the same approach to the classroom as the multitudes of young people I have encountered day after day. When I write, I want to be able to say, "I have something important to tell you," not, "this author desires to share the following with the reader." Therein lies the importance of change.

Now, do you see the frustration I share with Tevye? I have decided to handle the frustration in the same way Tevye handled it—through compromise. Most of this book is written in traditional textbook style. However, there will be occasions, particularly at the beginning of various chapters, where I will break from tradition and speak to you one on one—when I have something I really want to say directly to you. Those passages are printed in **bold type**.

Finally, I must acknowledge the massive amount of time and effort expended by Dorothy Sahlmann, former Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Central Arkansas. She served as proofreader, grammarian, stylist, supporter, and friend. Without her and the encouragement of my wife, family, and faculty colleagues, this project would never have come to fruition.

Don L. Collins  
University of Central Arkansas  
Conway



## *Part I Building Foundations*

<b>1</b>	<b>THE EUROPEAN ROOTS OF CHORAL MUSIC</b>	<b>1</b>
	Singing in the Greek, Roman, and Hebrew Cultures	2
	Singing in the European Culture	5
	Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion	26
	Bibliography	27
<b>2</b>	<b>CHORAL MUSIC IN AMERICA</b>	<b>28</b>
	Choral Singing in American Society	28
	The Development of Public School Vocal Music	37
	Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion	41
	Bibliography	41
<b>3</b>	<b>DEVELOPING A PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS FOR TEACHING CHORAL MUSIC</b>	<b>43</b>
	Identifying Areas Where a Strong Philosophy is Needed	45
	Four Established Philosophies that Relate to Choral Music Education	45
	Applying These Four Philosophies to Choral Music Education	48

**iv Teaching Choral Music**

Aesthetic Philosophies That Relate to Choral Music Education 53

Summary 61

Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion 61

Bibliography 62

**4 APPLYING ESTABLISHED LEARNING THEORIES TO CHORAL MUSIC EDUCATION 63**

Learning Theory 64

Motivation in the Classroom 88

Summary 92

Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion 92

Bibliography 93

**5 DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR TEACHING CHORAL MUSIC 95**

An Interactive Instructional Model for Effective Teaching 96

Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion 106

Bibliography 107

**6 CHARACTERISTICS OF A MASTER TEACHER 108**

The Master Teacher "In a Nutshell" 109

Specific Characteristics of the Master Teacher 111

Conclusion 121

Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion 121

Bibliography 122

**7 UNDERSTANDING THE ADOLESCENT 124**

Biological Development 125

Cognitive Development 126

Social Characteristics 130

Family Relationships 134

Musical Characteristics 136

Summary 137



Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion	137
Bibliography	138
<b>8 HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO TRAINING THE CHANGING VOICE</b>	<b>139</b>
Early Methods of Dealing With the Changing Voice	140
Duncan McKenzie's Alto-Tenor Plan	142
Frederick Swanson's Adolescent Bass Theory	144
Irvin Cooper's Cambiata Concept	146
The Cambiata Vocal Music Institute of America, Inc.	151
John Cooksey's Contemporary Eclectic Theory	152
Anthony Barresi on Adolescent Voice	155
Lynne Gackle on the Adolescent Female Voice	158
Summary	160
Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion	160
Bibliography	161

## *Part II Teaching*

<b>9 DEALING WITH ADOLESCENT VOICES IN THE MUSIC CLASSROOM</b>	<b>164</b>
Vocal Registers	165
The Female Adolescent Voice	167
The Male Treble	169
The Male Changing Voice in Middle/Junior High School	171
The Changed Adolescent Voice in Middle/Junior High School	175
The Male Changing Voice in Senior High School	176
Motivating the Hesitant Singer	177
Training the Uncertain Singer	178
Summary	181
Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion	182
Bibliography	182

<b>10</b>	<b>PROPER VOCAL TECHNIQUE FOR ADOLESCENT VOICES</b>	<b>184</b>
	Posture 185	
	Breathing 186	
	Singing—Resonance 190	
	Nonvocal and Single Tone Exercises 191	
	Multiple Tone Exercises 196	
	Applying the Vocal Technique to Choral Literature 200	
	Conclusion 202	
	Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion 203	
	Bibliography 203	
<b>11</b>	<b>TEACHING MUSIC LITERACY: AN IMPERATIVE</b>	<b>205</b>
	The Adolescent Reading Singer 206	
	Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion 246	
	Bibliography 247	
	Other Sight-Reading Methods 247	
<b>12</b>	<b>THE UNIQUE SOUND OF ADOLESCENTS SINGING TOGETHER</b>	<b>249</b>
	Heading in the Right Direction 249	
	Diction—The Choir's Ability to Communicate the Text 250	
	Choral Tone—The Choir's Vehicle of Expression 270	
	Interpretive Factors—The Choir's Personality 281	
	Style—The Choir's Authenticity 303	
	Conclusion 313	
	Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion 313	
	Bibliography 314	

**13 GETTING THE MOST OUT OF REHEARSAL 315**

- Pre-Rehearsal Activities 315
- Voice Classifications 330
- Choosing Literature for Adolescents 332
- Score Preparation and Presentation 340
- Rehearsal Technique 345
- Conclusion 368
- Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion 368
- Bibliography 369

**14 DISCIPLINE IS A DISCIPLINE 371**

- Behavior and Misbehavior 373
- The Challenge and Rewards of Choral Singing 374
- Three Exemplary Approaches to Teaching Discipline in the Choral Classroom 376
- Conclusion 386
- Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion 386
- Bibliography 387

*Part III Administering***15 CLASSES WITH EMPHASIS ON PERFORMANCE 389**

- The Choral Curriculum—A Sequential Plan 391
- Extra-Curricula Choral Activities 399
- Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion 411
- Bibliography 412

**16 CLASSES WITHOUT EMPHASIS ON PERFORMANCE 415**

- Teaching General Music to All Adolescents: The Definitive Challenge 416

## **viii Teaching Choral Music**

- The Fine Arts Course in High School 428
- Related Secondary Music Experiences 429
- Conclusion 430
- Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion 430
- Bibliography 430

## **17 TEACHING MUSIC IN NOT JUST TEACHING MUSIC 432**

- Recruitment is All in the Image 432
- Promoting the Choral Program 437
- Special On- and Off-Campus Choral Activities 438
- Nonbudgetary Financial Support 445
- Evaluation of Students 446
- A Friend In Need Is a Friend Indeed 450
- Professional Ethics 452
- Professional Advancement 458
- Professional Commitment—To Stay or to Leave,  
That is the Question 463
- Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion 469
- Bibliography 470

## **18 THE CHORAL ENVIRONMENT: BUILDING AND BUYING FOR LEARNING 472**

- Preparing the Music Budget 472
- Physical Facilities and Equipment 473
- The Choral Library 483
- Thoughts for Contemplation and Discussion 485
- Bibliography 485

## **APPENDIX A 486**

Choral Literature for Middle/Junior High School Students

## **APPENDIX B 496**

Choral Literature for Senior High School Students





# The European Roots of Choral Music

As a teacher of singing, it is essential for you to have a thorough foundation in the history of the choral art. Because the American culture is relatively new compared to its European, African, or Oriental ancestors, it is difficult for Americans to understand the significance of tradition and history fully. Even though we may feel great pride in standing in Independence Hall in Philadelphia, visiting the old Spanish fort in St. Augustine, Florida, or seeing the site of the Pilgrim's landing in Plymouth, Massachusetts, we should realize that much of what we are as a people and the thought processes that govern our lives are derived from the European cultures and even the earlier Greek, Roman, and Hebrew cultures. Regrettably, many Americans do not realize this, believing we are the way we are and we think the way we think simply because we are Americans. For you to be totally effective in the classroom, you must recognize the great historical events, sacrifices, traditions, and failures that preceded you. It is this understanding that enables you to challenge your students to fulfill their cherished responsibility of making a significant contribution to the choral art. Your understanding of choral history affects the manner in which you approach your students, the type music you choose, the teaching techniques you employ, and the aura of professionalism that will establish the proper attitudes about music your students will carry with them once they have left your care.

This chapter traces the development of the choral art from Greek, Roman, and Hebrew cultures to its practice in the European culture of the twentieth

## 2 Teaching Choral Music

century. It is an intriguing story. After studying what has been presented here, you might want to read further in the books and articles delineated in the chapter bibliography to get a more thorough understanding of the parts that interested you the most.

### SINGING IN THE GREEK, ROMAN, AND HEBREW CULTURES

#### Greek Influences

From research in ancient Greek culture it is evident that music was a vital part of the lives of the people. It was included in many public religious observances, marriage and funeral rites, harvest and vintage festivals, and banquets and other festive occasions. Instruction in singing and playing the lyre (a stringed instrument of the harp class with a small sound box made from the shell of a turtle) was a standard part of the education of the free citizen. Performance practice was not limited to professional musicians. The public was musically educated to the point of not only being able to judge good and bad performances but also being participants in singing hymns, paeans, dithyrambs, parthenias, and dramatic choruses.

Evidence indicates that choral singing was combined with dancing as well. These singing and dancing ensembles included men performing together, women together, men and women together, or men with boys, all of whom performed unison or octave/unison choruses. Of the many types of choral dances, three emerge that are significant:

The paean:	an invocation to Apollo, the god of manly youth and beauty, poetry, music, oracles, and healing. It was first mentioned in <i>The Iliad</i> (c. 850 B.C.).
The parthenia:	a chorus for all women composed of Spartan virgins introduced c. 650 B.C.
The dithyramb:	a choreographed representation of the adventures of Dionysus, god of fertility (c. 600 B.C.). This chorus resulted in the great Greek tragedies and comedies of the fourth and fifth centuries B.C.

Greek choruses are thought to have been quite large, possibly numbering as many as 600. Dithyrambic choruses were conventionally composed of fifty boys and men arranged in a circle around a player of the aulos, a popular Greek double-reed oboe-type wind instrument of Oriental origin.

Scholars disagree about the size of the choruses that performed in the

Greek dramas of the fourth and fifth centuries B.C. It is believed there were twelve participants in the dramas of Aeschylus and fifteen in those of Sophocles. The Greek comedies may have consisted of as many as sixty singers.

Robinson and Winold shed some light on one's understanding of the role of the chorus in Greek dramas:

To appreciate the importance of choral participation in the dramatic presentations in ancient Greece, we must realize that these celebrations were not private undertakings intended for the amusement of the public, but festivals of a semireligious character which were considered essential to the political and moral welfare of the nation. The organization of the choruses was provided by law. If a poet wished to mount a dramatic production, he had to apply to a magistrate. If his request was granted, the best singers in each district were sought out and given an examination. Once the singers were chosen, wealthy citizens furnished the financial support necessary for the sustenance, instruction, and equipment of the choir. The singers were generally trained by a chorus master who was assisted by the leader of the orchestra. On certain occasions the poet chose to perform this duty.<sup>1</sup>

### Roman Influences

Since the great Roman Empire contributed so much to modern-day civilization, it is difficult to believe that it contributed almost nothing to the choral art, but such is the case. In fact, it seems that the cultivated classes tolerated music, but in a bit of contemptuous manner. As an example, Cato, a great Roman statesman, provided as proof of the worthlessness of one of his political opponents the fact that he was a singer. The music-making process was not considered to be part of the educational procedure of the upper class, and the status of professional actors and musicians was very low.

Evidently, choral performances were popular in Rome but these came about strictly through Greek and Oriental influences. It may be concluded from literary evidence and inscriptions on various monuments that music was part of the popular life of Rome, particularly in public celebrations. During the reign of Julius Caesar it is recorded that 12,000 singers and instrumentalists assembled in Rome for such a celebration.

The Romans undoubtedly assimilated much into their culture from the Greeks and other cultures, but without extant musical documentation it is difficult to ascertain exactly what indigenous contributions were made.

### Jewish Influences

There is little question that the performance of music in the medieval church was most greatly influenced by performance practices in Jewish worship before and after the death of Christ. In fact, one might be so bold as to say that Christian musical performance was patterned after Jewish worship at least until the development of organum and beyond. Granted, modern notation and music

<sup>1</sup> Ray Robinson and Allen Winold, *The Choral Experience* (New York: Harper's College Press, 1976), p. 9.

#### 4 Teaching Choral Music

theory have their roots in the Greek culture, but performance practice is definitely of Jewish origin.

Singing, mostly in small groups, dominated performance practice in both traditions. One of the best sources to understand the origin of singing in these cultures is the Bible, both Old and New Testament writings. The first recorded song in the Bible was sung by Moses on the banks of the Red Sea after the rescue of the children of Israel from Pharaoh's army. The second song mentioned in the Bible is the one sung by Miriam, on the same occasion, as sort of a refrain to Moses' song. Singing occurred at the battle of Jericho and at David's victory over the Philistines, and even while in captivity in Babylon the Israelites sang a song of their homeland.

One of the more ambitious musical presentations is recorded in Second Chronicles 5:12–14 where singing and playing of instruments marked the dedication of Solomon's Temple. In fact, when David ascended the throne of Israel he appointed the Levites to be the official musicians (singers and players) of the temple (First Chronicles 15:16); they included women in David's temple and young boys in Herod's temple.

The book of Psalms, often referred to as the hymnbook of the Hebrew people, represents the largest body of biblical songs. Interestingly, they have become a staple for singing in Christendom as well. This will become evident as their influence is examined throughout the development of choral music.

Recorded examples of singing in the New Testament include the *Annunciation* (Luke 1:30–33), the words of the angel Gabriel to the maiden Mary; the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46–55), Mary's response to being chosen to be the mother of God; the *Benedictus* (Luke 1:68–79), the outburst of Zacharias on the birth of his son John; the *Gloria in Excelsis* (Luke 2:14), the song of the hosts of angels as they sang to the shepherds in the field at the coming of the Christ child; the *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:29–32), the words of Simeon, the devout servant, upon seeing the Christ child at the temple; the *Triumphal Entry* (Luke 19:38 and Matthew 21:15), the songs of praise of the disciples upon the entry of Christ into the city of Jerusalem at the beginning of Passion Week; and the *Last Supper* (Matthew 26:30), sung by the disciples around the table in the upper room as was the custom at Passover. Paul and Silas sang while in prison (Acts 16:25), and there are other references to singing of psalms and lyric songs in Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, Acts 4:24–30, and James 5:13.

In Jewish worship, evidence indicates singing was antiphonal (the singing of a chant as a refrain to the verses of a psalm) and responsorial (the performance of the congregation and choir in alternation) between a leader and the choir and congregation. It is believed that in these ancient times the congregation seldom joined in the singing except for one word responses such as *Amen*, *Halleluyah*, *Hoshahnna* (Oh help!), or *Aneau* (Answer us!). Somewhat later there is an indication that the Psalms may have been sung in a sort of dialogue between the leader and the choir and/or congregation.

What were the melodies like? There are present-day Jewish church musicians who insist that much of the original character of their chants is still maintained. Some musicologists believe that early Christian chants were



patterned after early Jewish melodies; therefore certain traditions in Eastern Orthodox worship are reminiscent of these original melodies. Suzanne Haik Vantoura, a French musician and scholar, promotes the theory that mysterious signs found above and below some of the Hebrew scriptures is a type of music notation. Over a period of several years she has deciphered these signs and arrived at specific rhythms and melodies. She has transcribed and recorded approximately three hours of early Hebrew music.<sup>2</sup>

As previously stated, the Eastern and Western medieval church maintained significant ties to Jewish music, particularly as far as worship and performance practice was concerned. It used the concept of yearly cycle of services, with each day ranked according to its importance. It retained Bible reading and psalm singing as major elements of worship. The performance characteristics of antiphonal and responsorial singing, and of soloistic virtuosity in an improvisatory style, were used. Some of the actual melodies, particularly those used in psalm singing, can be found in parallel Jewish and Christian worship versions. Also, like the Jews of the synagogue, the Christians generally employed only vocal music within their liturgy.

Accepting the above premise, one is able to close the 600-year gap between the New Testament singing practices and the emergence of monophonic plainchant of Pope Gregory I (590–604).

## SINGING IN THE EUROPEAN CULTURE

### Antiquity and Medieval Singing

Other than the premise that music in the early Christian church was based on Jewish practices, extant evidence is unavailable about singing procedures in worship services in the first three centuries of the Christian Church. In a letter to the Corinthian church (A.D. 96), Clement of Rome refers to the *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy, Holy), usage of which was acceptable practice in worship for Jews and Christians. Pliny, governor of Bithynia (c. A.D. 111–113), in a letter to the Roman emperor Trajan, referred to Christians as “meeting on a fixed day before daylight and reciting responsively among themselves a hymn to Christ as a god, and that they bound themselves by an oath not to commit any crime. . . . When they had performed this it was their custom to depart and to meet together again for a meal, but of a common and harmless kind.”<sup>3</sup>

Extant examples of worship practices in the second and third centuries do not include specific references to singing, but since singing was a part of worship before the second century and after the third century, there is reason to believe that it was also included in the intervening centuries. References to antiphonal and responsorial singing occur in Eusebius' (c. 260–340) *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Haik Vantoura, *La Musique de la Bible Revelee* (Paris: Dessain et Tolra, 1978), p. 364.

<sup>3</sup> T. S. Garrett, *Christian Worship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 47.