

INCORPORATING WORKS BY LIVING FEMALE COMPOSERS
INTO THE STANDARD REPERTOIRE FOR
DEVELOPING FEMALE VOICES

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify and classify works by living female composers that could be added to the standard repertoire for developing female voices. The Texas University Interscholastic League's Prescribed Music List (PML) was used as the determinant for which music has already been included in the standard repertoire. Few female composers were found represented on the PML and only one of those female composers was living. Nine songs by three prominent female composers were proposed for inclusion; however, due to an inability to access the rubric used to determine and classify pieces for inclusion on the PML, a rubric was developed. Current pedagogical research regarding the developing female voice with its qualities and limitations was utilized to determine proper criteria for the rubric. This rubric was then used to classify the proposed selections by difficulty. All nine songs were classified as class 1 vocal solos using the UIL's classification framework and the researcher-create rubric.

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Introduction

Representation in the world of classical music composition has long been skewed toward white males, a trend easily seen in any music history textbook and observed on any classical radio station. In recent decades, some conductors and musicians have intentionally sought to change this imbalance and bring works by traditionally underrepresented composers, such as women, people of color, or LGBTQ composers, to the forefront. However, these efforts usually only affect professional or collegiate musicians, not young performers at the secondary school level. Female composers are particularly underrepresented in the standard repertoire available for young singers at the middle school and high school levels. With many prominent living female composers actively composing new vocal pieces every year, there is no reason why their works should not be made accessible to young singers.

Incorporating new works into the standard repertoire is a multifaceted endeavor that requires first understanding what defines the standard repertoire and then finding music that is developmentally appropriate to include for a particular age group. For the purposes of this thesis, the emphasis lies on finding works that young female singers between the ages of 14 and 18 could potentially study and perform with relative success. Works by three prominent living female composers have been selected and analyzed to determine their level of difficulty in accordance with the classifications used by the Texas University Interscholastic League's Prescribed Music List (PML). The selected works would make excellent additions to any list of approved repertoire and the composers who wrote them would serve as outstanding role models to the next generation of performers, composers, theorists, and teachers currently attending secondary schools in Texas and in other areas of the United States.

Determining Standard Repertoire: The PML

In the state of Texas, the primary force determining the standard repertoire for students at the secondary level is the Texas University Interscholastic League (UIL). This organization is responsible for creating rules for and administering athletic, musical, and academic contests. UIL publishes a Prescribed Music List, or PML, which is comprised of all selections that are approved for state music contests. Each selected piece, whether for solo voice, chorus, band, orchestra, or any other instrumentation, is given a classification presumably based on the pedagogical difficulty of the pieces in relation to one another. For solo vocal literature, songs are given a classification of 1, 2, or 3, with 1 being the most difficult repertoire.

The PML is accessible online, though it is not easy to navigate. There are no options to filter the repertoire by categories such as time period or language. The composers of each selection are displayed only by their last names, making a search for any included female composers difficult. In total, only six female composers have works on the PML and only one of those composers is still alive (see Table 1). Their works account for 22 of the 1,350 vocal solos on the list (1.6%). Beyond a lack of female compositions, the PML also lacks many modern compositions. Many of the songs come from the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic periods, or from the early seventeenth century to the late twentieth century. Traditionally respected composers from earlier time periods are more strongly represented on the list; W.A. Mozart has 25 works listed on the PML, Johannes Brahms has 20, Robert Schumann has 31, and G.F. Handel has 39. Based on this information, it can be concluded that the PML does not accurately reflect the full repertoire of music available, especially in the digital age.

Table 1:
Current PML Selections by Female Composers

Composer	Selections	Classifications
Amy Beach (1867-1944)	Meadow-Larks	1
	Peace	1
	Ich sagte nicht	1
	Deine Blumen	1
	Je Demande a l'oiseau	1
	The Year's at the Spring	1
	Ah, love, but a day!	1
	Fairy Lullaby	1
	Take, O Take Those Lips Away	1
Margaret Bonds (1913-1972)	Minstrel Man	1
Katherine Kennicott Davis (1892-1980)	Nancy Hanks	1
	He's Gone Away	2
	The Pitcher	2
	The Deaf Old Woman	2
	Trust in the Lord	3
Florence B. Price (1887-1953)	Night	1
Penny Rodriguez (living, age unknown)	How Do I Love Thee?	1
	If Thou Must Love Me	1
	Love is Enough	1
	Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day	1
	There is a Lady Sweet and Kind	1
Clara Schumann (1819-1896)	Liebst du um Schönheit	1

Currently, there is no way to recommend or submit songs for consideration to the UIL committee that selects the PML repertoire. Additionally, no rubric is publicly available to explain how songs are selected and classified. Music educators have no way to truly gauge the difficulty of the pieces on the list without looking at the scores themselves. Teachers cannot access which factors are being considered and what criteria are being used as the works are

added, assuming that set factors and criteria do indeed exist. This lack of a rubric is inconvenient to the thousands of teachers and students who turn to this list to select appropriate repertoire to learn and perform.

The Developing Female Voice

The PML is designed for the use of secondary public schools; therefore, the works included have theoretically been deemed developmentally appropriate for middle school to high school voices. In order to claim that a work is such, evaluators must first understand the limitations and qualities of a developing voice at these ages.

Many researchers have studied the changes that occur to developing male voices as they progress through the physiological changes of pubescence, most notably John M. Cooksey, Duncan McKenzie, Frederick J. Swanson, and Irwin Cooper (Gackle, 2006). However, few have researched the changes that occur to developing female voices. The leading researcher in this field of study is Dr. Lynne Gackle, who currently serves as the Director of Choral Activities at Baylor University. The developing female voice was Gackle's doctoral dissertation topic, and she has since published numerous journal articles and a full-length book, *Finding Ophelia's Voice, Opening Ophelia's Heart* (2011), about this topic, as well.

Both adolescent males and females experience growth of their larynges and vocal folds, which contributes to a diminished range in the pitches they are able to phonate. In males, this growth is more pronounced, leading to greater changes in range than females. The female voice ultimately increases in range as it develops and the lower and upper limits shift; however, the tessitura, or comfortable singing range, of young female singers is inconsistent and decreases during development (Gackle, 1991). Expanded vocal tracts in both genders contribute to the

deepening or increased richness of male and female voices as they develop through adolescence toward adulthood (Gackle, 2006). These many physiological changes, as well as the general onset of puberty and new hormones, all contribute to the typical characteristics of developing voices.

According to Dr. Gackle (2006), developing female voices exhibit “increased huskiness/breathiness of tone, lowering of speaking voice, decreased and inconsistent range, ... noticeable changes in timbre (tone quality), voice “breaks”/cracking, ... obvious transition notes or register breaks, insecurity of pitch, and difficulty initiating phonation” (p. 30). When selecting repertoire for young female singers, teachers must continually assess the current development of their students’ voices and choose songs that appropriately match their current range and tessitura. Selecting repertoire that plays to students’ strengths rather than emphasizing their current weaknesses is not only healthier for the vocal development of each student, but it also helps students to embrace their own voices and celebrate what they are able to achieve in each phase as their voices continue to develop.

In her earlier research, Dr. Gackle identified four stages of development in the adolescent female voice, but she has since clarified that viewing them as phases of development serves as more appropriate framework since the changes happen so gradually over time. Rather than trying to assign stages, Gackle (2006) suggests that adolescent female voices be classified using the following criteria: average speaking pitch, vocal range/tessitura, register development, and overall voice quality or timbre (p. 32). Using a more wholistic approach to assess vocal development ensures that teachers consider all of the qualities and limitations of their young singers’ voices and select appropriate repertoire for their current development without boxing them into strict stages.

Proposed Rubric

To provide support for understanding the classification of vocal solos that are included on the PML, the following rubric has been developed (see Figure 1). This rubric is based on select criteria based on the qualities and limitations of the developing female voice as previously discussed, as well as analysis of songs already classified on the PML. While many other factors can be considered when determining the difficulty of a piece, these three categories encompass some factors of primary importance pedagogically.

Class:	Melody (range, tessitura, line):	Accompaniment:	Form and Length:
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - up to two octave range - large intervals including octave leaps - some chromatic passages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - does not often mirror vocal line - pattern may or may not be in line with vocal rhythms - some a cappella measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - through composed (ABC) or combination of contrasting sections (such as ABA, ABAB, AB) - can be longer selections such as arias
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - around one octave + fourth range - some larger intervals (P5 and greater) - occasional chromaticism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sometimes mirrors vocal line, at least in rhythm, - rarely any a cappella measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - contrasting sections (AB, ABA, etc.) or through composed (ABC)
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - around one octave range - mostly stepwise motion with small intervals - mostly diatonic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - often mirrors vocal line - entrances are clear - never any a cappella measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strophic (AAA) or two contrasting sections (AB, ABA) - simple and usually brief

Figure 1: Proposed Rubric for Determining the Classification of Vocal Solos for the PML

The first category analyzes the melodic features of a song, including the range, general tessitura, and shape of line. Young singers, typically moving from middle school to early high school, would benefit from a class 2 or 3 solo since the demands on range and tessitura are less than those found in a class 1. In addition, students in this age range would likely struggle with register breaks and inconsistency in pitch ranges and thus would benefit from simple melodies comprised of stepwise motion. The interval content of selected repertoire also grows increasingly more difficult from class 3 to class 1 solos. These features of the melody weigh heavily in the classification process since they are key in determining how physically difficult a song is for a young singer to learn and perform.

The second category analyzes the accompaniment features of a song. The most significant differences between accompaniments for class 2 and 3 solos and class 1 solos is how often or closely it mirrors the vocal line in pitch and/or rhythm. Younger singers who struggle with identifying starting pitches or hearing their line require accompaniments in which their melodic line can be heard fairly clearly. Older singers may begin to sing pieces where the accompaniment pattern does not mirror their own line. Class 1 solos may contain brief measures or sections with no piano accompaniment.

The third and final category analyzes the form and length of a song. While these factors are not necessarily vital to classifying pieces pedagogically, they should still be considered when selecting repertoire for young singers. Lesser-trained singers will likely find more success singing shorter songs featuring melodic repetition. As a singer develops vocally through consistent training, she may begin to tackle more challenging repertoire. Older singers are likely to have more stamina and be more equipped to learn songs that have several contrasting sections.

This rubric has been utilized to classify the selected works. See Table 2 for a complete listing of the selected works for this project.

Table 2:
All Proposed PML Selections by Female Composers

Composer	Selections	Classifications
Lori Laitman	The Apple Orchard	1
	If I...	1
	Little Elegy	1
Libby Larsen	The Apple's Song	1
	My Candle Burns	1
Gwyneth Walker	As a Branch in May	1
	Let the Life I've Lived	1
	My Love Walks in Velvet	1
	Peace, My Heart	1

Selected Composers and Works

Lori Laitman

Lori Laitman (b. 1955, female/Caucasian) is a prolific American composer of vocal music. She holds a Master of Music degree from The Yale School of Music. Using the words of both classical and contemporary poets, she has composed over 200 songs. Additionally, she has written multiple operas, an oratorio, and some choral works. Her works are widely performed, and she has been commissioned by Opera America and the Center for the Arts at VA Tech, among others. Three of her songs have been selected as suitable for inclusion on the PML and have been classified according to the proposed rubric (see Figures 2a-c).

The Apple Orchard Text by Dana Gioia	Proposed Classification: 1
Melodic features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - octave + M6 range - large leaps including octave jumps - complex rhythms - frequently changing tonality and chromaticism
Accompaniment features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - dotted eighth-sixteenth figure prominent in bass line - blocked and rolled cluster chords - brief interludes that break pattern - most helpful for establishing tonality
Form and length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - through-composed setting of text with some repeated melodic ideas often in different tonalities - 71 measures, ~3'20"

Figure 2a: Rubric evaluation of *The Apple Orchard* by Lori Laitman

If I... Text by Emily Dickinson	Proposed Classification: 1
Melodic features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - octave + m6 range - large leaps and triad movement - frequently changing meters - some chromatic pitches
Accompaniment features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - arpeggiated and blocked chords that usually include the pitches of the melody - relatively sparse - echoes melody during interlude
Form and length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - through-composed setting of poem with a partial repeat - short- 46 measures, ~2'

Figure 2b: Rubric evaluation of *If I...* by Lori Laitman

Little Elegy Text by Elinor Wiley	Proposed Classification: 1
Melodic features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - octave + tritone range - large leaps - chromaticism and unstable/changing tonality
Accompaniment features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - flowing eighth note motion with some blocked chords - does not mirror vocal line in pitch or rhythm - seems to follow rather than lead vocal line
Form and length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - through composed setting of text - short- 26 measures, ~1'

Figure 2c: Rubric evaluation of *Little Elegy* by Lori Laitman

Libby Larsen

Libby Larsen (b. 1950, female/Caucasian) is a widely performed and recorded American composer. Her extensive catalogue of over 500 works includes not only vocal works, such as her 15 operas, but also chamber music and works for orchestra and other ensembles. In 1993, she won a Grammy for producing a CD recording featuring her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Larsen was the first woman to serve as a resident composer with a major orchestra and she has held many residencies around the country. Two of her songs have been selected and classified for inclusion on the PML (see Figures 3a-b).

The Apple's Song Text by Edwin Morgan	Proposed Classification: 1
Melodic features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - octave + m3 range - heavily chromatic melody with many half steps and minor thirds - shifting tonalities

Accompaniment features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - varied patterns and style - sometimes mirrors vocal line in both pitch and rhythmic figures - helpful for discerning tonality - though sometimes anticipates vocal line and creates brief half-step dissonances
Form and length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - through-composed setting of text - recurring melodic ideas in different tonalities or with other variations - long-55 measures, ~5'30"

Figure 3a: Rubric evaluation of The Apple's Song by Libby Larsen

My Candle Burns Text by Edna St. Vincent Millay	Proposed Classification: 1
Melodic features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - octave + P4 range - octave leaps - difficult intervals - chromaticism
Accompaniment features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - blocked chords - brief a cappella section - frequent dissonance with vocal line
Form and length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - through-composed setting of poem with a partial repeat - short- 29 measures, ~2'

Figure 3b: Rubric evaluation of My Candle Burns by Libby Larsen

Gwyneth Walker

Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947, female/Caucasian) grew up on a dairy farm in Vermont, an experience which has contributed to her work and personality as a composer. She is a graduate of Brown University and holds B.A., M.M. and D.M.A. degrees in Music Composition. Since 1982,

she has traveled around the country working full-time as a composer and building up a catalogue of over 350 commissioned works for orchestra, chamber ensembles, chorus, and solo voice. Four of her songs are included in this study and have been classified according to the proposed rubric (see Figures 4a-d).

<p>As a Branch in May Text by G. Walker</p>	<p>Proposed Classification: 1</p>
<p>Melodic features</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - octave + m6 range - main theme largely stepwise and thirds with a few larger intervals - largely diatonic with one chromatic pitch
<p>Accompaniment features</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - root-chord pattern most prevalent with increasing variation and movement as piece progresses - melodic interludes - extended a cappella section near the end - overall sparse accompaniment style with some staccato sections and some sections with only one hand playing at a time
<p>Form and length</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mostly strophic, AAAA'B - long- 145 measures, ~5'

Figure 4a: Rubric evaluation of *As a Branch in May* by Gwyneth Walker

<p>Let the Life I've Lived Text traditional with additions by Gwyneth Walker</p>	<p>Proposed Classification: 1</p>
<p>Melodic features</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - octave + M3 range - mostly stepwise and major thirds - one octave leap - no chromaticism or altered pitches (completely diatonic)

<p>Accompaniment features</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - alternates between blocked chords and moving eighth note patterns - occasionally mirrors vocal line in both pitch and rhythm - sparse at times (one chord per measure or only one hand playing at a time)
<p>Form and length</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strophic setting of traditional text and melody with a contrasting setting of Walker's additions, AABA' - 70 measures, ~3'

Figure 4b: Rubric evaluation of *Let the Life I've Lived* by Gwyneth Walker

<p>My Love Walks in Velvet Text by G. Walker</p>	<p>Proposed Classification: 1</p>
<p>Melodic features</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - octave + M6 range (A5 optional- lower notes included) - Dorian mode - recurring motifs - one octave leap - mostly stepwise and thirds - key change and tempo change for final verse - some meter changes
<p>Accompaniment features</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - arpeggiated and blocked chords - nearly constant eighth note movement throughout - becomes more complex and involved as song progresses
<p>Form and length</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mostly strophic, AAA'B - somewhat longer- 79 measures, ~4'

Figure 4c: Rubric evaluation of *My Love Walks in Velvet* by Gwyneth Walker

Peace, My Heart Text by Rabindranath Tagore	Proposed Classification: 1
Melodic features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - octave + P5 range - larger intervals including octave leaps, but also frequent stepwise motion - some chromatic pitches
Accompaniment features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - broken and rolled chords - more frantic eighth note patterns at times - clearly contrasting styles throughout - sometimes mirrors vocal line but also creates dissonance with it - triplet motions imitate birds in flight - brief a cappella moments (single measures)
Form and length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - through-composed setting of text with some partial repeats or variations on earlier motifs - average length- 86 measures, ~3'15"

Figure 4d: Rubric evaluation of Peace, My Heart by Gwyneth Walker

Conclusion

Music by living female composers is more prolific and more accessible than ever before with the rise of digital downloads and online catalogues, yet this music is not substantially represented in lists such as the PML that strongly influence standard repertoire for young singers. The three composers discussed here represent a small sample of the many talented and active female composers around the United States and the world. In a society that has become increasingly aware of diversity and the effects of representation on youth, the importance of including these women in the music young people sing cannot be overemphasized.

Additionally, it is recommended that UIL have a rubric or other classification criteria available for educators, composers, and publishers. Classification of music for the PML should

not be ambiguous, and it would be beneficial for composers and publishers to have a way of evaluating and suggesting works for inclusion. A stagnant and redundant music list could deprive singers and teachers by denying them access to a wider selection of repertoire and may disenfranchise composers by denying them access to a wider audience for their works. Including these proposed works and others by underrepresented composers in the PML and other approved repertoire lists could enrich the music community, and could perhaps even change the face of future generations of musicians and composers to come.

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