

MUSIC MINISTRY



Music Notes

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In recent weeks, the choral music community had to come to grips with the reality that it may be a year or more before in-person rehearsals and performances of choral music can happen again in the United States, leading toward widespread despair about the future of our field. I wrote this message with the hope that my singer and choral director friends and colleagues would find encouragement and hope in my personal perspective. I'm now sharing this with our community at Unity Church with the hope that others outside of choral music may also find something meaningful in it.

My family and I came to the United States in 2012 from what was then known as "the murder capital of the world," a region of Mexico that has been especially hard hit by drug cartel and gang violence. Our current situation keeps taking me back to the experience of trying to make a living as a musician and raising a family in those circumstances. Shootings would take place frequently in public places such as playgrounds and malls, and going out after dark was just completely out of the question. For years we rarely left the house unless it was essential. Every single person we knew has lost a loved one to the violence that was and still is rampant in the region. Having lived through that, we were all connected by our shared grief and uncertainty for the future, a connection that I feel immediately when I meet fellow immigrants from the regions in Mexico that have been affected by the worst of the cartel violence.

Throughout all this, our government and institutions disappointed us constantly, refusing to acknowledge the reality of the situation. We all knew that the Mexican government would never come through for us, that the corruption and incompetence at every level were

too great. The police and military were just as dangerous as the cartels and gangs, and in many cases they were one and the same. It was clear that our institutions had failed us, that any sort of change could only come from grassroots organizing and from within our own communities.

Musicians were especially affected by the violence. Many of us had to drive or walk after dark following concerts or a full day of teaching. Some were targeted for kidnapping after a performance was covered in the media, and many had to perform at venues such as night clubs and bars, which were frequent sites of murders and mass shootings. The alternative was having no income at all. However, it wasn't just about the income: the act of making music never felt more necessary, more relevant. Music, dance, art, stories, are what made the whole situation bearable all those years.

It's hard not to feel overwhelmed by our reality. It's easy to feel powerless. We are at the beginning of a new reality and we are still trying to make sense of it. Most of our community is still in the early stages of grief or in triage, frantically trying to shift gears and remain employed, acquire new skills, care for families, and learn a new way of living. It is early in the process and things are changing every day. We don't know enough about what this new reality is — nobody does. We all have our process. For some it may mean pausing and introspection; for others it may mean exhilarated play, trying out new technology and interdisciplinary collaboration, making stuff. In the end, our role is the same it has always been, to make sense of the world, to convert reality into stories and give it a narrative. When that reality is particularly oppressive or senseless, art that brings joy, comfort, and insight is especially needed. Music provided moments of fun and lightness amidst the reality of living in the "murder capital of the world" while also helping us make

sense of the senseless deaths of loved ones murdered by the gangs and cartels.

My love for choral music is rooted in the conviction that there is so much more to it beyond "bringing a large group of people into a room to sing for another large group of people." I love it for its nearly limitless potential, for its incredibly vast repertoire and the countless expressions of communal and individual singing that have existed in every culture since before humans even developed language. There is room for everyone and everything in our field. The idea that every choral director and singer out there is going to just throw up their hands in the air and give up until there's a vaccine is just so absurd, so impossibly ridiculous, that it's not even worth considering. We are grieving because our music is our identity, it is at the core of who we are... what we're losing isn't just a hobby. However, that connection is also our power: our process will always find a way to enable us to tell those stories and connect with each other. Once we figure it out in this new circumstance, the need to tell stories and find human connection always wins out.

Now is when we can do the most good. If it wasn't obvious before, it should be obvious now: we are essential workers. Nobody knows what the future will look like, but we can at least be certain that we will be forced to learn new ways of working and supporting our work and we will emerge with a true appreciation for the act of being able to gather together and sing. This alone is reason enough to make me very excited for the future of our field.

Share a music message!

Turn to the back cover for details!

Sing with a Unity choir!

Turn to page 8 for details!