

## A Letter from Your Conductor

July 2016

Welcome to the 2016 Middle Level Honors Orchestra!

Congratulations on being selected for this very special orchestra—it is a tribute to your hard work and passion for something truly remarkable—making music in a symphony orchestra.

I am so looking forward to meeting you all in October. Besides a spectacular concert, we also will have the opportunity to learn as much as we can about these four pieces. Between now and then, you have three jobs:

- 1) **Learn to play all four pieces** (every single note, every rhythm, every detail like dynamics and articulation.) How will you know if you're ready for our first rehearsal? You'll know when you have the music nearly memorized from studying it so carefully. If you have a private teacher, take a piece to work on with them each week. Take your questions about fingerings, articulations, and style. And be sure to thank your teacher for helping you!
- 2) **Listen to the pieces online.**  
YouTube is your friend.
- 3) **Learn as much background information on each piece as you can.**  
Google is your friend.

Let's talk a bit about each piece:

### **“Anvil Chorus” from *Il Trovatore* by Giuseppe Verdi**

There is no other piece in history quite like this one. Where does it come from? What's its story? (Hint: there are lyrics. What does the piece take place?) Write down what you learn on the back of your part. Find a video clip of this scene. (That's a hint. It's from an opera.) And why is it called the “Anvil” Chorus? What is an anvil, anyway? Pay close attention to the articulation styles—which notes are short, which are full length, and which are accented. And remember to practice slowly, to learn quickly.

### **The Pinery Boy, arr. by Carrie Gruselle**

Strings, you will have the rare opportunity to play the world premiere of a brand new piece, written for you! The Pinery Boy is an old Wisconsin folksong. See how much you can learn about it. What story does its lyrics tell? Happy ending or sad?

This piece is an arrangement and it's an arrangement that has never been heard before, so there is not a single recording of it (until we record one in October)! However, the original folksong has been sung for many years, and there is at least one arrangement for choir. See if you can find recordings on YouTube. There is a famous one by Art Thieme, and the band Emperors of Wyoming.

Please write in the counting in your part—especially the measures in 5/4 time signature. More importantly—can you figure out why the famous arranger (who lives in Wisconsin, by the way) chose to make some measures in the meter of 5/4? What does that do? Also be able to identify where in your part you have the melody (if you do).

### **Sleepers, Wake! By J.S. Bach, arr. by Randal Swiggum**

This is another brand new piece. Well, not exactly. It's one of the most famous pieces in history, by Bach, and dating from 1731. But it's never been arranged for young orchestra before. So it will be another premiere for us.

This is not an easy piece. But it's definitely worth learning, slowly and carefully—its energetic melody is its own reward. Find YouTube videos that use its original German title: *Wachet auf*. There is a wonderful recording from the BBC Proms 2010. *Wachet auf* is actually the title of a larger piece that this movement is from—but you'll recognize this melody (from Movement II). And it's only about 5 minutes long. What a melody!

Work carefully and slowly to learn your part. Strings, in particular, will need to work out their shifting and fingering carefully, with your teacher, and write them in. For example, violins in m.35 will want to start in 3<sup>rd</sup> position (mark things like that).

### **Danse Macabre by Camille Saint-Saëns**

This is another very famous orchestra piece with a story behind it. Find it. There are lyrics, too. (Warning: the story is a little freaky. Really appropriate for the weekend before Halloween.) Everyone: find a great recording (any orchestra). See if you can find the original song, and its lyrics. This piece is incredibly exciting to play—but you really have to know what's happening in the story at any moment.

Strings: you have some tricky bowings that will need to be practiced slowly and then carefully worked up to tempo.

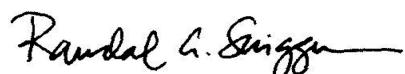
## **THE PUZZLE**

Besides being a really cool concert of famous music (and a couple premieres!), these pieces all have something in common. It has to do with what they're "about." It's not obvious from their titles—it's only something you can start to guess when you know what each individual piece is about.

I hope, besides learning the pieces, that you are learning *about* them. And that you will have some answers for the puzzle when we come together. Get started right away!

Remember, you should have these pieces so close to memorized that you can play long stretches of them without looking. *Our purpose at the first rehearsal will not be to figure out how your part goes—it will be for you to figure out how everyone else's part goes.*

If you have any questions about the music, feel free to email me between now and our first rehearsal in October. I can't wait to get started!



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