

Composing for Treble Voices and Primary Choirs

by *Sherelle Eyles*
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Sherelle Eyles was a speaker at the ANCA Qld Choral Convention Gold Coast 2014. She composes and self publishes children's choral pieces that have been performed by hundred of children's choirs across Australia, and is published in the Young Voices of Melbourne Choral Series. Her choral songs have been sung at Pemulwuy Male Voice Festival 2014, Out of the Box Festival, Brisbane 2012, The State Choral Festival of Victoria, 2011, The Next Generation Sings Festival Gold Coast 2011, Young Voices Choral Festival 2013, Choral Fanfare 2013, ANCA Treble Voices Singing Through Life Festival 2014, Qld Youth Music Awards 2014, and the Qld Young Conservatorium State Honours Ensemble Programme 2013, won first prize in the Under 12s Championships at the National Choral Eisteddfod, Canberra 2012, Junior Gondwana Summer Music Camps, January 2013, Suzuki Foundation Graduation Concert at Sydney Opera House, 2014, chosen set choral pieces of the National Choral Eisteddfod, Canberra, 2013, the Western Australia Massed Choirs Festival 2014 involving over 4000 children and the Primary Proms at Sydney Town Hall 2015 involving 2500 children. Her song 'Gecko', was a finalist in the Queensland Music Awards 2013 – Children's Song Category. Sherelle is a piano examiner for the AMEB. She has been a piano teacher and choral accompanist for

Paul Holley at Brisbane Girls' Grammar School since 1997.

To hear a group of children sing your compositions must be one of the most rewarding experiences in the musical world. I commenced composing in 2009 after realising that the choral repertoire for my own children at Primary school was quite limited in style. My main goal was to write songs that children relate to, at their level, and to avoid the mass commercialisation of singing vastly American choral repertoire that is often movie or popular song based. (Such songs are also a valuable part of the repertoire but must not be, in my opinion, the sole basis for musical development.)

When composing for Primary choirs and Treble voices there are a number of issues one must address. Firstly, young Australian children respond well to Australian themes and my first compositions for childrens choir *Animal Songs for Children (Gecko, Dugong, Bilby, Crocodile and Carpet Python)* attempt to capture the movements of each of the animals. Secondly, the children enjoy using the combination of voice, movement and actions to characterise the animals. Body percussion is incorporated as a learning tool, a means for rhythmical development and purely as entertainment. In Gecko the children must make noises like a Gecko in time with the music. There is a great advantage in having actions in choral music that are particularly designed for younger children as it keeps their

attention during rehearsal and provides an opportunity for movement, when sitting still for long periods of time can be so difficult.

As a recently commissioned composer for the Pemulwuy Festival 2014 for Boys Grammar School Brisbane Chamber Choir I am aware of the impact of my choral compositions on the boys in the choir. My pieces for Primary choir are often to encourage boys to be involved and enjoy singing with such pieces as *A Thousand Stars* about the solar system, *Carpet Python*, *Daddy Long Legs Spider* and *Crocodile*. Boys value a melodic tune, good rhythmic solidity and structure. They can be flamboyant but also sensitive and are capable of rising to the occasion.

And finally, it is important that the difficulty level is appropriate for the Primary choir. I keep my scores 'flexible' so that pieces can be adjusted according to the needs of the choir. A piece that is too long or technically challenging can be off-putting, too easy means a loss of interest; however a well designed (flexible) choral piece for Primary treble voices can have children as young as 5-7 year olds singing in harmony, having a lot of fun acting out actions about dinosaurs and crocodiles whilst singing about repertoire that they love. I would encourage all choral conductors to have a go at composing for your choir as you know what their capabilities and interests are.



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