BOOSEY & HAWKES CONCERTS FOR CHOIRS: IN THE NEED OF PRAYER; KALEIDOSCOPE

User-friendly arrangements

Reviewed by Michael Quinn

The Concerts for Choirs series offers themed, user-friendly arrangements which directors are encouraged to see as a one-stop shop when programming choral concerts.

In the Need of Prayer consists of 20 spirituals for mixed choir, arranged by Christopher Norton. Norton’s arrangements leap off the page in an astonishingly stylish manner, proving that the man behind Microjazz is no slouch when it comes to choral writing. His trademark jazz piano accompaniments provide the perfect backdrop to some delightfully schmaltzy choral moments, in both fast and slow pieces, but there are also some lovely a cappella arrangements, particularly Every Time I Feel the Spirit and a slow-building Were You There, which is a tour de force. At times the range demanded for singers is quite extensive, including bottom E for alto parts; parts also divide fairly frequently. Overall, though, this is a collection which will be of equal delight to teachers and students.

Kaleidoscope, a selection of secular arrangements for upper voices, is disappointing in comparison. In theory it contains a greater range of pieces by 20th- and 21st-century big-name composers, but too many seem to rely on canon to develop the melody. The collection does offer some well-thumbed classics, such as the Manning Sherwin arrangement of A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square and Copland’s I Bought me a Cat, alongside newer arrangements such as In Midst of Woods by Hywel Davies. As the texts are often unfamiliar, the volume would be helped by more in-depth notes about the pieces, with pronunciation notes in the case of some of the more obscure folksongs.

Reviewed by Felicity Hayward

MUSIC BOARD GAME WORKSHOP

ERIC BRANSCOMBE
ALFRED, £19.95

These board games are about reinforcing musical literacy and knowledge

Reviewed by Tom Deveson

In even the most musically active classrooms, there are wet playtimes or unplanned quarters of an hour when children can be usefully occupied making something more like silence than sound. These board games are aimed at children of primary age and are about reinforcing musical literacy and knowledge while having competitive fun. The book is American, but won’t be difficult to transpose into British settings. It contains all the templates needed, to be supplemented with buttons, beans or tiny toys.

There are five games, with increasing challenges to children’s grasp of written notation. In Checkerdozie, they move around the board collecting patterns of rests and beats and matching them against sol-fa derived phrases. Strike up the Band requires them to take possession of musical opposites – presto and lento, semibreve note and semibreve rest – while frustrating their opponents by the strategic use of wild cards and blocking devices.

Beware of the Box links maths to music, as players use dice to acquire random sets of beats to assemble into four-beat bars, while adding and subtracting and reading coordinates. Meter Mess matches different time signatures against more complex chains of notes, with semiquavers, dotted crotchets and rests making things that little bit harder. Spin Out features other kinds of knowledge – orchestral instruments, composers from Bach and Haydn to Stravinsky and Elvington. None of these games is a substitute for practical learning but they will grant busy teachers brief episodes of hard-earned respite.

Reviewed by Tom Deveson

PICTURES OF MUSIC EDUCATION

ESTELLE R JORGENSEN
INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS, £55

Fresh, vital and invaluable

Reviewed by Michael Quinn

Indiana University professor Estelle R Jorgensen is surely one of the most interesting commentators on music education practice at work today. Her previous book, The Art of Teaching (IUP, 2008), was a remarkable manifesto in all but name that attempted to ‘open wide the conversation on teaching that is waiting to happen’.

Her latest, which offers a different – though no less highly personal and deeply engaging – perspective on music education, employs a characteristically all-embracing approach to present an engaging and informative discussion of various conceptual and practical approaches to teaching music in the classroom. Her aim, here, is to ‘move beyond literal ways of thinking and doing’ in order to allow for ‘a more creative embodiment of musical thought’.

The beauty of Pictures of Music Education is the sheer simplicity of its underlying proposition: a dozen chapters, each of which adopts and analyses different metaphors and models as a viable means of rethinking the approach to, and meaning of, music teaching and learning. Its merits are many, with Jorgensen a genial and wise guide who writes with a quiet but compelling authority underpinned by wide-ranging philosophical sensibilities. The intersections of pedagogy, art and philosophy are deftly woven together in chapters variously dealing with metaphors and related models.

Jorgensen’s concluding analysis of the implications for further practice of her own examples and discoveries, and for developing a systematic framing of them, ties the multiple threads of the book together with enviable eloquence. As a first step in ‘delineating the lines of more robust theoretical frames for comparative approaches to music education’, this may well prove to be a landmark book. Fresh, vital and invaluable.