Race and Ethnic Identity Discussion Handout

Instructions

For each of the scenarios below:
- ✓ Identify the issue/s surrounding equity, access and belonging present in this scenario.
- ✓ Reflect on how this situation may, or may not, be present in your own chorus.
- ✓ Brainstorm a range of possible responses to the scenario. In your chorus, whose responsibility is it to speak up and challenge, or support, the issue presented?
- ✓ Record your conversations and responses for reporting back to the larger group.

Scenarios for Discussion

1. You are on tour to rural Nebraska. At the first dinner stop the wait staff at your table only make eye contact with you, ignoring the Pakistani chorus member sitting beside you.

2. Your board of directors is exploring ways to be more diverse as a leadership group. One board member responds, "I don't see color."

3. Your Membership Committee receives an email from a singer who requests to not sit by "Beverly" because her fragrance triggers allergies. Beverly is an older black woman.

4. Amar, an Indian man, joins a men's chorus. The director points out another man from India across the room and asks, "Do you and Jayant know each other?" Amar looks affronted and says, "There are over a billion people in India." However, it turns out that Amar and Jayant are not only from the same town but went to the same high school. The director turns the whole incident into one big joke.

5. The director of a men's chorus is a 60-something white gay man originally from a small town in Texas. He directs a gay men's chorus that is predominantly white. At one point he jokes to the chorus, "I just don't know how to talk any more. When I was growing up, 'colored people' was a polite term. Now it's 'people of color.' I just get so confused!"

Action Steps

What are some concrete steps your chorus could undertake to better address race and ethnic identity?

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Artistic Considerations and Performance Practice

Performing music from a culture or community that is not familiar to your chorus or conductor takes extra preparation, research and sensitivity.

Here are recommendations for how you can address identity in your artistic planning:

- ✓ **Seek out and purchase music** composed and arranged by individuals rooted in that culture, or at least those who have studied and understand the culture from which they are writing.

- ✓ **Artistic Directors: plan** your score and rehearsal preparation with the same diligence as you would in understanding the text, craft and form of a western classical music composition. Research the history behind the text. What stories accompany the song? What is the sub-text? Then, educate your chorus and audience.

- ✓ Know the difference between **cultural appropriation** versus **cultural appreciation**. Program not from a place of political correctness, but with an appreciation and deep understanding of the music.

- ✓ When learning music from a culture not familiar to the chorus, **encourage singers to attend an event or visit a neighborhood where that music is performed**. This could be a small-group activity or connected to a sectional rehearsal.

- ✓ Make sure it is **appropriate** to sing a song outside of its original community or sacred context.

- ✓ **Focus on authentic style** including vocal tone, articulation, phrasing, expression, instrumentation, and movement. For example, not every African song is intended to be accompanied by a drum, or to utilize movement or clapping. Is it appropriate to add harmony, or is the song intended for unison singing?

- ✓ **Bring in guest musicians** to assist in teaching authentic performance practice. Skype and Zoom are both excellent resources if you do not have an expert nearby. Compensate these artist experts.

- ✓ **Examine assumptions about choral genres** that tend to be perceived as "white music" (i.e. classical = white).

- ✓ Be intentional about **who is featured on stage**. Hire soloists, instrumentalists and guest artists who can authentically perform the music you are programming.

- ✓ **Don't assume** that people from non-white communities want to hear this music. Do your homework, then create a performance space that is accessible and welcoming.