

Some Budget Savers for Choral Directors

by Drew Collins

There are many considerations when you are in charge of (or have access to) a budget. Be sure you know exactly how your district deals with these concerns, and who can answer your budget questions.

- What will you need to spend money on during the year? (Know this before you buy *anything!*)
- Some schools separate accounts for transportation (e.g., buses for contests and field trips), but some combine everything into one account.
- Does your school pay for robes? contest fees? piano tuning? posters? Or does it come out of your music budget?
- Is there a “music boosters” or “music parents” club?
- Who handles fund raisers, and what is that money used for?
- Does your district or school have a contract with a distributor, or can you use any music dealer you want?

Here are some ways you can stretch any budget, without “compromising your art.”

1) **Create your own editions of Public Domain music.** Music written before about 1900 is fair game, since it was originally composed or published before copyright laws came into effect! The general rule is “Brahms and before.” All you have to do is copy the original notes, rhythms and words (you can’t copy translations - you either have to sing it in the original language or create your own translation) in the original voicing. This can be time consuming, but, depending on the length of the work and the cost of a published edition, it could be worth it.

An advantage of this method is creating your own expression markings. BUT, if you’re too busy (like most of us)...

2) **MasterWorks Press** is a company that publishes classic choral music in single master copies. Ten dollars buys you 1) one “photo ready” copy, and 2) the rights to make *unlimited* photocopies of that master score.

One idea is to buy the single master copies with your own money (instead of using the school’s budget). That way, you can use it for any choir you conduct for the rest of your career.

3) **Write, commission, or request works specially composed, arranged or edited for you or your choir.** If you are or someone you know is a composer or arranger, you can produce your own music! If you are a school teacher, this has the added benefit of giving your students insight into the creative process.

One idea is to have the English teacher hold a poetry contest, and have a student or friend (or yourself!) compose a piece on that text. You can even have the class participate (“What meter would work best? Should this be in major or minor? Should the tempo be fast or slow? What should the form be?”).

4) This may sound obvious, but **check your files** to make sure you don’t already own copies of a piece. Then, check with other teachers in your district and neighboring schools to see if they have copies you can borrow (and offer to lend them any of your music whenever they need it).

Remember: New isn’t always better (or, at least, it’s not necessary); use what you have in the files.

5) **Don't round up!** If you need 36 copies of a piece, don't order 40. You will need...

- 1 per singer,
- 1 (or 2) for yourself,
- 1 for your accompanist,
- possibly some copies for judges/clinicians,
- and maybe 2-3 extra copies "just in case."

If possible, don't go beyond what is absolutely necessary. If you buy 2 fewer copies of every piece, and you have 4 choirs of 30 singers, and each choir sings 4 new pieces per year, you may have saved enough money to buy *one more new piece that year!*

6) **Octavo Music Corporation** is a music dealer that automatically gives a 30% discount off every order! That's almost *one-third* of your total budget!! Here's their contact information:

Octavo Music Corporation
Box 4723
Evansville, IN 47724-4723
Phone: 1-800-844-6874 • Fax: (812)475-1577

7) Ask your school if they have a **tax free** form letter or number. This allows you to make purchases without paying sales tax (at retail stores like OfficeMax, for example). If you have \$1000 to spend, and you save sales tax on all that, that's \$60-75 more you can spend. \$75 may not sound like much, but it adds up; it could pay for a piano tuning or another new piece for one of your choirs.

8) Download free scores from **Odhecaton Music** (www.OdhecatonMusic.com) or the **Choral Public Domain Library** (www.cpd.org). It's free, and photocopying these scores is perfectly legal.

9) Not all printed music is copyrighted! If it doesn't bear the © symbol or the word "copyright" on the first page of music, make as many copies as you want...legally!

10) **St. James Music Press**, designed to help church musicians, sells books of photo-ready anthems. You buy the book for a flat fee, and can photocopy as much as you want. (Visit <http://www.sjmp.com/>) As they are quick to point out, "If you use even just one anthem, the book has paid for itself!" Also, check out York Early Music Press (YEMP) on the same website.

11) Out-of-print music is most likely still under copyright control. However, the copyright holder may grant permission to photocopy...and for a nominal fee (50¢ per copy or so).

12) Host a composition contest. Announce it on various composer e-mail news lists. Consider charging a nominal entrance fee, and award the winner \$100 (or so) and a recording of the premiere. Better yet, write a grant for the money.

-- *Protect and encourage excellent compositions. NEVER make illegal photocopies!* --