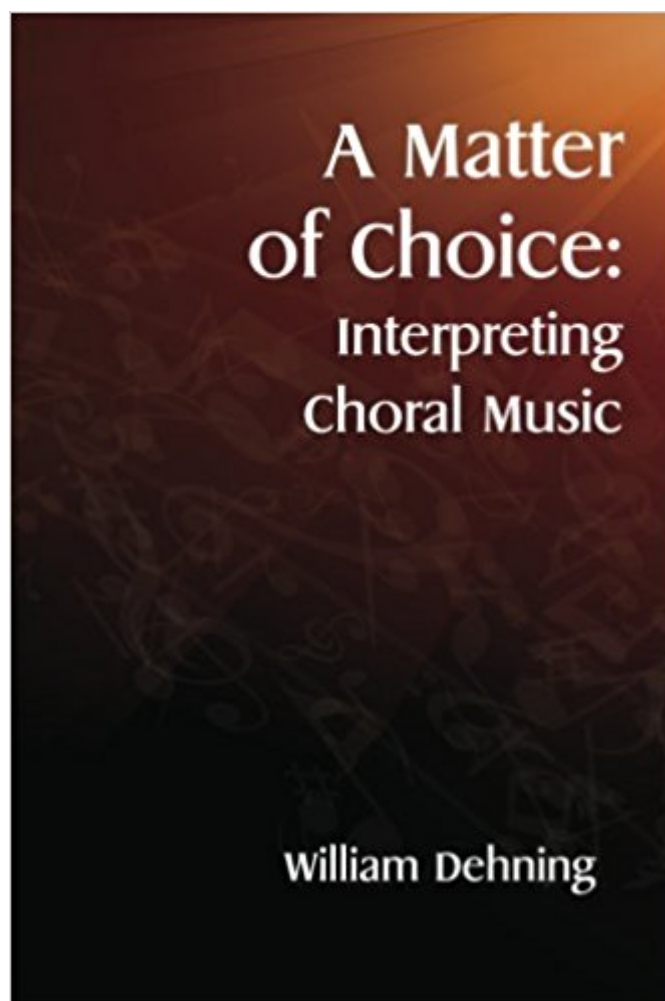


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# A Matter Of Choice: Interpreting Choral Music



## Synopsis

"Dehning is part poet, part technician, part scholar..." - Maurice McCullen, Stockton Record "This book is about Artistry. Artistry is a matter of choosing what to do with the materials at hand. You make them your own. There's only one You (and he's so original and profound!). You can do your utmost to get more or better materials but you still have to choose what to do with them. And see, there is no such thing as the 100% perfect choice, is there? Choice involves risk: Marriages, jobs, cars, houses, grad schools, cereals, you name it. Comes right down to it, you make your choices based on the evidence, pro-con lists, coin flips, planet alignment, the Book of Mormon, whatever. Robert Moon: "Look if you like but you have to leap." Aldous Huxley: "You pay your money, you take your choice." Choice is everything; it is in the very title of this book. It is the key to Interpretation, which is what God put conductors on this planet to do." In a style somewhere between witty and profound, William Dehning walks us through his own interpretive choices of some of the world's greatest choral works, including the "how" and "why" he made those choices. His insights are invaluable to any choral director as they strive to bring music to life with authenticity, accuracy and artistry. William Dehning is Emeritus Professor of Choral Music, University of Southern California and the Past President and Founding Member of the National Collegiate Choral Organization. He is the author of Chorus Confidential: Decoding the Secrets of the Choral Art.

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## Customer Reviews

William Dehning was Chairman of the Choral Music Department in the Thornton School of Music at

the University of Southern California from 1992-2007. Under Dehning's direction, the USC Thornton Chamber Choir, won three prizes at the 1999 Gyorgi Dimitrov Choral Competition in Varna, Bulgaria, including Best Conductor and the Grand Prize. They won four prizes at the 2001 Florilege Vocal in Tours, France, including a prize for Best Renaissance Performance and the Grand Prize. In 1994 they were among five choruses worldwide selected to perform at the biennial World Choral Festival in Seoul, Korea. They also performed at the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) Western Division Conventions in 1996, 2000 and 2004, as well as at National Conventions in 1997, 2001 and 2005, receiving multiple standing ovations. In 1997 the ensemble toured Poland under the auspices of the Chopin Academy in Warsaw, and toured East Asia in 2006, with concerts in Tokyo, Taipei and Seoul. The ensemble frequently appeared with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestras, conducted by Helmuth Rilling and Esa-Pekka Salonen. Dehning received the first annual Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2003, and in 2007 received the Thornton School's highest honor, the Ramo Music Faculty Award, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to music and education, to the Thornton School of Music and the University of Southern California, and to humanity. • As guest conductor in Europe and Asia, Dehning has had engagements with the Karlovy Vary Symphony in the Czech Republic, as well as the professional Bucheon City Chorus and National Chorus of Korea, where he has also given week-long conducting masterclasses. He was also a guest conductor for the Pilgrim Chorus of Korea, and the Formosa Singers in Taipei, Taiwan. For ten years, he was the founder-conductor of the California Choral Company, a chamber chorus of professional calibre that acquired a reputation as an excellent and innovative ensemble in Europe as well as the United States. Prior to his appointment at USC, he was Director of Choirs at the University of the Pacific for twenty years, where he was recipient of the university's Distinguished Professor Award and its Commencement speaker in 1991. He earned his doctorate from USC with highest honors in 1971, has done post-doctoral studies in England and Germany, and has lectured at Munich's Hochschule für Musik.

Bill Dehning describes this book as one that would probably only appeal for a niche audience, and indeed, if you have ever sung for him in his choirs or experienced any of his performances, you will at minimum will want to know how his musical brain ticks and at maximum want to know how-in-the-world-does-he-do-it?!!!! so that you, as a choir director could also approach that level of artistry. If you are a member of that audience, then you must get this book. If you are a choir director and have no prior knowledge of Dr. Dehning or his work and just stumbled upon this book from a

search engine, then you must get this book. What Dehning offers in this book is a way of score study/analysis/preparation—*not* the usual text/form/texture/harmony, etc. analysis, though that is used as necessary—but an analysis that will yield an artistic, moving performance. And I purposefully used the qualifying word, "moving." I think that I should also have used the qualifier, "stirring." If you are like I am, having sung in his choir or partaken of his performances, then you know what I mean. For those who don't know what I mean, you need to understand why we would be highly interested in this book. There are those that perform Bach and Monteverdi, quite competently. Then there's Dehning. He OWNS Bach and Monteverdi. To the point that the rest of us hope that he would be so kind as to lend it to us to also perform. And let's not limit him to those two composers, genres, and time periods, either. In his book, he references his USC Chamber Choir's performance at the 2005 National ACDA performance at Disney Hall in Los Angeles. I was there. I am totally disgusted with Disney's strict legalities that didn't allow performances in its wonderful venue to be recorded. If that performance would have been recorded, we would have one of choral arts' Greatest Moments. Truly. We (the whole audience) were in awe. So that's the man, the artist, the choral director that is the author of this book. He and his choirs have won numerous international competitions and awards. This book is the graduate class that I wish he would have done at USC. So now that you have the background and the premise of the book, let's talk about it. First of all, if you are expecting a typical academic, read a paragraph, fight drowsiness, fall asleep, wake up and repeat the cycle type of book, nope this ain't it. (Sorry English purists.) The feel of this book is as his other most excellent book, *Chorus Confidential: Decoding the Secrets of the Choral Art*, found here on in print and for the Kindle at

[http://www..com/Matter-Choice-Interpreting-Choral-Music-ebook/dp/B00SLQNSA4/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1426487308&sr=1-1&keywords=matter+of+choice+dehning](http://www..com/Matter-Choice-Interpreting-Choral-Music-ebook/dp/B00SLQNSA4/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1426487308&sr=1-1&keywords=matter+of+choice+dehning), His style is one of "let's sit down at the bar and have a chat about choral music" kind of narrative. And I don't drink. But I believe that would be an accurate description. (Note: If you are an English purist, there may be times where you will be offended reading his book.) So yes, it reads easily and is easily digested. None of this nose-in-the-air snobbery or "I'm better than you" type of read. Yes, he occasionally does point out his (well-deserved) accolades, but does so because it drives home the point that he knows what he's talking about. Dehning didn't write the book to say "See how smart I am?" If you would ask him why he wrote the book or why we are having this little chat at the bar he would say, "Well, only because you asked me to." The basic format of the book consists of Dehning going through 14 scores, explaining how he approached the music and why. That's it. The music journey he takes you on are of different time eras and genres so you get a good feel about his

methodology. He also provides facsimiles of pages of the actual scores from which he conducted, showing his pencil marks and notes. This is where things get really helpful. It appeals to the visual learners in us to see what he is actually talking about. My only wish is that his whole rehearsal score would have been provided instead of the selected pages. I know that it was his decision (he stated so in the book), but I would have gladly paid more for a thicker book to see all of his score markings. My recommendation to the students of this book would be to just go online and order every piece he discusses and follow along. So what did I get out of the book? Permission. Permission to make justifiable artistic decisions. Permission to make interpretations that do not necessarily strictly adhere to what's literally written on the page, but make sense musically and help bring out the spirit of the piece. Ideas. Ideas on how to interpret choral music and do so in a tasteful manner that brings out the soul of the piece to the director's, singers', and audience's delight. In the classic arts, we are diligent, as we should, with doing exactly "what's on the page." With "what's on the page" being defined as applying our knowledge of the composer's/arranger's style and intent as well as what we know historically. However, we would be amiss to not also apply that same diligence to the aesthetic and emotional aspect of the music. What is music? It is the history of human emotion throughout all time. As Dehning would say, you heard it here first. I now have more ideas than I've had before on how to approach this. Get this book. You will learn from one of the masters. It has changed the way I look at and prepare a score. It will you, too.

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