



# Convention 2023

Diversify your Programme: practical tools and ideas  
to mix up your choir's repertoire.

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# ABCD Convention 2023

- How to source non-standard repertoire [women, black, lgbt+, disabled etc],
- Cultural appropriation,
- Persuading your choir and committee to embrace change,
- Suggested best practices and resources to help you programme exciting and engaging performances,
- How to bring your audiences on the journey with you.
- ABCD Website preview: resources for repertoire and general inclusivity

## **The story of the Nibi (Water) Song, as told by Beatrice Menase Kwe Jackson, Migizi Clan.**

This song was written by Doreen Day at the request of her grandson Mashkoonce. She attended a conference about the water in which the internationally known environmental speaker Dr. Masaru Emoto said, “the very least we should do every day, is to speak to the water.”

Water, we love you.

We thank you.

We respect you.

So she did this. Every day on their drive to drop Mashkoonce (Little Elk) to school, they passed a body of water. And every day they said these words to the water as they drove by. They made games by saying it in different voices and then would say it as fast as they could. Then one day Mashkoonce, said, “Nokomis, why can’t we say this in our language?” So, Doreen asked her daughter’s language teacher to write it in Ojibwemowin. Doreen had the words taped to the car visor as they learned the words.

One day this grandson Mashkoonce said, “Nokomis why don’t we sing the words, don’t you think the water would like it to be sung?” So she thought about it and came up with the tune. They sang this song to the water every morning on their drive to school.

It is sung like a lullaby and we don’t use shakers or drums.

**Doreen and her grandson, Mashkoonce, give permission for everyone to share this song...  
sing it to the water every day.**

[Link to recording](#)

# Nibi (Water) Song

Music by Doreen Day  
Words by Masaru Emoto  
both members of the Migizi Clan

Transcribed by Jeremy Haneman

$\text{♩} = 100$

Voice

Nee - beh Gee zah - gay - ee - go. Gee meh gwetch

5

Voice

wayn nee - me - go. Gee zhah wayn nee - me - go

**Language:**

*Ojibwemowin*

**Translation:**

*Water, we love you*

*We thank you.*

*We respect you.*

**Performance note:**

*Sung like a lullaby without percussion*

**Recording and background info:**

[http://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com/?attachment\\_id=2244](http://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com/?attachment_id=2244)

# Why embrace diversity in choirs?

- We (ABCD) believe that equity, diversity and inclusion are of paramount importance to create a better world for our musical leaders, singers and audiences. It will create a richer and more profound artistic experience for everyone when diverse voices are seen, heard, sung and played.
- Diversity is about recognising individual as well as group differences, and aims to create an inclusive culture for all
- Diversity values and respects people's differences to ensure everybody's needs and requirements are met. Supporting diversity in music could be something as simple as changing the music you teach/perform so you're not only teaching white male European composers, or making sure your rehearsal space is accessible to musicians with disabilities.
- Equality and diversity leads to more innovation and more opportunities for everyone, and better access to talent
- Working with people from different backgrounds and with different experiences allows us to open our minds and get a new perspective.
- The benefits of equality and diversity are clear but this doesn't mean embracing equality and diversity is easy.
- "Suffice it to say that, as I understand it, it's a kind of positive discrimination. We give an artificial bump to a particular demographic to correct a historical imbalance, with the aim that future generations have a level playing field. For now, we assemble the musical equivalent of 'binders full of women' so that in the future, it won't matter." James Potter, Precentor and Director of Music at Magdalene College, Cambridge
- Seeing oneself represented in leadership, membership and in the repertoire can be life changing – Little Big Things

Starting  
point – your  
own  
ensemble(s)  
Think about:

- The demographics of your groups
- What music is standard, what is non standard ?
- Have you had a situation where you or your singers were reluctant to perform a piece of culturally specific music?
- Have you ever performed a piece of culturally specific music and received negative feedback/backlash?
- Have you ever witnessed a choir perform a piece and thought “they should not have done that!”
- What is comfortable for your group to perform? What would make you uncomfortable? What music makes you feel a total outsider?
- Is it wrong, is it exploitation, if a chorus of white singers performs an African American gospel song? Is it sacrilege for non-Native Americans to perform a sacred song from the culture of an indigenous nation? Would a Jewish person be offended if a non-Jewish choir decontextualized a synagogue prayer, performing it in concert?



# What is Cultural Appropriation?

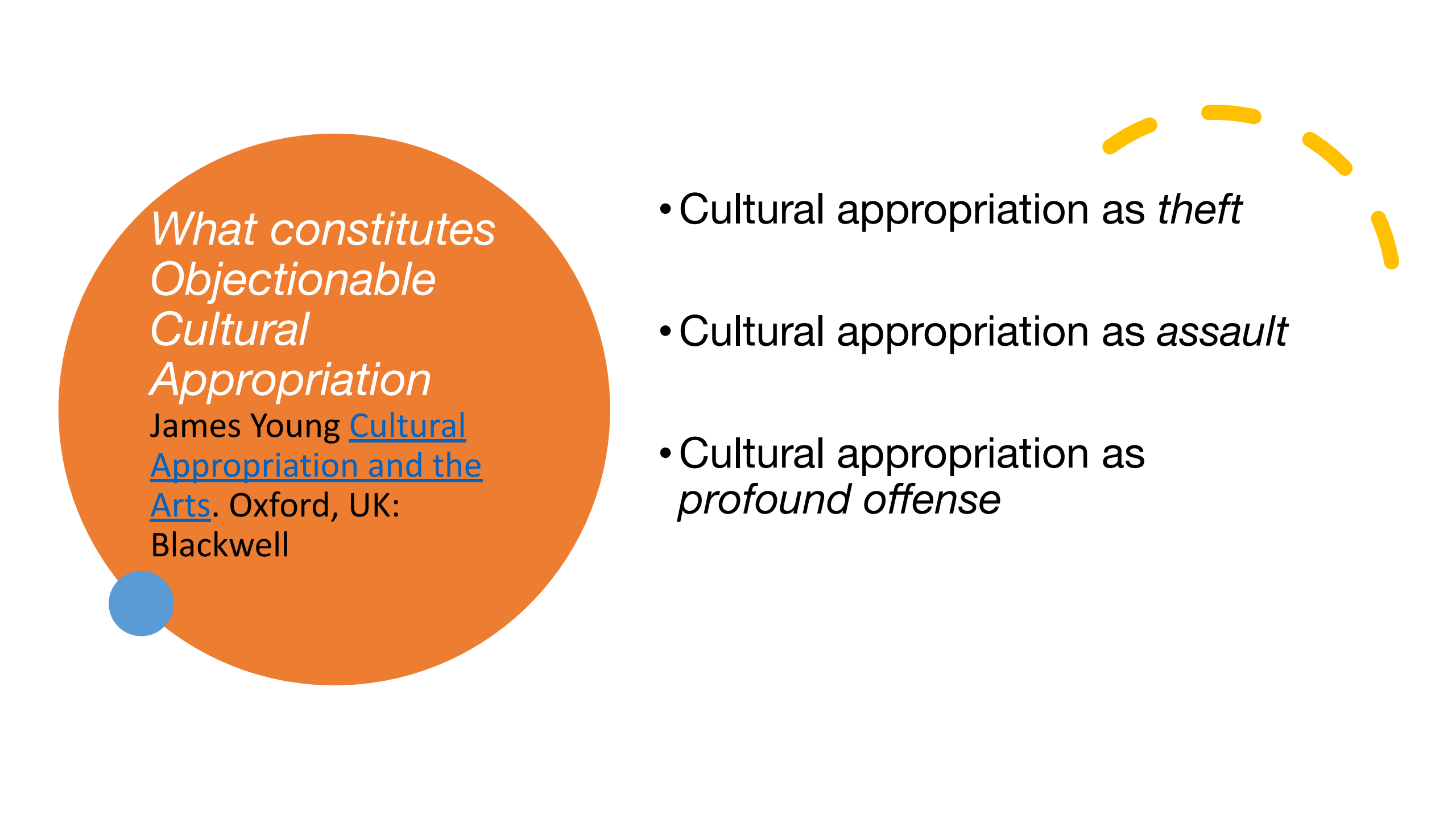
- Cultural appropriation takes place when members of a majority group adopt cultural elements of a minority group in an exploitative, disrespectful, or stereotypical way. *A member of a majority group oversimplifying the culture of a minority group, or treating the culture of a minority group as a joke, is cultural appropriation*
- Modern conundrums: Mikado, Madame Butterfly, Tippet Negro Spirituals, Otello etc
- However, cultural appropriation is impossible to avoid unless we live in a bubble.
- If cultural Appropriation is inescapable how do we navigate the arts without being offensive or harmful?





*What is  
considered  
acceptable  
cultural  
appropriation:*

- **Cultural exchange** (between cultures roughly equal levels of power),
- **Cultural appreciation** (when elements of a culture are used while honouring the source they came from. Important to note that appreciation involves respect and value (Fragoso, 2016)),
- **Cultural consumption** (harmlessly and often unknowingly interact with culture outside of our own, e.g. watching a film, listening to music, eating food, using linguistic phrases etc) (Rollo, 2022)



*What constitutes  
Objectionable  
Cultural  
Appropriation*

James Young [Cultural  
Appropriation and the  
Arts](#). Oxford, UK:  
Blackwell

- Cultural appropriation as *theft*
- Cultural appropriation as *assault*
- Cultural appropriation as *profound offense*

Advice on how  
to navigate this  
issue:  
(from Ryan  
Cho, ACDA  
Choral  
Journal May  
2015):

- *Make sure you know the history and context of the music you sing and the elements you mix in it*
- *If you are uncertain about the performance practice for a piece, or question if it's appropriate for you to perform, ask the community from which it comes for their opinion*
- *Don't use culture as a gimmick (choosing a piece because it might be fun without considering the origins)*
- *Recognise and acknowledge your relative privilege and realise that your group may have a greater responsibility to show respect when borrowing elements of a less powerful culture than they have when exploring yours.*
- *Make a point to support the cultural communities from which you borrow when they need support*
- *Commit to performing the music well (or as well as you can)*
- *Seek to obtain all necessary permissions (if it's published then the assumption is that permission has been given, but more challenging when arrangements are done by non members of a culture who have perhaps not sought permission or done their research)*
- *Be humble - none of us are experts in all forms of music*
- *Approach all music with the same care as you would with a piece from your area of expertise (e.g. messiah, early music etc)*

**Lonnie Norwood, Jr, clinician of traditional African American sacred music, helping educators and ensembles understand its historical significance, incomparable African influence, vocal techniques, and the Black liberation aspects behind the vast collection of music**



# How to get your choir and committee to join you in exploring new repertoire?



Do they want to build new audiences?



Do they want to keep existing audiences engaged?




Do they want to challenge themselves?



Do they want to explore hidden gems in the repertoire?



Do they want to challenge stereotypes, break new ground and offer opportunities to people who have previously been underrepresented or even blocked in the music world?



# Take audiences with you on the journey

- Share that you are doing something new and any challenges – audiences love a journey
- Give reasons why you chose a particular piece and be proud of doing it
- Explain the history and context of the work, and offer translations or summations of the text
- Acknowledge anyone within the group and outside who helped you achieve an authentic performance
- Get feedback from the choir and the audience e.g.: What's working well/Even better if...
- Anonymous feedback is the most useful!