Expressing the Self: Critical Reflections on Choral Singing and Human Rights in Prison

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ABSTRACT

The relationships between choral singing and rights in prisons generate a wealth of complexities. With an increase in published research concerning prison choirs and incarceration in the United States at an all time high, it is especially important to address thoughtfully the complex issues that surround choral singing within prison contexts. By considering the relationships between self-expression and human rights with an emphasis on select articles of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, we begin to reconsider prisoners' needs in light of these relationships. We examine the purposes of prison education and ideas within two theories of offender rehabilitation: The Risk Needs Responsivity Model and the Good Lives Model. Through these analyses we reexamine the interactional theory of choral singing pedagogy based on Christopher Small's concept of musicking. The multiple functions of imprisonment and of choral singing conflict with one another; our aim is to examine these conflicts and argue that effectively facilitated choral singing in prisons satisfies some of the reentry needs of people in prisons and provides value to those who are incarcerated for life. A central aspect of this argument includes clarifying critical components of effective choral singing pedagogy in prison contexts. We conclude with important ramifications for future research and music education in general.

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