

## The John Sanders Memorial Competition for Young Composers 2018

The Adjudicators of this year's competition enjoyed looking in detail at the submitted compositions, but were unable to select a 2018 Competition Winner.

Although a few entries fulfilled a few of the Adjudicators' criteria, not one entry fulfilled them all.

In order for a piece to be successful in this competition, a composer has to

1. enhance and interpret intelligently the selected text. (The musical style of many of the entries seemed to the Adjudicators inappropriate).
2. set the text sympathetically, by considering the stresses and colours of the selected language. (The setting of English, in particular was often very clumsy, with weak syllables on strong beats, and so on).
3. give his/her piece a clear musical shape, and sense of direction. (Some pieces started well, but quickly became confused or too static, particularly rhythmically static).
4. write vocal lines that are interesting for the performer, but singable. (Did the composers sing their own vocal lines? SO many pieces contained unnecessarily difficult, or even ugly vocal lines.)
5. carefully consider the choral scoring. (Many pieces were over-written. Often, what sounds alright on the piano simply does not work with a choir. There was far too much divisi scoring in the some of the pieces. Writing in eight parts requires great skill and care.
6. consider for what sort of choir he/she is writing. (Too many entries were simply far too hard even for a cathedral choir. Even the choirs of our great cathedrals do not have unrestricted rehearsal time. Almost all the entries would have been beyond the abilities of any church choir.)
7. consider if a potential choir and a potential audience will actually enjoy a work. Even in the 21st century, after more than a hundred years of experimental dissonant harmony, most singers and listeners do not relish unrestricted dissonance. Chains of minor seconds are wearing on the ear, and often unjustified by the text. Some of the entries were unnecessarily and exhaustingly dissonant. The Adjudicators are not seeking blandness in the compositions; but gratuitous ugliness - unjustified by the text - achieves nothing.

We would encourage all composers of choral music to sing in a choir, to see what actually works. Writing effectively for choirs is an art which can only be learned by working in a choir. Moreover, we would suggest that those composers who haven't, should undertake a course of traditional harmony and counterpoint. We know the cry of "rules are made to be broken" is often repeated; and composers must develop their own styles. BUT, in order to write effectively for choirs, certain things just have to be known. Music is a language which needs to be learned in order to know how to communicate.

Christopher Robinson  
Bob Chilcott  
Adrian Partington  
Tim Rogers