

**CULTURAL COUNTERPOINTS:  
Examining the Musical Interactions between the U.S. and Latin America**



**Meisten, Kimberly D. (VocalEssence):  
“Increasing Cultural Awareness through Choral Music”**

**Abstract:**

This paper examines the impact of a unique community engagement program called ¡Cantaré!, which places Mexican composers in Minnesota classrooms to serve as composers-in-residence. Since 2008, the Minnesota-based chorus VocalEssence has connected eight different Mexican composers with more than 20 school, college and community choruses. Urban, suburban and rural communities have participated. The composers work directly with the singers and write new choral works specifically for each group. Through the VocalEssence ¡Cantaré! program, more than 5000 people have heard 35 new choral works, commissioned and premiered in community concerts throughout the state.

The paper will clarify the effects of the program on audiences, composers and performers by reviewing evaluation results and exploring the cross-cultural influences of the compositions. Data has been collected from student, teacher and composer surveys; teacher and student focus groups; classroom observations; Cultural Advisory Committee meeting notes; audience and budget statistics; and related ¡Cantaré! educational resources developed for music teachers and conductors.

Key findings reinforce the profound impact of the arts (in this case, contemporary choral music) in the assimilation process of immigrant populations. As the public face of the immigrant group, the arts can enhance understanding and tolerance, easing the incorporation of present and future immigrants. It is our hope that this paper will demonstrate the program’s positive social and musical impact, thus motivating others to replicate the program nationally.

**How to Cite this Paper:**

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**Editorial Disclaimer:**

This paper was presented at the Latin American Music Center’s Fiftieth-Anniversary Conference titled “Cultural Counterpoints: Examining the Musical Interactions between the U.S. and Latin America,” Indiana University, Bloomington, October 19-23, 2011, and was accepted on the basis of its abstract, which was peer-reviewed. This paper is presented as submitted by the author, who has authorized its dissemination through *IUScholarWorks*.