

Singing Songs of Justice



Students at Girls Academic Leadership Academy in Los Angeles engaging in body percussion with education program manager, Emma Benatar.

Based in Los Angeles, CA, VOX Femina is a women's choir dedicated to commissioning and performing new music and raising awareness about issues that concern women. They began offering music education programs in 2016 to address the lack of music education programs in public schools in Los Angeles. Chorus America funding supports their new Justice Choir Program, which takes its inspiration from the Justice Choir Songbook, and is aimed at middle and high school students.

During the 2022–2023 academic year they worked with three schools—Girls Academic Leadership Academy, New Village Girls Academy, High Desert Middle School—and one after-school community center, Heart of Los Angeles. The teaching artists developed curricula around repertoire from the Justice Choir Songbook, which is a collection of songs tailored to be accessible to people of all ages and musical experiences. This resource is freely available online with the goal of encouraging more community singing and making. The first song the students learned from this book was *Lift*

Every Voice and Sing, a song known widely as the Black National Anthem. VOX Femina wrapped up the program with a concert where they brought students from all participating schools to perform together the songs they had learned over the 12 week program.

A primary component of this project was providing space for students to have discussions about the meaning and cultural significance of the songs they learned. The Justice Choir Songbook provided the foundation for a curriculum which introduced high quality music with relatable messages, while creating opportunities to confront issues of social, economic, and environmental justice. These conversations helped the students connect with music more deeply, but also demonstrated the profound impact that music-making has on communities.

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