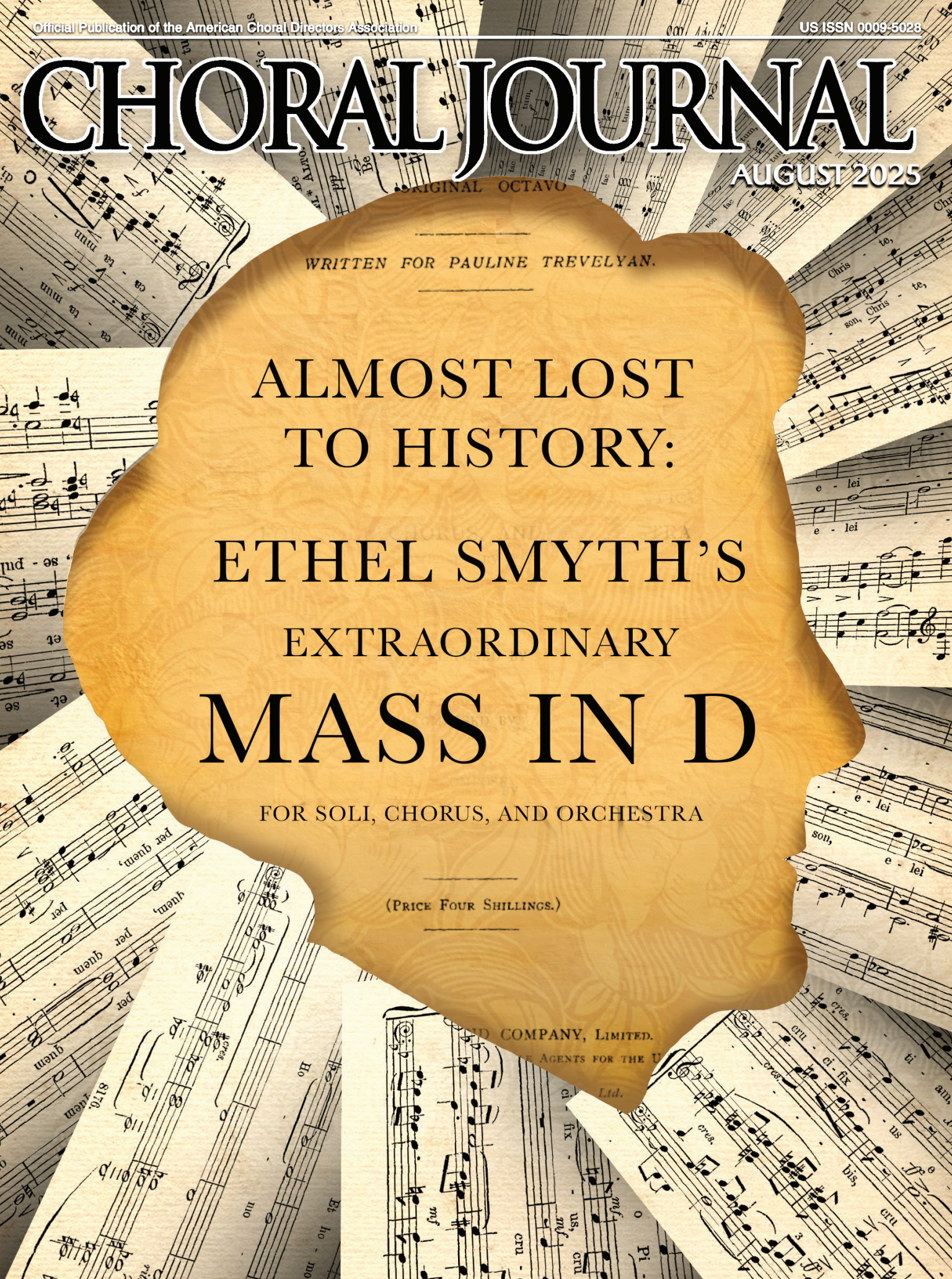
Official Publication of the American Choral Directors Association

US ISSN 0009-5028

CHORAL JOURNAL

AUGUST 2025



ALMOST LOST TO HISTORY:

ETHEL SMYTH'S EXTRAORDINARY

MASS IN D

FOR SOLI, CHORUS, AND ORCHESTRA

The Best Learning Happens in the Moment

breezin' thru® *theory*

Find What You Need to Teach, FAST!

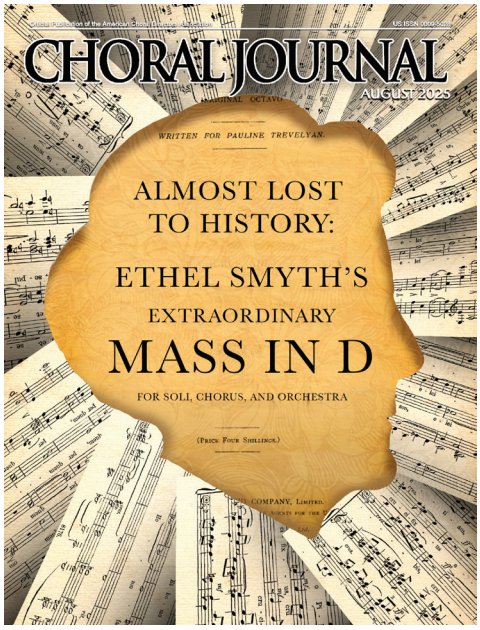
Your rehearsal time is precious, and every minute counts. But when students hit a roadblock in their understanding — like struggling with rhythms or key signatures — it can slow everything down. Our new feature, **Theory On The Go**, is designed to keep the momentum going. With access to Breezin' Thru Theory's vast resources, you can instantly pinpoint clear explanations, drills or games, create targeted assignments or easily access the full curriculum to build a lesson plan in seconds. Whether it's for in-the-moment teaching or to support repertoire learning, **Theory On The Go** is your new go-to tool, because music theory should never slow you down.

Part of your 25/26 subscription!

Order Now! BreezinThruTheory.com 1-855-265-3805

Contents

August 2025/Volume 66, Number 1



Annual dues (includes subscription to the *Choral Journal*): Active $125, Industry $150, Institutional $135, Retired $45, and Student $15. Library annual subscription rates: U.S. $75; Canada $80; International $170. Single Copy Issues US/Canada: $9; International: $20. Circulation: 13,000. Main office: 405-232-8161

The *Choral Journal* (US ISSN 0009-5028) is issued monthly except for April, July, and December by the American Choral Directors Association. Periodicals postage paid at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and additional mailing office.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Choral Journal, PO Box 1705, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73101-1705.

Since 1959, the *Choral Journal* has been the refereed, international journal of the American Choral Directors Association. Each issue features: scholarly articles, anonymously peer-reviewed by the editorial board; refereed articles on pedagogical or scientific issues for the choral conductor; refereed articles with practical advice and ideas for the choral conductor; reviews of books, recorded sound, and choral works by choral experts; and editorials from association leadership. The January issue previews each year's regional or national conference offerings. Articles from the *Choral Journal* can be found in the following online databases: JSTOR (Arts & Sciences XI Collection); ProQuest (International Index to Music Periodicals); University Microfilms International; NaPublishing; RILM (Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale); EBSCO music index; and WorldCat. Advertising options are available for members and nonmembers. Cover art by Efrain Guerrero. Interior art by Tammy Brummell. Musical examples by Tunesmith Music <www.Tunesmithmusic.com>. Copyright 2025.

Features

Articles

Reviews

News

Editorial

STANDING COMMITTEES

ADVOCACY & COLLABORATION
ALEX GARTNER, CHAIR
agartner@pensacolasings.org

COMPOSITION INITIATIVES
KATIE HOUTS, CHAIR
katie.houts@gmail.com

DIVERSITY INITIATIVES
ARREON HARLEY-EMERSON, CHAIR
arreon@equitysings.com

EDUCATION & COMMUNICATION
JOHN MCDONALD , CHAIR
JohnMcDonald@wustl.edu

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES
JOSHUA HABERMANN, CHAIR
joshhabermann@gmail.com

REPERTOIRE & RESOURCES
GRETCHEN HARRISON, CHAIR
nationalrr@acda.org

RESEARCH & PUBLICATIONS
JESSICA NÁPOLES, CHAIR
jnapoles@acda.org

ADVOCACY STATEMENT

The human spirit is elevated to a broader understanding of itself and its place in the world through the study of and participation in choral music. Singing in a choir produces more active and involved citizens. It affects self-worth in youth and adults. It builds connectivity throughout communities. Society benefits from the aesthetic beauty and community of singers created by choral programs within schools, houses of worship, and community organizations through involved citizenry, connectivity throughout communities, and feelings of personal self-worth. The American Choral Directors Association and its membership resolve to ensure the survival of choral programs for this and future generations by:

Actively voicing support for funding at local, state, and national levels of education and government; collaborating with local and national organizations to ensure the distribution of arts funding data and arts-related activism opportunities; advocating for full access to choral singing and inclusion of all singers in a choral program; and ensuring the distribution of advocacy statements and data regarding choral programs.

From the Executive Director

Robyn Hilger

With Gratitude and Hope

This month marks a significant moment for ACDA—a changing of the guard. Many of our dedicated state presidents are wrapping up their terms, our national executive committee roles are changing, and we have wonderful leaders from national R&R and standing committees who are rotating off. All of these leaders have navigated shifting priorities and led during uncertain times, and all while inspiring and building community within ACDA.

To our state presidents, thank you. Your time, energy, and hearts have helped move this organization forward. Some of the most important work you've done hasn't shown up in headlines or reports—but it's been felt deeply by the people you've supported and encouraged within your local communities.

To André Thomas, who ends his term on the executive committee after eight years of service, thank you. I will be forever grateful for your guidance and friendship. Your love for this profession, people, and organization is profoundly inspiring.

To David Fryling, who ends his term as president and becomes the chair of the past president's council, thank you. You've led during one of the most critical times of transformation in ACDA. Your knack for cutting right to the heart of the matter has been invaluable. Thank you for being our Lodestar. You are a valued partner and friend, and I look forward to our continued work together.

To Dustin Cates, Joy Hirokawa, Emily Williams Burch, Robert Bode, Ryan Beeken, Kelsey Burkett, Caron Daley, Brandon Elliott, and Damion Womack, who are ending their terms on national R&R and/or standing committees, you've pushed our content and event offerings forward with depth and a deep sense of service to the membership. It was a privilege to serve with such masterful experts.

The future of our organization is in good hands. Our new leaders are stepping into a vibrant legacy of service—and they are not alone. They are part of a strong network, supported by their predecessors and by a community that believes in the power of connection, music, and leadership. Leadership transitions can bring both a sense of loss and a sense of renewal. Let's celebrate those who are completing their service by offering our deep gratitude, and let's rally around those who are just getting started.

To our outgoing servant leaders, thank you for everything. To our incoming leaders, welcome. We can't wait to see what you'll do.

Robyn Hilger

From the **President**

Edith Copley

As I write my first column for the *Choral Journal*, I want to thank Tom Shelton, who encouraged me to run for national office, saying that serving on the ACDA National Board was the most rewarding experience of his career. Tom was right—it is truly an honor to work with my colleagues on the National Board and Robyn Hilger, our visionary executive director. I am also grateful for the opportunity to meet so many talented and dedicated choral colleagues from around the country. Since I begin each day by saying aloud what I am grateful for in my life, I thought my first column should center on gratitude.

When I began my two-year term as president-elect, André Thomas tasked me to chair the Bylaws and Constitution Rewrite Committee. I am indebted to Lynne Gackle, Peggy Dettwiler, Vincent Oakes, Tim Westerhaus, Mariana Farah, and Robyn Hilger, who worked on this arduous, two-year process that paved a new path into the future for our organization. As I begin my term as president, I have tasked our new president-elect, Jessica Nápoles, to form a committee to tackle the next important step for ACDA: the development of a Five-Year Strategic Plan.

As vice president, my primary responsibility was to serve as the chair of the 2025 National Conference in Dallas. (An interesting sidenote: I attended my very first ACDA national conference forty-eight years ago in Dallas!) As conference chair, I chose the theme, logo, conference committee members, eleven invited ensembles, and developed a new schedule, but the lion's share of the work was done by others. My heartfelt gratitude goes out to the conference committee, who made this massive event an uplifting and positive experience for those in attendance: Jessica Nápoles (co-chair), Stan McGill (program and performance site coordinator), Brian Galante (performing choirs), Cari Earnhart (interest sessions), Pearl Shangkuan (immersion choirs), Gretchen Harrison (R&R forms and deep dives), Jared Berry and Andrea Galeno (honor choir coordinators), John Stafford (vocal jazz honor choir coordinator), William George-Twyman (equipment), Jennaya Robison (music in worship event), Robert Sinclair (student worker coordinator), our performance site managers (Brett Ballweg, Randall Hooper, Alonso Brizuela, and Natalie Walker-Cell), and all our student workers.

Special thanks to all the auditioned and invited performing choirs, conductors, interest session presenters, and exhibitors who inspired and connected with us in meaningful ways during those four days in March. Very special thanks to Robyn Hilger, Elizabeth Roewe, Karen Kegelman, and the entire national office staff for their work on the conference with such incredible attention to detail. I also want to publicly thank Amanda Bumgarner and Ron Granger for their tireless editorial work on the *Choral Journal*. The January and February national conference issues were absolutely amazing.

(Continued on the next page)

NATIONAL OFFICERS

PRESIDENT
EDITH COPLEY
ecopley@acda.org

VICE PRESIDENT
PEARL SHANGKUAN
pshangkuan@acda.org

PRESIDENT-ELECT
JESSICA NÁPOLES
jnapoles@acda.org

SECRETARY/TREASURER
ROBERT NATTER
rnatter@gettysburg.edu

PAST PRESIDENT
DAVID FRYLING
dfryling@acda.org

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ROBYN HILGER
executivedirector@acda.org

NATIONAL R&R CHAIR
GRETCHEN HARRISON
nationalrr@acda.org

EASTERN REGION PRESIDENT
AMANDA HANZLIK
amandahanzlik@gmail.com

MIDWESTERN REGION PRESIDENT
DERRICK FOX
foxderri@msu.edu

NORTHWESTERN REGION PRESIDENT
WILLIAM CAMPBELL
billcampbell@nwacda.org

SOUTHERN REGION PRESIDENT
JEFFERY AMES
jefferyacdasouthern@gmail.com

SOUTHWESTERN REGION PRESIDENT
JONATHAN D. OWEN
Jonathano@swacda.org

WESTERN REGION PRESIDENT
JULIE DANA
jdana@acdawestern.org

INDUSTRY ASSOCIATE REPRESENTATIVE
OLIVER SCOFIELD
KI Concerts
oliver@kiconcerts.com

CHORAL JOURNAL EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITOR

AMANDA BUMGARNER
ACDA National Office
405-232-8161 (ex. 205)
abumgarner@acda.org

MANAGING EDITOR

RON GRANGER
ACDA National Office
405-232-8161
rgranger@acda.org

EDITORIAL BOARD

SEAN MICHAEL BURTON
seanburtonmusic@gmail.com

MARQUES L. A. GARRETT
marques.garrett@unt.edu

ZEBULON M. HIGHBEN
zebulon.highben@duke.edu

MICHAEL PORTER
cmporter1750@gmail.com

BRETT SCOTT
cornislb@ucmail.uc.edu

WILLIAM SOUTHERLAND
william@williamsoutherland.com

DEBRA SPURGEON
dspurg@olemiss.edu

COLUMN EDITORS

MICAH BLAND
mbland1613@gmail.com

MATTHEW HOCH
mrh0032@auburn.edu

ELIZABETH HEARN
ehearn@olemiss.edu

GREGORY PYSH
gregory.m.pysh@gmail.com

JENNIFER RODGERS
rodgersj@iastate.edu

ELIZABETH CASSIDY PARKER
eparker@temple.edu

From the **President**

(Continued from the previous page)

This issue of the *Choral Journal* features two articles that immediately caught my eye. The first article by Honey Meconi discusses Dame Ethel Mary Smyth's *Mass in D*, which was the topic of my doctoral dissertation! Smyth was a fascinating woman who was a prodigy, author, conductor, suffragette, and ground-breaking English composer from the turn of the twentieth century. Smyth's *Mass in D* is a powerful work that deserves to be performed more frequently. The second article by Jennifer Hutton presents a metaphor of the choir as a garden and encourages conductors to examine their rehearsal approach and realign their practices in order for each individual to develop and grow. Dr. Hutton was a brilliant graduate student at Northern ArizonaUniversity, and it is wonderful to see her thoughtful research printed in this issue of the *Choral Journal*.

In closing, I know that many of you are even now anticipating the start of a new school year, liturgical year, and/or concert season. Thank YOU for your dedication to the choral profession. You and the music make a difference in the lives of your singers and all those who come to listen—and for this, I am very grateful.

From the **Editor**

Amanda Bumgarner

This month's *Choral Journal* is the first issue in Volume 66. The Volume 65 installment of our annual index was printed in the June/July 2025 issue, and I want to thank Scott Dorsey for his continued work on this amazing resource. The full main index is available at acda.org/choraljournal. On the left sidebar is a bold heading: **Choral Journal Index**. Underneath are two links to the first and second volumes. This invaluable resource includes all articles in the *Choral Journal* archives and will assist you in locating previous Journal content.

The articles this month cover a range of topics, and as always, while I know that most do not read every single article in every issue, I do hope that over the full volume year, you can can find content that is useful, inspiring, and applicable to your area(s) of work. In this issue, there are several R&R articles from the national chairs of contemporary/commercial, world musics and cultures, and tenor-bass. The national R&R chairs contribute content to *Choral Journal* on a rotating basis. Find a list of recent articles on page 47.

I invite you to consider how you might contribute to *Choral Journal* and earn a place in a future index. We accept submissions at any time and welcome the chance to discuss an article idea with you. If you have any questions, direct them to: abumgarner@acda.org.

2026 REGION CONFERENCES

2026 ACDA Eastern Region Conference
February 25-28, 2026 • Providence, Rhode Island

Midwestern Region

2026 ACDA Midwestern Region Conference
February 25-28, 2026 • Milwaukee, Wisconsin

2026 ACDA Northwestern Region Conference
March 4-7, 2026 • Tacoma, Washington

2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference
March 4-7, 2026 • Memphis, Tennessee

2026 ACDA Southwestern Region Conference
March 4-7, 2026 • Albuquerque, New Mexico

2026 ACDA Western Region Conference
March 4-7, 2026 • San Jose, California

www.acda.org

Almost Lost to History: Ethel Smyth's Extraordinary *Mass in D*

HONEY MECONI

The ever-growing interest in women composers has drawn increased attention to the music of British composer Ethel Smyth (1858–1944).[1] Glyndebourne and other venues have produced her best-known opera, *The Wreckers*, while the Boston Symphony recently programmed its overture. A complete recording by the BBC Symphony and Chorus of Smyth's path-breaking opera *Der Wald*—the first opera by a woman ever performed by the Metropolitan Opera—appeared in 2023; the premiere recording of her vocal work *The Prison* won a Grammy Award in 2022; and her choral *March of the Women* continues to be the composition most closely associated with the suffrage movement. Also receiving more frequent performance is her extraordinary *Mass in D*, a work that "inspires enthusiasm in the singers,"[2] according to one of its first champions, theorist Donald Francis Tovey. This article explores the history and musical makeup of this challenging and deeply rewarding work.

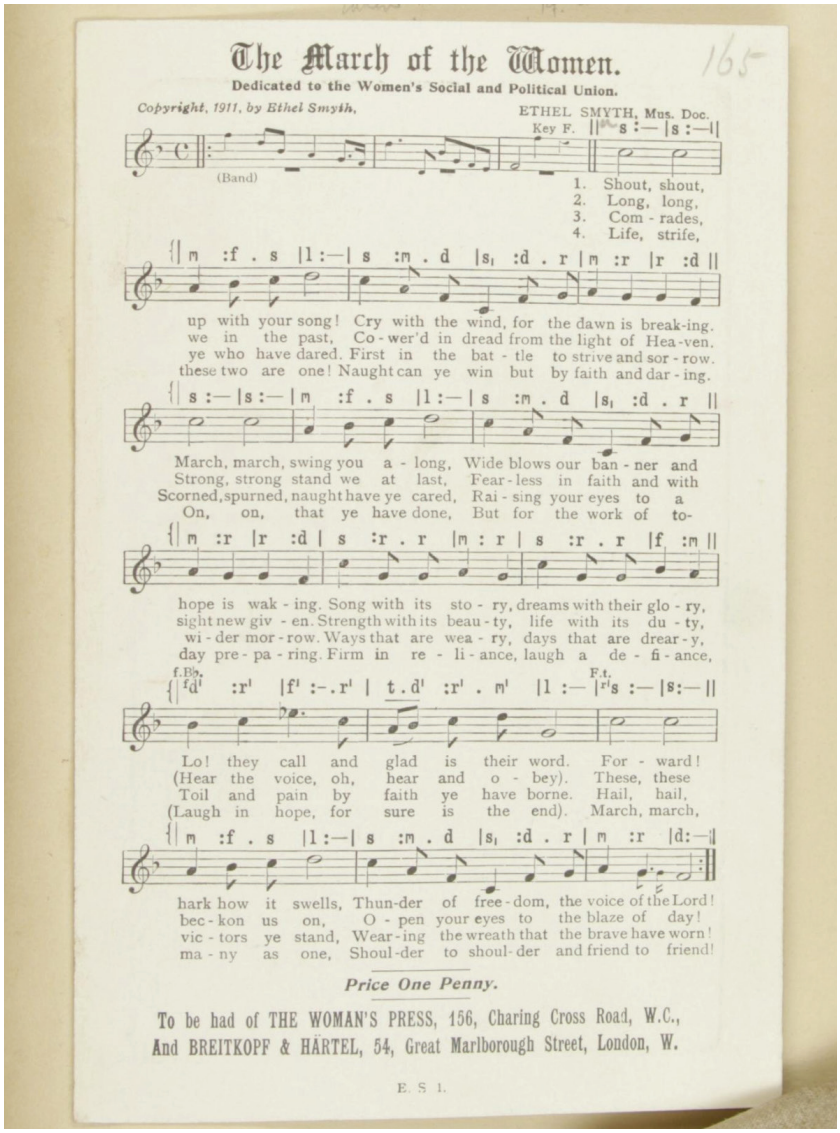
Honey Meconi
Arthur Satz Professor of Music
University of Rochester/Eastman School of Music
Founding Editor, Oxford Studies in Early Music
honey.meconi@rochester.edu

Ethel Mary Smyth ca. 1920–25. Bain Collection.
Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division. Public Domain.

Biography

Ethel Smyth was born into an upper-class British family; her father was a major general.[3] Inspired by a governess who had attended the famed Leipzig Conservatory, she decided at the age of twelve that she, too, would study there. After overcoming her father's objections (women of her social class did not pursue professional careers in music), she enrolled at the Conservatory in 1877 to study composition with Carl Reinecke. Unhappy with her instruction at the Conservatory, however, she switched to private lessons with Leipzig-based composer Heinrich von Herzogenberg, whose wife was a close friend of Brahms. Smyth accordingly met Brahms (and occasionally turned pages for him) as well as numerous other important musicians such as Clara Schumann, Edvard Grieg, and Tchaikovsky.

Smyth returned to England after more than a decade based in Europe, although she continued to travel frequently on the continent. She produced a number of early publications, including her cello and violin sonatas (Opp. 5 and 7, respectively), but her first major composition was the *Mass in D*. She then turned her attention to opera, producing six works in three languages between 1892 and 1924, as well as choral, vocal, chamber, and orchestral works.[4] Nevertheless, her compositional output was less than one might expect from so gifted a composer. A gregarious and outgoing personality as well as a keen sportswoman, Smyth led an active social life to the noticeable detriment of her productivity. External factors affected her composition as well. For a good two years, her main focus was the suffrage movement (Photo 1), after which World War I affected her deeply, making composition almost impossible. Added to all of this was her increasing deafness. The result was that Smyth began a second career as an author during the war, publishing a series of memoirs and other nonfiction books that provide a valuable portrait of musical and cultural life in both Britain and on the continent during her lifetime.


The March of the Women.

Dedicated to the Women's Social and Political Union.

Copyright, 1911, by Ethel Smyth. ETHEL SMYTH, Mus. Doc.

Key F.

(Band)

1. Shout, shout,
2. Long, long,
3. Com - rades,
4. Life, strife,

up with your song! Cry with the wind, for the dawn is break-ing.
we in the past, Co - wer'd in dread from the light of Hea-ven.
ye who have dared. First in the bat - tle to strive and sor - row.
these two are one! Naught can ye win but by faith and dar - ing.

March, march, swing you a - long, Wide blows our ban - ner and
Strong, strong stand we at last, Fear-less in faith and with
Scorned, spurned, naught have ye cared, Rai - sing your eyes to a
On, on, that ye have done, But for the work of to-

hope is wak - ing. Song with its sto - ry, dreams with their glo - ry,
sight new giv - en. Strength with its beau - ty, life with its du - ty,
wi - der mor - row. Ways that are wea - ry, days that are drear - y,
day pre - pa - ring. Firm in re - li - ance, laugh a de - fi - ance,

Lo! they call and glad is their word. For - ward!
(Hear the voice, oh, hear and o - bey). These, these
Toil and pain by faith ye have borne. Hail, hail,
(Laugh in hope, for sure is the end). March, march,

hark how it swells, Thun-der of free - dom, the voice of the Lord!
bec - kon us on, O - pen your eyes to the blaze of day!
vic - tors ye stand, Wear - ing the wreath that the brave have worn!
ma - ny as one, Shoul - der to shoul - der and friend to friend!

Price One Penny.

To be had of THE WOMAN'S PRESS, 156, Charing Cross Road, W.C.,
And BREITKOPF & HÄRTEL, 54, Great Marlborough Street, London, W.

E. S. 1.

Photo 1. Ethel Smyth, March of the Women, 1911. The British Library, Public Domain

Origin and Reception of the *Mass in D*

Smyth composed the *Mass in D* during a period of religious fervor brought on by her relationships with the wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury as well as the devoutly Catholic Pauline Trevelyan. Reading Trevelyan's copy of *The Imitation of Christ* led Smyth to embrace the Anglican High Church and compose the Mass, which was dedicated to Trevelyan.[5] And that

was the end of any religious ardor. As Smyth later stated, "I was near becoming one [Catholic] myself once. Then I wrote a Mass, and I think that sweated it out of me."[6]

The Mass was finished in 1891, premiering at the Royal Albert Hall on January 18, 1893. The chorus was the Royal Choral Society conducted by Sir Joseph Barnby; the work shared the program with Haydn's *Creation*. Although the hall was packed and the audience enthusiastic, the critical reception varied. The conductor thought the mass was "over-exuberant," and the Archbishop of Canterbury, who did not like Smyth personally, remarked that "in this Mass God was not *implored* but *commanded* to have mercy."[7] George Bernard Shaw, in his less-than-positive review, claimed that "the decorative instinct is decidedly in front of the religious instinct all through, and … the religion is not of the widest and most satisfying sort."[8] The *Daily News* snidely remarked on "the preference shown to this gifted young English lady when numerous compositions by prominent musicians still await a hearing by our premier choral society."[9]

Others were considerably more enthusiastic. Conductor Hermann Levi claimed that "no living German composer … could have written it."[10] He also considered it "the strongest and most original work that had come out of England since Purcell's time."[11] For critic and *Grove Dictionary* editor J. A. Fuller Maitland:

> The work definitely places the composer among the most eminent composers of her time, and easily at the head of all those of her own sex. The most striking thing about it is the entire absence of the qualities that are usually associated with feminine productions; throughout it is virile, masterly in construction and workmanship, and particularly remarkable for the excellence and rich colour of the orchestration.[12]

Theorist Donald Francis Tovey compared it favorably to Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*, calling it "God-intoxicated music" and a "locus classicus" in choral orchestration.[13]

Structure and Highlights

The *Mass in D* is a substantial work, lasting just over an hour and calling for SATB soloists, large mixed chorus, and full orchestra. Smyth's six movements follow the common practice of dividing the Sanctus text into separate Sanctus and Benedictus sections (Table 1). Although the published score follows the liturgical order

Table 1. Structure of the *Mass in D*

Movement	Initial Tempo	Length	Key	Vocal Forces
Kyrie	*Adagio*	263 mm.	dm	chorus alone
Credo	*Allegro con fuoco*	284 mm.	DM	chorus + SATB solos
Sanctus	*Adagio non troppo*	94 mm.	DM	chorus + A solo
Benedictus	*Andante*	80 mm.	CM	soprano/alto voices + S solo
Agnus	*Adagio non troppo*	203 mm.	dm	chorus + T solo
Gloria	*Allegro vivace*	615 mm.	DM	chorus + SATB solos

of Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus, and Agnus, it also contains Smyth's surprising recommendation to sing the Gloria last, since she wished the Mass to conclude joyfully.[14] As it turns out, this reordering is beneficial to the chorus, as it means that the three most choral-heavy movements (Kyrie, Gloria, and Credo) are no longer consecutive.

Smyth begins the Mass with the only movement without soloists.[15] Despite its very short text, this Kyrie is substantial, with almost as many measures as the text-rich Credo. The movement is dominated by its opening motive (Figure 1) that serves as an ostinato for the basses throughout the initial Kyrie but also recurs in all voices throughout the movement and returns at the end. The quiet opening of the movement gives no hint of the faster central section of the movement that will come. This central section concludes with powerful *fortissimo* octave motion in all voices—an exciting moment early on in the Mass—before a return to the *tempo primo* and a quiet conclusion. As an added benefit to singers, the motivic unification throughout this movement simplifies the learning process.

The Credo presents an instant contrast with its fast, syncopated pulse and switch to D Major. The lengthy text presents numerous opportunities for contrast, such as the solo tenor for "Qui propter nos homines," the hushed slow motion of "et homo factus est" appropriately sung by divisi male voices, the descending chromatic twists of the Crucifixus, and the imitative rising motives of "et resurrexit." The movement concludes with the expected fugue on "Et vitam venturi."

The peaceful Sanctus, with its eight-part homorhythmic divisi chorus and alto soloist, is followed by the equally peaceful but very different Benedictus. The

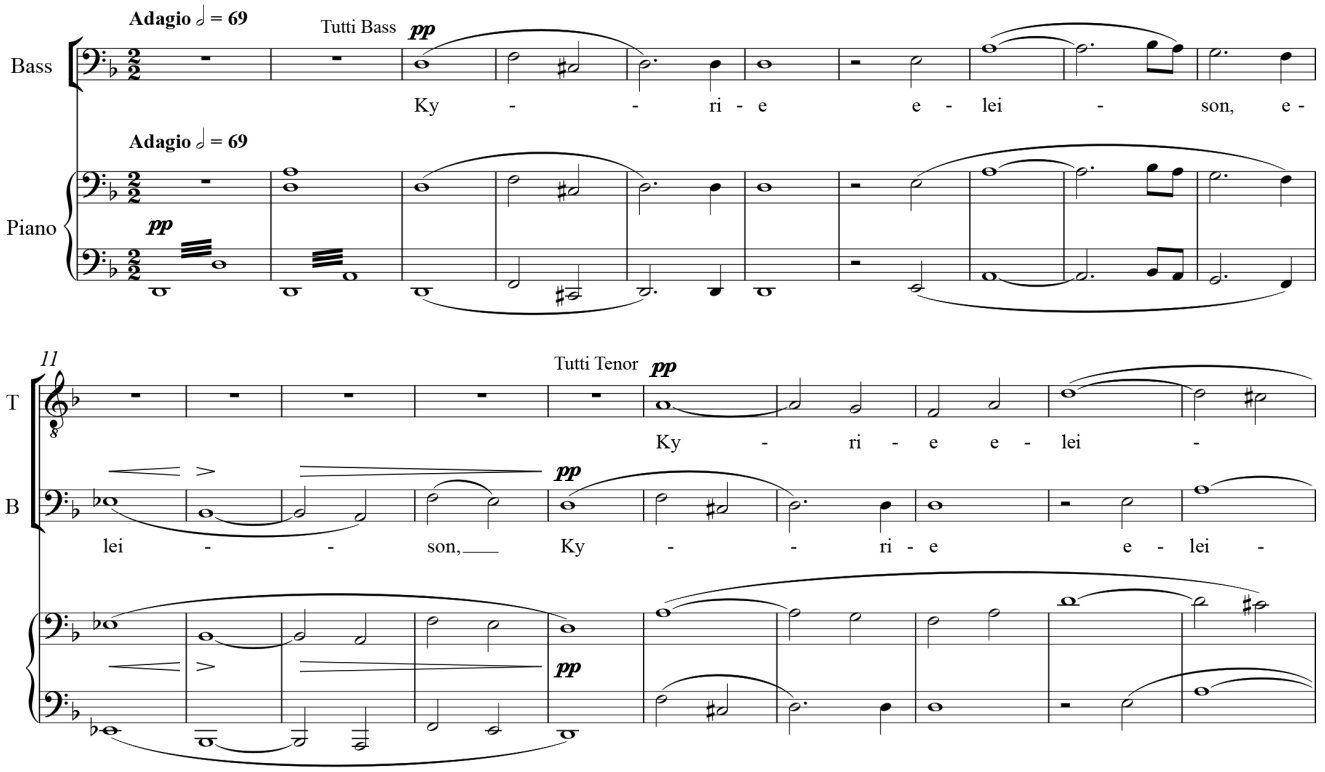


Figure 1. Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D*, "Kyrie," mm. 1–20.
1925, public domain

Benedictus section is frequently a place of choral rest, with the text given to multiple soloists; the chorus would then return for the obligatory repeat of the Osanna text (most often sung to a repeat of whatever Osanna music concluded the Sanctus). Smyth, however, takes an unusual and unexpected approach. She eschews the concluding Osanna text altogether, and the Benedictus is performed by the soprano soloist and chorus women only, the latter mostly in SSA combination but sometimes with a second alto part added. This focus on soprano and alto voices provides an especially compelling sonority for this movement.

The beginning of the Agnus presents a strong contrast to the preceding music. The switch to minor is appropriate now for the brooding plea for mercy; after the extended tenor solo that begins the movement, the powerful attack of the chorus underscores the anguish of the plea. The chorus then provides the quiet transition to the final tranquil "dona nobis pacem" and switch to major. Performers who wish to follow the published score and end the Mass here, rather than using Smyth's preferred Gloria conclusion, will find it an effective and fitting close.

Those who accede to Smyth's wishes, however, will proceed to the exuberant Gloria, where, as in the Credo, the composer changes tempo, meter, mode, and texture as needed to bring out the text, whether it is the brisk homorhythmic opening "Gloria," the slower and softer "Et in terra pax hominibus," or the chromatic minor for "miserere nobis." Especially effective is Smyth's massive buildup as she approaches the close of the movement (and the Mass). This begins with the choral "tu solus Dominus," then shifts to a solo section with an especially moving "cum Sancto Spiritu" by the alto soloist over a poignant reiterated oboe motive (Figure 2), and finally returns to full choral glory for the drive to the cadence. Smyth succeeded brilliantly in her desire for a positive ending to this work.

The Path to Recognition

Overall, the mass is a thrilling, powerful, composition. Working with rich Brahmsian harmonies, Smyth shifts tempos and textures throughout to match the ever-changing text, using a sure hand with the orchestration to maximize the impact. Despite relatively few performances since its premiere, the Mass is in fact one of the major choral/orchestral works of the nineteenth century. It is, therefore, sobering to realize that this piece was almost lost to the world.

The premiere was slow to happen in the first place. Thanks to the dominance of the Anglican Church in Britain and its preference for English texts, little interest existed in the late nineteenth century for Latin works by English composers, especially one, like Smyth, trained in Leipzig rather than at home. Some

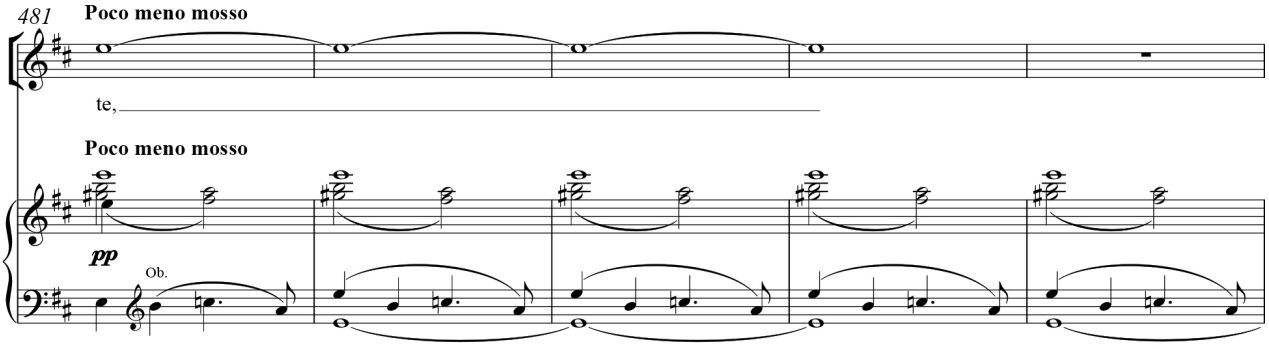


Figure 2. Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D*, "Gloria," mm. 481-485. 1925, public domain

Anglican composers still wrote Latin-texted music, but important figures such as John Stainer and Arthur Sullivan wrote no Latin-texted works at all. Most of the Latin-texted sacred music that did exist used organ or was unaccompanied (e.g., Charles Villiers Stanford's popular Op. 38 motets), although Hubert Parry wrote a *De profundis* (1891) and *Magnificat* (1897) and Stanford a Requiem (Op. 63, 1897) and *Te deum* (Op. 66, 1898) using orchestra. Overall, the amount of Latin-texted music at the time was dwarfed by choral works in English, with oratorios on biblical subjects being especially popular.

Smyth was not the first modern composer in Britain to write a choral/orchestral Mass, but she was the first of only three composers we now consider of major significance to do so. Smyth's Mass was followed by Stanford's Op. 46 *Mass in G* (completed in late 1892) and Vaughan Williams's *Cambridge Mass* of 1899. Even in this company, Smyth's Mass stands out as different, for Vaughan Williams's work was a Missa brevis composed as an academic requirement and Stanford's work was a liturgical mass written on commission.[16] In contrast, Smyth intended her work for the concert hall from the start.

Ethel Smyth, 1903. Aimé Dupont Studio. www.ethelsmyth.org

Smyth was well aware of musical preferences of the time, writing, "If I had chosen an Old Testament subject—say, Methuselah, or perhaps Joash King of Judah … one of the Three Choirs Festivals might have jumped at it. But, strange to say, the everlasting beauty of the Mass appealed to me more strongly."[17] She also recognized that, since the piece required a full orchestra, large chorus, and SATB soloists, "a huge and complicated choral work is not a convenient item in a choral season."[18] Fortunately, Smyth had the support of both Queen Victoria and the Empress Eugenie, widow of Emperor Napoleon III of France; the latter paid for the necessary publication of the music.[19] The Empress, a personal friend of Smyth's, arranged for the composer to play portions of the Mass during one of the Queen's visits to the Empress. Queen Victoria then invited Smyth to Balmoral Castle to perform still more of the Mass.[20] The patronage of these two monarchs helped make the eventual performance of the Mass a society event.

Despite accolades from leading musicians of the time after the premiere, Smyth still had to wait more than thirty years until the second performance in 1924. Christopher St. John suggests of Smyth:

> She was born at least twenty years too soon for the merits of her music to be immediately recognized by her contemporaries. Its vigour and rhythmic force, its intensely personal character, were something new in English music of the early nineties, and the new … is always feared by the majority.[21]

James Garratt suggested that "the Mass seemingly shakes its fist at the conventionality and isolationism of the British choral tradition."[22] Certainly not much changed in the British choral scene in the early twentieth century, at least in terms of preferred genres. Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912), whose choral works cemented his fame, set nothing in Latin, and the same is true for Frederick Delius (1862–1934), whose *Mass of Life* is based on Nietzsche and whose Requiem uses a text by Heinrich Simon. Vaughan Williams's Mass from 1921 is unaccompanied, while that by Charles Wood uses only organ accompaniment. Holst, Vaughan Williams, and Wood set a few additional unaccompanied Latin texts, but Latin was not the focus of their choral efforts. Only the prolific Stanford wrote a choral/orchestral Mass in this period, the *Mass Via Victrix* Op. 173, as well as three unaccompanied masses and an unaccompanied *Magnificat*.

Accordingly, Smyth's initial attempts to secure a second performance were failures. Despite claiming to be "mad keen" about the Mass, choral societies "all had commitments which prevented a date being fixed for its performance."[23] A friend of Smyth's was told that "at Amsterdam the Committee of the Choral Union were *afraid* of the effect of producing a woman's work."[24] Smyth later wrote about this period:

> I think the slaying of the Mass … not only distressed but honestly surprised Barnby [the conductor]. Yet gazing back … I see that nothing else could have been expected. Year in year out, composers of the Inner Circle, generally University men attached to our musical institutions, produced one choral work after another—not infrequently deadly dull affairs—which, helped along by the impetus of official approval, automatically went the round of our Festivals and Choral Societies, having paid the publisher's expenses and brought in something for the composers before they disappeared for ever. Was it likely, then, that the Faculty would see any merit in a work written on such different lines—written too by a woman who had actually gone off to Germany to learn her trade?[25]

Elsewhere, Smyth wrote that "to squash that Mass and relegate it to limbo for 33 years was a triumph of the art of refusing to see. Will anyone point to the masterpieces of the 'nineties that naturally put its poor nose out of joint? Where are they today?"[26]

Smyth describes the lead-up to the eventual second performance thus:

> In the middle 'twenties, my pre-war musical activities having been staged mainly in Germany, I bethought me … of the Mass, which had never achieved a second performance, which none but grey-beards had heard, and the existence of which I had practically forgotten. A couple of limp and dusty piano-scores were found on an upper shelf, and after agitated further searchings and vain enquiries at Messrs. Novello's, the full score turned up in my loft. In spite of the judgment of the Faculty the work had evidently been appreciated by the mice, and on sitting down to examine it I shared their opinion, and decided that it really deserved a better fate than thirty-one years of suspended animation. But when I consulted the publishers as to the possibility of a revival, the reply was: 'Much as we regret to say so, we fear your Mass is dead.' This verdict stung me into activity.[27]

Thanks to Smyth's efforts, Adrian Boult conducted performances in Birmingham (February 7, 1924) and London shortly thereafter (March 3).

A century later, performances are finally increasing.[28] Recent performances of the Mass have taken place across Britain and in the United States, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and Sweden, sung by a very wide range of choruses, including symphony chorus (BBC Symphony Chorus), professional choir (Voices of the Ascension), cathedral choir (Cathedral Choral Society, Washington National Cathedral), town/gown chorus (Eastman-Rochester Chorus), and community chorus (Cappella Clausura). Still, Smyth's contributions as a choral composer continue to be overlooked in places where they might be expected. She is missing from Chester Alwes's two-volume *A History of Western Choral Music* (2016); she is absent from Stephen Town's

An Imperishable Heritage: British Choral Music from Parry to Dyson (2012); and she appears only in the revised 2022 edition of Dennis Shrock's *Choral Repertoire*, not the 787-page original 2009 edition.[29]

Preparation for Performance

One can offer various reasons for Smyth's slow start in entering the repertoire. The most obvious one is that, even though women composers have been producing excellent music since the Middle Ages, each has been essentially forgotten after her own time. Smyth's book *Female Pipings in Eden* is about precisely the precarious position of women in the arts and her own experiences of prejudice and misogyny; she was well aware of the resistance her music encountered because she was a "woman composer." Only with the advent of second-wave feminism did a sustained attempt to reclaim women's musical history arise.[30] Even today, compositions by women composers receive fewer performances than those by men.

Significantly, though, the *Mass in D* has been considered difficult: Christopher St. John, Smyth's first biographer, noted this, as did Tovey.[31] In writing about a different choral work by Smyth, no less a figure than Gustav Holst, a superlative composer for choirs and a choir director himself, said, "Why, oh why is *Hey Nonny No* so hard!"[32] In fact, *Hey Nonny No* is in many ways far easier than the Mass.[33] The work's rhythms are straightforward, its text underlay is overwhelmingly syllabic, and its texture lacks any contrapuntal artifice. It is only the harmonic writing that makes *Hey Nonny No* challenging. In discussing Smyth's vocal writing in general, Elizabeth Wood states, "Her music challenges an untrained voice, for it requires great strength and agility; even trained singers have complained of its technical risks."[34]

The *Mass in D*, however, is no more difficult than other major choral/orchestral works, although conductors choosing to program the work should be aware of certain things to watch in preparation for performance.[35] First, until recently, the orchestral parts for the Mass were error ridden, a fact that hardly made performance more enticing. Fortunately, the parts were redone in 2020, eliminating one performance challenge.[36] But choruses still must use the one choral score available, Novello's revised piano/vocal score from 1925. Like many older scores and even some recent ones, it lacks measure numbers and employs not-especially-appealing fonts for both text and music.[37] Stems are occasionally missing for some notes (e.g., the first soprano pitch at Letter T on p. 79). More significant is the use of the old-fashioned quarter-note rest that is a mirror version of the eighth-note rest. Conductors will likely need to point this out to singers so that they can make the adjustment to an unaccustomed notational practice as quickly as possible. For this article, Figures 1, 2, 3, and 6 have been re-inscribed, but Figure 4 is reproduced directly from the score that singers would use in performance, thus highlighting the very different look of this earlier score.

The following musical examples highlight various elements of Smyth's typical musical style in the Mass that especially deserve conductors' attention.

Smyth shows a striking tendency to begin motives or long notes on weak beats in a measure. Figure 3 on the next page, from the Credo, shows an example of such unexpected rhythmic placement. The soloists are concluding their section in cut time with an Andante tempo. The music then switches to common time and "allegro energico." The imitative choral entries on "Qui cum patre" are all on weak beats, however, with the rhythmic displacement compounded in the alto part in the first measure of the bottom system by the commencement of a whole note on beat two. The same unexpected rhythmic layout is found earlier in the movement in the "Dominum et vivificantem" section. Conductors need extreme clarity in their beat and cues at such points.

Figure 4 on page 16, taken from the Gloria, shows multiple tendencies in Smyth's writing (page 31 of the vocal score; note the missing quarter rest in the final measure of the bass). We see again Smyth's use of weak-beat entries. At the beginning of the bottom staff, the sopranos have an extended high $g^{2\flat}$ that begins on the weak beat of the measure (the meter here is 2/2). It is far more common in choral writing to begin extended notes (i.e., whole note or longer) on the strong beat of a measure, most often the downbeat. This practice has a venerable tradition dating back to the fifteenth century, where the tactus provided strong and weak beats in the musical pulse. Smyth goes against that practice in numerous places throughout the Mass. Conductors

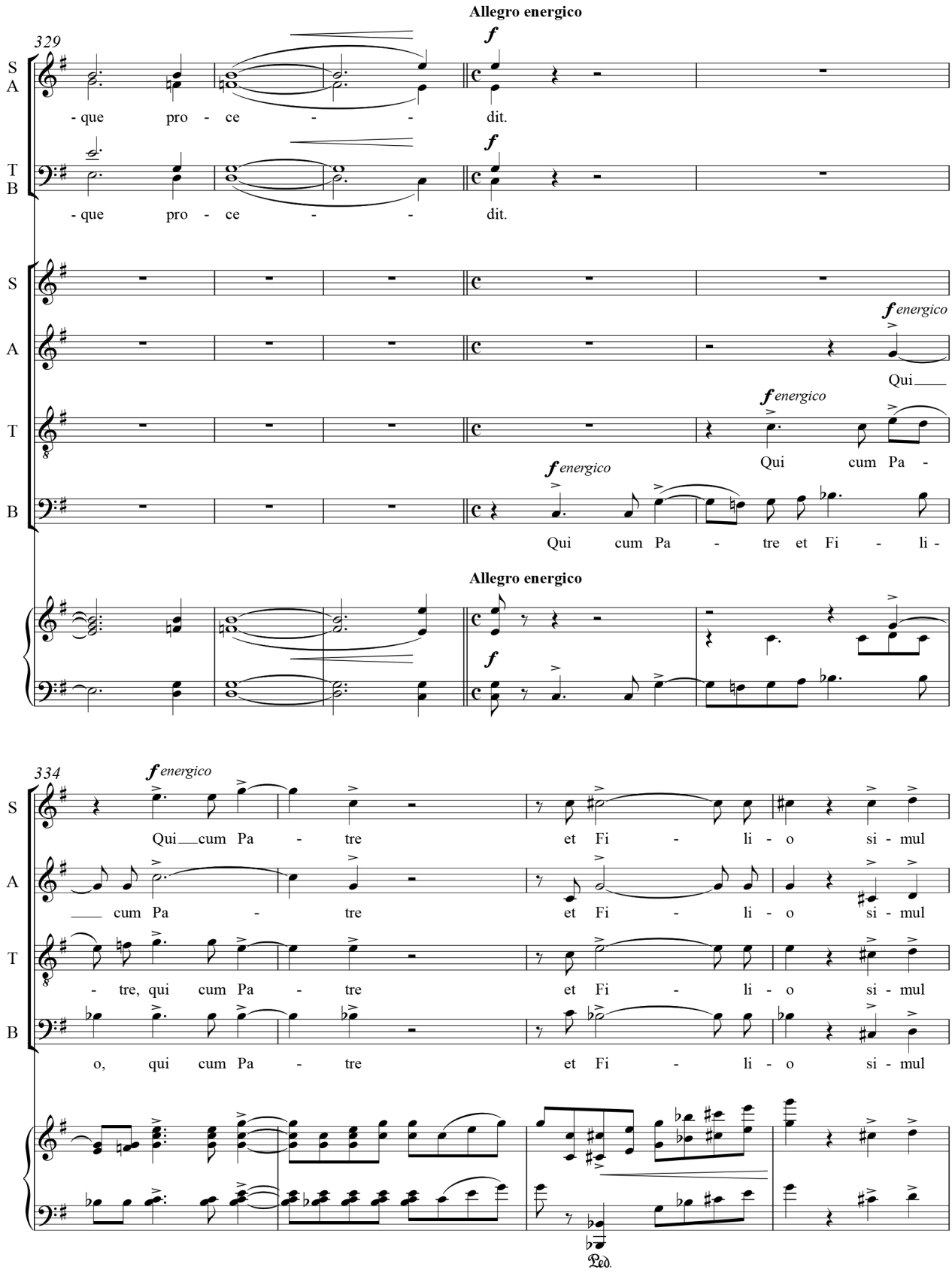


Figure 3. Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D*, "Credo," mm. 329–337.
1925, public domain

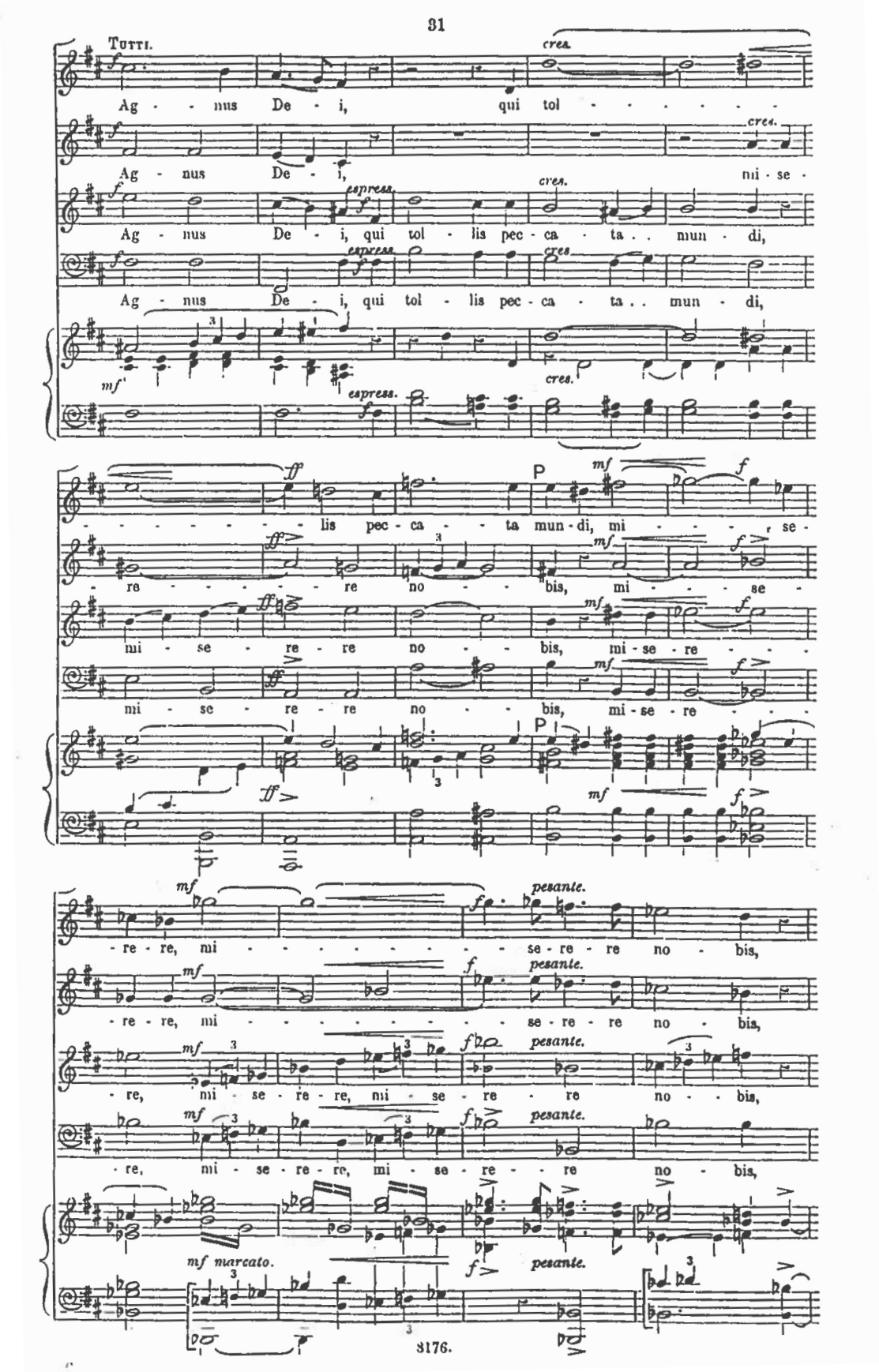


Figure 4. Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D*, "Gloria," mm. 317-330.
reproduction of 1925 score, public domain

should encourage singers to use whatever will help them keep their place when longer notes enter on the "wrong" beats, whether that is numbering beats in a measure or adding hash marks.

Figure 4 also shows some of Smyth's harmonic tendencies. Even though the overall harmonic plan of the Mass is quite straightforward—with the exception of the C Major Benedictus, all movements have D minor or D Major as their home key—Smyth frequently shifts the harmonic focus within movements, rapidly and not always to closely related keys. The excerpt shown here begins in B minor, but by the end of the page the key has shifted to the distant E flat minor. Such unexpected modulations and Smyth's extreme fondness for harmonically unstable seventh chords (and other extended harmonies) can generate melodic lines that require special attention in rehearsal.

The *Mass in D* presents some challenge in the ranges required for the singers. Figure 5 shows that these are extensive for every voice part: close to two octaves for altos and second tenors, two octaves precisely for first sopranos, first tenors, and first basses, and more than two octaves for second sopranos and second basses. Further, Smyth is not always sparing in her use of registral extremes. The low D in the second bass part—a pitch normally avoided in choral writing—is found in every movement, and it is held for four full measures in the "pax hominibus" section of the Gloria. Sopranos, meanwhile, hold high a^2 for four measures right before the end of the Credo, and at letter S in the same movement their a^2 extends for five and a half measures. The most striking use of extreme ranges is found in the Benedictus, however.

Figure 6 on the next page shows the second choral entrance in the Benedictus, with some slightly unexpected melodic writing and, most striking, the tessitura of the alto part when the texture is for three voices. It is normal when writing for three-part women's voices for the alto line to lie somewhat lower than usual. But Smyth takes this tendency to the extreme. By the end of the page the alto line has descended to g sharp below middle c^1; it moves to g natural at the top of the next page, and elsewhere in the movement it sinks to the f sharp a fifth below middle c^1, a half step lower than the recommended limit for basic alto part-writing. Now, many alto parts go below middle c^1, and sometimes indeed down to low f sharp or even f. But in most part writing, the alto line usually stays at middle c^1 or above, and when it goes below that, it tends not to linger there. In contrast, the alto part in Benedictus, when the writing is in three voices, spends most of its time below middle c^1. The part contains 153 notes,[38] of which only 53 are middle c^1 or above and 100 are below middle c^1. I know of no alto part anywhere written for women's voices that spends that much time in the lowest range of the alto voice.[39] Smyth's unusual emphasis on this low tessitura makes for one of the most effective sections of the Mass.

The *Mass is D* was only Smyth's second choral/orchestral composition; her earlier work, *The Song of Love* (Op. 8), is a cantata from 1888.[40] Although Smyth was evidently a compelling solo singer, she was not a choral singer. But that did not prevent her from writing an impressive work. One is reminded of John Adams and his first choral work, *Harmonium*. In his memoir, Adams candidly acknowledges that:

> The choral writing was full of unreasonable difficulties, the result of my inexperience in composing for voices … Singers continue to blanch at the challenges to their voices and my requirement that they count bars as if they were rivets in a stadium roof.[41]

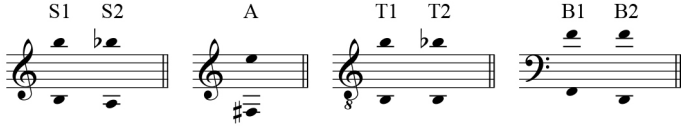
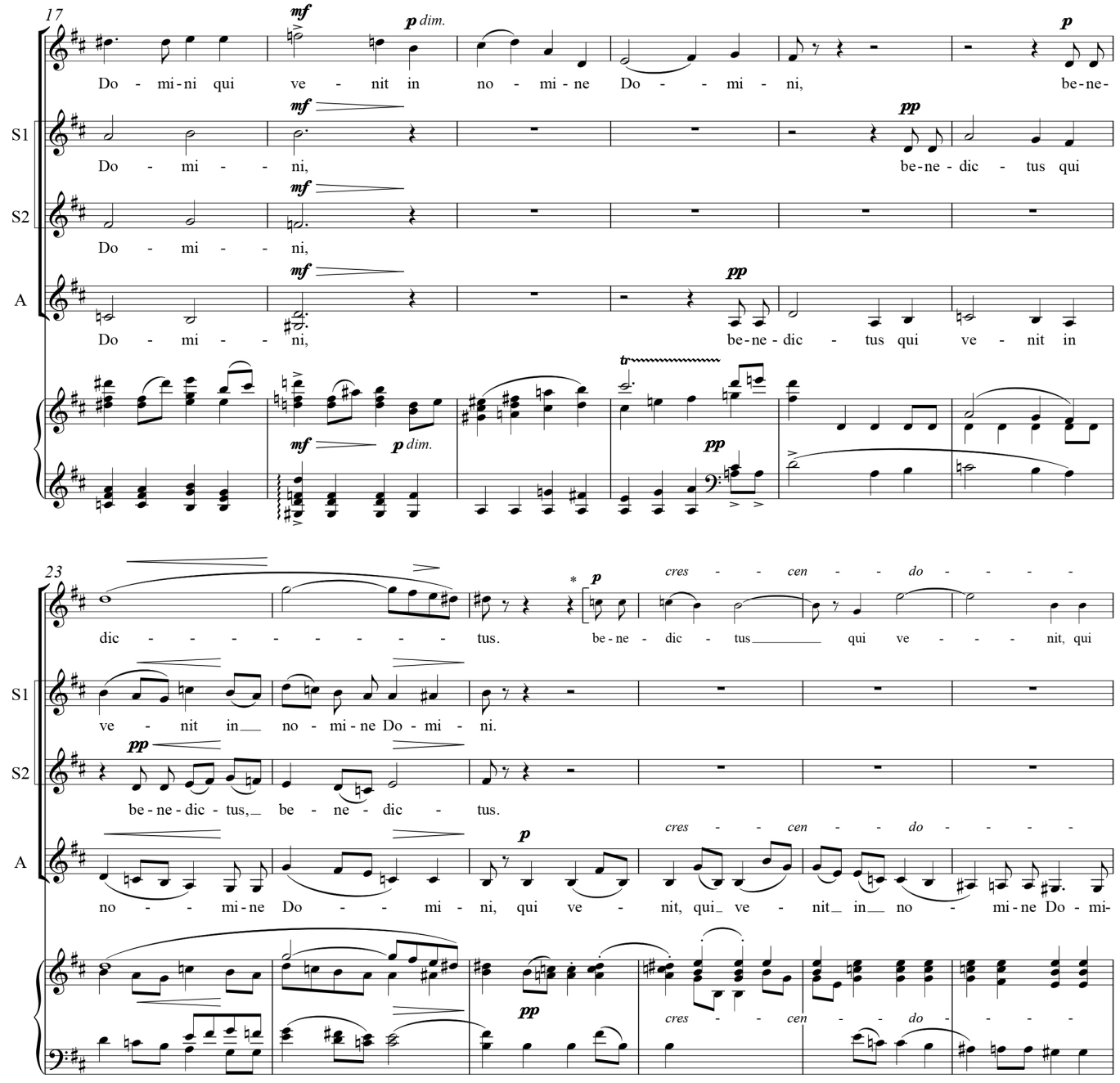


Figure 5. Choral ranges in Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D.*



*The passage in brackets is only to be sung when this number is performed without Chorus.

Figure 6. Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D*, "Benedictus," mm. 17–28.
1925, public domain

But Adams then continues: "Once they learn to perform it, rarely will chorus members communicate to me a lingering resentment over the work's challenges."[42] The same is true for the *Mass in D*. Tovey noted long ago that the Mass "inspires enthusiasm in the singers."[43] And in writing about the Mass, Smyth herself said, "I see that…I shall never do anything better!"[44] Like every challenging piece of music by a good composer, music that seems unexpected when one is first learning it comes to feel "just right" once performers master their parts.

Conclusion

Early in her career Ethel Smyth declared, "Oh what a Mass I will write one day! *Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi*. What words! What words!"[45] In the time between the first and the second performance, when the latter seemed unlikely, she also presciently wrote, "But if, even after one's own death, anyone thinks it worth producing, it will not have been written in vain."[46]

Ethel Smyth's *Mass in D* was certainly not written in vain; it is an extraordinary work in multiple ways. It is extraordinary that it was composed at all in a musical climate with small interest in the genre. It is extraordinary that the score was not lost and that Smyth never gave up on her attempts to garner a second performance despite many obstacles and an unsupportive publisher. And it is simply extraordinary as a dramatic and exciting piece of music that has a powerful impact on both performers and listeners. The Mass is a deeply rewarding sing, and it deserves to take its place in the pantheon of choral works that are known and beloved by all. CJ

NOTES

[1] A partial listing of recent performances and recordings (as well as much other information on Smyth) can be found at www.ethelsmyth.org; website content curated by Smyth specialist Dr. Amy Zigler.

[2] Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis* (Oxford University Press, 1937), V: 236.

[3] The three full-length biographies of Smyth are Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1959); Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The Story of Ethel Smyth* (William Kimber, 1984); and Sulamith Sparre, *"Man sagt, ich sei ein Egoist. Ich bin eine Kämpferin"*: *Dame Ethel Mary Smyth (1858–1944)*, *Komponistin, Dirigentin, Schriftstellerin, Suffragette*, Widerständige Frauen 10 (Verlag Edition AV, 2010). St. John (birth name Christabel Marshall) was Smyth's literary executor and friend who first met the composer in 1911. Smyth herself left six memoirs: *Impressions that Remained: Memoirs*, 2 vols. (Longmans, Green, 1919); *Streaks of Life* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1921; 2nd ed. 1922); *A Final Burning of Boats Etc*. (Longmans, Green and Co., 1928); *Female Pipings in Eden* (Peter Davies, 1933; 2nd ed. 1934); *As Time Went On...* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1936); and *What Happened Next* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1940). An extensive bibliography appears at www.ethelsmyth.org. All biographical information in this article comes from these sources.

[4] For a detailed list of works with information on available editions, visit www.ethelsmyth.org.

[5] On the composition of the Mass, see *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, ed. Ronald Crichton (Viking, 1987), 164, as well as Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, 47–50.

[6] St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, xvi.

[7] Barnby's assessment as "over-exuberant" is found in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, 194. The Archbishop's comment appears in Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 172.

[8] George Bernard Shaw, *Music in London 1890–94: Criticisms Contributed Week by Week to the World*, 3 vols. (Vienna House, 1973), II: 244.

[9] Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, 64.

[10] Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 50.

[11] Elizabeth Wood, "Lesbian Fugue: Ethel Smyth's Contrapuntal Arts," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (University of California Press, 1995), 183.

[12] J. A. Fuller Maitland, "Smyth, Ethel," in *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1911), 490.

[13] Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, V: 235–236.

[14] The score reads "N.B.—It is recommended that in performing this work, the numbers be given in the following order: *Kyrie, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei, Gloria*. E.S." In fact, this order follows the Book of Common Prayer.

[15] Several recordings of the complete Mass are available on YouTube. An excellent one by the BBC Symphony and Chorus can be followed along with the score at www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVSpw3srMbc.

[16] The commissioner was Catholic convert Thomas Wingham, the musical director of Brompton Oratory. The Oratory

was one of the few venues in Britain championing orchestral masses at the time. See Jeremy Dibble, *Charles Villiers Stanford: Man and Musician*, rev. ed., Irish Musical Studies 15 (The Boydell Press, 2024), 278.

[17] Smyth, *Streaks of Life*, 102.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, 60.

[20] Smyth, *Streaks of Life*, 90–102.

[21] St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 87.

[22] James Garratt, "Britain and Ireland," in *Nineteenth-Century Choral Music*, ed. Donna M. Di Grazia (Routledge, 2013), 357.

[23] St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 91.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 172–173.

[26] Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats Etc.*, 17–18.

[27] Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 173. The original autographed full score was thought to have been lost again after 1924 but was located by Dr. Lisa Colton in March 2025; see www.womensongforum.org/2025/04/30/discovering-the-original-manuscript-of-ethel-smyths-mass-in-d/ The full manuscript has now been digitized at https://digitalheritagelab.liverpool.ac.uk/ethel-smyth-mass-in-d. A new edition to be published by Breitkopf und Härtel is underway.

[28] A partial list of recent performances (since 2008) is found at www.wisemusicclassical.com/performances/search/work/10017/. Probably because Smyth was famed as a suffragist, the most performances took place in 2018, the centennial of the Act of Parliament that first granted the vote to British women, though only propertied ones over the age of thirty.

[29] Dennis Shrock, *Choral Repertoire* (Oxford University Press, 2009; rev. ed. 2022); Chester L. Alwes, *A History of Western Choral Music*, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 2015–2016); Stephen Town, *An Imperishable Heritage: British Choral Music from Parry to Dyson* (Ashgate, 2012).

[30] See, for example, the pathbreaking *Historical Anthology of Music by Women*, ed. James R. Briscoe (Indiana University Press, 1986) and the essay collection *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (University of Illinois Press, 1987).

[31] St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 85, wrote that for the premiere, "Chorus and orchestra were intensively rehearsed, and they needed to be, as Ethel's score made demands on their technique to which they were unaccustomed." Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, 236, calls the vocal writing "somewhat difficult."

[32] St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 152.

[33] The score can be found in the Choral Public Domain Library.

[34] Elizabeth Wood, "Sapphonics," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2006), 45.

[35] Conductors contemplating performance are encouraged to follow the score online; see note 15. Practice tracks for parts of the Mass are now beginning to appear online; for example, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4NCPtmQreM.

[36] I am grateful to Dr. William Weinert for providing information about the orchestral parts.

[37] Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D for Soli, Chorus, and Orchestra*, revised edition (Novello, 1925). All references are to this score.

[38] That number does not include the few instances where the music splits into four parts.

[39] Parts designated "altus" or "contra" in Renaissance music frequently have a low tessitura, but they were sung by men. Perhaps anticipating vocal difficulties for the choir, Smyth writes in the Benedictus score "Can be sung as Solo, without Chorus" (p. 88).

[40] Earlier choral works, all unpublished, are unaccompanied.

[41] John Adams, *Hallelujah Junction: Composing an American Life* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 114–15.

[42] Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 115.

[43] Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, 236.

[44] Smyth, *Streaks of Life*, 103.

[45] St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 58.

[46] Smyth, *Streaks of Life*, 103.

TeachMusic.org

IS A HOME FOR MUSIC EDUCATION RESOURCES FOR ALL.

From young, aspiring music educators and their parents to current music teachers and counselors, TeachMusic has assembled helpful articles, websites, videos, and print materials to benefit everyone.

ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION PATHS. This resource points aspiring educators–particularly those who have a degree in music, but not music education–in the right direction to begin their music education career, based on their state's requirements.

RESOURCES FOR COUNSELORS. Many counselors do not have a background in music education, and music college admissions can be tricky to navigate. We're here to help counselors and their students.

NEW Resource: The TeachMusic Job Board!

A full service job board for all things music education, serving both job seekers and employers.

teachmusic.org

DO YOU HAVE A STUDENT INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MUSIC TEACHER?

Have them check out
TeachMusic.org!

DID YOU KNOW?

Your student loans may be forgiven if you teach music for a qualifying employer like a public school or non-profit. Learn more at TeachMusic.org.

The Choir as Garden: A Dynamic, Singer-Centered Approach to Choral Leadership

Jennifer C. Hutton

Today's choral educators often prioritize relational goals for singers as they strive to foster positive experiences of belonging, relationship-building, and community. Such goals reflect a person-centered approach that values singers' experiences as much as (or more than) the music they present.

Despite choral leaders' intentions, singers' experiences do not always reflect the relational, person-centered values that leaders espouse. Researchers have identified barriers to singers' positive experiences including requirements that singers mold themselves to a conductor's musical vision and the use of repetitive rehearsal techniques focused on technical perfection.[1] When teacher-conductors prioritize musical results more than singers' experiences, ensemble members can lose positive rewards of group singing that leaders ostensibly intend to foster.

Jennifer C. Hutton
Assistant Professor of Choral Music Education
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
huttonj@uwm.edu

This article presents a metaphor of the choir as a garden to help educators align their practices with the relational, singer-centered values they often hold. The Garden Model frames teacher-conductors as cultivators of conditions that allow singers to develop and grow. When individuals' varied growth is fostered, singers can be emboldened to function as an interdependent ecosystem that is more than the sum of its parts. The first part of the article situates the model in the context of my own experience as a leader working with a new group.

Uncovering Singers' Understandings: The Puzzle Model

The Garden Model grew from a realization that singers sometimes experience choir as the model's opposite: a limiting, fixed environment focused on the conductor's needs. In a new role with an undergraduate, treble chamber ensemble, I learned that many singers viewed choir as a static space that forced them to adapt to an established structure. While working to uncover singers' perspectives, I came to understand their view as the Puzzle Model. In this view, the choir was a prefabricated jigsaw puzzle, and each singer was a piece required to fit into a fixed space. The Puzzle Model reflected singers' experiences in two arenas: voice parts and holding back their voices.

Voice Parts

In discussing their choral voice part, singers sometimes communicated that their individual vocal identity should be subsumed to the ensemble's needs. Most singers shared that they had no preference for which voice part they sang. In contrast to previous choral settings and those documented by researchers[2] where singers felt quite attached to their voice part, these singers relinquished control over this element of their choral experience to fulfill the larger group's needs. Singers' communication aligned with research by scholars Nana Wolfe-Hill and Patricia O'Toole, who have described how singers disregard their own experience and acquiesce to the desires of the conductor, whom they presume to hold much greater power.[3]

Though singers expressed few preferences, it felt uncomfortable to assign voice parts. The constrained soprano 1, soprano 2, alto 1, or alto 2 slots did not necessarily reflect singers' vocal identity or even their primary vocal range. Rather, the voice part that worked best for singers often reflected their past or potential vocal development, their aural or reading skills, or their confidence in having their voice heard. As conductor Liz Garnett has articulated, voice classification "is as much a dialogue between the individual's experience and habitus to date and the vocal and emotional behaviors encoded within a particular choral tradition as it is an act of objective assessment."[4] Although assignment of voice parts is often helpful and necessary for the ensemble, the process sometimes felt like trying to force puzzle pieces into slightly incompatible spaces. Knowing that approaching voice parts as rigid, fixed categories could unnecessarily constrain singers' identities and vocal growth,[5] I emphasized to singers that voice parts were flexible.

Holding Back Voices

In rehearsals, singers held back their sound, subsuming their individual voices to the group. After speaking with singers individually, several confirmed that they constrained their sound to try to serve the larger ensemble. Some expressed concern that their voice would stick out due to its size, vibrato, or tone quality. Singers also expressed hesitance based on fear of making errors. They articulated insecurities related to singing accurate pitches and rhythms, reading notation accurately, and handling text (a task sometimes made more challenging by learning differences or singers' first language). Sometimes, they hesitated because of general anxiety about having their voice heard. Perhaps because of past experience, singers seemed to perceive the ensemble had fixed expectations that might not accommodate their voice.

A New Model: Choir as Garden

As this ensemble's leader, I critically examined my own practices. Following scholar John D. Perkins's query, "What is written on our choral welcome mats?,"[6] I reflected on how I might have unintentionally perpetuated an idea that our group was a static and limiting

space, and I examined how I might facilitate a more free and welcoming experience for singers. Although some of the singers' concepts of the choir predated my leadership, I determined to remake any habits that perpetuated the Puzzle Model. A new model was needed to move toward a singer-centered approach that clarified the values of the choir, held the conductor accountable for practices aligning with those values, and communicated with singers about the ideas that guided our choral community.

The Garden Model frames the conductor's role as a facilitator of a welcoming environment. Just as horticulturalists cultivate a hospitable environment for plants, choral leaders can create a welcoming space with conditions that encourage growth. The Garden Model also asserts that, like plants, individual singers are different, and the collective environment benefits from expressions of individuality. In biological ecosystems, diversity is a strength. Similarly, in choral environments that value and welcome individuals' varied characteristics, the collective ensemble is primed to thrive. The next section will contextualize the Puzzle and Garden Models by relating them to scholarly discourses about education, choral pedagogy, and tensions in the role of the conductor.

"The Garden Model also asserts that, like plants, individual singers are different, and the collective environment benefits from expressions of individuality."

Context for the Garden Model

The Gardener in Philosophy, Education, and Psychology

Many philosophers, educators, and psychologists have used the metaphor of a gardener to represent person-centered approaches.[7] Philosophers Plato and Jean-Jacques Rousseau compared teachers to gardeners, suggesting that educators can facilitate students' growth by cultivating a well-tended learning environment.[8] Philosopher Martin Buber framed educators as either gardeners or sculptors.[9] Those who approach teaching as gardeners help learning unfold naturally; in contrast, Buber wrote, those who approach teaching as sculptors seek to shape students into premade, fixed forms. Psychologist Alison Gopnik applied a similar framework to parenting.[10] Gopnik urged parents to serve as gardeners who nurture children's potential for growth rather than as carpenters who shape children into their fixed vision of "the ideal" adult.

Buber's and Gopnik's concepts of the exacting sculptor and carpenter find their counterparts in traditional, formal conceptions of the choral leader. In formal Western musical training, the conductor engages in solitary score study to craft an ideal vision of a musical product, which they then exhort singers to recreate precisely.[11] This model permeates much of choral ensemble music making. In the ensemble I worked with, singers had internalized this system as the Puzzle Model. They confined their voices in what they perceived as a specific, predetermined approach to ensemble singing. Comparing the choral educator to a gardener offers a different approach, as the conductor leads by recognizing and valuing singers' musical contributions and by creating ample, flexible space for all individuals to grow.

Tensions in the Conductor Role

Scholars have identified elements of choral leadership that reflect both the Puzzle Model and the Garden Model. Researcher Patrick Freer asserted that both performance and pedagogy are part of an optimal music education.[12] Yet, Freer argued, formal musical training can encourage conductors to spend more energy on creating a pristine musical performance than on crafting pedagogy that prioritizes singers' needs.

Other scholars have described tensions between choral leaders' choices to prioritize *product*, *process*, or *people*.[13] Within this framework, conductors emphasize to varying degrees the final musical *product*, the *process* of learning and rehearsing, or the experiences of the *people* in the choral ensemble. These distinctions reflect elements of the Puzzle Model's emphasis on a preformed, static musical *product* and the Garden Model's *process*-based, *person*-centered emphasis on singers' development and growth.

In reality, most pedagogical approaches are not "all or nothing." As Garnett explained, although the strict discipline in Western choral traditions can produce "exclusionary and elitist practices," the same choral traditions reflect a "generally inclusive ethos" that views singing as universal and beneficial to all.[14] Choral educators can work through these tensions, Garnett wrote: "It is possible to negotiate a path through this contradictory ideological landscape without either diluting artistic standards or alienating those one would wish to engage."[15] Critical analysis of one's own pedagogy can help educators develop strategies that align with their inclusive intent.

Negative Effects of Product-Centered Approaches

Although some choral contexts, such as professional ensembles, might unapologetically prioritize a product-centered approach, choral researchers have identified disadvantages of product-centered approaches for singers in a variety of settings.[16] When a group focuses on replicating the conductor's vision of a static musical product, choral singers can regularly feel marginalized or taken for granted.[17] Singers in choral settings have reported feeling judged, evaluated, and excluded as conductors ignore their individuality and treat their voices as cogs in a music-making machine.[18] Though choral leaders might aim to care for singers and their voices as they pursue a refined performance product, they sometimes overtax and fatigue singers in their focused drive toward musical excellence.

Further, conductors' narrow pursuit of technical perfection through repetitive "microrehearsing" and persistent corrections of errors can take the joy out of expressive music making.[19] Leadership approaches built on constant cycles of error correction can not only make singing miserable, they can also devalue singers' agency and neglect to develop singers' independent musical skills.[20] Moreover, competition-based systems for achieving technical excellence can lead to singers being discouraged, excluded, and disenfranchised.[21] Such approaches reflect a view of singers as objects through which to achieve a musical goal rather than as subjects who shape their own growth.

In addition, with a product-focused approach, relationships can suffer. In choral environments where leaders prioritize technical performance standards over the singers' growth and relationship building, singers often experience few positive relational ties to the group and its members.[22] When singers must consistently mold their voices to the conductor's vision of a predetermined musical product, they lose relational benefits that arise from choral singing.

Positive Effects of Person-Centered Approaches

In contrast, researchers suggest that when choral educators cultivate a welcoming environment for all ensemble members, they offer space for singers to feel connected with others as their authentic selves.[23] Approaches to choral singing that are collaborative and person-centered can help singers experience rewards from agency and growth.[24] Scholar Nana Wolfe-Hill used a feminist pedagogical approach to advocate for an "equalization of power," wherein singers share their own knowledge and express their voice through dialogue and community.[25] Choral leaders who facilitate such agency and belonging in choral communities might counteract the unjust marginalization of individuals who have been regularly excluded or minoritized, making the choral environment a more socially positive, humane, and equitable space.[26]

When choral educators intentionally choose approaches that most effectively support singers' experiences, the positive impact can be profound. The following section articulates how the Garden Model can help choral communities realize relational, singer-centered goals.

The Three Values of the Garden Model

The Garden Model's three values serve to foster positive, relational experiences for singers. The first two reflect attention to the value and growth of individual ensemble members: 1) *Every individual helps create the environment*, and 2) *Each voice brings qualities to recognize, nurture, and value*. The third value situates the ensemble as an interconnected ecosystem: 3) *The ensemble is more than the sum of its parts*. The following sections describe each value and its application to rehearsal contexts.

Value 1: Every Individual Helps Create the Environment

In the Garden Model, every individual helps create the environment. Instead of relying on only the choral leader to sculpt a pre-imagined performance, singers actively shape the group and its music making. Four practices can facilitate this goal: a) musical decision making, b) embedded leadership, c) singing away from the printed score, and d) highlighting the individual within the collective.

A.) Musical decision making

If every individual is to create the environment, singers must make musical choices. When singers exercise their skills in musical interpretation, expression, and technique, they grow as individuals and help shape the ensemble. Musical choices within the rehearsal might occur during arranging, improvisation, or other creative activities involving informal learning.[27] According to scholars including Matthew Garrett and Jessica Nápoles et al., invitations into critical thinking at the top levels of Bloom's taxonomy—*analyze*, *evaluate*, and *create*—center singers' contributions and offer singers agency to actively shape music making.[28] In rehearsals, singers might demonstrate critical thinking with gestures showing contour or articulation or by verbalizing ideas about expressive choices.[29] Short writing exercises can prompt singers to articulate goals for a musical passage, summarize a piece's message, or quickly reflect on a rehearsal activity. When they are given space to actively guide music making, each singer shapes the ensemble environment.

B.) Embedded leadership

In many choral organizations, singers serve in formal leadership roles as officers, section leaders, or committee members. Such positions can benefit choral communities by dispersing power held by the conductor and offering singers avenues for ownership. To further facilitate every individual's creation of the environment, all singers can engage in informal, short-term, rotating leadership roles. Each individual might serve as a facilitator of a small-group discussion, or rotating singers might report to the full group after sectional rehearsals to share successes and remaining struggles. Rather than relegating icebreaker activities only to opening days of rehearsals or special events, leaders might engage singers in community-building activities on a regular schedule. Consistent activities that invite singers to share elements of themselves encourage singers to co-create the ensemble based on their strengths.

C.) Singing without the printed score

Rehearsal processes that rely on printed notation as the primary vehicle for music learning require singers to have significant formal musical training. This emphasis creates barriers for singers who have seldom engaged in music with notation and for singers with learning or language differences that make reading notation a greater challenge. Moreover, reliance on the printed score can neglect singers' expressive experiences, a vital element of singing that notation cannot fully represent. In contrast, teaching through oral/aural traditions, away from the printed score, transmits music through singers' entire presence, creating multiple pathways for musical communication.[30] Even if used as a small portion of a group's rehearsal practices, teaching and learning orally/aurally can foster a relational, singer-centered approach by offering a deeper, more direct path to musical expression and by encouraging singers to bring their full selves to the group.

D.) Highlighting the individual within the collective

In performing ensembles, unity is often a central goal, yet singers also benefit from feeling valued as unique, individual contributors.[31] To emphasize that every individual helps create the environment, choral leaders might highlight singers' musical contributions through intentional use of flexible repertoire and arrangements. Adaptable repertoire such as lead sheets, rounds, or improvisational or aleatoric music can spotlight individual singers' soloistic ideas, their abilities as instrumental accompanists, or their decisions about musical form or expression. Singers' own compositions, too, can be highlighted as an element of group singing. Deliberate approaches to repertoire can render singers' individual musicality more visible to the group.

Value 2: Each Voice Brings Qualities to Recognize, Nurture, and Value

In the Garden Model, each voice brings qualities to recognize, nurture, and value. This concept applies to a) singing voices, including singers' tone quality and style, and to b) speaking voices, including singers' intellectual and interpretive contributions.

A.) Singing voices

Because the singing voice is deeply tied to individuals' identities, choral leaders' responses to ensemble members' singing can be especially impactful.[32] Explicit or implied messages about timbre, style, or vocal technique can support or diminish singers' identities.[33] When singers perceive that in the choral environment, the ways they sing outside of choir are devalued, they might hold back their voices, thereby diminishing their strength and individuality.

Through the Garden Model, leaders aim to recognize voices for their uniqueness, appreciating singers' most typical, preferred, or default tone qualities. If, for instance, some singers perform a passage with a more "chesty" or "belted" tone than the musical style typically calls for, the whole choir might experiment with matching that tone quality, then create the opposite quality, a lighter, thinner sound. Next, singers might experiment with a middle ground, incorporating both qualities without judgment of one or the other. Such exercises communicate that all singers are capable of singing in a variety of tone qualities and that all choices of sounds can be viewed positively (provided they are vocally healthy). Finally, singers can weigh in on the tone quality "recipe" they might use for particular passages and pieces. An ecumenical approach to tone quality embraces varied types of singing, honors singers' cultural and musical identities, and recognizes, values, and nurtures each voice in the room.

B.) Speaking voices

The Garden Model approach makes space for each singer's speaking voice by validating singers' verbal contributions. For many choral leaders, leaving time and space for verbal contributions can be a challenge, as their musical training often prioritizes rehearsal efficiency, and singers' verbal contributions are not always economical in the context of a tightly planned rehearsal. To make room for singers' speaking voices, choral leaders can use three concrete communication strategies.

First, when singers ask questions in rehearsal, leaders can attune to their motivation. For instance, when asked, "Do you want measure 43 *piano*, as marked?" a leader might cast the question not as a factual query about the conductor's wishes but as the singer's constructive musical contribution. Perhaps the singer, bothered that the ensemble did not sing the *piano* they hoped for, offered the most polite expression of their viewpoint they could envision in the rehearsal context. When educators respond to singers' questions as essential, thoughtful musical commentary, regardless of the questions' alignment with their predetermined rehearsal priorities, they recognize, nurture, and value the voices in the room.

Second, leaders might respond to singers' verbal contributions with another question. For instance, "What is your interpretation of that *piano* marking?" or "Can you describe what you are hearing?" After choral leaders recognize that singers want to actively shape the music, they can open up space for them to do so. The ensuing dialogue frequently generates expressive choices that the ensemble embraces.

Third, leaders can recognize that their words communicate, intentionally or not, who has the right and responsibility to make decisions. For instance, regularly using words including "need" or "should" might communicate that only the leader knows the one "right" way to create music. Rather than framing musical feedback as imperatives such as "We need to…," "We should always…," or "Yes, but it's got to be…" leaders might frame feedback as questions: "What happens if we listen for…?" "What might help us…?" or "I wonder what might change if we tried…." Questions that redirect singers' attention encourage sensitivity to the group's sound. When leaders avoid directive commands and instead encourage awareness, they nurture singers' contributions to the ensemble.

Value 3: The Ensemble is More than the Sum of its Parts

The Garden Model's first two values focus on the growth of individuals. The third value articulates that

though individual growth is vital, the ensemble is more than the sum of its parts. This third value illuminates how singers function as a greater whole. Interestingly, plant ecosystems' ability to function collectively and interdependently offers a deeper understanding of how choral ensembles can thrive.

Scientists have discovered that plants use complex underground networks to transmit helpful messages to other plants. Through garden soil, tomato plants attacked by pests send biological signals that protect neighboring plants.[34] In forest ecosystems, trees use communication networks to share nutrients and chemical messages that benefit others.[35] Even more remarkably, trees' messages help not just those of the same species, but a variety of trees and plants.[36] That is, plants protect others not simply because they are genetically related but rather because they share the same ecosystem. Gardens and forests act as collective, interdependent superorganisms in which plants share resources, communicate cooperatively, and work in concert to benefit others. In many ways, plants in an ecosystem operate as one.

How do these findings apply to choral ensembles? Researchers have found that groups of singers, too, operate as interdependent superorganisms. Physically, when humans sing together, their breath rates, heart rates, and movements align. Psychologically, singers report powerful experiences of togetherness, synchrony, and oneness during singing. In such moments, many singers feel an intangible connection to something larger than themselves. United in collective experiences, singers can sense that the choir is greater than the sum of its parts and that one singer's experience is connected to the experience of all.[37] The Garden Model's third value encourages the cultivation of space for singers to grow into experiences as an interdependent collective.

Three Values: A Holistic Approach

Taken together, the three Garden Model values encourage a holistic approach to ensemble music making. Values 1 and 2 honor individual singers' strengths and actively uncover their unique contributions. Value 3 articulates how diverse individual strengths can coalesce to form a greater collective. A fertile groundwork based on individual assets supports singers as they grow dynamically into an interdependent whole.

Further, in the Garden Model, singers' diverse strengths coalesce into unity, not conformity. Each distinct individual is cared for simply because they are part of the choral ecosystem, and none is asked to diminish their strengths by aiming to look, think, or act like another. As singers work to unify tone, vowels, diction, dynamics, or phrasing, they attune carefully to all fellow ensemble members, creating community organically as they "learn from, listen to, and feel at one with other singers."[38] In this inclusive, humane, and dynamic model of an ensemble, as scholar Sean Powell wrote, "embracing difference" becomes part of "true solidarity."[39]

Complexities and Challenges

The Garden Model as an approach to choral music making holds inherent challenges. The model prompts choral leaders to reflect on important values and remake ingrained habits. Enacting new practices in this context can feel destabilizing, uncomfortable, or risky. Leaders, along with singers, must cope with the uncertainty involved in reflection and change.

Structural conditions can act as barriers to change. For example, many choral environments are built on competitive selection processes including auditions, scholarships, solo opportunities, and tiered ensemble structures that rank singers against others. By assigning differential value to individual musicians, these selective processes contradict the Garden Model notion that all voices should be recognized, nurtured, and valued equally.

Garden Model values are also challenging to enact when, as in many professional ensembles, the core mission is to exemplify musical perfection. As discussed above, consistently prioritizing conductors' expertise over singers' experiences works against the Garden Model's singer-centered ideals. Yet conductor-focused approaches centered on technical excellence, efficiency, and the leader's predetermined vision might be strongly ingrained in a leader's habits or an institution's traditions, even in educational and community settings where technical perfection is not explicitly articulated as the primary goal.

To make progress toward singer-centered goals, choral leaders might first acknowledge that competition and emphasis on technical perfection, no matter the setting, can diminish singers' positive experiences. Second, leaders can have confidence that their choices matter; person-centered approaches increase singers' positive experiences.[40] Third, leaders can disrupt structural obstacles to singer-centered goals. For instance, leaders might ask questions such as, "What alternatives to competitive, tiered ensemble structures might uphold singer-centered values? How might I more often engage singers' individuality and less often prioritize my own ideas? How might our choral community frame changes not as diminishing conductors' technical control but instead as widening the circle of voices?"[41]

Fourth, leaders can understand that potential paths are multi-layered, not an oppositional binary. Some choral communities might be well served by blended approaches if they build on the needs and assets of those present in the room.[42] For instance, choral educators might aim for an approach that, while not fully democratic, is fully inclusive. An entirely democratic model in which all individuals vote on every decision is rarely practical; however, an inclusive model that invites each singer to shape the community's work is frequently achievable.[43] Leaders using an inclusive approach can communicate that all voices are valued while facilitating and mediating singers' varied contributions. Finally, choral leaders can discuss the Garden Model's complexity with singers, clarifying the group's values and aims. Choral communities can lift up the model's values while simultaneously embracing and grappling with its complexities and challenges.

Conclusion

Rather than framing singers as puzzle pieces in a fixed shape of the leader's design, the Garden Model helps singers' strengths coalesce into an interconnected whole that transcends any one voice. In so doing, the Garden Model's dynamic, singer-centered approach supports the relational values that choral communities often espouse but do not always successfully fulfill. An ecosystem based on individual strengths and collective interdependence encourages the belonging, relationship building, and community that many choral ensembles seek. For choral leaders who articulate relational, singer-centered aims, the model of a choir as a garden can serve a vital purpose in aligning our practices with our values. CJ

NOTES

[1] Frank Abrahams, "Critical Pedagogy as Choral Pedagogy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Choral Pedagogy*, ed. Frank Abrahams and Paul D. Head (Oxford University Press, 2017), 13–30; Anna Bull, "Getting it Right: Why Classical Music's 'Pedagogy of Correction' is a Barrier to Equity," *Music Educators Journal* 108, no. 3 (March 2022): 65–66, doi.org/10.1177/00274321221085132.

[2] Bridget Sweet and Elizabeth C. Parker, "Female Vocal Identity Development: A Phenomenology," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 67, no. 1 (April 2019): 62–82.

[3] Patricia O'Toole, "I Sing in a Choir but 'I Have No Voice!'" *Visions of Research in Music Education* 6 (2005); Nana Wolfe-Hill, "Collaboration and Meaning Making in the Women's Choral Rehearsal," in *The Oxford Handbook of Choral Pedagogy*, ed. Frank Abrahams and Paul D. Head (Oxford University Press, 2017), 185–204.

[4] Liz Garnett, "Choral Pedagogy and the Construction of Identity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Choral Pedagogy*, ed. Frank Abrahams and Paul D. Head (Oxford University Press, 2017), 139.

[5] Liz Garnett, "Construction of Identity," 139–140; Bridget Sweet, "The Adolescent Female Changing Voice: A Phenomenological Investigation," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 63, no. 1 (April 2015): 70–88.

[6] John D. Perkins, "What is Written on Our Choral Welcome Mats? Moving Beyond Performative Culture Toward a More Just Society," *Choral Journal* 58, no. 5 (December 2018): 28–40.

[7] Avi I. Mintz, "The Present, Past, and Future of the Gardening Metaphor in Education," *Oxford Review of Education* 44, no. 4 (July 2018): 414–24, doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2017.1419948.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Martin Buber, *Israel and the World: Essays in a Time of Crisis*, trans. W. Kauffman (Syracuse University Press, 1948/1997), 149–150.

[10] Alison Gopnik, *The Gardener and the Carpenter: What the New*

Science of Child Development Tells Us About the Relationship Between Parents and Children (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016).

[11] Frank Abrahams, "Critical Pedagogy"; Ruth Gustafson, "Drifters and the Dancing Mad: The Public School Music Curriculum and the Fabrication of Boundaries for Participation," *Curriculum Inquiry* 38, no. 3 (June 2008): 267–97; Christopher Small, "Performance as Ritual: Sketch for an Enquiry into the True Nature of a Symphony Concert," *The Sociological Review* 34, no. 1 (supplement) (May 1986): 6–32, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1986.tb03312.x.

[12] Patrick K. Freer, "The Performance-Pedagogy Paradox in Choral Music Teaching," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 19, no. 2 (October 2011): 164–78.

[13] Susan Wharton Conkling, "Collaboration in the Choral Ensemble," *Choral Journal* 41, no. 2 (2000): 9–15; Andrea Maas, "Facilitating Musical Expression in School Choirs: Honoring Individuality, Seeking Unity," *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* 9 (2021): 116–42; Rollo A. Dilworth and Temple University Performing Arts Collaborative, "'Performing "Weather"': Creating an Artistic Climate for Exploring Social Justice" (performance presentation at ACDA National Conference, Cincinnati, OH, February 24, 2023); Anthony J. Palmer, "Treating the Choral Singer as a Person," *Choral Journal* 22, no. 3 (1981): 29–32; Ramona M. Wis, *The Conductor as Leader: Principles of Leadership Applied to Life on the Podium* (GIA Publications, 2007).

[14] Liz Garnett, "Construction of Identity," 129–30.

[15] Ibid., 130.

[16] See, for example: Rachel Carlson, "Through the Singer's Eyes: Lessons from a Professional Choral Singer," *Choral Journal* 64, no. 4 (November 2023): 57–63.

[17] André de Quadros and Emilie Amrein, *Empowering Song: Music Education from the Margins* (Routledge, 2023); Ruth Gurgel, *Taught by the Students: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Deep Engagement in Music Education* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Elizabeth C. Parker, "Fostering Belonging in Choral Contexts," *Choral Journal* 64, no. 4 (November/December 2023): 37–41; Julia T. Shaw, *Culturally Responsive Choral Music Education: What Teachers Can Learn from Nine Students' Experiences in Three Choirs* (Routledge, 2020).

[18] Abrahams, "Critical Pedagogy"; Jennifer C. Hutton, *Choral Educators' Experiences Creating Connection During Group Singing* (PhD diss., Temple University, 2023); O'Toole, "I Sing in a Choir."

[19] Brian O. Ackles, "Agile Development Instructional Framework (ADIF): A New Strategy for Student-Centered Music Education," *Choral Journal* 59, no. 2 (September 2018): 22–36; Bull, "Getting it Right"; Gurgel, *Taught by the Students*; O'Toole, "I Sing in a Choir"; Perkins, "Choral Welcome Mats."

[20] Abrahams, "Critical Pedagogy"; Ackles, "Agile Development"; Conkling, "Collaboration."

[21] Marci L. Major and Elizabeth C. Parker, "Disrupting the Choral Class System: A Journey of One High School Choral Program," *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* 11 (2023): 43–61; Sean R. Powell, *The Ideology of Competition in School Music* (Oxford University Press, 2023).

[22] Betty A. Bailey and Jane W. Davidson, "Adaptive Characteristics of Group Singing: Perceptions from Members of a Choir for Homeless Men," *Musicae scientiae* 6, no. 2 (September 2002): 221–56; Gunter Kreutz and Peter Brünger, "A Shade of Grey: Negative Associations with Amateur Choral Singing," *Arts & Health* 4, no. 3 (October 2012): 230–38, doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2012.693111; Ronald G. Morgan, *A Study of a Director's Behaviors and his Students' Perceptions in a High School Choral Ensemble* (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1992).

[23] Charles Adderley, Michael Kennedy, and Werner Berz, "'A Home Away from Home': The World of the High School Music Classroom," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 51, no. 3 (October 2003): 190–205; Parker, "Fostering Belonging"; Perkins, "Choral Welcome Mats."

[24] Jennifer Kelly, "Building Collective Inspiration in a College Choir," *Choral Journal* 64, no. 10 (August 2024); Maas, "Facilitating Musical Expression"; Wolfe-Hill, "Collaboration and Meaning Making."

[25] Wolfe-Hill, "Collaboration and Meaning Making," 189.

[26] Gloria Anzaldúa et al., "We Hold These Truths: Defining Access, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Restorative Practice," *Choral Journal* 62, no. 7 (March 2022): 49–56; de Quadros and Amrein, *Empowering Song*; Perkins, "Choral Welcome Mats"; William Southerland, "The Rainbow Connection: How Music Classrooms Create Safe Spaces for Sexual Minority Young People," *Music Educators Journal* 104, no. 3 (March 2018): 40–45.

[27] Carole J. Ott, "Connection, Communication & Context: Improvisation in a Choral Setting," *Choral Journal* 56, no.

1 (August 2015): 38–45; Aimee D. Pearsall, *A Multiple Case Study of Informal Learning Practices and Processes Within Three High School Choral Programs* (PhD diss., Temple University, 2023).

[28] Matthew L. Garrett, "An Examination of Critical Thinking Skills in High School Choral Rehearsals," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 61, no. 3 (2013): 303–17; Jessica Nápoles et al., "Critical Thinking in the Choral Rehearsal: An Initial Study of Approaches to Teacher Training," *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* 4, no. 2 (2013): 105–16.

[29] Abrahams, "Critical Pedagogy"; Simon Hill, "Critical Pedagogy and the Choir," *Choral Journal* 61, no. 7 (February 2021): 6–11; Maas, "Facilitating Musical Expression"; Southerland, "Rainbow Connection."

[30] Ysaye M. Barnwell, *Singing in the African American Tradition: Building a Vocal Community* (Homespun Tapes, Ltd., 2009).

[31] Elizabeth C. Parker and Jennifer Hutton, "Singing and Caring," in *The Oxford Handbook of Care in Music Education*, ed. Karin S. Hendricks (Oxford University Press, 2023), 268–79.

[32] Patrick K. Freer, "Hearing the Voices of Adolescent Boys in Choral Music: A Self-Story," *Research Studies in Music Education* 27, no. 1 (December 2006): 69–81, doi.org/10.1177/1321103X06027001050; Matthew L. Garrett and Joshua Palkki, *Honoring Trans and Gender-Expansive Students in Music Education* (Oxford University Press, 2021); Bridget Sweet and Elizabeth C. Parker, "Female Vocal Identity Development: A Phenomenology," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 67, no. 1 (April 2019): 62–82.

[33] Nicole Becker and Jeanne Goffi-Fynn, "Discovering Voices: Expanding Students' Musical and Vocal Ideals in an Urban Community Children's Choir," *Choral Journal* 56, no. 7 (February 2016): 8–19; Jennifer C. Hutton, *Creating Connection;* Julia T. Shaw, *Culturally Responsive Choral Music Education: What Teachers can Learn from Nine Students' Experiences in Three Choirs* (Routledge, 2019).

[34] Yuan Yuan Song et al., "Interplant Communication of Tomato Plants through Underground Common Mycorrhizal Networks," *PloS one* 5, no. 10 (October 2010): e13324.

[35] Suzanne W. Simard, "Mycorrhizal Networks Facilitate Tree Communication, Learning, and Memory," in *Memory and Learning in Plants,* ed. Frantisek Baluska et al. (Springer, 2018), 191–213.

[36] Suzanne Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree: Uncovering the Wisdom and Intelligence of the Forest* (Vintage Books, 2021).

[37] Alf Gabrielsson, "Strong Experiences with Music," in *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, Applications*, ed. Patrick N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda (Oxford University Press, 2010), 547–74; Jennifer C. Hutton, *Creating Connection*; Viktor Müller, Julia A. M. Delius, and Ulman Lindenberger, "Complex Networks Emerging During Choir Singing," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1431, no. 1 (2018): 85–101; Viktor Müller, Julia A. M. Delius, and Ulman Lindenberger, "Hyper-frequency Network Topology Changes During Choral Singing," *Frontiers in Physiology* 10 (2019): 207; Katie Overy and Istvan Molnar-Szakacs, "Being Together in Time: Musical Experience and the Mirror Neuron System," *Music Perception* 26, no. 5 (2009): 489–504.

[38] Dag Jansson, Erik Døving, and Anne Haugland Balsnes, "Serious Musicking: Choral Pedagogy in 'Low-Threshold' Choirs," *Music Education Research* (2024): 5; Maas, "Facilitating Musical Expression."

[39] Powell, *Ideology of Competition*, 115.

[40] Natasha Hendry, Siobhan Lynam, and Caroline Lafarge, "Singing for Wellbeing: Formulating a Model for Community Group Singing Interventions," *Qualitative Health Research* 32, no. 8-9 (2022): 1399–1414.

[41] Miriam Altman, "My Voice Is Heard: Centering Student Agency with the Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance Model" (presentation at Wisconsin Choral Directors Association Refresh! Conference, Kenosha, WI, July 18, 2024).

[42] See Jansson, Døving, and Balsnes, "Serious Musicking," for a discussion of potential "blended approaches."

[43] Wolfe-Hill, "Collaboration and Meaning Making," 192.

The **ACDA Career Center** offers job seekers the tools they need to quickly find and apply for top choral jobs available only through the association.

AMERICAN CHORAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

CHORAL PROFESSIONALS:

Keep Your Career on the Move

- LEVERAGE social connections by posting your resume or anonymous career profile that leads employers to you
- SEARCH and apply to hundreds of fresh jobs on the spot by using robust filters
- QUICKLY configure job alerts to deliver the latest jobs right to your inbox
- SEEK expert advice about your career issues
- RECEIVE a free evaluation of your resume

For questions or concerns, please contact the ACDA help desk at membership@acda.org.

ymcareers™ by communitybrands

ACDA.careerwebsite.com

PennState
College of Arts
and Architecture

The Fifth International Meeting of the

Symposium for Research in Choral Singing

In-person attendance is envisioned for North American participants, and the remote option is welcomed for those outside North America

April 30 - May 1, 2026

The Big 10 Conference Center
Chicago, Illinois

AMERICAN
CHORAL
DIRECTORS
ASSOCIATION

In Memoriam

Conan Castle (1927-2025)

Conan Castle passed away at St. Luke's Hospital in Lee's Summit, Missouri, on April 12, 2025. A graduate of Northwestern University, he served at the University of Central Missouri as director of choral activities from 1959 to 1989 and received the Byler Distinguished Faculty Award in 1986. The choral rehearsal room in the Utt Music Building was named the "Conan Castle Choral Room" in 2019. When asked to choose from various sites to be named for him, Dr. Castle chose the rehearsal room because that was where he "formed his music and his relationships." During his tenure, he was in charge of the summer music camps and produced many madrigal dinners. He and his wife left the Conan and Patricia Castle Vocal Music Scholarship as a legacy to future choral students. For many years, the two would travel to Wales each summer, where Dr. Castle served as a choral judge at the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod. Dr. Castle was very active in the American Choral Directors Association and encouraged all his choral students to participate in the Missouri ACDA Chapter. He served the *Choral Journal* as a review editor and wrote several articles: "The Motets of Johann Michael Bach" (June 1984), "ASIA CANTAT in Nagano: An Observation" (December 1984), and "Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod: An Adjudicator's View" (April 1989).

MAP MIDAMERICA PRODUCTIONS & MidAm International

THE REVIEWS ARE IN!

★★★★★

"It was a truly dazzling experience."

"Fabulous time!!"

"Very well organized!"

"Thank you MAP for the opportunity to conduct so many magnificent musicians in the premiere concert hall and for your support, professionalism, and kind words throughout the entire experience."

DON KRUDOP, GUEST CONDUCTOR

"Such a great experience for all!"

"The staff was very knowledgeable."

"Thanks for the unforgettable experience of performing again with MidAmerica Productions at Carnegie Hall. What a joy to work with you and your team of professionals... You have given us all a gift that we will cherish forever."

DAVID B. WEAVER, GUEST CONDUCTOR

"A highly-professional team of individuals!"

"It still feels surreal that I had the chance to perform at Carnegie Hall. It's wild, overwhelming and truly a dream come true. Thank you for believing in my small voice. I'm crying as I write this because it means so much to me. The singing I was once told would lead nowhere brought me to Carnegie Hall. That's something I'll carry with me forever."

STUDENT FROM THE PHILIPPINES, CHOIR PARTICIPANT

"Excellent organization!"

"I would repeat my experience with them in a heartbeat."

PERFORM WITH US!

2026 DATES AT CARNEGIE HALL

MARCH 14, 2026	APRIL 5, 2026	MAY 9, 2026	MAY 30, 2026	JUNE 21, 2026
MARCH 21, 2026	APRIL 19, 2026	MAY 24, 2026	JUNE 6, 2026	JUNE 28, 2026
APRIL 1, 2026	APRIL 26, 2026	MAY 25, 2026	JUNE 14, 2026	

212-239-0205 | contact@midamerica-music.com

www.midamerica-music.com

On the Voice

Matthew Hoch, editor <mrh0032@auburn.edu>

Group-Voice Pedagogy in the Choral Setting

by Amelia Rollings Bigler

Imagine a room where something remarkable happens—an energetic and engaging experience with the individualized attention of a one-to-one voice lesson and the collaborative spirit of a choral rehearsal. Singers engage in targeted, quick-paced, playful, and fun repetitions of exercises and short song cuts designed to help them achieve their individual vocal goals, but they do so together. They learn from each other and grow both as soloists and as members of an encouraging collective.

Group-voice classes uniquely focus on the individual while integrating group-pedagogical strategies that foster more effective learning and encourage social interaction and connection. This article examines the convergence of group-voice pedagogy and choral pedagogy. It offers practical strategies and resources for choral directors that aim to advance the vocal goals and development of each individual while reinforcing the cohesiveness and performance of the collective ensemble. Practitioners have emphasized the importance of integrating science-informed voice pedagogy and singing instruction inclusive of a wide range of genres into choral rehearsals and classrooms.[1] This article will explore different ways to accomplish these goals using a group-voice pedagogical approach that fosters increased vocal growth, artistic freedom, and overall fulfillment in the choral setting.

Overview

Group-voice pedagogy has seen a resurgence of interest in recent years with new initiatives, workshops, and resources. In 2022, the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) announced the Clifton Ware Group-Voice Pedagogy Award to support voice instruction in group settings.[2] At the 2024 NATS Conference in Knoxville, Tennessee, my colleagues and I led a premium workshop and a breakout panel on group-voice strategies for various settings and with singers at different ages and stages.[3] My own passion for group-voice teaching began after attending a workshop with Clayne Robison at Brigham Young University.[4] This transformative experience inspired further exploration of the topic throughout my graduate studies as I focused on how to integrate group-voice training into choral methods classes and with instrumental music education majors. Since that time, I have incorporated small and large group-voice curricula into my ac-

ademic applied voice studio and independent business and conducted mixed-methods, longitudinal research on student perceptions of a group-voice curriculum.[5] In 2023, I established the Center for Group-Voice Pedagogy and Research at Coastal Carolina University and launched our summer Group-Voice Pedagogy Intensive, which features a dedicated session on applying group-voice teaching principles in the choral setting.[6]

What Is Group-Voice Pedagogy?

Cynthia Vaughn, coauthor of the popular class-voice textbook, *The Singing Book*, describes group voice as "not exactly like private lessons" and "not exactly like choir. It's something different."[7] At its core, *group-voice pedagogy* refers to the study of the art, science, or practice of applied voice teaching in group settings.[8] Unlike a one-to-one voice lesson between one singer and one voice teacher, group-voice teaching involves paired, small, and large groups of singers working toward solo singing outcomes together in a shared environment. Group-voice classes can provide a supportive and collaborative atmosphere where individuals can develop functional, observational, and artistic singing and performance skills . . . *together.*

Group-voice instruction has had a long-standing presence in voice pedagogy, although historically, the content of these classes may have been more focused on music reading and ensemble singing.[9] Currently, practitioner-based articles and class-voice textbooks offer resources for group-voice study in various contexts.[10] While many might assume that voice classes only include avocational singers, beginning singers, or nonvoice majors, some authors have also discussed the inclusion of group training with voice majors in academic settings.[11] However, research specifically focused on group-voice pedagogy remains limited.

Why Group-Voice Pedagogy in the Choral Setting?

Among voice professionals, choral conductors deeply understand both the benefits and challenges of teaching and directing singing in groups. In fact, some might argue that choral pedagogy *is* group-voice pedagogy. While elements of these two fields can be effectively merged (which is the focus of this article), an important distinction remains. Traditional choral pedagogy emphasizes creating a unified collective sound with necessary attention given to aspects of blend and balance. Group-voice pedagogy prioritizes the solo voice outcomes of singers training together in groups. Choral directors may spend time on vocal exercises and developmental voice training; however, it can be challenging to hear and give feedback to individual voices when the entire group sings together, especially in larger ensembles. By integrating principles from group-voice pedagogy, choral directors may be able to more effectively balance attention on individual voices while also engaging the entire group in repetitions of functional voice exercises and repertoire tasks.

We know that the sound of an ensemble depends on much more than the sum of its parts. As James Daugherty states, singers will sing differently in an ensemble than they do as soloists due to the unique acoustical, perceptual, and sociological elements present when singing in a group.[12] We cannot, therefore, assume that an ensemble of excellent solo voices will automatically have an excellent choral sound.[13] And yet, we understand that each singer's overall voice function, mastery of their instrument, and ability to technically and stylistically adapt to genres they wish to perform (including various genres of ensemble music) can lead to dramatic differences in the overall timbre and artistic flexibility of the group. Most singers will not be able to gain these skills through one-to-one voice lessons. The vocal instruction they receive in choral ensembles may be the only formal voice training they ever experience. Integrating group-voice instruction into choral rehearsals and choral programs can be one way to ensure all singers have access to quality voice instruction.

Choral directing demands a deep understanding of both voice and choral pedagogy. Similarly, group-voice pedagogy requires specialized knowledge, skills, and training that can differ from one-to-one voice instruction and traditional choral methods. This article cannot comprehensively address all the facets of group-voice pedagogy or describe in words the dynamic and complex interactions between individuals in group-voice classes. However, the following concepts can serve as a

starting point for further exploration.

Getting Started: Key Ideas

Alternate between the Group and Individuals

In group-fitness or dance classes, instructors can easily observe, assess, and provide feedback; however, things become much more challenging in group-music classes. Alternating between one singer and the group in a dynamic, rhythmic, and repetitive way will allow you to hear and monitor individual singers and the entire group without disturbing the flow by stopping to focus on one person for too long. This method can be used when exploring technical voice concepts at the beginning of rehearsal (commonly called "warm-ups"), during repertoire work, and when teaching almost anything in a group setting.

Find the Flow

When introducing a new skill, give the entire group multiple repetitions of the concept before calling on an individual. Without stopping and while staying in the tempo and meter of the exercise pattern, choose an individual who appears confident in that particular exercise. Alternatively, you might ask for a volunteer, although this might require you to wait briefly. After the singer performs the repetition, pause and offer simple, specific, and related feedback based on the directives you gave the group. Without losing momentum, say, "Everyone and then (the name of the singer you called)" and cue the next repetition with the piano, which gives the individual and the entire group a chance to integrate the feedback.

On the next repetition, call on the same singer one more time to assess improvement. You can give a quick, "Yes, nice onset!," for example, as you move on to the next repetition with the group or stop momentarily to give additional feedback or the next direction. Continue alternating between the group and individuals in this paced and rhythmic manner. You will see that by the time you call on the fifth or sixth singer, many have integrated the feedback you explored with the first few singers, and you can continue to scale the concept. During technical voice work, do not be concerned about balance and blend. Instead, focus on the individual's voice development and command of the instrument as a solo singer.

By using this "popcorn" approach, singers tend to be more engaged, as they expect to be called on to demonstrate at any time. There can be many variations of this concept; however, the primary goal is to be able to hear, instruct, and assess individuals while they learn from each other and practice repetitions as a group. Once you feel that many of the singers have learned the concept, you can do a quick "lightning round" assessment where each singer performs one repetition down the row or around the circle without stopping.

Pass and "Phone a Friend"

Some singers may be nervous to sing alone in a choral setting. Always offer an option to pass or "phone a friend" to sing with them on the repetition (using a phone gesture and pointing to another group member). If a singer chooses to pass or phone a friend, simply go to the next repetition with the pair or back to the entire group without hesitation or stopping the rhythmic repetition of the exercises. Typically, individuals will grow more comfortable with singing solo in front of each other as time progresses, especially when encouraged in a playful and supportive atmosphere.

Guided Self-Assessment, Feedback, and Peer-Teaching

Rather than giving feedback, you can also ask guided self-assessment questions (e.g., "did you feel that repetition was more breathy or pressed?"). Individuals can respond verbally, or the entire ensemble can use their hands to indicate the answer (e.g., thumbs up/thumbs down, using fingers to rank 1 to 10). Depending on the overall cohesion of the group, you might also have another singer provide guided feedback or include a peer-teaching moment (e.g., "what did you notice about the closure on that repetition?" and "what could we add to the exercise to make it even more efficient?"). Asking specific, guided questions helps focus the responses and prevents open-ended answers that could unintentionally upset another singer, especially if they do not know each other well. These approaches can help monitor individual progress, encourage critical thinking, and assess higher-order skills.

Rehearsing Repertoire

You can utilize the previously mentioned ideas in repertoire by rehearsing an interval, series of pitches, one phrase, or a section on a loop. Alternate between individuals and the group with quick, simple, and scaled directives and feedback. You can also include short cuts (8–10 measures) of transposable repertoire from a variety of genres as a way to explore specific concepts (e.g., Rihanna's "Umbrella" for onsets or the Cranberries' "Zombie" for registration). You can vary your approach depending on the unique vocal and musical goals, the level of the singers, and the stage of the rehearsal process.

Foster Group Cohesion, Camaraderie, and Fun

Cohesion and camaraderie in group classes begin with effective leadership. From the beginning, members of the ensemble need to know that the director has the best interest of the individual and the group in mind throughout every step of the process. Make sure to spend a little time in each rehearsal on a group cohesion activity so that singers can connect with one another (e.g., sharing their singing goals, something exciting they did last weekend, or their earliest memory of singing). Incorporate games, breakout moments, and small-group assignments that promote bonding and collaboration, such as designing a voice exercise together, sharing a list of their favorite singers, or encouraging them to eat lunch together. Create a positive and energetic atmosphere by playing their favorite songs during the beginning of rehearsals, physical warmups, breaks, and any other group cohesion activities. Model supportive reactions when individuals sing and applaud bravery when they take risks. Demonstrate how to give feedback appropriately. Urge students to clap when they notice significant improvements and high five after completing focused sections of work. Once students become more comfortable in the group, they will be more willing to sing in front of each other and engage in shared learning experiences.

Utilize Practice Teams and Small Groups in the Ensemble

Set up a row of "VIP seats" in front of the group. Ask for one volunteer or assign an individual from each voice section to move to a VIP seat for part of the class or the entire rehearsal. You might even include fun sunglasses, hats, boas, or costume pieces they can wear! Having these singers directly in front of you allows you to hear and assess them more closely. You can assign different singers to these seats at various times in order to give everyone a chance. Alternate instruction and repetitions between individuals in the small group of VIP seats and the group as a whole.

You can also assign small groups of practice teams with 3–4 singers from one voice section or one singer from each voice section. Encourage them to create a team name, break off for activities during class, practice together, and check in with each other during the week. Since group cohesion tends to be stronger in smaller

groups, this strategy can help foster connection and collaboration.

Offer Group-Voice Lessons in Your Choral Program

Offering small or large group-voice lessons works well in various choral contexts, including religious, community, and educational settings. Some schools may already provide students with an opportunity to have one-to-one voice lessons during the school day with the choral director or other instructors; however, this model can pose challenges with scheduling and accommodating all interested students. It may also be exclusionary to those who cannot afford private instruction. As an alternative, offering small group-voice lessons (3–4 students) or a voice class (10–15 students) can be a more accessible option and allow students to receive more personalized voice instruction while also experiencing the educational and social benefits of learning in groups. Small group-voice lessons with students of similar voice types can be especially beneficial when preparing for competitions or festivals.

During these sessions, avoid master class format or having students observe. Instead, allow participants to sing most of the time as you alternate between individuals and the group. As Richard Rosewall described in 1984, "In class sessions we deal not with a set of miniature voice lessons given to individual students while others patiently watch, but a dynamic situation in which all persons present are participating all of the time."[14] Just like at the gym, watching others train will not be as productive——active participation drives progress.

Future Directions

In his 2016 call to reclaim group-voice instruction in music education, Patrick Freer emphasized the importance of educative singing that can "transfer across vocal platforms, genres, and activities."[15] Freer commented, "We encounter problems when we focus on the performance of choral music without emphasizing the underlying need to nurture the singing skills of all students."[16] Incorporating group-voice pedagogy into the choral setting can greatly improve both individual and ensemble vocal outcomes for *all* students. Imagine the impact when each singer can vocally express themselves more immediately, efficiently, and most of all, artistically.

As William Sauerland pointed out, however, voice professionals need "training that is specific to group voice class instruction."[17] Impactful group-voice teaching requires additional knowledge and skills beyond those typically found in one-to-one voice pedagogy and choral pedagogy. Simply applying one-to-one methods with multiple singers or having the whole ensemble sing together for the entire rehearsal may not be the most efficient or effective approach when incorporating technical voice training with choirs.

University voice pedagogy courses may primarily focus on one-to-one voice instruction. Furthermore, some choral directors might not be required to take a class fully dedicated to voice pedagogy or the course(s) required may not offer in-depth coverage of group-voice pedagogy.[18] For example, in the current NATS science-informed voice pedagogy resources, the proposed one-semester voice pedagogy syllabus includes a course outcome that students should be able to "teach voice lessons in one-on-one and/or group settings."[19] However, due to limited time and all of the important topics that must be covered, the proposed course schedule only dedicates one class to a practicum focused on group-voice teaching.[20]

Based on our knowledge of the current and variable state of this type of training in college and university programs, it is possible that some readers may not have fully experienced group-voice teaching as described in the context of this article. For those seeking more information and professional development opportunities related to group-voice pedagogy, I encourage you to explore the resources referenced in this article and consider joining the NATS Group-Voice Pedagogy Affinity Group.[21] Examine how this approach, including the practical steps detailed in this article, might inform your own professional practice.

Conclusion

Integrating group-voice strategies can enhance singing instruction in the choral setting by effectively balancing both individual and ensemble vocal outcomes. As we continue to explore the intersections of voice, choral, and group-voice pedagogies, sharing insights and in-

novations from our varied professional experiences will further strengthen our ability to nurture and inspire the voices in our studios, classrooms, and ensembles. CJ

Amelia Rollings Bigler is associate professor of music (voice and voice pedagogy) at Coastal Carolina University. In 2022, she was recognized by the National Association of Teachers of Singing as the inaugural recipient of the Clifton Ware Group-Voice Pedagogy Award.

NOTES

[1] Patrick K. Freer, "Reclaiming Group Vocal Instruction," *Canadian Music Educator* 57, no. 2 (2016): 42–47; David Harris, "Seven Essential Voice Science Tools for Choral Singing," *Choral Journal* 59, no. 8 (2019): 47–58; and Brandon A. Magid, "Beyond Bel Canto: Applications of Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) Voice Pedagogy in the Secondary Choral Classroom," *Music Educators Journal* 110, no. 2 (2023): 54–58.

[2] "Clifton Ware Establishes Group-Voice Pedagogy Grants," National Association of Teachers of Singing, January 18, 2022, https://www.nats.org/cgi/page.cgi/_article.html/What_s_New/Clifton_Ware_establishes_Group-Voice_Pedagogy_Grants; and "Clifton Ware Group-Voice Pedagogy Award," National Association of Teachers of Singing, accessed September 15, 2024, https://www.nats.org/Clifton_Ware_Group-Voice_Pedagogy_Award.html.

[3] Amelia Rollings Bigler, Dana Lentini, Craig Philip Price, and Cynthia Vaughn, "Better Together: Pedagogical Strategies for Group-Voice Instructors in Academic, Community, and Independent Settings" (premium workshop, 58th National Conference of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, Knoxville, TN, June 28, 2024); and Cynthia Vaughn, Dana Lentini, Craig Philip Price, Ayumi Nakamae, and Amelia Rollings Bigler, "Better Together: Exploring Group-Voice for All Ages and Stages," (breakout presentation, 58th National Conference of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, Knoxville, TN, June 30, 2024). Recordings of these sessions may be available on the NATS Live Learning Center, see https://nats.sclivelearningcenter.com/MVSite/Default.aspx.

[4] For more information on Clayne Robison and his group-voice teaching approach, see "Vocal Beauty Boot Camp," accessed September 15, 2024, https://www.beautifulsinging.com/book/ch11.php; and "10-Fold Teacher Efficiency Through Vocal Boot Camp," accessed September 15, 2024, https://beautifulsinging.com/singing/.

[5] Amelia Rollings Bigler, "The Effects of Small and Large Group-Voice Instruction on University Student Perceptions: A Longitudinal, Mixed-Methods Study" (podium presentation, 52nd Annual Symposium: Care of the Professional Voice, Philadelphia, PA, June 4, 2023); and Amelia Rollings Bigler and Katherine Osborne, "Small and Large Group-Voice Instruction Strategies in a University Setting: A Collective Case Study" (podium presentation, 10th International Congress of Voice Teachers Symposium, Vienna, Austria, August 4, 2022).

[6] To learn more about the Center and the Summer Group-Voice Pedagogy Intensive, see "The Center for Group-Voice Pedagogy and Research," *Coastal Carolina University*, accessed September 15, 2024, https://www.coastal.edu/humanities/centersandinitiatives/thecenterforgroupvoicepedagogyandresearch/; and "CCU's New Center for Group-Voice Pedagogy and Research to Hold Summer Program for Teachers," *Coastal Carolina University*, April 14, 2023, https://www.coastal.edu/ccustories/news/news-article/index.php?id=5549.

[7] Lisa Sain Odom, "Teaching Group Voice Lessons," CS Music, July 1, 2023, https://www.csmusic.net/content/articles/teaching-group-voice-lessons/.

[8] Merriam-Webster defines pedagogy as "the art, science, or profession of teaching." See Merriam-Webster, "pedagogy," accessed September 15, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pedagogy. The Oxford English Dictionary defines pedagogy as "the art, occupation, or practice of teaching." See Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "pedagogy (n.), sense 3," accessed September 29, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1029842480.

[9] Richard Rosewall, "Voice Class: Approach for the Eighties," *NATS Bulletin* 40, no. 3 (March/April 1984): 34–37.

[10] For example, see Cynthia Vaughn and Meribeth Dayme, *The Singing Book*, 4th ed., ed. Matthew Hoch (Rowman & Littlefield, 2024); Clifton Ware, *Adventures in Singing: A Process for Exploring, Discovering, and Developing Vocal Po-*

tential (McGraw-Hill, 2006); Katharin Rundus, *Cantabile Voice Class: A Manual about Beautiful, Lyrical Singing for Voice Classes and Choral Singers* (Pavane Publishing, 2013); Brenda Smith and Ronald Burrichter, *Class Voice: Fundamental Skills for Lifelong Singing* (Plural Publishing, 2022); Nikki Loney, *Full Voice Teacher Guide: Private and Small Group Voice Lessons for Singers 5 to 12 Years Old* (Full Voice Music, 2018), 56–75; Barbara Doscher, "The Beginning Voice Class," *NATS Bulletin* 32, no. 1 (October 1975), 31–33, 45; William Sauerland, "Voice Class: A Learner-Centered Approach," *Journal of Singing* 74, no. 5 (May/June 2018), 527–32; Sangeetha Rayapati, "Teaching Reaches Out: Class Voice and the Aging Singer," *Journal of Singing* 64, no. 5 (May/June 2008), 543–50; Anthony L. Barresi and Harriet Simons, "Voice Classes Won't Work in My School! (Really?)" *Music Educators Journal* 56, no. 1 (1969): 80–85; and Richard Rosewall, "Voice Class: Approach for the Eighties," *NATS Bulletin* 40, no. 3 (March/April 1984): 34–37.

[11] Katharine DeBoer, "Smart Strategies for Small Departments: Class Voice for Freshman Voice Majors," *Journal of Singing* 68, no. 3 (2021), 273–77; Robert B. Holden, "A New Model for Training the Collegiate Voice Student," *Journal of Singing* 58, no 4 (2002): 299–303; Robison, "Vocal Beauty Boot Camp" and "10-Fold Teacher Efficiency Through Vocal Boot Camp"; Amelia Rollings Bigler, "The Effects of Small and Large Group-Voice Instruction on University Student Perceptions"; and Amelia Rollings Bigler and Katherine Osborne, "Small and Large Group-Voice Instruction Strategies in a University Setting."

[12] James F. Daugherty, "Rethinking How Voices Work In a Choral Ensemble," *Choral Journal* 42, no. 5 (2001): 69–75.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Richard Rosewall, "Voice Class," 35.

[15] Patrick K. Freer, "Reclaiming Group Vocal Instruction," 46.

[16] Ibid., 42.

[17] William Sauerland, "Voice Class: A Learner-Centered Approach," *Journal of Singing* 74, no. 5 (2018), 531.

[18] Joshua Chism, "An Examination of Undergraduate Vocal Pedagogy Courses for Preservice Choral Music Educators" (paper presentation, 2020 ACDA Symposium on Research in Choral Singing, Atlanta, GA, May 1–2, 2020). This session has been archived via the following YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rp-EDXN-0hU; Melissa L. Grady and Melissa C. Brunkan, "Teaching What We Were Taught: A Survey of Choral Music Educators on Vocal Health, Anatomy, and Pedagogy," *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* 10, (2022), 136–62.

[19] "NATS Pedagogy Working Group I: Undergraduate Syllabus 1 of 1 ('One Course Wonder')," National Association of Teachers of Singing, accessed September 17, 2024, https://www.nats.org/_Library/Science_Informed_Voice_Pedagogy_Resource/Voice_Pedagogy_Syllabus_for_a_One-Course_Curriculum.pdf.

[20] "1 Semester Course Day-By-Day Plan," National Association of Teachers of Singing, accessed September 17, 2024, https://www.nats.org/_Library/Science_Informed_Voice_Pedagogy_Resource/Voice_Pedagogy_Syllabus_for_a_One-Course_Curriculum.pdf. The suggested two-semester syllabus includes one class on group-voice methods and two weeks of group-voice teaching practicum; however, 70 percent of teachers reported that their university only offered one-semester of voice pedagogy at the undergraduate level. See "Executive Summary: NATS Survey on Pedagogy Instruction, Fall 2021," National Association of Teachers of Singing, accessed June 11, 2025, https://www.nats.org/_Library/Science_Informed_Voice_Pedagogy_Resource/NATS_Voice_Pedagogy_Survey_Results.pdf; "NATS Pedagogy Working Group 1: Undergraduate Syllabus 1 of 2," National Association of Teachers of Singing, accessed June 11, 2025, https://www.nats.org/_Library/Science_Informed_Voice_Pedagogy_Resource/Voice_Pedagogy_Syllabus_for_a_Two-Course_Curriculum-First_Semester.pdf; "NATS Pedagogy Working Group 1: Undergraduate Syllabus 2 of 2," National Association of Teachers of Singing, accessed June 11, 2025, https://www.nats.org/_Library/Science_Informed_Voice_Pedagogy_Resource/Voice_Pedagogy_Syllabus_for_a_Two-Course_Curriculum-Second_Semester_practicum_.pdf.

[21] For more information about the NATS Group-Voice Pedagogy Affinity Group, see https://www.nats.org/affinitygroups.html.

In Memoriam

Donald Oglesby (1947-2025)

Dr. Donald Oglesby, a professor emeritus of the Frost School of Music and a pillar of its choral program for almost forty years, passed away on April 19 at the age of 77. Oglesby was deeply devoted to music education and music in the community. He joined the Frost School's choral faculty in 1977. That same year, Donald formed the Miami Collegium Musicum, a hybrid collegiate and community choir, leading it in performances at popular Madrigal Dinners (later Holiday Dinners) during the Christmas season. In 1984 it became the choir for the Miami Bach Society, where Oglesby, a passionate expert in Baroque and early music, was artistic director and conductor for many years, leading it in popular performances around South Florida and on tour internationally. He was also director of choral music at the historic Plymouth Congregational Church in Coconut Grove and taught for many years at a choral summer camp run by the Frost School.

Donald held a bachelor's of music from Birmingham-Southern College, a master's in musicology from the University of Illinois, and a doctor of music degree with distinction from Indiana University, where he concentrated on choral conducting. Oglesby served as president of the Florida chapter of the American Choral Directors Association. He was on ACDA's Research and Publications Committee and the Editorial Board of the *Choral Journal*.

Although he retired from the Frost School in 2016, he never stopped learning and being involved in music. He frequently attended concerts at the Frost School. He took cello lessons. He championed the importance of music in education, advocating for funding the arts in public schools. "He would argue that you need music to have the most complete and successful education," his son Thomas said.

Oglesby wrote several books on the Bach cantatas, including a guide to the scores for conducting students. He took part in the annual choral workshops led by Robert Shaw at Carnegie Hall and the chorus at the Oregon Bach Festival under Helmuth Rilling.

Repertoire & Resources

National Coordinator

Gretchen Harrison
National R&R Chairperson
nationalrr@acda.org

ACDA Repertoire and Resources: Who We Are, What We Do, and How You Can Become Involved

"Graduation song ideas? SATB. Thanks for sharing!"

"How can I start a Contemporary A Cappella group in my school?"

"Looking for call-and-response or other choir music from South Africa."

"I'm looking to expand my development/new to choir rep. Share some of your favorites!"

"My orchestra colleague and I want to make a habit of collaboration. Does anyone have good ideas on how to find music for high school choir and orchestra (strings only) to do together?"

These are just a sampling of the many questions related to Repertoire and Resources that are asked on Facebook group pages on a daily basis. If you want answers to similar questions or get excited when discussion centers around repertoire and resources, then the R&R area of ACDA is for you! ACDA has R&R leaders in national, regional, and state positions throughout a variety of age groups and ensemble types—from children's choirs to 4-year college & university singers and everything in between. Each state and region may have different positions based on area-specific needs and interests. Find a list of current R&R national chairs online at acda.org/about-us/acda-leadership. This column will address what leadership in the Repertoire and Resources looks like, how you can get involved, and end with resource suggestions.

Chairperson vs Coordinator: What's the Difference?

At the national level, there are four R&R coordinators with multiple chairs under that area. The chairperson supports ACDA constituents though one specific area, while the coordinator supports the chairs. For example, I am the repertoire specific coordinator, and I support specific chairs for areas of contemporary/commercial, world musics and cultures, tenor-bass choirs, soprano-alto choirs, and vocal jazz. Again, you can view all national chairs online at the ACDA website under "About" and "ACDA Leadership."

In another example, the national R&R chairperson for junior high/middle school is tasked with creating reading session content for in-person and virtual events. The coordinator over that area (in this case, the youth choirs coordinators) assists the chair, if requested, in these tasks. The coordinators have several chairs under their guidance and need to be attuned to all. In

smaller states, it is not uncommon for a coordinator to serve, in essence, as the chairperson for several of their areas. As previously mentioned, each state and region may have different positions based on need.

ACDA leaders do not serve in isolation. We work in an environment of vast interconnectedness. Every regional chair should know who their state R&R colleagues are, and every national chair should know who their regional and state colleagues are. If you are curious who your local leaders are, visit your state or region website or reach out to the state/region president for clarification. It is a strong hope that each chairperson locates their like-tasked chairs and coordinators for collaboration.

Project 360

In previous years of ACDA work, all efforts were focused upon creating an amazing conference experience—mountaintop moments, as they are. However, considering that only about 28% of our ACDA membership attends conferences, it is imperative that we develop programming and collaborative opportunities for the other 72% of dues-paying members. We call this Project 360. One example of a Project 360 initiative is our quick-pick rep lists. National R&R lists are available at https://acda.org/repertoire. Other ACDA regions and states include repertoire listings on their websites and in newsletters. If you are not signed up for your region or state newsletter, what are you waiting for? Another way to get involved is by joining your state or region ACDA Facebook group. Members of those groups often share questions, resources, and offer repertoire suggestions from leaders, and it's a great tool for networking and connecting with others in your area.

Interested in R&R Leadership?

Are you interested in becoming an R&R chair? The best way to become a leader is to be a leader. Harness your passion for repertoire to your district, state and region chapters. Look for service opportunities that match your leadership style. Practice excellent communication skills, embrace problem solving and trouble-shooting as a way of life. Let established leaders in your area know that you are interested in growing your leadership skills and offer to "intern" or "apprentice" under their guidance. Submit presentation ideas focusing on the areas about which you are passionate.

Above all, build your skills and leadership reputation upon integrity. Keep promises and appointments. Do a little more than you think you can. Engage others to join you in your pursuit of excellence. Be bold in applying for R&R positions. Know that it's very unlikely to be tapped for national leadership positions without having first served on the state or region layers, but don't be dissuaded. If you aren't appointed the first time around, identify the areas for improvement and pour your passion into growing and learning so that the "no" can turn into a "yes" the next time you apply.

Repertoire Support

We equip members to search, not only ask. The task of an R&R leader is to assist members with repertoire search/selection and resource identification. We are teaching our field to fish rather than to simply be fed. With that, here is a short list of some newer-to-me search locations for interesting, off-the-beaten-path choral music:

• MUZIKSEA – The first fully digital choral music publisher and distributor from Southeast Asia.
https://www.muziksea.com/

• Dozan World – Sheet music library from the Middle East.
https://dozanworld.com/collections/human-voices

• African Composers Edition – African Sheet Music
https://african-composers-edition.co.za/

• The Institute for Composer Diversity – Works of composers from historically excluded groups
https://www.composerdiversity.com/choral-database

• Rowan University – Music Sources for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
https://libguides.rowan.edu/musicdei/repertoire

• African Diaspora Music Project
https://africandiasporamusicproject.org/search-pieces

• Song Helix – A Database for Art Song Research and Discovery
https://www.songhelix.com/

I am so honored to work with one of the most creative, talented, diligent and passionate choral experts on the national R&R team. I cannot express my gratitude adequately. Below is the link to their combined genius in the form of the post-conference reading sessions produced by the national chairs.

https://acda.org/archives/events/2025-national-rr-virtual-reading-sessions

Please reach out to me or any of the national/region/state chairs with questions. Also, follow our Facebook Page "ACDA Collective: A Gathering Place for Repertoire and Resources," or any of the other Facebook pages or groups related to R&R. Enjoy the empowerment. Your search for repertoire, position, and purpose is just beginning!

Repertoire & Resources in the Archives

National Repertoire & Resources Chairs contribute content to *Choral Journal* on a rotating basis.

May 2025

"Building Resilience: Sustainability Considerations for Nonprofit Music Organizations" by Jack A. Cleghorn, Lifelong Choirs Coordinator

"Choral Connections: Building Community Among Conductors" by Matt Hill, Community Choirs Chair

Contemporary A Cappella

Robert Dietz
National R&R Co-Chair
Contemporary/Commercial
(Contemporary A Cappella)
rdietz55@gmail.com

How to Choose Repertoire for Contemporary A Cappella

by Robert Dietz

You're a director who has just started a new contemporary a cappella group as part of your program (congrats!). You've auditioned your singers, you've gone through lists of musical puns to choose your group's name, and your first rehearsal is quickly approaching. At this point you may be asking yourself: "Wait …what are we actually going to sing?"

It's a simple question, yet the answer can be surprisingly complex when it comes to selecting repertoire for a pop a cappella group. Which songs you choose, how you choose them, and where you look for your arrangements can have a big impact on your group's identity and eventual success. In this article, we will look at each part of the selection process and discuss some of the best practices for picking repertoire for your group.

What Songs Should I Choose?

One of the hallmarks of contemporary a cappella is covering popular songs that your audience will recognize. Twenty years ago, that often meant "whatever pop arrangements we can get our hands on." Arrange-

ment scarcity in the early days of a cappella led to some truly odd and eclectic set lists (my high school group performed songs by artists as varied as Stevie Wonder, Eric Clapton, and They Might Be Giants). Thankfully, contemporary a cappella arrangements are much easier to find these days.

Now that we're free to be more strategic about our song choices, how can we give our repertoire search some direction? Here are some important factors to consider:

1) Popularity: Does the group like the song? Will your audience recognize the song?

2) Achievability: Does the song lend itself well to the group's strengths (or can it be arranged so that it does)? Do you have a soloist that can carry the song?

3) Identity: Does the song fit the group's vibe? Does it fit in well with the other songs you are considering?

Sometimes answering these questions may lead you as the director to simply choose the songs yourself. However, the process can be more collaborative.

How Should I Choose Songs?

Some groups find success by employing more democratic methods of song selection. In order to assess popularity, it can be effective to simply ask your group what they want to do. This may seem like an obvious approach, but the trick is in designing a process that allows for group feedback without hurt feelings (if members feel they are being ignored) or a deluge of suggestions (if there is a lack of structure to how ideas are shared).

Consider a song vote method where group members are allowed a certain number of song submissions (perhaps three songs per member). Members are given a due date to submit their ideas, after which time all of the ideas are aggregated into a playlist. Members then have a certain amount of time to listen and vote on their favorites (this can be purely top choice, or allow for a few top choices—say, a top three). The director can then view the results of the vote and see which songs the group feels most passionate about. This system helps everyone feel heard and gives a clear structure to the process.

While a director may choose to go with the popular vote, consider the benefits of the "benevolent dictator" approach, where the director makes the final call based on the top vote winners. This allows for the director to take the group's desires into account while still injecting their own expertise into the proceedings.

To assess achievability, consider a song pitch method, where members are tasked with finding songs that they want to sing (perhaps based on the results of a song vote), and performing those songs for the group and/or the director. This approach lets you see clearly whether you have soloists capable of executing the songs you are considering. It also allows individuals to bring their own personal style to the song, which may be valuable information for an arranger if you are hiring someone to do custom work. Once you have your songs decided, it's time to move to the final phase: finding arrangements.

Where Do I Get My Arrangements?

If you are a new group, I recommend starting your journey with stock arrangements (meaning non-custom arrangements). Custom arrangements are more expensive, and it's best to save that investment for when your group's sound and style are more established. The process of performing stock charts will also help you discover which arrangers you like best, and thus, who you might want to hire for custom work.

While major publishers do have more contemporary a cappella material than they used to, if you want to find the most current popular songs, you've got to look for indie published arrangers! Your first stop should be Sheet Music Plus or Sheet Music Direct to find charts that have been uploaded by arrangers using Hal Leonard's ArrangeMe website. ArrangeMe is a burgeoning site that has pre-cleared the rights to millions of popular songs and allows arrangers to make their work available within days. It's also a great way to publish any arrangements that you do for your own group!

The catch when it comes to sheet music sites is that they can be difficult to navigate. So, how can you find what you're looking for? Find arrangers you like and search them by name! I maintain this document of

contemporary a cappella arrangers, which is a useful place to start looking for names.

Consider some keywords to help narrow your search, such as: "A cappella," "contemporary a cappella," or "pop a cappella" + [Song Title] or [Artist]. You need the song title/artists, as any of those terms alone will give you way too many results to sort through.

In addition, you can use filters to help narrow your search: try "pop" under Genre and "school and community" under Usages.

Conclusion

Selecting repertoire for a pop a cappella group can feel overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. Hopefully you now feel more confident in knowing which songs to choose and how to choose them. Using all these tools together will help you find great, current arrangements for your group that both they and your audience will love!

Tenor-Bass Choirs

Dustin S. Cates
National Chair, Tenor-Bass Choirs
cates.dustin@gmail.com

Teaching and Leading with TLC: An Interview with Dr. Tim Seelig

by Dustin S. Cates

Dr. Tim Seelig is internationally recognized for his contributions to choral music and LGBTQ+ advocacy through the arts. He is conductor laureate of the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus and conductor emeritus of the Turtle Creek Chorale in Dallas, Texas. Dr. Seelig is a frequent guest conductor for honor choirs across the country, and his own ensembles have also performed at state, regional, and national ACDA conferences.

As a champion of new music, Seelig has commissioned numerous new works, including the first AIDS Requiem, *When We No Longer Touch* by Kristopher John Anthony, *Testimony* by Stephen Schwartz, and *I Am Harvey Milk* by Andrew Lippa. In addition to his work on the podium, he is a respected author and educator. His publications, *The Perfect Blend* and *The Perfect Rehearsal*, are widely used practical resources in choral methods and choral pedagogy, and his 2020 autobiographical memoir, *Tale of Two Tims: Big Ol' Baptist, Big Ol' Gay,* offers a personal reflection on his life and career. His work has also been featured in award-winning documentaries, including the Emmy-winning, *After Goodbye: An AIDS Story* and *Gay Chorus Deep South,* which premiered at the prestigious Tribeca Film Festival.

Over a career spanning more than three decades, Dr. Seelig has conducted a broad range of ensembles. However, the bulk of his work has been teaching and leading tenor-bass choirs, particularly gay men's choruses, within the context of the broader LGBTQ+ choral movement.

As a result of his vast experience and success working with tenor-bass voices, I invited Dr. Seelig to present at our Repertoire and Resources Tenor-Bass Forum at the 2025 ACDA National Conference in Dallas, Texas. The forum, titled "Programming Tenor-Bass Choirs with TLC," offered insights into repertoire selection, rehearsal strategies, and his signature approach emphasizing tears, laughs, and chill bumps. Following the forum, I had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Seelig in greater depth about his teaching philosophies, his work with tenor-bass choirs, and the lessons he has drawn from a remarkable career in choral music.

A Philosophy Rooted in Respect

Tim Seelig's approach to teaching is rooted in his background as a professional opera singer and voice teacher. His transition from the studio and stage to the conductor's podium was not only a career shift but also an evolution. "I didn't know any better than to think

that choirs also warmed up and used the same technique as I had used in the voice studio," Seelig recalls. This foundational belief in vocal technique shaped the sound of the Turtle Creek Chorale and became a hallmark of his choral leadership.

He admits that the early years of his conducting career were marked by trial and error. "I learned choral technique by the seat of my pants. I knew vocal technique very well. I knew conducting pretty well. But I didn't know how to communicate that as a conductor." Over time, he developed a practical and accessible approach that was tailored to his volunteer, community-based ensemble. "It was a matter of just communicating as quickly and as easily as I could—a lot with gestures and a lot with modeling."

This pragmatic and practically applicable approach ultimately led to his widely used book, *The Perfect Blend,* which originated from a suggestion by composer and friend Greg Gilpin. "He said, 'Just write down what you're doing,'" Seelig recalls. The result was a resource that leveraged years of trial and error into a clear, relatable and often humorous guide for conductor-teachers. At the heart of Seelig's philosophy is a deep respect for the music, the singers, and their time: "There's only one answer to a great rehearsal, and that's preparation. To not plan a rehearsal within an inch of its life is disrespecting your singers and their time."

Repertoire that Resonates

For Dr. Seelig, programming is a deeply creative and meaningful task. "Choosing repertoire is both the most challenging and most fun thing any of us does," he explains. His approach is guided by intentionality and emotional resonance, using what he calls the "TLC" model: tears, laughs, and chill bumps.

Seelig draws a distinction between programmers who build concerts piece by piece, and "top-down" thinkers who begin with a thematic vision. "I'm more of the top-down. I want to do a concert on butterflies. I can feel it. I can hear the applause. I don't know any songs about butterflies, but I know it's going to happen," he says to illustrate his point. For him, this imaginative approach has led to concerts that are musically compelling but also emotionally and socially impactful.

His commitment to thematic programming is influenced by his experience with GALA Choruses, a network of over 200 LGBTQ+-centered choral ensembles from around the world. Seelig believes that GALA Choruses have influenced broader choral practices. "When I came out and we were planning concerts that were themed, other people had no idea what in the world that was," he recalls. "We taught by example. People started looking over the fence at the success of gay and lesbian choruses and wondering how we were filling our audiences. Now, non-GALA choruses are using thematic programming and 'choral theatre' more than they ever did."

Seelig is also an advocate for expanding tenor-bass repertoire. "The repertoire was sad at best," he says of his early career. "We had not begun writing for ourselves." Since then, he has commissioned numerous works and continues to push publishers to release more tenor-bass repertoire. "Publishers still say the market is not big enough. But in today's age, you can publish digitally with no money."

Among his favorite pieces are those that reflect his TLC philosophy. For laughter, he recommends Jonathan Wilcox's *Musical Risotto* and Eric Lane Barnes's *Landscapes*. For tears, he cites Stephen Schwartz's *Testimony*, a powerful work that has become a staple in LGBTQ+ choral literature. And for chill bumps, he points to pieces like Morten Lauridsen's *O Magnum Mysterium* and Jacob Collier's arrangement of *Bridge Over Troubled Water*. Ultimately, for Seelig, programming is about the connection between the music and mission and performers and audience. "Music is not the end. It's a means to the end. And that end is to touch every possible emotion in a concert—maybe a couple of times."

Working with Tenor-Bass Choirs

Seelig's work with tenor-bass choirs includes a blend of vocal pedagogy, ensemble psychology, and an understanding of the opportunities and challenges these choirs present. He emphasizes the importance of building the sound from the bottom up. "It's always built on a pyramid. I love a good choir with 21 first tenors, 30 second tenors, and 50 basses," he jokes.

This approach is especially important in tenor-bass

choirs, where tuning can be a challenge because of the close harmonic structure. "We can shake the walls with sound as opposed to peel the paint," he quips. While acknowledging the distinct qualities of tenor-bass choruses, he maintains that the fundamental techniques for good singing are universal. "I don't think there's anything particularly unique about one choir to another. The key is listening." He also advocates for clear communication, efficient rehearsal pacing, and a strong emphasis on outer voice tuning.

Music and Mission

Dr. Tim Seelig's legacy in choral music is inseparable from his lifelong commitment to advocacy, particularly through the lens of LGBTQ+ visibility, inclusion, and empowerment in the arts. His work has consistently embodied what he describes as the "twins of music and mission … I've tried to feed them both every single day," he says. For Seelig, a choir is not just a group of people singing together, it is a vehicle for social change.

Since retiring from the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus in 2022, Seelig moved to Portland, Oregon. Aside from the occasional honor choir, guest lecture and a TedxTalk (available on YouTube), he has been enjoying his retirement and spending lots of time volunteering at the Oregon Humane Society. In the fall of 2024 he came out of retirement to found the Portland Sage Singers, a community-based choral ensemble for older LGBTQ+ singers. "Who starts a choir when they're seventy-four?" he jokes. The group's motto—"singing for the rest of our lives"—was gifted to the ensemble by activist and songwriter Holly Near, who wrote the LGBTQ+ social justice anthem, "Singing for Our Lives."

As Seelig reflects on his career, he returns to this truth: "Lives are changed in rehearsal, not performance." This belief underscores his commitment to preparation, presence, and purpose. Whether conducting a world premiere, mentoring an emerging conductor, or building a new ensemble from the ground up, Seelig remains focused on creating meaningful human connection through music. "I try to make sure that every single person I meet feels full and whole just the way they are."

His legacy, however, is not measured in accolades or performance, but in impact. "At the end of the day, it's the same for all of us who are music educators or conductors. I'm most proud of the people whose lives have been changed."

World Musics and Cultures

Madlen Batchvarova
National Chair, World Musics and Cultures
batchvarova@hanover.edu

Bridging Centuries, Crossing Borders: An Introduction to Dutch Choral Music

by Michel Hogenes and Madlen Batchvarova

From Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck's polyphonic masterworks to Calliope Tsoupaki's avant-garde vocal landscapes, Dutch choral music exhibits a remarkable convergence of tradition, experiment, and cultural expression. Because of its rich historical heritage and constant sensitivity to modern artistic trends, the Netherlands is frequently referred to as a Korenland,[1] literally "a choir country." This article offers a brief synopsis of the Dutch choral tradition, examining its historical roots, variety of repertory, and distinct sociocultural character. By doing this, we intend to offer information that will be helpful to choral conductors and educators worldwide, but especially in the United States of America.

A Nation of Choirs

The Netherlands boasts one of the highest per capita densities of choirs in the world. The term *Nederland Korenland* reflects a strong national self-image: that of a singing society in which amateur and professional

choirs alike flourish. The spectrum is broad, encompassing classical chamber choirs, church and community choirs, shanty choirs, gospel ensembles, and innovative contemporary vocal groups. This high level of civic participation in choral singing makes it a cornerstone of Dutch cultural life.[2]

Crucially, this participation transcends demographic boundaries. Though recent shifts, such as an ageing membership base, pose challenges for the amateur choral sector, the foundational infrastructure remains strong. More than half of Dutch choirs say that the majority of their members are over the age of fifty, according to the 2024 VerenigingsMonitor.[3] There is less youth involvement, particularly in contrast to the United States, where school and religious choirs offer young singers strong platforms. Nonetheless, the Dutch model demonstrates the possibility of a choral culture that transcends institutional boundaries and lasts a lifetime.

The Professional Sector

In addition to this strong amateur history, the Netherlands is home to several professionally recognized choirs that enjoy international recognition. The Laurens Collegium, Cappella Amsterdam, and the Netherlands Chamber Choir are known for their innovative programming, technical mastery, and dedication to old and new music. These ensembles often collaborate with renowned composers and multidisciplinary artists, which shows that the choral art is very much alive.[4]

Dutch conductors such as Peter Dijkstra, Jos van Veldhoven, and the late Reinbert de Leeuw have become known throughout the world for their creative interpretations and historically informed performance techniques.[5] In addition to influencing Dutch choral music, their work has had a lasting impact on how people around the world view both old and contemporary music.

Tradition as Cultural Heritage: The Renaissance

The Netherlands has a long history of being a center of musical creativity since the Renaissance era. Choral Franco-Netherlandish tradition in the region was developed by master composers such as Josquin des Prez, Orlando di Lasso, and Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck. Their polyphonic masses, motets and psalm settings are marked by innovative counterpoint and emotional depth on par with their Italian and German contemporaries. The influence of those composers was not restricted to the Low Countries but also left a mark on German Baroque composers.[6]

Dutch choral music is an excellent example for their ability to create world music that, despite being deeply rooted in regional culture, progressed to achieve worldwide recognition, influencing and eventually being adapted by various choral traditions through time and distance. This is a good example of how local innovation interacts with international culture.

Tradition as Cultural Heritage: The Bach Passion Phenomenon

One of the most distinctive elements of Dutch choral life is its enduring devotion to the Passions of J. S. Bach, particularly the *Matthäus-Passion* and *Johannes-Passion*. Nowhere in the world are these works performed more frequently or more diversely than in the Netherlands. Audiences all over the country attend hundreds of Passion performances every year in the weeks leading up to Easter, which range from elaborate professional concerts to locally inspired amateur versions.[7]

The degree to which these Passions have evolved from merely liturgical observances to cultural events makes the Dutch approach unique. The *Matthäus-Passion*, in particular, is considered a national cultural monument by many. Ensembles such as the Netherlands Bach Society (notably at the Grote Kerk in Naarden) have set the benchmark for scholarly rigour and expressive depth, often combining historically informed instrumentation with modern dramaturgical elements. Some modern Dutch choirs even perform these Passions in multimedia or semi-theatrical settings, adding further levels of interpretation while still honoring the original work. The Dutch Passion tradition serves as an example of how to recontextualize historical material for contemporary audiences at a time when classical concert audiences are dwindling in many regions of the world.

Repertoire Diversity and Contemporary Innovation

The music of Sweelinck is one of the most notable examples of the Netherlands' lasting contributions to Renaissance and Baroque choral traditions, but its choral repertory also exhibits a vibrant modernism. A wide range of composers from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have created choral works that are distinguished by their daring artistic exploration and cross-cultural interaction.

Rudolph Escher, Ton de Leeuw, and Calliope Tsoupaki are three especially noteworthy authors published by Donemus, the top publisher of contemporary music in the Netherlands.[8] The reflective poetry of Escher's music is influenced by Impressionism and French Symbolism. His 1953 composition, *Le vrai visage de la paix*, combines contemporary harmonic language with transparent textures to set a pacifist poem by Paul Éluard. His works require delicacy and accuracy, providing choirs with chances to experiment with sophisticated expressiveness.[9]

On the other hand, Ton de Leeuw was influenced by non-Western musical traditions and Gregorian chant. Modal harmonies, drone textures, and reflective pacing are used in his *Car nos vignes sont en fleur* (1970) and *Psaume 122* to transport singers to a peaceful auditory realm.[10] De Leeuw's compositions have influenced the development of choral composition's aural and spiritual potential.

Greek-born composer Calliope Tsoupaki, who has settled in the Netherlands, blends modern methods, modal polyphony, and Byzantine chant.[11] Through ethereal voice textures and microtonal inflections, her compositions, including *Ode to the West Wind and Styx*, delve into themes of memory, myth, and spirituality. Her compositions are an excellent example of how modern Dutch choral art incorporates worldviews while retaining its unique voice.

Pedagogical and Structural Innovations

The foundation of Dutch choral education is a dedication to quality and innovation. Conservatories such as the Amsterdam Conservatory and the Royal Conservatory in The Hague provide demanding instruc-

The Perfect Books for Young Music Lovers

by Joy Anthony Douglass

Scan or click to listen to "WHERE THE MUSIC COMES FROM" by Lee Hoiby, performed by Peter Stewart, baritone; accompanied by the composer.

available at amazon

Search for "Joy Douglass"

"CALVIN is a captivating story of a boy who loves to sing and thrives in a boy choir of other talented young people.

In the sequel, WHERE THE MUSIC COMES FROM, Calvin ponders whether to apply his skills to science or choral conducting.

Written by experienced master teacher and musician, Dr. Joy Anthony Douglass, the books are of special interest to teachers and young people who aspire to explore their artistic values through music."

- Ann Howard Jones

DMA in Choral Conducting, U of Iowa | Professor Emerita- Boston University
Assistant to Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony Choruses

Photo by Steve Gilbert

Visit our website:
www.joydouglass.com

tion for vocalists and conductors, emphasizing both modern technique and historical repertoire.[12]

The relative safety and respect given to choir conductors is another structural characteristic of the Dutch choral scene. According to the VerenigingsMonitor, over 90 percent of Dutch choirs engage professional artistic leadership, and most of these roles are compensated at professional rates—an average of €61 per hour.[13] The Dutch system models a sustainable framework for artistic leadership within the choral sector.

Pronunciation and Language in Dutch Repertoire

The intricacy of the Dutch language, especially its distinct phonetic system, presents a barrier for foreign choirs hoping to perform Dutch music. English speakers are not familiar with a number of vowel sounds and consonants found in Dutch, including the uvular /x/ and the front rounded /ʏ/. Additionally, Dutch is a stress-timed language that necessitates a unique attention to vowel duration and rhythm.[14]

Choral directors can handle this by providing International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcriptions, modelling with native-speaker recordings, and paying special attention to diphthong articulation and syllabic stress. Comprehensive guides to the Dutch alphabet and pronunciation are available on the CoLanguage website, which also includes examples and thorough descriptions of the sounds that correlate to English. These techniques can significantly improve performance authenticity and diction.

Dutch Music in Concert Programming

Sometimes concert programming feels like opening a window into another era. Mixing historical echoes with modern performance isn't just about singing the right notes—it's a way to connect with a culture's soul. Delving into Dutch Renaissance choral pieces—be it a motet, madrigal, chanson, psalm, or mass—invites choirs and audiences on a unique, immersive journey. Instead of merely rehearsing melodies and rhythms, one begins to notice the rich backdrop of history, social circumstances, and artistic flair that shaped these works, peeling back layers to reveal the repertoire's deeper roots.

Integrating early Dutch pieces into today's concerts not only expands an ensemble's creative palette but also weaves together threads from different eras. The intricate counterpoint and expressive settings of Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, Orlando di Lasso, and Josquin des Prez influenced later composers across Europe. Placing Renaissance polyphony alongside modern Dutch choral works highlights a fascinating evolution of national musical identity while giving audiences a performance that feels both rich and wonderfully unpredictable. This is just one of the many ways world musics and cultures repertoire can enter and enrich our choral concert programs.

Platforms like Dutch Culture USA lend a friendly hand in this cultural exploration. As a branch of the Kingdom of the Netherlands' outreach in America, they join forces with top Dutch artistic institutions, offering conductors and educators practical, valuable resources.[15] These platforms help guide repertoire choices and deepen contextual understanding—bridging performance with a more genuine, heartfelt cultural appreciation.

BeroepKunstenaar is a website from the Amsterdam University of the Arts. It maintains a list of institutions dedicated to the collection, archiving, and research of musical heritage in the Netherlands. The Nederlands Muziek Instituut (Netherlands Music Institute) and the Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis (KVNM, Royal Society for Dutch Music History) could prove to be particularly informative resources for choral conductors.[16]

The Choral Public Domain Library offers a rich and varied repertoire of Dutch choral music, both sacred and secular. The collection encourages entrepreneurial conductors to discover a wide variety of works that represent different voicings and degrees of difficulty, both a cappella and with instrumental accompaniment. It should be mentioned that the collection also includes pieces for SAB choir with organ accompaniment and is thus especially suitable for developing or smaller choirs in community, church, and school environments.[17]

Cross-cultural and Inclusive Practices

Another aspect of the Dutch choral landscape is the community involvement and accessibility of choir singing. A culture of inclusivity is demonstrated by, for example, participatory performances, which enable aspiring singers to join professionals in singing parts of large choral works. Other groups strengthen the function of choral music as a medium for social cohesion by focusing on working with groups who are, for example, socio-economically marginalised or have a disability.[18]

The growing preference of Dutch choirs for multidisciplinary performances is a final element brought forward here. These often combine dance, theatre, and new media components, making the concert experience interesting for new audiences. Although this move toward hybridity is in line with more general European developments in the performing arts, it nevertheless retains a typically Dutch sensibility: inventive, cooperative, and community oriented.[19]

Conclusion

Dutch choral music is a powerful example of striking a balance between professionalism and involvement, tradition and creativity. The Netherlands has a plethora of repertoire, performing techniques, and structural ideas that are worth exploring further for American conductors, singers, and academics. Whether it is through the modernist works of De Leeuw and Tsoupaki, the historically rich performances of Bach's Passions, or the general acceptance of chorus singing as a communal act, the Dutch choral tradition speaks with a voice that is both distinct and universal. CJ

Michel Hogenes, PhD, is principal lecturer at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands.

Madlen Batchvarova, DMA, is professor of music, director of choral programs, Hanover College, IN.

NOTES

[1] T. Dapôt, "Liever Dua Lipa dan Bach, het popkoor is in trek: 'Zingen werkt voor mij therapeutisch.'" ["I'd rather have Dua Lipa than Bach, the pop choir is popular: 'Singing is therapeutic for me.'"] *Trouw*, January 16, 2025.

[2] Landelijk Kenniscentrum voor Cultuureducatie en Amateurkunst (LKCA). *VerenigingsMonitor 2024*.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Nederlands Kamerkoor, *About Us*, Accessed March 22, 2025. https://www.nederlandskamerkoor.nl.

[5] Dutch Bach Society, *Matthäus-Passion at Naarden*. Accessed March 22, 2025. https://www.bachvereniging.nl.

[6] Encyclopedia Britannica, "Franco-Netherlandish School." Accessed April 2, 2025. https://www.britannica.com/art/Franco-Netherlandish-school

[7] "Johan Sebastian Bach PassieBarometer," *ZINGmagazine*, 2025, https://www.zingmagazine.nl/passiebarometer/.

[8] www.donemus.nl. Accessed March 22, 2025.

[9] https://donemus.nl/composer/rudolf-escher/. Accessed March 22, 2025.

[10] https://tondeleeuw.com. Accessed March 22, 2025.

[11] https://www.calliopetsoupaki.com. Accessed March 22, 2025.

[12] L. Samama, *Dutch Music in the 20th Century* (Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

[13] Landelijk Kenniscentrum voor Cultuureducatie en Amateurkunst (LKCA). *VerenigingsMonitor 2024*.

[14] Van den Hout, T. "Dutch Phonetics for Choirs," *ZINGmagazine* 3 (2022): 45–47.

[15] Dutch Culture USA, *Your Shortcut to Dutch Arts and Culture in the US*. Accessed April 5, 2025. https://www.dutchcultureusa.com.

[16] BeroepKunstenaar is a website of the Amsterdam University of the Arts, https://www.beroepkunstenaar.nl/

[17] Choral Public Domain Library. Works in Dutch. https://www.cpdl.org/wiki/index.php/Category:Works_in_Dutch

[18] Hearts in Harmony. Inclusief zingen voor koren zonder beperkingen. [Hearts in Harmony. Including choir singing without limitations.] Koorenstem.be.

[19] Landelijk Kenniscentrum voor Cultuureducatie en Amateurkunst (LKCA). *VerenigingsMonitor 2024*.

PROJECT : ENCORE™ NEWS

A Catalog of Contemporary Choral Music

ProjectEncore.org

QUARTERLY ENDORSEMENTS

TARA MACK *(new to PROJECT : ENCORE)*

The Risk of Birth

- SSATB; Soprano solo; a cappella; English (Madeline L'Engle)
- 4' 00". Message is the last line: "Love still takes the risk of birth" (despite troubling times); a message of hope. The composer sets L'Engle's two historical epochs (current, and time of Jesus' birth) differently, each as too troubled for bringing a child into; yet love and new life prevail. Beautiful harmonic and melodic writing. Excellent HS, above. (ProjectEncore.org/tara-mack)

MICHAEL MARKOWSKI *(new to PROJECT : ENCORE)*

Ekklesia

- SSAATTBB; a cappella; English (Andy Wilkinson)
- 3' 00". "Ekklesia" means a coming together, a gathering. The poet and composer reference voices joining together in song as an ideal example of unity: "Now the many become the one." A gentle setting with rich harmonies, lovely lines, and enough independence of line to maintain interest and flow. Lovely addition for excellent HS and above. (ProjectEncore.org/michael-markowski)

EDWARD DAVID MESSERSCHMIDT *(new to PROJECT : ENCORE)*

Peace Trilogy

- SATB, divisi; a cappella; English (William Carlos Williams, Emily Dickinson, John 14:27)
- 8' 27". Written in the context of wars between Ukraine and Russia, Israel and Gaza, within Sudan. Concepts: Peace is only found in sleep; sadness about the lack of peace; peace beyond what the world can offer. Beautiful expression of longing in a time of uncertainty. Beauty of tone is the primary prerequisite. Rewarding for solid HS and above. (ProjectEncore.org/edward-david-messerschmidt)

JAMIE POWE *(new to PROJECT : ENCORE)*

The Gun Mass

- SATB-SATB; S/T soloists a cappella; English and Latin (Haley Hodges)
- 18' 00". A magnum opus along the lines of Britten's War Requiem, in it weave of Latin liturgical text and English poetry. The subject is mass shootings. Dramatic use of choral forces, in explosive chordal utterances, sometimes chant, some polyphony. Incredibly powerful! Must have excellent S/T soloists, and very capable choir. (ProjectEncore.org/jamie-powe)

PROJECT : ENCORE™ is an online catalog of post-premiere, new choral music, reviewed and endorsed by an international panel of prominent conductors.

ember choral arts

Four times each year, P:E adds newly-accepted scores into its catalog. Score submission deadlines are the 15th of January, April, July and October.

JOSEPH ECKMAN

Psalm 100

- SSAATTBB; optional Sop high D solo at end; English (Hebrew Testament)
- 4' 45'. Exhuberant setting of this well-known Psalm! Vibrantly rhythmic, mix of chordal and independent-line construction, often simultaneously. Middle, slower section in lovely 4-part motet style. The writing feels natural in its flow, yet never lacks for interesting harmonic twists. Needs 8 solidly independent sections. Exciting closer! (ProjectEncore.org/joseph-eckman)

JUSTINE KOONTZ

Dixit Maria

- UNISON; piano; Latin (Luke 1)
- 3' 45". Using an incredible economy of resources, composer Koontz has created a truly beautiful setting of this well-known text of the Annunciation. Through creative/dramatic use of text repetition and tempo fluctuation, the piece captures the awe, the hesitancy, the eagerness … in beautiful lines. Art worthy of any treble ensemble. (ProjectEncore.org/justine-koontz)

While finalizing your fall-into-December programming, don't forget to let the robust search engine of the PROJECT : ENCORE catalog go to work for you!

Search by keyword, voicing, instrumentation, even length! Happy programming!

DEBORAH SIMPKIN KING, PHD.
Conductor
P:E Director and Founder
DeborahSKing.com

MAP MIDAMERICA PRODUCTIONS & MidAm International

PERFORM AROUND THE WORLD

CELEBRATING OUR 2025 INTERNATIONAL RESIDENCIES:

3 COUNTRIES

520 PARTICIPANTS

1 MILLION MILES TRAVELED

15 CHOIRS

3 RESIDENT ORCHESTRAS

2,405 AUDIENCE MEMBERS

JOIN US IN 2026:

PARIS, FRANCE

VIENNA & SALZBURG, AUSTRIA

STOCKHOLM & UPPSALA, SWEDEN

FLORENCE, ITALY

LONDON, ENGLAND

HAVE A LOCATION YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE ON OUR 2027 SEASON? VISIT THE LINK BELOW OR SCAN THE QR CODE TO SHARE WHERE YOU WANT TO CONDUCT IN 2027.

WWW.MIDAMERICA-MUSIC.COM/INTERNATIONAL-RESIDENCIES-2026

Choral Review

Lionel Daunais's *Figures de danse*: An Accessible & Theatrical Québécois Choral Gem

by Brian C. Murray

Lionel Daunais (1901–1982) was a prominent twentieth-century *Québécois* musician whose compositions—solo vocal works, song cycles, folksong arrangements, individual choral works, and multi-movement choral works—markedly impacted Canadian music. This choral review offers an overview of Daunais's *Figures de danse*, which features his signature luxurious vocal writing and refined drollery. Through six nonsensical movements, Daunais delves into death and dance with exquisite choral and piano writing. As the entire work is in French, reading a translation before each movement may benefit a non-French speaking audience. This narration is an invaluable opportunity to collaborate with colleagues in theatre and dance, adding vibrancy and humor to the performance.

Figures de danse is appropriate for youth choirs, community choirs, university choirs, and professional choirs alike. And indeed, it has seen performances by myriad types of choral ensembles at institutions including Baylor University, Canadian Chamber Choir, Chœur de Chambre du Québec, Creekview High School, Michigan State University, R.L. Turner High School, University of North Texas, University of Wyoming, and Vancouver Youth Chorus. As the majority of choral repertoire deals with the topics of love and loss, Daunais's *Figures de danse* can serve as a light-hearted and comedic foil to an otherwise serious and moderate-to-slow program.

Upon winning the *Prix d'Europe* in 1926, Daunais's career as a singer soared. After studies in Paris and work with the Algiers Opera, he returned to Montréal, where he founded *le Trio Lyrique* and *Les Variétés Lyriques*. As a renowned vocalist, his compositions exude the effortless melodicism of French *mélodie*. Daunais's works all feature traditional harmonic language, idiomatic vocal writing, and often include challenging piano accompaniments. His foremost attribute, however, is a dedication to the text—often humorous and written by Daunais himself.

Figures de danse comprises six short tragicomic miniatures for mixed choir and piano. In his whimsical and nuanced writing, Daunais explores the outlandish fates of various dancers. *Éditions d'Alliance* first published the choral score in 1975. They published the piano accompaniment as a separate score in 1992.[1]

Each movement in the work functions as a standalone caricature. In the opening movement, "Pas grave," Daunais succinctly reports of Natascha's determination to conclude her dance career at the behest of a Shah, who lavishes her with exotic jewelry. Next,

in "Jetés-battus (Épitaphe)," he chromatically beseeches the listeners to mourn for Idoménée who tragically toasted her tutu too near the fireplace. The third movement, "Grand-Écart" translates to "the splits." In the introduction, the piano begins in prime unison and then expands by more than five octaves. Subsequently, the voices then mirror the same musical acrobatics. Unfortunately, because a nail was left precariously on the stage, Graziella can no longer perform the titular *grand-écart*.

The composer ironically sets the fourth movement, "Adagio," to a lively *tarantella*. In this miniature, two onlookers witness Saltarello in a sartorial scandal while performing his adagio. In the fifth movement, "Bayadère," Daunais reveals the dancer's striking entry for a performance on the back of a panther after a rhapsodic piano introduction. In a dramatic *coup de théâtre*, the panther enters solo, having engorged the dancer. This movement ends with an unaccompanied Brahmanic prayer that entreats successful digestion. Finally, in "Maryse and partner" Daunais portrays Maryse and Jos as two trapeze partners who valiantly execute spellbinding acrobatic acts. Lamentably, this routine abruptly ceases with Jos's unexplainable absence. Daunais then punctuates Maryse's demise with the pronounced interrogation, "oú est Jos?" [Where is Jos?].

In addition to performing the work in its entirety, conductors might consider excising various movements for a concert. This simplification will provide the flavor of the work while also reducing the difficulty. Movements five and six are the most substantial and could be excerpted as stand-alone pieces. Another option is to pair this work with other repertoire based around

dance. For example, numerous Baroque works based on dance, *walzer–Liebeslieder*, *Neue Liebeslieder*, "Wechsellied zum Tanz" by Brahms, or Schubert's "Der Tanz." Other possibilities are works by living composers, for example: "Dance!" by Robert T. Gibson, "Solidaridad" by Rosephanye Powell, "Danse macabre" by Z. Randall Stroope, "Vital Dance" by Dale Trumbore, or *An Hour to Dance* by Gwyneth Walker.

Daunais's *Figures de danse* is a fanciful delight and a welcome respite to programs that are often replete with somber repertoire.

There are multiple challenges when performing this work. Fast French text, local references, and issues with the score often inhibit regular performance. Various resources and strategies can ameliorate these challenges, however.[2] Additionally, with the publication of a new edition that combines the choral and piano scores and removes numerous errors, *Éditions d'Alliance* mitigated the foremost challenge to frequent performance of the work.[3] Further, a thorough understanding of the text is necessary to comprehend and savor the satire in Daunais's captivating work.

Daunais's *Figures de danse* is a fanciful delight and a welcome respite to programs that are often replete with somber repertoire. Fancy the professional recording of *Figures de danse* by Julia Davids and the Canadian Chamber Choir or various reference recordings of the work available on YouTube and other streaming platforms.[4] Revel in the wittiness of the text and enjoy an exploration of this moribund musical fantasy. CJ

Brian C. Murray is the director of choral activities and assistant professor of music at the University of Wyoming. bmurray7@uwyo.edu

NOTES

[1] As of this printing, we were unable to secure permission to include musical examples from the publisher, Alliance Chorale du Québec (Éditions de l'Alliance). Interested readers can view score samples or purchase at: https://boutique.chorales.ca/products/figures-de-danse-satb-piano

[2] Patricia Abbott, "The 30-Year History of the Alliance des Chorales du Quebec and Its Impact on Choral Singing in the Province." *The Phenomenon of Singing* [Online], Volume 5 (July 1, 2005). https://journals.library.mun.ca/ojs/index.php/singing/article/view/584/402; Patricia Abbott, "The Vocal and Choral Music of Lionel Daunais (1902-1982)." Paper presented At the 3rd Phenomenon of Singing International Symposium, Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada (2001); Hilary Apfelstadt, "Canada's Choral Music Development." *Choral Journal* 54, no. 8 (March 2014): 34–41; Brian C. Murray, "A Conductor's Guide to Lionel Daunais's Figures de danse" (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2020). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1703295/ ; Oscar O'Brien, "L'Estétique de notre folklore," La Presse Montréal (October 21, 1942): Microfiche, MIC A28.

[3] Lionel Daunais, *Figures de danse: Suite fantastique pour voix mixtes.* ed. Brian C. Murray (Alliance des Chorales du Québec, 1975).

[4] Lionel Daunais, *Figures de danse*. Choeur de Chambre du Québec, Robert Ingari, conductor. Recorded October 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JT_-tddR6Z8; Lionel Daunais, *Figures de danse*. University of North Texas University Singers, Dr. Richard Sparks, conductor. Recorded April 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gptvRSzQ6tw&t=2s; Julia Davids, conductor. *In Good Company*. Recorded in 2009. Polar Bear Records, 2010, compact disc. Includes Daunais's *Figures de danse*.

Call for Submissions for ACDA Publications

The ACDA publications staff and editorial boards are interested in receiving articles of interest to the choral profession. Submission highlights are below for the 3 ACDA publications. Email Amanda Bumgarner, ACDA Publications Editor, with questions abumgarner@acda.org.

Choral Journal – practical and scholarly information related to choral music, composition, and performance. Published 9 times per year.

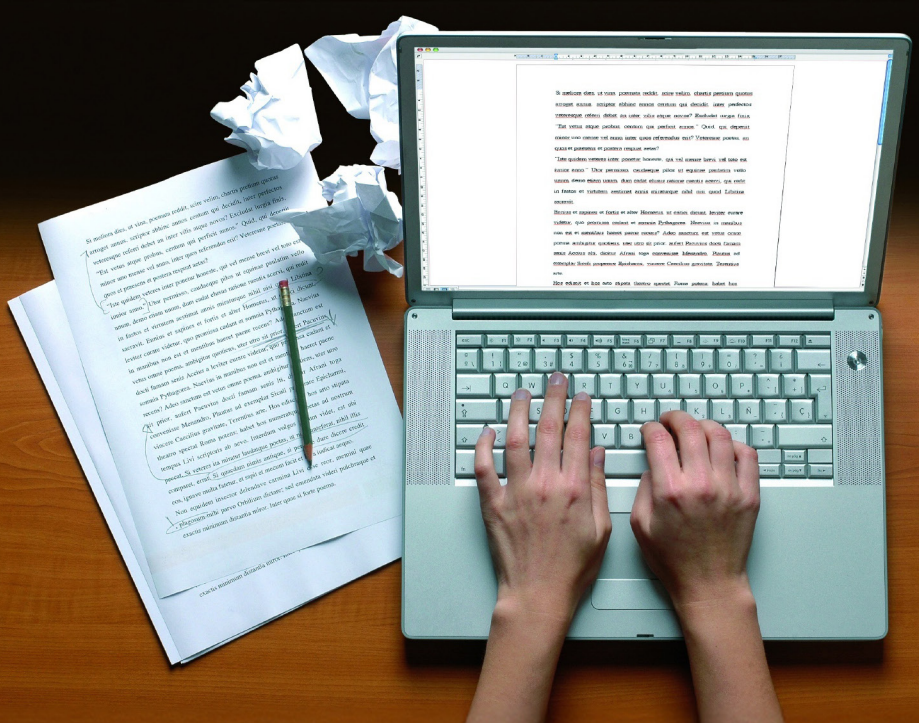
https://acda.org/choraljournal

ChorTeach – practical strategies for the classroom and community choirs, specifically those working with grades K-12.

https://acda.org/chorteach

International Journal of Research in Choral Singing – rigorous, systematically grounded methodologies to investigate phenomena of potential interest to all who sing in, work with, or are otherwise interested in choral ensembles. Published as individual articles by volume year.

https://acda.org/ijrcs



Ask a Conductor

Question 3

What are some ice breakers/community-building activities I can use for our first choir rehearsal of the season? My choir is very new and unsure of the idea of choir warm-ups and singing together with each other.

The "Ask a Conductor" section of *ChorTeach* was a reader-generated Q&A format where readers submitted questions related to teaching, conducting, rehearsing with, or singing with K-12 students. Three to five educators answered the question, with a new question appearing in each issue. There are eight "Ask a Conductor" questions, available in the *ChorTeach* archives at acda.org/chorteach.

Question: What are some ice breakers/community-building activities I can use for our first choir rehearsal of the season? My choir is very new and unsure of the idea of choir warm-ups and singing together with each other.

Maria A. Ellis
"Girl Conductor"
Director,
The Sheldon's City of Music All-Star Chorus
info@girlconductor.com

The first day of choir rehearsal with any choir, especially a new choir, is always so fun to me. The choir members have a little nervousness about them. They want to do a good job but may not be confident about singing. Their trepidation is compounded if they are in a room with people they don't know well. I want to take some of the nervousness out of the room with activities that encourage us to move, sing, and learn each other's names in a fun, non-judgemental environment.

When working with an elementary choir, one of the first activities I use is "Lean Forward/Lean Backwards." This activity has singing, movement, and lots of smiles. I ask the students to mirror me as I demonstrate how to "lean" in the various directions. I make it a point to demonstrate how to "lean," as I do not want any student to fall or to bump another student. After the students understand the directions, I sing the lyrics and have the students move with me: "Lean forward, lean backwards to the left, to the right; hands up, hands down to the left to the right. Lean forward, lean backwards to the left, to the right; hands up, hands down to the left to the right." Once the students start moving, I invite them to sing with me. We sing the lyrics and move while modulating the key and changing the tempo. The students have a wonderful time with this activity.

Another activity I use is "Tell Me Something Good!" from the R&B hit composed by Stevie Wonder and performed by Rufus and Chaka Khan. I have the students sing the melodic line, "Tell Me Something Good!" (CLAP). I then point to the individual students and ask

them to say their name (so I can learn names and how to pronounce them), tell them what their favorite song is, and tell me something good about their day. After approximately five students answer, I invite everyone to sing "Tell Me Something Good," and we learn about more students. I always challenge myself that by the end of the activity I should be able to name each child.

After doing these activities, the students are not feeling nearly as nervous or alienated as when they came into the room. They now know each other's names and have laughed, sung, and played together. I also take the opportunity afterwards to explain to the students about the warm-up process and why we warm-up our voices, minds, and bodies. For more warm-up activities, visit www.Girlconductor.com.

Jackson Hill
Artistic Director, Singing Girls of Texas
Elementary Choir Director
Fort Worth Academy of Fine Arts
jackson.hill@fwafa.org

Below are descriptions of three activities I incorporate into my rehearsals throughout the first week each year. All of them require no materials, have easy-to-explain rules, are a great way to physically and mentally engage students, and allow teachers to demonstrate that voices can be used in unfamiliar ways and it can be fun.

Posse

Rules:

1) Each student in the class finds a partner and shares their name with them. Once they have shared their names, they need to face you with their thumbs up to show they are ready to start.

2) Once you say "go," every pair will play one round of rock-paper-scissors.

3) Whoever loses becomes a part of the winner's "posse" and starts following behind them, chanting their name.

4) Each winner will then play against another winner. They will know who the other winners are because they will also have a posse cheering them on.

5) Each time someone loses, they and their posse join in following and chanting the name of whoever beat them.

6) This process continues until the entire class is chanting the last winner's name.

Pros: The activity is a quick way for your students to begin to learn each other's names and to hear their own name used in an affirming way. Almost nothing is cooler than seeing "the shy student" have twenty classmates jumping around them, cheering them on as they play.

Things to Consider: This activity should be noisy and will require your kids to move around the room—you will need a little tolerance for crazy. To help regain your students' attention at the end, you should already have a mechanism in place to draw their attention back to you. This could be a call-and-response, a hand gesture, whatever works best for you. Additionally, to help keep the activity safe, you will want to establish ground rules about how students should travel around the room before you start playing.

Demonstration:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HH44f8nkHo0
or scan the QR code below.

High-Medium-Low

Rules:

1) The students must look at you at all points in time. They may blink (yes, they will ask you this)

2) You will shake your arms above your head, at shoulder height, or down by your waist. Each time your arms change position, you will say either "high," "medium," or "low."

3) "Do what I say, not what I do" is what I tell my students. Meaning, they will need to make their arms move in whatever direction you tell them to with your voice. "High" means shake your hands above your head, "medium" is by your shoulders, and "low" is down by your waist.

4) Your goal is to trick the students into moving their arms the same direction you move yours, even when your arm movements don't match up with what your voice says.

Pros: This is a fun activity that can energize and focus your students at any point in a rehearsal. One of the reasons I like using it at the beginning of the year is it allows me to use my voice as a tool for "play." Once the students are comfortable with the game, I will make my vocal inflection match the direction my hands are moving. If I say "high," I will use a floaty, falsetto sound, when I say "medium," I will use my regular speaking voice, and "low" is borderline vocal fry. I can add another level of play by using my falsetto on "low" and a deep pitch on "high." This helps break the ice a little with my students in regard to using their own voices, especially when encouraging boys to access their own falsetto. For a smooth transition, you can end this activity on a "high," then go directly into siren echoes to begin your vocal warmups.

Things to Consider: There are lots of ways you can adjust the difficulty of this game: how long you wait between before having the kids change position, how emphatically or calmly you give a command, establishing short, repeated patterns of commands and then breaking them in sneaky ways. I would incorporate these tricks gradually. All of them can make the game way more fun for a class that is eager for a challenge, or really frustrating for a class that isn't quite ready.

Demonstration:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vJrz7_uzsc or scan the QR code below.

Four Behind

Rules:

1) You will create a four-beat pattern using some sort of body percussion (snapping, clapping, patting your legs, etc.) or vocal sound.

2) The students will echo your pattern.

3) While they are echoing you, you are simultaneously showing them the next four-beat pattern. This creates a cycle of them echoing the pattern that they just saw, while watching you to see what they will do next.

Pros: This is a great attention grabber to use at the start of class or can function as a brain break in the middle of rehearsal. Incorporating spoken patterns can let your students play with timbre, range, and dynamics. For added benefit, you can have them play the game to music. This is a fun way to help develop their sense of steady beat. You can also incorporate challenging rhythmic patterns that will be introduced in your repertoire and help them develop fluency in those patterns in a playful way.

Things to Consider: I've had the best luck teaching this one when I break down the learning process. First I'll have the students echo four beat body percussion patterns, but I won't show them their next pattern until

they've completed the one they've already been given. Once they are clear with that step, then I will explain to them how they will need to think ahead and give them spoken cues to help keep them on track. I will begin to phase out the spoken cues, and then they should have it.

Demonstration:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzThpraoZ1I
or scan the QR code below

Ian Tapson
Director of Choirs
Lake Minneola High School
Minneola, Florida
TapsonI@lake.k12.fl.us

Creating a safe rehearsal space is crucial when working with musicians no matter the age or experience together as an ensemble! The more your musicians trust themselves, each other, and of course, you as the conductor, the more connected they will be to the music-making process. Although we are anxious for their first sound as a choir, we must see past the voices in the room and invest in the hearts of those who make the music.

Begin by selecting activities that require little social investment at first. One of my favorites is the activity "This or That" or "Would You Rather?" Using a list of prompts, the director or assigned leader calls out "would you rather…" and the students will move to either side of the room based on their response. This is a great way for students to see shared interests without pushing them out of their comfort zone.

I will often follow an activity like the one above with a name game. I recommend using a game like "Connections." All students should begin seated. Students will say their name and something they like and another student will respond and say, "My name is ___and I also like___, but I also like_____." The "connected" student will rise and join the student who began the game. You may need to provide topic guidance so students can easily select their "likes." This involves a little more personal investment, but it is another way for students to create those personal connections with people in the room.

"Integrating these team-building exercises have done wonders for the culture of my program and the relationships we have with each other."

Once we have spent more time together, I like to incorporate activities that involve a little more interaction and social investment from my students. Choir speed dating was a suggestion from a choral colleague and I love it! Students will form concentric circles where the inside circles rotate clockwise every 30 seconds to answer a fun question with their partner. It is easy to come up with silly things like "what is a song you are embarrassed you know all the words to?" Choir speed dating allows you to format your questions to the needs of the ensemble, which, again is important as you are building those relationships.

Additionally, each Friday, I devote time so students could chat as a class through a few different activities, some of which have also been mentioned in this Journal and online.

- Shout-outs have been a great way to leave encouraging messages for other students in the program. I read them out loud and students clap and celebrate as they are passed out.

- I also encourage them to share a high (wow) or a low (pow) from their week. My students love this and will often take the whole class time if I am not careful!

- When the students have a stronger bond, we do an activity called, "Throwing of the Beads." Students stand in a circle and I throw a beaded necklace

to a student and deliver a genuine compliment. The recipient then chooses another student until all students have gone.

- I also incorporate movement/dances, funny warm-ups, solfège games, and sometimes karaoke to make it a FUN FRIDAY. We still rehearse but use it as a planning session for the next week.

Integrating these team-building exercises have done wonders for the culture of my program and the relationships we have with each other. Whatever you choose to do, make sure it is authentically given and implemented in the rehearsal. You are integral to the community building of your ensembles and set the tone for the year to come. Make it a great one!

William George-Twyman
Director of Choral Studies,
Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, Dallas, TX
Past Repertoire and Resources Chair,
High School Mixed, SWACDA
wigeorge@dallasisd.org

The idea of community in the choral ensemble is very important. So many times, we get to the end of a concert cycle and realize that there are some altos who have no idea who is in the tenor section, or as is common in school settings, seniors who don't know any of the sophomores' names! There are activities that we can engage in during our first rehearsal to plant the seeds for a tight-knit and close musical community to form. For me, the most important part of community building is that it feels organic and interwoven with the musical goals of the ensemble. As we come to understand the different reasons singers come to choir, it is vital that we act with intention when it comes to forming the identity of the group. I've learned that the classic icebreaker games of "Two truths and a lie" or small group charades can be dynamic and fun for a moment, but those games lack any real and lasting substance when it comes to learning about another person.

One of the best ways to get to know the sections is during the voicing process. I always keep the other sections in the room while we go through and listen to every singer in various combinations until we find the correct sound for that group. Even if you don't do full voicing on day one, it's helpful to at least go around and hear everyone sing something individually or as a section. I'm also reiterating each singer's name out loud while I do this so that everyone (including me) begins to associate names, faces, and voices.

Another place to begin community building is during sectionals. As we have undoubtedly learned, every section begins to take on their own sound and group dynamic the longer they sing together. During sectionals, bonds can be formed over conquering a particularly hard passage or by sharing a private joke with the conductor that only they know about. Forming solidarity within a section is easier when the goals are common and focused on the music. The moment that every tenor in the room experiences that rich, golden tone that they've been striving for is a transcendent one, and it can lead to a moment of section pride when they rejoin the choir and get to show that off, heaped with praise from the conductor.

You may notice that I haven't given many examples of activities that do not have a strict musical focus. My ideas about leaving goofy games and activities aside are very much shaped by conversations that I've had with singers over the years. Often, I hear that singers are sometimes uncomfortable being pressured into sharing personal information about themselves, no matter how innocent the information might seem. A person who does not participate in the game can be viewed as a "wet blanket" or someone who "hates fun," which undermines the stated goal of community building. Though everyone comes to choir for a different set of social or emotional reasons, everyone is there for the music, so synthesizing community with music makes the most sense with the least amount of potential friction. We build lasting structures by ensuring they have strong foundations. If you build your choir community on firm musical ground, you'll never look back and lament that you didn't do trust falls in the first rehearsal. Listen to your singers, feel out the emotional "pulse" of the choir, and guide them towards what is truly important and best for everyone involved. CT

CHORAL JOURNAL CONTACT INFORMATION

Book Reviews	Gregory Pysh	gregory.m.pysh@gmail.com
Choral Reviews	Amanda Bumgarner	abumgarner@acda.org
Lift Every Voice	Amanda Bumgarner	abumgarner@acda.org
On the Voice	Matthew Hoch	mrh0032@auburn.edu
Recorded Sound Reviews	Amanda Bumgarner	abumgarner@acda.org
Rehearsal Breaks	Jennifer Rodgers	rodgersj@iastate.edu
Research Report	Elizabeth Hearn Elizabeth Cassidy Parker	ehearn@olemiss.edu eparker@temple.edu
Student Times	Micah Bland	mbland1613@gmail.com

For feature article submissions, contact the editor, Amanda Bumgarner, at <abumgarner@acda.org>.
View full submission guidelines at acda.org

Book and music publishers should send books, octavos, and discs for review to:
Choral Journal, Attn: Amanda Bumgarner, P.O. Box 1705, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73101-1705

OTHER ACDA PUBLICATIONS CONTACT INFORMATION

ChorTeach	Amanda Bumgarner	chorteach@acda.org
International Journal of Research in Choral Singing	Bryan Nichols	bnichols@psu.edu

Advertisers' Index

MAKE 2026 HAPPEN

PROVIDE YOUR SINGERS A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE!

Registration open through September

MAR 16 — CARNEGIE HALL, New York, NY	MAR 22 — CARNEGIE HALL, New York, NY	MAR 30 — CARNEGIE HALL, New York, NY	APR 11 — CARNEGIE HALL, New York, NY
JUN 16 — CARNEGIE HALL, New York, NY	JUN 20 — CARNEGIE HALL, New York, NY	JUN 22 — CARNEGIE HALL, New York, NY	MAR 21 — LINCOLN CENTER, New York, NY

APR 13 — MEYERSON SYMPHONY CENTER, Dallas, TX

NATIONALCONCERTS.COM INFO@NATIONALCONCERTS.COM

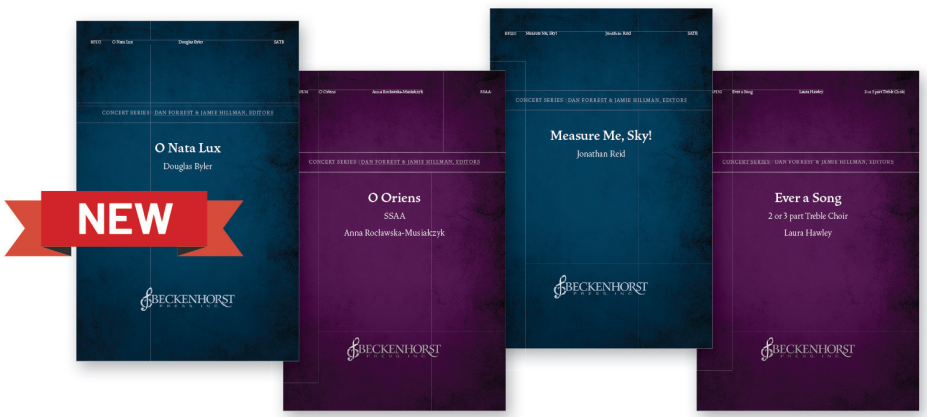
American Choral Directors Association
P.O. Box 1705
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73101-1705
<www.acda.org>

New Music for School, University, and Community Choirs

The Music of Dan Forrest

Exquisite choral settings with evocative accompaniments, published by The Music of Dan Forrest

distributed by Beckenhorst Press



Intermediate SATB | Advanced SSAA | SATB or TTBB | SA or SSA

BECKENHORST CONCERT SERIES

Outstanding repertoire for festivals, all-states, and concerts, carefully curated by Dan Forrest and Jamie Hillman for SATB, SSAA, TTBB, and Youth Choirs

beckenhorstpress.com

BECKENHORST PRESS, INC.