



2026 ACDA Midwestern Region Conference

Conference Overview



Derrick Fox

It is my honor to invite you to join us for the 2026 Midwestern ACDA Region Conference, February 25–28 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Our theme, “Reflections of Us,” speaks to the heart of

who we are as choral musicians, educators, and human beings. Together we will celebrate the music, the people, and the communities that make our region so vibrant.

This conference is more than a gathering; it is a reunion. For many of us, the MWACDA conference is the rare moment where we reconnect with long-time colleagues, mentors, and friends. It is where we share ideas freely, where a chance conversation in a hallway sparks a new project, and where we are reminded that we are part of something much larger than ourselves.

At the same time, it is also a place of welcome—an opportunity to meet new faces, form new collaborations, and expand our circle of friends and colleagues. Whether this will be your first conference or your fifteenth, you will find yourself embraced by a

community of people who care deeply about both the art and the people who make it.

The program in Milwaukee promises to inspire and challenge. You will encounter world-class choirs from across the Midwest and beyond, hear new works alongside treasured classics, and experience the remarkable diversity of choral traditions that define our profession. Our honor choirs will showcase the talents of singers from across the region, and our reading sessions, interest sessions, and exhibits will offer practical tools you can carry back to your own ensembles. And, of course, who wouldn’t want an opportunity to take a photo with Curdy!

Beyond the music, we will also enjoy the warmth of Milwaukee itself, a city with a rich cultural heritage, a thriving arts community, and a welcoming spirit. Against the backdrop of Lake Michigan, our time together will be filled not only with music but also with laughter, conversation, and renewed purpose.

I hope you will join us. Come ready to be challenged, encouraged, and renewed.

Midwestern Region Conference Registration Information

until January 15 at 11:59 PM CST

Attendee \$325 Retired \$250 Student \$100

January 16 - February 28

Attendee \$375 Retired \$275 Student \$125

One Day \$190 **only available on site**

Register at acda.org/region-conferences



2026 ACDA Midwestern Region Conference

Headliners/Opening Night Concert

Headliners

JOA Choir (South Korea)



JOA Choir was founded in January 2016. Based in Busan and designated a professional arts organization by Busan Metropolitan City, this ladies' choir is guided by conductor Gun Yoon Lee. They interpret and perform a diverse repertoire—from classical to popular music, traditional Korean sounds, and jazz—through the distinctive beauty and delicacy of women's voices. Pursuing a sound that stands apart from conventional female choirs, they offer a fresh model to Korea's arts scene and are growing toward the global stage. In 2022 they drew strong attention as one of the most notable choirs on the audition TV show *Sing For Gold*, and in 2025 they won the Grand Prix at the Korea International Choral Competition.



Gun Yoon Lee was born in Busan, South Korea. Drawn to the allure of music in middle school, he began composing and studying music and later pursued conducting, graduating from Chung-Ang University, where he was the student of Dr. Hak-Won Yoon, Korea's "Grandfather of Choral Music." He currently serves as the principal conductor of the Anyang City Boys & Girls Chorus and conducts the Sunhwa Arts School Choir. In addition to choral conduct-

ing, his versatility is evident in both Western symphony orchestra and traditional Korean orchestra conducting and instruction. He has elevated the stature of Korean choral conductors and composers on the global stage both in performance and as a competition/festival juror. He has composed numerous choral works, traditional Korean pieces, and even opera, all earning high praise.

Lyyra



Lyyra is the new all-women vocal ensemble from The VOCES8 Foundation and is based in the United States. Lyyra records exclusively for Warner Classics and seeks to redefine the genre of upper voice music in the choral landscape, highlighting the astonishing capabilities within the full spectrum of women's singing. The sound of this bright, young group combines velvety richness alongside star-like brilliance. With a broad texture and exhilarating range of sound, the group's talented members specialize in classical, jazz, pop, and folk music from diverse traditions and backgrounds. Lyyra tours in the United States and internationally. The group gave its debut performances in 2024, including ACDA, and released its debut EP *More Love* on the VOCES8 label. Lyyra is Anna Crumley, MaryRuth Miller, Elizabeth Tait, Aryssa Leigh Burrs, Ingrid Johnson, and Cecille Elliott. Lyyra's creative director is Erik Jacobson.

Reflections of Milwaukee (Opening Night Concert)

As choral artists, our work transcends leading rehearsals and presenting concerts. Choral music making can reach deep into the lives of both singers and listeners to provide a space for hope, connection, and shared experience—a space desperately needed in this

time of algorithms and media sequestering us firmly into ideological bubbles. Choral singing builds and enriches community, and at this opening night concert, we meet several featured choirs who are integral to the fabric of Milwaukee. While these choirs all present regular concerts, their primary missions utilize singing to explore and uplift the health, faith, education, identity, and/or dignity of community members.



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Special Events

Choral Leadership Academy for Pre-Professional Teachers

Designed for high-achieving undergrad and graduate-level pre-service educators, the Leadership Academy fosters management skills, pedagogical growth, and community building in the early stages of professional development for the next generation of choral music educators. The Leadership Academy provides pre-professional teachers with meaningful learning experiences and direct access to mentors among thought-leaders in the field, shaping an innovative, inclusive, and enduring future for choral music education.

Music in Worship

Come and raise the roof with us as we create the Big Midwestern Church Choir! Join local church choirs and conductors from around the region for an opportunity to learn new music for worship contexts. Participants will have the opportunity to take music back to their home choirs, and directors will leave with new resources and tricks of the trade to share with their ensembles. Selected repertoire will be relevant, meaningful, and accessible for congregations of all sizes.

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Performing Choirs

Angelica Cantanti Youth Choirs Concert Choir



The Angelica Cantanti Youth Choirs is one of the oldest and most respected children's community choral programs in the Minneapolis–St. Paul area. The artistic staff includes directors Ann Williams, Michelle Gehrz, Elizabeth Egger, and Dr. Joseph Kemper. ACYC offers ten ensembles for singers in grades K–12, including opportunities for diverse levels of experience and an adaptive program for youth with special needs. ACYC is guided by its mission to inspire and nurture a creative community of singers through high-quality choral experiences. Performance highlights include the 2018 Super Bowl, National ACDA Conferences in 2019 and 2025, and recognition as the Best Community Choir in Minnesota.



Elizabeth Egger (she/her) directs the Angelica Cantanti Youth Choir's Concert Choir and teaches choir at Scott Highlands Middle School in Apple Valley, MN. Her ensembles have performed at MMEA (2014, 2015, 2025) and ACDA (2015, 2022). She conducted ACYC singers at Super Bowl LII (2018) and led the children's chorus for Mahler's *Symphony of a Thousand* with Osmo Vänskä (2022). In 2024–2025, she presented at MMEA and ACDA conferences and directed the Children's Chorus for Turandot with the Minnesota Orchestra. Also a passionate performer, she has sung with professional ensembles across the Midwest. Egger holds an MME from the University of St. Thomas and a BM from the University of Minnesota.

Bowling Green State University Men's Chorus



The Bowling Green State University Men's Chorus is open to all tenor and bass students, faculty, and staff. The ensemble encompasses students from across many majors, representing all seven colleges at the University, with over half being non-music majors. The chorus functions both as a student organization and as a course offered through the College of Musical Arts, promoting an atmosphere of camaraderie and exemplary musicianship. During the group's fifty years of existence, the BGSU Men's Chorus has toured annually, produced numerous recordings, and performed at state, regional, and national conferences and seminars of ACDA, NAFME, and IMC.



Richard Schnipke, DMA, serves as director of choral activities and associate professor of music performance studies at Bowling Green State University. His duties include conducting the Collegiate Chorus and the University Men's Chorus as well as teaching graduate and undergraduate courses in choral conducting and choral literature. Previously, Schnipke was a member of the faculty at Xavier University and The Ohio State University, and was a public school choral director in Ohio for fifteen years. As a vocalist, Schnipke has sung professionally with Cincinnati's Vocal Arts Ensemble, the Cincinnati Fusion Ensemble, Collegium Cincinnati, Cincinnati Opera, and Opera Columbus. Schnipke also presents frequently on the incorporation of Dalcroze Eurhythmics in the choral rehearsal.

Central Michigan University Chamber Singers



The Chamber Singers are the flagship ensemble at Central Michigan University School of Music. The ensemble comprises twenty-four undergraduate students studying music as their primary area of emphasis. The ensemble's strength is the versatility and range of vocal ability and approach to a truly diverse repertoire. "Full body" is a phrase often used to describe the sound of this choir, but they also move in and out of styles elegantly, from Renaissance to romantic, pop, and even vocal jazz, and do so authentically. The ensemble's proposed program reflects just this, with contemporary choral standards, spirituals, vocal jazz, and so on.



Amon Eady serves as the director of choral activities at Central Michigan University, where he conducts four ensembles and teaches undergraduate and graduate choral conducting and choral literature.

Before arriving at CMU, Eady taught at both the middle school and high school levels over the course of nine years in the White Station community of Memphis, Tennessee. Eady's choirs have performed at state and regional ACDA conferences, including performances by the Central Michigan University Chamber Singers at the 2020 Michigan ACDA Conference, and the White Station High School Men's Choir at the 2014 Southern ACDA Region Conference. Eady was recognized by Tennessee MEA as Music Educator of the Year in 2014.

Chorale NouvEAU



Chorale NouvEAU, based in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, is an auditioned adult community choir of mixed voices founded in 2019. Known for its elevated performances and diverse repertoire, the choir blends artistic excellence with a strong commitment to community impact. Each season, the choir partners with a local nonprofit, using its concerts to raise awareness and support for causes that matter to the community. Rehearsing once a week for two hours, the ensemble prepares two concert programs annually. Chorale NouvEAU actively supports the broader Chippewa Valley arts scene by collaborating with other local performing groups.



Kate Larson is a passionate choral conductor with twenty years of experience in music education. She holds a BM in vocal music education from St. Olaf College and an MME from the University of St. Thomas. She began teaching in Davenport, Iowa, and spent nine impactful years at Mound Westonka High School in Minnesota, where her choirs were honored to perform at MMEA and ACDA state conferences, and twice at the Minnesota Choral Arts Finale at Orchestra Hall. In 2014 she was honored as the Outstanding Young Choral Director of the Year by Minnesota ACDA. Now based in Eau Claire, WI, Larson is the founder and artistic director of Chorale NouvEAU, choir director at Christ Church Cathedral, and artistic/musical director of the Stand in the Light Memory Choir.



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Performing Choirs

Detroit School of Arts Concert Choir



The Detroit School of Arts Concert Choir is the premier vocal ensemble of the Detroit School of Arts, a nationally recognized fine and performing arts high school in Midtown Detroit. Under the direction of Julian Goods, the choir has earned consistent superior ratings at MSVMA festivals and received top honors at the 2025 WorldStrides Heritage Festival in NYC, including Best Concert Choir and the Choral Sweepstakes Award. They have performed with the Detroit and Lansing Symphony Orchestras and the University of Michigan Men's Glee Club (2022, 2024). Featured appearances include the Kennedy Center, Michigan Youth Arts Festival, and Abyssinian Baptist Church.



Julian J. Goods is codirector of choirs at the Detroit School of Arts and artistic director of Rackham Choir. At DSA his ensembles have earned consistent superior I ratings at MSVMA festivals, performed with the Detroit and Lansing Symphony Orchestras, and won top honors at the 2025 WorldStrides Heritage Festival. A University of Michigan graduate (BM, MM), he teaches at Lutheran Summer Music and serves as organist at Hartford Memorial Baptist Church. Goods has conducted *Messiah* and led the Illinois ACDA Join Voices Festival. His performance credits include *St. John Passion*, Faure's *Requiem*, and *Porgy and Bess*. He is a recipient of the MLK Spirit Award and the Earl V. Moore Award.

First Community Church Marble Cliff Singers



The Marble Cliff Singers was formed in the fall of 2021 and is one of three adult-aged ensembles comprising singers from our two choirs who sing for weekly worship services at First Community Church in Columbus, Ohio. The singers range in age from twenty-one to seventy, with varying levels of music experiences. The choir performs repertoire that is musically challenging and in which the message is one of inclusion and acceptance. They sing for special projects throughout the church year, provide music for the annual Good Friday worship service, and perform on the annual Carols for Christmas concert.



C. Andrew Blosser, DMA, is an assistant teaching professor at The Ohio State University, where he also serves as the area head of the voice department. An active performer, he has presented master classes and recitals throughout the United States and internationally. Blosser served as cantor for services at the Berlin Cathedral and as soloist for Mozart's *Missa Longa* at the Salzburg Cathedral. Highlights as a featured soloist include Vaughan Williams's *On Wenlock Edge* (Carpe Diem String Quartet), Handel's *Messiah* (Columbus Symphony Orchestra), and Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* (Bach Society of Dayton). Blosser has also served as the director of music at First Community Church in Columbus, Ohio, since 2019.



Amy Johnston Blosser served for nine years on the ACDA national board as the R&R committee chair and was the 2023 National Conference chair for auditioned choirs. She has helped plan ACDA conferences in Cincinnati, Kansas City, Minneapolis, Salt Lake City, Dallas, Oklahoma City, Miami, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Under her direction, Bexley High School Vocal Ensemble has performed at NAFME and ACDA state conferences, including Central Region performances in 2012, 2016, and 2020. Her choirs tour extensively throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. Blosser was named Educator of the Year for Bexley City Schools in 2011 and is the associate director of music at First Community Church. She was selected for the 2015 ACDA International Conductors Exchange Program with Sweden.

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Indian Trail High School and Academy Chorale



The Indian Trail High School and Academy Chorale is the premier mixed choral ensemble at Indian Trail High School and Academy in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Founded in 2010, this seventy-voice ensemble is the cornerstone of the school's vocal music program. The group has performed at regional festivals, state conferences, and internationally in cities including Rome, Paris, London, Vienna, and Salzburg. Representing a diverse student body, the Chorale offers inclusive musical experiences that foster both artistic and personal growth. Through a wide-ranging repertoire, adjudicated events, and global collaborations, the ensemble helps students develop lifelong skills and become thoughtful, creative, and engaged citizens.



John Choi is the director of choral music at Indian Trail High School and Academy in Kenosha, WI, leading Chorale, Cantare, Concert Choir, and Treble Choir, and codirecting the KUSD Madrigal Choir. He served on the Wisconsin Choral Directors' Association board (2008–2012) and planning committees for WCDA conferences (2006–2013), and received the WCDA Outstanding Young Choral Director Award in 2008. In 2023, Choi earned the KUSD Spark Award for excellence in education. He holds a BM from Carroll University and an MME in choral conducting from UW-Milwaukee. Choi also advises the Indian Trail National Honor Society chapter.



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Performing Choirs

Isthmus Vocal Ensemble



The Isthmus Vocal Ensemble was founded in 2002 and has maintained itself as one of Madison's most beloved summer musical traditions. The sixty-member, all-volunteer choir gathers each July for two intensive weeks of rehearsal, culminating in a weekend of performances for the community. Initially drawing from alumni of the UW-Madison Concert Choir, the membership now includes singers from across the Midwest and beyond. Founding artistic director Scott MacPherson led the ensemble from its inception until 2017, building a foundation of musical excellence and fellowship that flourishes to this day under current music director Michael McGaghie.



Michael McGaghie joined the Isthmus Vocal Ensemble as artistic director in 2018. As professor of music and director of choral activities at Macalester College, he conducts the Macalester Concert

Choir and Chorale and teaches courses in musicianship, music history, and conducting. An advocate for the music of living composers, he has commissioned and premiered works by Dominick Argento, Saundor Choi, Dominick DiOrio, Jocelyn Hagen, Tarik O'Regan, Jake Runestad, and Dale Trumbore, among others. He has served in multiple leadership roles within the NCCO.

Lawrence University Cantala



Cantala is a select ensemble comprising SSAA voices (mostly first year and sophomores) whose fields of study represent the broad diversity in a liberal arts education. Founded in the fall of 2000, the choir performs literature that includes traditional advanced treble literature, world, folk, and contemporary works. They perform and record newly commissioned compositions by established and emerging composers from around the world, with over seventy works since 2002. Cantala annually joins forces with all LU choirs and orchestra in performances of choral/orchestral masterworks.



Phillip A. Swan is director of choral studies at Lawrence University and musical director for LU musicals. Swan directs Cantala and LU Vocal Spectrum and teaches courses in conducting and music education. He serves as artistic director for NEWVoices and was the recipient of the 2016 Chorus America Education and Community Engagement Award. Swan has conducted Cantala at two ACDA national conferences (2011 and 2019); four regional conferences (2006, 2014, 2018, and 2022); and one state conference (2004). He participated in ACDA's 2014 International Conductor Exchange Program to China and serves as state president for the Wisconsin CDA. Swan received degrees from Concordia College (Moorhead), UT El Paso, and the University of Miami (Florida).

Linn-Mar High School Bella Voce



Bella Voce is the advanced treble choral ensemble at Linn-Mar High School in Marion, Iowa. One of seven concert choirs and one of three treble choirs in a vibrant and growing program, Bella Voce comprises forty auditioned treble singers in grades ten through twelve. The group is part of a robust fine arts department in which over 750 students participate in at least one of sixteen curricular ensembles across choir, band, and orchestra. Bella Voce is known for its stylistic versatility and ability to perform a wide range of global choral literature, with particular attention given to repertoire that reflects diverse styles, compelling texts, and emotionally resonant experiences.



Jack Jorgensen is a vocal music teacher at Linn-Mar High School in Marion, Iowa, where he directs Bella Voce, Lux, and Concert Chorale. He also serves as the director of the treble prep show choir, Hi-Style, and the music director for Linn-Mar's annual spring musical. Jorgensen earned his BME from Luther College, where he sang in Nordic Choir under the direction of Andrew Last and was assistant conductor to Mark Potvin. A proud Wisconsin native, he now lives in Marion with his wife, Liz—an elementary music teacher in the district who inspires him daily with her creativity and heart. He is grateful to be part of a vibrant fine arts program that values musical excellence, personal growth, and shared joy.

Luther College Nordic Choir



Nordic Choir honors the Lutheran choral tradition while exploring new and innovative choral works that span styles and genres. Nordic Choir has earned a reputation as one of the premier collegiate choral ensembles in the United States. Founded by Sigvart Steen and memorably conducted for fifty-seven years by Weston Noble, previous conductors include Craig Arnold and Allen Hightower. Since 2017 the choir has been under the direction of Andrew Last, who views his role as facilitating the journey from technical artistry to an emotional awakening, saying, "Great choral music stirs within us a spirit and passion, connecting us in a community of belonging and acceptance."



Andrew Last is the Weston Noble Endowed Professor and director of choral activities at Luther College in Decorah, IA, where he conducts the Nordic Choir, teaches conducting, and serves as the artistic director for Christmas at Luther. Last holds a DMA in choral conducting from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he was named a Hixon-Lied Fellow. He received his MM from Northern Arizona University and his BM in education and voice from Luther College. Ensembles under Last's direction have been featured at National ACDA (2017, 2025) and Regional ACDA (2016, 2022). Last made his Carnegie Hall conducting debut in 2019. Last is a frequent clinician and guest conductor around the United States and abroad.



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Performing Choirs

North Scott High School Singers



North Scott Singers is the flagship ensemble at North Scott High School and have consistently received high marks at state contests. Singers are consistently accepted into the all-state program. The choir has performed in Chicago, New York City, Toronto, and the Kansas City Renaissance Festival. The ensemble has premiered three commissioned pieces by Moira Smiley, Connor Koppin, Paul Langford, and Julie Thomas. All North Scott Singers follow a solfège/takadimi curriculum and receive voice instruction, culminating the year by performing a solo.



Lori Potts is the head choral director at North Scott High School in Eldridge, Iowa. She is in her thirty-first year of teaching at North Scott, where she leads three curricular choirs and two jazz choirs with over 180 participants. North Scott Choirs have consistently received high marks at state contests. In 2017, the North Scott Choir made their mark on the all-state scene with nineteen students accepted and averaging fifteen to twenty-five ever since. The program was featured on KWQC TV covering the success of the program. She credits years of adaptability, determination, creative education, Paul Skyles at the junior high, and husband, Bruce, as being her keys to leaving a legacy of building the high school program from “nothing to something.”

Stare at the Sun



Stare at the Sun was founded in 2018, with an inaugural series of concerts presented in January 2019. The ensemble originally comprised graduates from Northwestern University’s Bienen School of Music who sang under Donald Nally and were highly influenced by his work with the Crossing and Northwestern’s elite chamber choir, the Bienen Contemporary/Early Vocal Ensemble. Since the organization’s founding, the ensemble has become much more varied and now consists of professional singers who are active throughout the Chicagoland area. We are currently finishing up our fourth full concert season, which consisted of three full concert cycles, a Call for Scores, and a composer workshop with an educational outreach component.



A.J. Keller serves as associate director of choral organizations at Northwestern University. He recently conducted the world premiere of a commissioned work for Chicago’s Ear Taxi Festival. He has served as a chorus master with Chicago Opera Theater, chorus mastering premiere performances of works by Jake Heggie, Justine Chen, and Errollyn Wallen. He served as assistant chorus master for the world premiere of David Lang’s *prisoner of the state* with the New York Philharmonic in 2019. He is also internationally active, serving as guest conductor in an artistic collaboration with the Danish contemporary-music chamber choir Ensemble Edge, involving performances of Lang’s *the little match girl passion* at the Royal Academy of Music in Aarhus.

University of Wisconsin-Madison Concert Choir



Concert Choir is the premier choral ensemble at the Mead Witter School of Music. The ensemble is composed of singers who demonstrate exceptional musicianship, vocal technique, and ensemble skills. Concert Choir is dedicated to performing a diverse repertoire that spans the entire breadth of the choral literary tradition. In recent years, Concert Choir has achieved significant recognition for its artistry, earning the honor of performing at the 2022 Wisconsin MEA Convention and the 2025 ACDA National Conference. In 2024, Concert Choir was selected as the winner of the American Prize for Best Choral Performance in the large collegiate choir category.



Mariana Farah is the director of choral studies at UW-Madison, where she conducts Concert Choir, teaches courses in graduate choral conducting, and oversees all aspects of a comprehensive choral program. Prior to her appointment at UW-Madison, Farah served as the associate director of choral activities at the University of Kansas. Choirs under her leadership have successfully performed at the Missouri, Kansas, and Wisconsin MEA conventions and at the 2008 and 2018 Southwestern ACDA Region Conferences. The UW-Madison Concert Choir performed at the 2025 ACDA National Conference in Dallas. Farah's research focuses on Brazilian choral music, particularly the choral works of Ernani Aguiar. She maintains an active schedule as a clinician for festivals in Brazil and in the United States.

Waukee High School A Cappella



A Cappella is the premier ensemble at Waukee High School and is part of a comprehensive choral program with a tradition of excellence. A Cappella has appeared twice at national ACDA conferences and multiple regional conferences, including 2022. Over the past ten years, A Cappella has been selected for the Luther College's Dorian Choral Invitational, the featured choir at Wartburg's Meistersinger Honor Choir Festival, the Morningside University Choral Invitational, and the featured 4A ensemble for ICDA's Iowa Choral Showcase three times. In recent years, students from this ensemble have performed with the Urbandale Singers, the King's Singers, VOCES8, the Iowa State Singers, and the Wartburg Choir.



Jeff Knutson is in his ninth year at Waukee High School, where he directs A Cappella, two bass clef choirs, a show choir, and a jazz choir. Each year, Knutson coordinates Festival of Peace, directs a masterwork, and plans a choir tour, with international tours occurring every three years. Knutson received his bachelor's degree from Luther College and his MM in choral conducting from Michigan State University. Knutson serves as an R&R chair for the Iowa Choral Directors Association.



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Interest Sessions

Appropriation or Collaboration? Programming World Music

Are you interested in programming world music repertoire but unsure how to select and teach pieces while avoiding cultural appropriation? In this session, we will discuss concepts of authenticity, cultural validity, appropriation, and collaboration as they relate to world music repertoire in the choral ensemble. The presenter will introduce a checklist for selecting choral arrangements of world music pieces and a brainstorming worksheet for how to teach and rehearse world music for choirs based on research and practitioner articles. Participants will use the checklist to evaluate sample octavos for cultural validity, cultural bias, and practicality. Participants will then discuss how to introduce and rehearse sample pieces with their ensembles in ways that engage cultural collaboration and avoid cultural appropriation.



Austin Norrid is assistant professor of instruction for choral music education at The Ohio University, where he conducts Bella Voce (SSAA) and Choral Union (SATB) and teaches coursework in music education and choral conducting. While completing his PhD in music education at Pennsylvania State University, Norrid served as interim director of Essence of Joy. His research focuses on inclusion and belonging for LGBTQ and multilingual music students and music educators. He has presented research and professional development sessions at state and national conferences and has guest lectured at universities across the United States on topics including multilingual learners, world music pedagogy, and empathy in choral ensembles.

Choir as a Mirror: Reflect and Celebrate Student Identities

What if deeper musical engagement starts by understanding who your students are beyond the notes they sing? This session explores centering identity formation—the ongoing, dynamic process through which individuals come to understand, define, and express who they are. Affirming identity builds trust, celebrates individuality, and encourages rich, expressive ensemble singing. Participants will learn research-backed approaches and methods to create spaces that support healthy identity formation and will leave with a comprehensive toolkit of practices such as expansive, inclusive language, thoughtful rehearsal design, and meaningful repertoire curation that promote student engagement and retention. Reimagine musical excellence and transform your space into one where every voice is truly heard and valued.



Leah Wyman shapes emerging musicians as a graduate instructor of conducting and choral/vocal pedagogy at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She earned degrees from the University of Washington and Manhattan School of Music and directed nine ensembles of diverse voicings during her graduate studies. Wyman's doctoral research explores conscious choral pedagogy, an innovative framework blending cognitive science, interpersonal growth, and social awareness to foster transformative choral experiences. Wyman has conducted and presented at Southwestern ACDA Region and ACDA state conferences in Missouri and Washington. With over a decade leading community and church music, she has spearheaded landmark projects like the Ohio premiere of Joshua Clausen's *Requiem: For Victims of American Mass Shootings* with the Fairmount Choir.



Cee E. Adamson (she/they/Mx.) stands as a beacon of versatility and excellence, seamlessly weaving together her roles as an opera singer, voice teacher, choral di-

rector, and arts administrator with grace and passion. As a choral educator, Adamson assumes the role of a visionary choral director whose leadership has transformed vocal ensembles into beacons of musical excellence. Adamson serves as the artistic director and conductor of STANCE: Seattle Trans and Nonbinary Choral Ensemble. Adamson earned a DMA in vocal performance and choral conducting from the University of Washington. She also earned an MM and a master's of performance from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. Her other education includes the Advanced Artist Diploma and MM from Shenandoah Conservatory and undergraduate degrees in music, theatre arts, accounting, and management from Franklin Pierce University.



Anjali Chudasama is a singer, educator, and conductor focused on developing individual identities and connecting with the community through music. Chudasama is the director of choirs at Shoreline Community College, where she serves students in classroom-based, ensemble, and private studio contexts. She earned an MM in choral conducting at the University of Washington, where she worked with students in the Treble Choir and Chamber Singers, and in the music history and music education departments. She is thrilled to work the vibrant Seattle community and enjoys participating as a conductor and singer in the community and professional ensembles such as Harmonia Chorus and Orchestra, the Choir of the Sound, and the Evergreen Ensemble, as well as serving as an interim director of the Chamber Singers at Seattle University.

Collective Wisdom: Reflections from Midwestern Prison Choirs

This session will be led by five prison choir practitioners who will each share snapshots of their unique settings, exploring the many forms musicking in prison may take and the challenges experienced along the way. Reflections from currently and formerly incarcerated

singers will be shared, as well as select audio and video footage of the prison choirs. In addition to discussing specific carceral contexts, this session will connect more broadly to anyone interested in the intersections of justice and choral singing. The presenters will share how their work in prisons has impacted the work they do with choirs on the outside. Participants will leave with educational resources, suggested repertoire (including songs by incarcerated composers), ideas and “how-tos” for collaborating within prisons, and inspiration from a population that is most often forgotten in our “reflections of us.”



Amanda Weber is passionate about uniting music, art, and community through her work as an artist and collaborator. Weber is the founder and artistic director of Voices of Hope, an organization that builds choral singing communities in correctional facilities in the state of Minnesota. Founded in 2015, Voices of Hope has been featured through numerous publications including the *Choral Journal* (2021), a chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of Community Singing* (2023), a 2016 TEDx Minneapolis Salon, and Weber's doctoral dissertation, which was awarded ACDA's Julius Herford Dissertation Prize in 2018. In addition to her work as a



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Interest Sessions

prison choir practitioner, Weber is active as a conductor, singer, pianist, and composer. She currently serves as the director of worship and the arts at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis.



Catherine Roma has created vibrant choral communities that reach across barriers of race, religion, class, sexual orientation, and age for over forty years. She works to translate the values of social justice and

inclusion into fundamental experiences of community for both audience and singers. Roma became one of the founding mothers of the women's choral movement when she started Anna Crusis Women's Choir in Philadelphia in 1975 and founded MUSE Cincinnati's Women's Choir in 1983. She is emeritus professor of music at Wilmington College. Through Wilmington, she has directed numerous prison choirs, beginning with the UMOJA Men's Chorus at Warren Correctional Institution in Lebanon, OH. Currently she conducts NIA Men's Chorus at Chillicothe-CI. In 2012, Roma founded the one hundred-voice World House Choir in Yellow Springs, OH, which often performs for peace and justice within prisons.



Mary Cohen is a professor of music education at the University of Iowa and lead author of *Music-Making in US Prisons: Listening to Incarcerated Voices*. She led the Oakdale Community Choir, comprising

non-incarcerated and incarcerated singers, from 2009 to 2020. The participants wrote 150 original songs, and the choir sang seventy-five of those songs. She created the Inside Outside Songwriting Collaboration Project with incarcerated and non-incarcerated partners who build relationships while creating original songs. Cohen coleads the International Music and Justice Inquiry Network Caring Communities: scholars from over twenty countries who lead or research music making in prisons and collaborate virtually. She has been a keynote speaker in Germany, Canada, Portugal, and England, interviewed by BBC3 *Music Matters*, and completed over forty publications.



Jody Kerchner is NEA Conservatory Professor of Music Education at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. She teaches courses in choral conducting, community music engagement, music psychology, creativity, and pedagogy. She is president-elect of the International Society for Music Education. Kerchner is also the founder/conductor of the Oberlin Music at Grafton Prison Choir, an all-male choir at a state-level, minimum- and medium-security prison in Northeast Ohio, where the choir has just completed its tenth year. Kerchner holds a PhD in music education from Northwestern University, and MM in vocal performance and BME from West Chester University.



Laura Clapp is a graduate student in choral conducting at the University of Michigan, where she directs the university's prison outreach choir, Out of the Blue.

A recipient of the 2025 Presser Graduate Music Award, she is currently researching prison choirs in the United States and UK. Prior to her graduate studies, Clapp worked with Voices of Hope, a Minnesota-based prison choir organization, as a recipient of the Yale Glee Club Service Through Music Fellowship. While in Minnesota, Clapp also codirected StreetSong, a choir for people who have experienced homelessness. She has been a researcher for the New Muses Project, helping build their database of marginalized composers, and a soprano and teaching artist with Border CrosSing.

Due Diligence: First Steps for Ethical Native Engagement

Choral educators are often asked to include diverse voices, but "due diligence" is not always part of the equation. In this session, we will explore what it means to ethically engage with Native American music. Thomas Goedecke and Alyssa Beltran (Pyramid Lake Paiute) will share how to navigate the complex

layers of colonialism, appropriation, and misrepresentation in Native music programming. We will also examine how to build authentic relationships with Native communities, ensuring that your programming goes beyond tokenism. Attendees will leave with practical strategies for respecting Native music, creating space for Native voices, and ensuring that your programming benefits Native peoples through academic research and community-based projects, including Nā Haku Mele, a yearly call for scores for new works in 'ōlelo Hawai'i.



Thomas Goedecke (PhD, music composition), based on Maui, Hawai'i, is most known for his work intersecting sound worlds from Western and Pacific non-Western voices. He specifically finds joy in working with indigenous languages of the Pacific and combining them with traditionally western ensembles, advocating for the proliferation and celebration of Polynesian, Asia-Pacific, and American indigenous art. Goedecke is currently a tenure-track instructor at the University of Hawai'i Maui College, where he directs the College Chorus and Hawaiian Chorus and teaches in the Institute of Hawaiian Music and music studies programs. As a composer, conductor, and educator, he is dedicated to preserving and promoting these cultural traditions.



Alyssa Beltran (Pyramid Lake Paiute) is a Native music educator, scholar, and Powwow dancer based in Santa Cruz, California. She currently serves as the director of choral activities at Pacific Collegiate Charter School, teaching choir and intro to performing arts to students in grades seven to twelve. Beltran also serves as the vocal director for the school's spring musical, working alongside the department's theater, instrumental music, and dance educators. She is pursuing a master's in secondary education at San José State University, where she earned her BME and minor in Native American studies. Her teaching experience spans concert and jazz choirs, concert and jazz bands, strings, performing arts, and general music. Beltran is committed to fostering inclusive musical environments full of meaningful collaborations.

Evolving Landscapes: Choral Music Education in Underserved Areas

Higher education is facing more and more challenges as the world continues to change. Additionally, many of us teach in areas where students are often underserved. Each student is different when it comes to their preparation for studying music in college. Our panel discussion seeks to ask some tough questions: How do we meet the needs of our students? How do we “meet them where they are” while also preparing them adequately for the future of music education? Our goal is to start a conversation so we can share ideas about how to better prepare our students for today's world.



Erin Colwitz is professor of music and director of choral activities at Northern Michigan University (NMU), where she conducts the Arts Chorale and the University Choir. Under her leadership, NMU choirs have toured Italy, Finland, Austria, and Poland, as well as throughout the United States. Her choirs were chosen to sing at both Michigan and Alabama educators' conferences. Colwitz is a frequent guest conductor, lecturer, contest adjudicator, and choral clinician throughout the United States. As a clinician and lecturer, Colwitz presents at conferences at the state, regional, national, and international levels, including at the Athens Institute of Research and in Bangkok and Chiangmai, Thailand. She earned her MM and DMA from the University of Southern California.



Gabriela Hristova is an associate professor of music at the University of Michigan-Flint. She conducts the University Chorale and Chamber Singers, and teaches courses in conducting, choral literature, and music performance. Hristova directs the Summer Vocal Academy of Music for middle and high school students at the University of Michigan-Flint, which is recognized for its high level of music instruction. She previously taught as a visiting professor of conducting and director of choirs at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Oberlin, Ohio, and conducted



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the University of Michigan Women's Glee Club during her doctoral studies at the University of Michigan.



Gerald Case-Blanchard, baritone, serves as vocal director and music program area coordinator at Kellogg Community College, where he has taught since 2004. A native of Philadelphia, he holds a BME from West Chester University of Pennsylvania, an MM in vocal performance from Central Michigan University, and a DMA in voice performance from Michigan State University. His recordings include *With a Song in My Heart* (Blue Griffin Records), *I Can Tell the World*, *Live with the Earl Nelson Singers*, and Mozart's *Requiem* with the Detroit Symphony Civic Orchestra. He has held faculty appointments at the University of Michigan–Flint, Adrian College, Lansing Community College, and the Michigan State University Community Music School. He currently serves on the board of directors for Michigan ACDA.



Steven Hankle is associate professor of choral music and music education at the University of Dayton, where he directs the University Chorale and Bella Voce and teaches choral conducting and methods. He also serves as chorus director for the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra Chorus and as choral faculty at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, where he conducts the Festival Choir, Vocal Ensemble, and Staff Choir. A versatile conductor and educator, Hankle has led performances of major works by Rutter, Brahms, Hagenberg, Thomas, Faure, and Mozart, and has served as conductor, clinician, and adjudicator throughout the United States, Kenya, and Mexico. A native of Chicago, Hankle earned degrees from San Francisco State University and The Florida State University.

In Her Voice:

Spotlighting Female Choral Composers

The purpose of this interest session is to introduce attendees to *In Her Voice: Spotlighting Female Choral Composers* (GIA, 2025), a book that focuses only on women composers who write primarily for choral ensembles and who represent a span of several centuries, multiple countries, and various genres of music. Fifty-six authors wrote about 225 composers, giving information about their lives and music. Each entry includes biographical information; the titles of several compositions with details about voicing, instrumentation, duration, publishers; and a bibliography for further reference. A panel of four people involved in the book's creation will describe the context of the project and share video recordings from additional contributors.



Hilary Apfelstadt is professor emerita of choral studies at the University of Toronto. She remains active as a guest conductor, clinician, masterclass presenter, and author. She has served ACDA as interim executive director, national president, Central Region president, North Carolina president, and has received leadership awards from both ACDA (NC-ACDA, Ohio-ACDA, Central Region, Midwestern Region) and Choirs Ontario in Canada. She has taught public school, community, and church choirs and was a faculty member at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro and The Ohio State University. Her ensembles have performed at conferences of ACDA and Choral Canada, and she has guest conducted many festival choirs, including forty all-state choirs in the United States and the National Youth Choir of Canada. She curates a choral series by Canadian composers for Hinshaw Music.



Alan Troy Davis is a conductor, music educator, voice teacher, and tenor with experience in academic, church, and community music settings. Davis has taught choral music at high schools in Oregon,

Colorado, and California, earning superior ratings and awards with his ensembles. He has completed doctoral coursework in choral conducting at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where he was assistant conductor for four choirs and teaching assistant for the advanced conducting course. He holds an MM in choral conducting, an MME in secondary education, and a BM. His research focuses on choral intonation, conducting pedagogy, and repertoire by women composers. He is the architect, associate editor, and contributing author for *Choral Repertoire by Women Composers* (GIA, 2025) and copresented an interest session at the 2025 ACDA National Conference.

Lynne Gackle is a clinician for this session. Her photo and bio are on page 96.



Mari Ésaabel Valverde is an award-winning transgender Mexican American composer who has been commissioned by ACDA, Boston Choral Ensemble, Cantus, the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses, Los Angeles Master Chorale, One Voice Mixed Chorus, Portland's Resonance Ensemble, Seattle Men's and Women's Choruses, TMEA, and the University of Michigan Men's Glee Club. She has also built a reputation as a singer, educator, adjudicator, and translator. Following six years as a high school classical voice instructor, she spent two years specializing in transgender voice training. Proficient in Spanish, French, and Brazilian Portuguese, she has translated numerous vocal works and documents. A native of North Texas, she holds degrees from St. Olaf College and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

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The Intersections of Gospel and European Choral Traditions

This session will explore the dynamic intersections between gospel music and European choral traditions through the lens of gospel composers Isaac Cates, Diane L. White-Clayton, and Raymond Wise. Choral directors will be provided with pedagogical insight and repertoire suggestions that are both stylistically authentic and accessible to ensembles trained in traditional Western art music. Participants will engage with annotated score excerpts, conductor's analysis charts, and performance recordings to examine how gospel's oral tradition, rhythmic drive, and expressive spirituality can harmonize with the structural clarity, counterpoint, and vocal balance of European choral works. By engaging both traditions, we discover deeper connections across race, history, and musical lineage, honoring gospel not as "other" but as part of our shared choral heritage.



Bryon Black II is an active choral conductor and composer. He currently serves as an assistant professor of music and director of choirs at DePauw University. He received his DMA in choral conducting from the University of South Carolina. His research of the intersections between gospel music and European choral traditions provides choral conductors with accessible repertoire and pedagogy for approaching gospel music. Black's compositions have been performed by several collegiate, church, and community ensembles. This includes a live concert album, *In the Spirit! An Encounter with Spirituals*, featuring original choral arrangements of spirituals by himself and Durrell LeGair. Black resides in Indianapolis, IN, with his wife, Briannah.

Más Que Ritmo: Heart and Heritage of Latinx Choral Music

This session explores the rich diversity of Latinx vocal music and how it reflects the many voices, cultures, and stories within Latinx communities. What makes Latinx music Latinx? Is it language, rhythm, or the history behind it? We'll examine the defining influences—Indigenous, African, European, and contemporary—and how they blend into a living tradition. From folk songs to modern Latinx composers working within classical forms, this session highlights how music expresses unique identities and shared experiences. Participants will gain practical tools for teaching this repertoire, including Spanish diction, rhythmic feel, culturally responsive rehearsal strategies, and approaches to oral tradition. Together, we'll sing and move, embracing the vibrant rhythms and emotional vitality central to Latinx expression. Attendees will leave with rehearsal-ready resources, historical and cultural context, and curated repertoire lists suitable for varied ages and ensembles.



Eric D. Reyes is a Mexican American conductor who was born and raised in Southern California. Reyes is assistant professor of music and director of choral activities at Hope College, where he leads ensembles such as the Chapel Choir, College Chorus, and VERITAS. He also founded ¡Canto!, a program supporting high school Latinx vocalists. Reyes holds an MM and DMA in choral conducting from the University of Michigan. He is grateful for the support of his wife, soprano Jennie Judd Reyes, and his mentors.

Redefining Community: Choral Music at the Margins

What does "community" choir really mean? This session invites choral leaders to rethink inclusivity by

exploring music making at the margins of society. Drawing on the presenter's experience starting a choir in a women's correctional facility, we will examine how choral music can restore dignity, build connection, and foster artistic expression in overlooked spaces. Topics include how to begin a program in a prison or similar setting, suggested musical resources, and strategies for building trust and access in nontraditional ensembles. Participants will also engage in broader reflection on access, justice, and belonging in the choral world. Whether you're starting something new or reimagining your current community, this session offers practical tools and inspiration to expand your definition of who gets to sing.



Elena Cressy is a passionate conductor and educator pursuing her DMA in choral conducting at the University of Iowa. She earned her MM in choral conducting from the University of Kansas and holds a degree in music education from Carthage College. Cressy taught elementary music and high school choir in Milwaukee and was music and theatre director at Kettle Moraine School for Arts and Performance. At KU, she assisted with several choirs, served as minister of music at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, and was associate director of the Lawrence Children's Choir. Her work explores the intersection of choral music and social justice, including founding a choir at the Women's Correctional Facility in Topeka, KS. She is an active guest conductor and clinician known for her vibrant energy and collaborative spirit.

Selecting and Programming Repertoire with Purpose

At all levels of musical experience, skill, and maturity, the singers we work with deeply desire to connect with the music we assign them to learn. We make great efforts to select pedagogically appropriate repertoire that will engage singers and audiences. However, many choral performances just simply don't connect with our community. The questions that need to be

considered are: Is this music and the program that it is a part of relevant? Are we setting our singers up for success and opportunities to meaningfully engage with the repertoire we have chosen? Does it cultivate their musical and nonmusical skills to serve? This session will provide new national data-based repertoire selection trends, suggest programming models for choirs of all abilities, and provide resources to ensure the music we select is diverse in conceit, origin, and impact.



William McLean is the associate director of choral activities at Baylor University, where he conducts choirs and teaches courses in conducting and choral literature. He has served as associate conductor of the Dallas Symphony Chorus and on the faculty of the University of Texas at Arlington. Ensembles under his direction have performed at the national ACDA conference and state NAFME conferences. McLean has presented sessions at international, national, and state ACDA and music education conferences on topics of community building, programming, and innovative rehearsal strategies. He holds degrees from the University of North Texas, Baylor University, and St. Olaf College.

Singing by Heart: Aural Tradition in the Choral Classroom

Cultures around the world use the aural tradition to teach and share songs. While notation and music literacy are essential aspects of our choral classrooms, teaching songs through the aural tradition (i.e., "by heart") encourages and promotes active listening, focus, and teaches style and artistry in ways that notation cannot. In this session, participants will learn a variety of songs by rote, hone pedagogy for teaching aurally, and see how incorporating this music and pedagogy strengthens our communities and ensembles. Come to this session ready to sing, connect, and expand your aural abilities.



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Elisabeth Cherland (she/her) is a fourth-generation choral conductor as well as professor, singer, song leader, violinist, and Lutheran church musician. As director of choral activities at Minnesota

State University, Mankato, she teaches courses in choral methods, conducting, theory, private voice, and conducts the Concert Choir and Chamber Singers. Cherland earned a DMA in choral conducting at the University of Washington, an MME with certification degree from VanderCook College of Music, and a bachelor's in music and English from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. Her research interests include women in academia, feminist and narrative research, and song leading and aural pedagogy. She lives with her partner and two children in St. Peter, Minnesota, and loves story-telling and story-hearing, knitting, bubble tea, and sunshine when it's available.

Standards-Based Grading in the 6–12 Music Curriculum

Discover how Standards-Based Grading (SBG) can bring clarity, consistency, and equity to grades six to twelve music assessment. This session shifts the focus from points and participation to mastery of clearly defined learning goals aligned with the National Core Arts Standards. Led by a teacher using SBG since 2018, you'll see real examples from ensemble, general music, and composition classes. Learn to create rubrics, design student-friendly learning targets, and track growth with digital tools. Whether you're new to SBG or refining your system, you'll gain practical strategies and solutions to common challenges such as communicating grades to students and families. Leave with rubrics, lesson materials, and a digital tracker to support meaningful, student-centered assessment.

Matthew Clark is the choral director at Daniel Wright Junior High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois, where he



leads a comprehensive vocal music program for grades six through eight. He holds degrees from Vanderbilt University (BM, MME) and Michigan State University (MM in choral conducting). Clark has taught at both middle and high school levels and regularly presents on standards-based grading, curriculum development, and adolescent vocal technique. A committed advocate for student-centered music education, he fosters a classroom environment focused on growth, creativity, and collaboration. He frequently serves as a clinician and guest conductor.

Supporting Sopranos in the Choral Ensemble

Do the sopranos in your ensemble complain of vocal fatigue? Do you want to help them to be successful? Sopranos face a unique challenge in that their part is often the most audible and can be difficult to sing with healthy vocal technique. There can be a disconnect between what they learn in private lessons versus what they are asked to do in a choral rehearsal regarding vibrato, resonance, diction/vowel modification, and register shifts. This session is based on interviews with sopranos who have made careers both as soloists and ensemble singers, and will give you tools to help the sopranos in your choirs to be successful. Although this session gives specific advice for sopranos, much of it can easily be applied to other voice parts.



Christiana Howell directs the Women's Choir, All-College Choir, and teaches private voice at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's College in St. Joseph, Minnesota. An active singer, she is a soprano with the Minnesota Renaissance Choir, Bach Roots, and The Summer Singers, and has sung in professional choirs and opera choruses in the United States and abroad. She holds degrees in music educa-

tion, vocal performance, and choral conducting. She has conducted choirs across North America, the UK, and Europe, and currently directs the South Metro Chorale in Savage, MN.

Unified Music: A Practical Demonstration of Music for All

Unified Music is a celebration of belonging and inclusion that offers a practical model where students of all abilities—those receiving accessible education services and their general education peers—make music side by side. This interactive session demonstrates the daily structure of a thriving Unified Music program, including classroom rituals, a mini lesson, and a closing activity. Designed for educators new to or experienced with inclusive practices, the session includes resources, curriculum ideas, and Q&A. We'll explore advocacy tools and student perspectives that highlight music's power to unify. Join us as we expand access to music making and help Unified Music become a celebrated practice across the Midwest and beyond.



Zack Carlson-Giving is the vocal music director at Buffalo High School, where he leads all curricular and extracurricular choirs, directs annual musicals, and teaches Unified Music. Under his leadership, the Concert Choir was selected to perform at the 2020 MMEA Midwinter Clinic. Unified Music performed at the 2024 ACDA-MN Fall Conference and the 2025 MMEA Midwinter Clinic. Carlson-Giving cofounded the Minnesota Choral Mentorship Program and has presented sessions at MMEA and ACDA conferences at the state and regional levels. He is the current ACDA-MN R&R chair for high school choirs and was honored in 2021 as the ACDA-MN Outstanding Young Choral Director of the Year. In 2024 he conducted the ACDA-MN 7-8 CTB Honor Choir. He holds degrees from the University of Minnesota Duluth and Michigan State University.

Using Technology to Enhance Student Learning in Choirs

As this year's conference theme eloquently states, we as choral music educators should strive to embrace the "ever-evolving tapestry of our art." One of the most significant aspects of our evolution in the choral classroom over the past decade has been innovation in technology. This immediately applicable session will explore a range of technological tools that can enhance student learning in the choral setting. Current trends in music technology will be examined, including the use of performance assessment platforms, laptops/tablets, smartphones and web-based collaboration, Artificial Intelligence, and more. Benefits of using technology-assisted learning tools will be discussed alongside barriers that may impede successful technology integration. The session will also feature practitioner-focused demonstrations of technology-assisted tools and suggestions for effective implementation.



Jason Hawkins is a professor of choral music education at Western Illinois University, where he directs choral ensembles, teaches music education courses, and serves as the assistant director of the School of Music. He earned degrees in music education from WIU, Governors State, and the University of Illinois. Hawkins returned to WIU as a professor following twelve years at Plainfield North HS, a program that grew from thirty-five to two hundred students during his tenure and received numerous honors, including a spotlight performance at Carnegie Hall and a *DownBeat* award in vocal jazz. Hawkins makes frequent appearances as a clinician/conductor for state choral festivals and nationally with WorldStrides Heritage Festivals. He has presented research on the use of technology in the choral classroom at multiple state music education association conferences and has related publications in print.



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Honor Choir Conductors

6th-9th Grade Treble



Coty Raven Morris, a New Orleans native, is the Hinckley Assistant Professor of Choir, Music Education, and Social Justice at Portland State University. She holds a master's in choral conducting from Michigan State University. A newly published composer, Morris's works have been performed at honor choirs and festivals across the country. She is also a two-time Grammy Music Educator nominee (finalist, 2024; semifinalist, 2025). Morris is a host at All Classical Radio and the International Children's Arts Network. She also serves as chorus master and artistic collaborator with Portland Center Stage, the Oregon Symphony Orchestra, and Choirs of America. She is the founder of Being Human Together, a community focused on conversations around mental health, diversity, and inclusivity in music education.

10th-12th Grade Tenor/Bass



Ryan Beeken serves as director of choral activities and associate director for the School of Music at Wichita State University, where he conducts the Concert Chorale and Madrigal Singers and teaches graduate and undergraduate conducting and literature. His choirs have been featured at state, regional, and national conferences of ACDA and NAfME. A frequent guest conductor and clinician, Beeken has received invitations to lead nearly one hundred all-state and honor choirs in twenty-two states and internationally. He recently concluded service on the national executive board of ACDA as chair for student membership and previously held leadership roles at regional and state levels. Prior to WSU, he taught at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Michigan State University, Drake University, and in Iowa public schools.

6th-9th Grade Tenor/Bass



Herbert Washington is the Harvey K. Smith Artistic Director of the Grammy Award-winning Phoenix Boys Choir and a proud alumnus of the organization. Widely recognized for his dynamic teaching style, he is an active choral clinician, conductor, lecturer, and adjudicator. He also cofounded The Choral Window, an international resource for directors that shares innovative techniques to enhance music literacy and energize rehearsals. Beyond choral education, Washington is a passionate advocate for diverse musical styles, having produced, composed, and arranged music in both commercial and radio settings. A graduate of St. Olaf College and the University of Arizona, he founded the award-winning cappella ensemble Meow or Never and has served in leadership roles with ACDA.

10th-12th Grade Treble



Kelly A. Miller is an associate professor of music and coordinator of music education at the University of Central Florida, where she conducts the SoAl Chorus, TeBa Chorus, and the UCF Community Choir. She teaches undergraduate and graduate classes in music education while coordinating and supervising student teachers through their junior and senior internships. She enjoys presenting choral, vocal, and leadership workshops and frequently serves as a clinician and festival adjudicator. Miller is the current editor-in-chief of the *Florida Music Director*, the chancel choir director at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church in Orlando, and a past president of Florida ACDA. She holds National Board Certification in secondary choral music and a DMA in choral conducting from Michigan State University.