



2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Conference Overview



Jeffery Ames

Our Southern Region is culturally diverse. We scatter and shine like a prism of light. This truth heavily influenced this year's conference theme, "Prism of Voices."

When considering a program for our ensembles or worship services, we subconsciously think of how music can be viewed through the lens of a prism. By embracing different styles and cultures, music naturally breaks into a broad spectrum of sounds, textures, and experiences. When viewed through the lens of cultural diversity and stylistic interpretation—which includes the Western canon—music transforms into a soundscape rich with stimulating tonalities, rhythms, and emotional expressions.

We are all different and have varying thoughts about music along with different beliefs and biases. These variances contribute to our beauty.

Just as a prism reveals the hidden beauty within light, exploring music through the lens of various styles and cultures unveils an expansive sonic landscape, inviting listeners into new experiences, emotions, and connections across time and place. This is the purpose of the 2026 Southern Region Conference, and we believe there is so much to offer.

All roads and flight paths lead to Memphis, Tennessee! The conference team and I are very excited about the 2026 conference being held where the iconic Mississippi River flows along the banks of the birthplace of the Blues, Rock & Roll, and the home of Elvis; it's also a hotspot for foodies.

Okay now... "Y'all come!" Be ready to experience beauty on many levels, and may your heart, mind, and soul spread music, love, and light. We'll see you at "Prism of Voices" 2026!

Southern Region Conference Registration Information

until January 15 at 11:59 PM CST

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

January 16 - March 7

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

One Day \$175 **only available on site**

Register at acda.org/region-conferences



2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Headliner/President's Concert

Headliner

Ansan City Choir (South Korea)



Ansan City Choir was founded in 1995 and has attracted attention for its diverse repertoire from the Renaissance to the contemporary, with original compositions showcasing the music and traditions of Korean culture. The choir receives praise for its demanding season of over seventy concerts that are innovative and diverse. Ansan City Choir has been invited to prominent choral events such as the World Choir Symposium (2002 US and 2017 Spain), the Vatican Concert (2011), and the 2012 and 2019 ACDA National Conferences. At home and abroad, the Ansan City Choir proudly promotes the heritage of the Korean choral tradition. After celebrating its thirtieth anniversary in 2025, the Ansan City Choir is pioneering a new path of choral artistry with conductor Dr. Jihoon Park.



Jihoon Park is a well-respected composer and the conductor of the Ansan City Choir. He has composed choral music in various styles that include traditional settings as well as others that incorporate his Korean heritage. Park has conducted professional and semi-professional choirs in Korea and guest conducted in venues across the United States, Europe, and the UK. Park has received favorable reviews for his robust programming, which is balanced with repertoire that showcases his musical sensitivity. As a conductor and composer, he will continue his development into

a performer who leads his singers into a diverse and innovative future.

President's Concert

Requiem for Colour: A Journey through Lament and Joy

Requiem for Colour: A Journey through Lament and Joy is more than a typical requiem. It is a journey from West Africa to present-day America told through music, spoken word, and powerful imagery. Composed in the Western tradition, the work skillfully incorporates Black idiomatic styles to include spirituals, jazz, R&B, hip-hop, and gospel to mourn the conflicts and celebrate the successes of Black Americans. This powerful opus reckons with our past and current societal vices of injustice; yet amid the despair, life is renewed as we celebrate new beginnings and hope for a better tomorrow. *Requiem for Colour* will be performed by the 2026 Collegiate Honor Choir, accompanied by the Belmont University Symphony Orchestra, two dynamic orators, a soprano soloist who will melt your heart, and a tenor soloist who will empower your heart.



André J. Thomas is an associate artist with the London Symphony Orchestra and emeritus professor of music at The Florida State University. He served as visiting professor of choral conducting at Yale University (2020–2022) and has been a faculty member at the University of Texas, Austin. A renowned guest conductor, Thomas has led prestigious orchestras and choirs worldwide. He is also a distinguished composer and arranger, with works published by Gentry, Hinshaw, Lawson Gould, Boosey & Hawkes, Heritage Music Press, and others. His book, *Way Over in Beulah Lan'... Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual*, is a significant contribution to the field. Thomas has received numerous honors, including the Robert Shaw Award from ACDA (2017) and the Samuel Si-

mons Sanford Medal from Yale University. He is a past national president of ACDA.

Belmont University Chorale



Chorale is the flagship classical choral ensemble of the School of Music at Belmont University. Formed in 1970, it is also one of the earliest performing ensembles in Belmont's musical history. This auditioned, mixed ensemble performs diverse literature from all genres. The Belmont Chorale has been recognized for its musical excellence with performances at MENC conventions and the Southern ACDA Region. The ensemble tours annually, and international performances include the St. Moritz Festival in Switzerland (1985 and 1987); Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia (1989); England (2004); the Republic of China (2007); Italy (2011); Latvia and Estonia (2015); the Republic of Ghana (2019); and Puerto Rico (2024).



Jeffery L. Ames serves as the Southern ACDA Region president, director of choral activities, and full professor at Belmont University. A published composer and writer, Ames specializes in composing works that are from the heart. His literary publications focus on choral music in the concert gospel genre as well as choral music in the Western tradition composed by modern Black composers. Ames holds the honor of being the first recipient of the prestigious ACDA James Mulholland Choral Music Fellowship (2005), being the

first African American ACDA International Conductors Exchange Program Fellow (2016), and being the first African American recipient of the Presidential Faculty Achievement Award (2023), the highest honor bestowed to a faculty member at Belmont University.

Belmont University Symphony Orchestra



Symphony Orchestra is a full symphony orchestra of the finest string, woodwind, brass, and percussion musicians on campus. The Symphony Orchestra seeks to prepare classical and commercial music majors for successful careers performing professional-level repertoire that includes classical historic eras, contemporary classical, globally influenced compositions, jazz, popular, and folkloric styles of music. In addition to its annual performance in Belmont's "Christmas at Belmont," the Symphony Orchestra has performed with music celebrities Andrea Bocelli, Trisha Yearwood, Cody Fry, CeCe Winans, and Tracy Silverman.



Christopher H. Fashun is a versatile conductor, performer, and music educator known for his ability to conduct and perform across classical, popular, and folkloric styles. A champion of new music, Fashun has commissioned choral works, conducted the Oregon and Iowa all-state orchestras, and presents frequently at national and state music education conferences. A distinguished recipient of a 2019 Fulbright Award in the U.S.

Scholar Program, Fashun lived in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, researching Afro-Brazilian music and culture. His project title, “The Dissemination of Afro-Brazilian Music in Salvador da Bahia,” explored the cultural, racial, religious, and musical milieu that contribute to the shared musical identity of Afro-Brazilians.

Coahoma Community College Concert Choir



The Coahoma Community College Concert Choir maintains an established reputation in Mississippi for performing diverse repertoire that includes arranged concert spirituals, oratorios, and gospel music. They have sung at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation in Washington DC, Mississippi ACDA, and the Southern Miss Invitational Choral Conference. Kelvin K. Tower's arrangement of “A Change is Gonna Come” was featured in the internationally aired *Pulse* film documentary (London, England). The choir continues to garner the profoundly honored place of representing Coahoma Community College nationally and globally. They have toured throughout the United States and most recently in Tokyo, Japan.



Kelvin K. Towers serves as the fine arts department chair and director of choral activities at Coahoma Community College in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Since joining the college in 2002, Towers has

built a distinguished twenty-three-year career leading a wide range of vocal ensembles including Concert Choir, Gospel Choir, Show Choir, Barbershop Quar-

ter, and Men's and Women's Vocal Ensembles. Towers has adjudicated choral festivals and competitions at the local, state, and national levels, including for Southern ACDA Region. He has served as president of the MACJC Choral Directors Association and currently leads the two-year college R&R division of Mississippi ACDA. Towers holds a PhD and an MME from the University of Mississippi.

Mississippi Valley State University Valley Singers



The Valley Singers have been Mississippi Valley State University's premier choral ensemble since 1960 and exemplify the university's commitment to excellence in the performing arts. Comprising forty-five select vocalists, the Valley Singers represent the pinnacle of MVSU's choral tradition, showcasing a diverse repertoire that spans centuries and styles. The Valley Singers have earned invitations to prestigious conferences and festivals, including their historic debut at the 2025 Mississippi MEA/Mississippi ACDA State Conference. The ensemble also represented the university on the international stage at the 2025 International Verona Choral Competition in Italy, where they proudly received the Silver Cup in their category.

Brandon T. Cash is director of choral activities and assistant professor of music at Mississippi Valley State University, where he conducts the University Choir,



Men's Glee, Women's Chorale, and Valley Singers. He also teaches secondary choral methods, choral conducting, and applied voice. Cash holds a doctorate in choral music education from the University of Georgia, an MM in choral conducting from the University of Nebraska–Omaha, and an MA in counseling and a BME from Hampton University. He has earned advanced certifications in educational leadership, law and policy, and music education. An accomplished clinician, adjudicator, tenor soloist, and researcher, Cash serves as Mississippi ACDA's R&R coordinator for world music and cultures, chair of repertoire-specific choirs, and a national board member of NCCO.

Tennessee State University Meistersingers and University Choir



The Meistersingers is the premier chamber choral ensemble at Tennessee State University. As an auditioned mixed ensemble, many members also participate in TSU's larger choral ensemble, the University Choir. Meistersingers performs literature from Renaissance to current popular music genres. The University Choir is the large choral ensemble of Tennessee State University. The ensemble prides itself on having high musical expectations and performing a wide variety of standard choral literature while also being open to all students of TSU. Over half of the members of the University Choir hold majors other than music. The University Choir comes from a long, respected tradition of choral singing among Historically Black Colleges and Universities.



Jasmine Fripp is a Grammy-nominated music educator and the director of choral activities at Tennessee State University, where she leads the University Choir, the Meistersingers, and the newly reinstated TSU Showstoppers Showchoir. She is also the founder of The Passionate Black Educator, a platform that empowers music educators and advocates for holistic, culturally responsive education for Black and Brown students. With nearly a decade of teaching experience, Fripp has developed award-winning choral programs known for excellence and cultural relevance. Her students have performed at Bridgestone Arena, the Country Music Hall of Fame, and the Nashville Schermerhorn Symphony Center. She is a recording artist and songwriter and holds degrees from Winthrop and Belmont Universities.

Corona del Mar High School Madrigal Singers singing with high school students from Cape Town, while on tour to South Africa in 2024. Photo by Vanessa Valdes

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2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Special Events

Music in Worship Event

Longing for Light

In a world filled with uncertainty, we long for light to guide us. In this interfaith service we will look for light together, raising our voices in song. We will sing and hear familiar and beloved hymns/anthems. There will also be new music, including “Shine, O Light,” a new hymn setting of HYFRYDOL by Terre Johnson. The featured performing ensemble is the Inspirar Choir from Rock Hill, SC, conducted by Jeremy Mims.

Inspirar



Inspirar is a nonprofit ensemble based in Rock Hill, South Carolina. They strive to engage, educate, impact, and inspire audiences through exceptional, high-level choral singing; promote unity and harmony through the performance of diverse choral literature; and provide transformative, awe-inspiring choral performances to listeners and supporters. They are composed of conductors, voice teachers, and performers committed to providing quality performances for their community.



Jeremy Mims is associate professor of music and director of choral activities at Winthrop University. Previously he was on the faculties of Clarke University and Whitman College, where he conducted the choirs and orchestra, and was a public school edu-

cator in El Paso. Mims has served as conductor and pianist for numerous high school all-region and all-state choirs, as well for professional and university choruses. His choirs have performed at state and regional conferences, at Carnegie Hall, and in festivals in Bulgaria, Italy, and the Czech Republic. Mims has presented at regional and national ACDA conferences and is president-elect of SCACDA. In 2022 he received second place for the Dale Warland Award in Choral Conducting. Mims holds degrees from Hardin-Simmons University and UMKC.

Presider



Emily Floyd is the director of traditional music at Covenant Presbyterian Church, Charlotte. A graduate of The Florida State University, she has served as director of music in various congregational settings, including Shallowford Presbyterian Church (Atlanta) and First Baptist Church (Asheville). Additionally, Floyd serves as the president of Presbyterian Association of Musicians and music in worship R&R chair for Southern ACDA. Her ministry has long been marked by a strong congregational focus coupled with a vigorous connection to the wider music community.

Requiem for Colour: A Pre-Concert Talk

The composer will share the impetus for *Requiem for Colour: A Journey through Lament and Joy*. Jeffery Ames will lead the listener into a deeper dive of the meaning, understanding, and celebration for this momentous work. An explanation of the title and symbolism will be shared, as well as a short description of each movement. An invitation is extended to share, learn, and celebrate a resilient American culture.

Jeffery L. Ames will be the speaker for this talk. His photo and bio are on page 101.

Opening Night Concert

A Cappella: Back By Popular Demand!

Our opening night concert celebrates the power and creativity of contemporary a cappella, bringing voices together for an unforgettable evening of music. This concert highlights the artistry of singing without instruments, featuring everything from pop favorites and soulful ballads to upbeat rock anthems and jazz-inspired harmonies. Audiences will be swept away by tight harmonies, vibrant vocal percussion, and stand-out solos that showcase the full range of the human voice. Each ensemble brings its own unique sound and personality, making every moment fresh, exciting, and inspiring.

Whether you're a devoted fan of a cappella or experiencing it for the first time, "Back By Popular Demand" promises to entertain, uplift, and amaze. Don't miss this unforgettable celebration of music reimagined—completely a cappella—and discover why this concert truly lives up to its name!

Pearl River Community College The Voices



The Voices is the premier contemporary a cappella

ensemble from Pearl River Community College in Poplarville, Mississippi. Known for their dynamic sound and engaging performances, The Voices have quickly built a reputation as one of the most exciting collegiate groups in the region. Last year, they released their album *Absence of Time* and won their first CARA award for Best Country Song. The group also traveled to Puerto Rico, where they combined their passion for music with meaningful service opportunities. On the competitive stage, The Voices earned first place and best choreography at the 2023 ICCA Athens Quarterfinal.

LaDona Tyson, Director

Mississippi State University TrellDawgs



The TrellDawgs, founded in 2016 at Mississippi State University, are a spirited collegiate a cappella ensemble dedicated to pushing the boundaries of vocal artistry. Their name marries musical roots and university pride: "Trell" nods to the treble clef in sheet music, while "Dawgs" honors the MSU Bulldogs mascot. The TrellDawgs blend varied backgrounds into a tight-knit musical family united by a passion for harmony and creativity. Their repertoire spans chart-toppers, timeless classics, and imaginative new arrangements, all delivered with rich harmonies, bold vocal runs, and dynamic beatboxing. Beyond performance, the group emphasizes community impact through benefit concerts, charitable outreach, and musical education.

Caleb Studdie and Maddie Chapman, Student Directors



2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Special Events

Belmont University The Pitchmen



The Pitchmen are a male-identifying a cappella group from Nashville, Tennessee, composed of eigh-

teen students from Belmont University. From their debut album, *Ultraviolet*, to becoming the 2023 and 2025 ICCA champions and taking home numerous awards for outstanding soloists, outstanding choreography, and outstanding vocal percussion throughout the competition season, the student-run group has set themselves apart because of their dedication to their craft and to one another. While encompassing the modern Nashville sound, they pride themselves on singing a broad range of music that offers something for every audience member to enjoy. The Pitchmen recognize the importance of each member of their team and are empowered by their differences.

Javi Castro, President



Worship & Music Conference

Presbyterian Association of Musicians

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JUNE 21-26 & JUNE 28-JULY 3

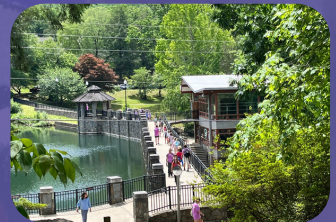


WHO'LL BE a WITNESS?

Join the Presbyterian Association of Musicians for a week in Montreat, North Carolina, to learn, worship, sing, and fellowship.

This year's conference highlights include:

- Choirs for children, youth, and adults
- Instrumental ensembles
- 36 classes and 16 topical interest session offerings
- Daily worship
- Renowned faculty
- The True Story of Cinderella (Comic Operetta), Talent Show, Hymn Festival, Chamber Concert, and Closing Concert
- And much more!



Registration open now

presbysmusic.org/conference



2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Student Conducting Masterclasses

Graduate and Undergraduate



Alissa Mercurio Rowe serves as associate professor and Galante Chair and director of choral studies at Louisiana State University, where she conducts the LSU A Cappella Choir and leads the graduate choral conducting program. Under her leadership, the LSU choral area established an annual choral conducting intensive for aspiring conductors, a high school choral festival that serves hundreds of music educators annually, and a choral composing symposium providing a workshop space for Louisiana composers. The LSU choirs performed abroad with the Vox Anima Festival in London and with guest artists Adolphus Hailstork and Grammy Award-winning soprano Hila Plitmann. Rowe is an active adjudicator, guest conductor, and clinician.

University of Mississippi Concert Singers



The University of Mississippi Concert Singers is a mixed ensemble of college students who represent a diverse student population pursuing a variety of majors from across the campus. Most of the singers participate for the duration of their tenure at the university, which creates many lasting friendships. The Singers have appeared at five ACDA conferences in 2006, 2007, 2010, 2016, and 2022. The choir performs commissioned works, including a premiere of Ivo Antognini's *Veni*

Sancte Spiritus at the 2025 Mississippi State Conference. Several prominent composers have worked with the choir, including Eric Whitacre, who stated, "Conducting this chorus is like driving a Ferrari. If you ever get the chance to do it, I highly recommend it."



Donald Trott is the director of choral activities at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) in Oxford, where he coordinates the graduate conducting program and conducts the Concert Singers, Men's Glee, and University Chorus. His choirs have performed at ACDA conferences (1998, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2016, and 2020); and MMEA conferences (2005, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2018). Trott is a past president of the Southern ACDA Region. He is the recipient of the 2022 ACDA Southern Region Distinguished Service Award and 2024 Award of Excellence, and the 2023 MS ACDA Ernestine Ferrell Award. Trott previously created an ACDA monograph and was editor and contributor for *Conducting Men's Choirs* (GIA). Trott is a graduate of Westminster Choir College and the University of Oklahoma.

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2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Performing Choirs

Apex and Apex Friendship High Schools Peak Ensemble Treble Choir



The Peak Ensemble Treble Choir comprises the honors treble classes from Apex High School and Apex Friendship High School. They believe wholeheartedly in the importance of collaboration and have seen the many benefits that come from working together. The students, or as they say “cousins,” and directors have grown from learning and working together. They are two separate schools, two separate ensembles, with two separate directors, but they do a concert together and travel together annually. Singing their stories together has proven more impactful in the growth of the students in and out of the classroom.



Sam Wanamaker has been the choral director at Apex Friendship High School for the last ten years. Wanamaker earned a BME from Appalachian State University and is a proud Mountaineer alumnus. Wanamaker is a board member on the high school choral section of NCMEA and the TTBB high school R&R chair for NC-ACDA. His choirs have sung at the North Carolina Music Educators Conference and twice at the North Carolina ACDA Conference. Wanamaker has performed as a soloist with the North Carolina Symphony and the North Carolina Master Chorale. He has conducted and performed throughout the United States and Europe.



Heather Copley is in her twenty-seventh year as the choral director at Apex High School. She holds a BA in voice and a BME from Meredith College. Copley teaches choir full time at Apex and serves as the vocal director for her school’s musical each year. She also serves as the PLC coordinator for the high school chorus teachers in Wake County and enjoys mentoring new teachers. Copley also enjoys adjudicating MPA and working with all-county and festival choirs and leading workshops on vocal technique around the state. She served on the NC MEA high school chorus executive board for many years. Copley also has a small studio where she teaches private voice lessons.

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Charlotte Master Chorale Chamber Singers



The Chamber Singers, Charlotte's premier chamber choir, consists of thirty volunteer singers of professional caliber drawn from the Charlotte Master Chorale, renowned for vocal prowess and artistic expression, and dedicated to performing challenging repertoire from all periods of music from Baroque motets to the art music of today. The Chamber Singers are recognized as one of the premier chamber choruses in the Southeast.



Kenney Potter has served as conductor and artistic director of the Charlotte Master Chorale for the past ten years. His choirs have received widespread acclaim, including winning the Grand Prix for best choir in the Pärnu International Choral Festival in Pärnu, Estonia. He has been a featured soloist in Carnegie Hall and was choir soloist for the Grammy-winning Oregon Bach Festival Choir as well as the International Bach Academy conducted by Helmuth Rilling. Under Potter's leadership, the Master Chorale has received critical acclaim for artistic excellence and creative programming. He spent thirty years teaching middle school, high school, and at Wingate University. In addition to his work with the Chorale, Potter is president of the ECS Publishing Group, overseeing the production of E. C. Schirmer, Galaxy, and Morning-Star publishers.

Cordova High School Men's Chorale



The Men's Chorale of Cordova High is an ensemble for tenor/bass singers in grades nine through twelve. The ensemble exists to build character and future male leaders through the means of making music. While there is an entry audition, any gentleman desiring to be a part of this brotherhood is welcomed! The Men's Chorale has quickly grown to be another highlight of the choral program at Cordova. This ensemble continuously receives superior ratings and best in class at assessments and festivals. What is most valued by this ensemble is the change that is harvested in each young man through the power of music making.



Adrian Maclin is in his twelfth year as director of choirs at Cordova High School and nineteenth year of teaching. While at Cordova, his groups have performed at Southern ACDA Region, Tennessee MEA, Carnegie Hall, and in numerous halls throughout the country and internationally. His ensembles are widely known for their inspiring, thought-provoking, and moving performances. In addition to his work at Cordova, he serves the Memphis-Shelby County School District on the music leadership team. Maclin also serves on the board of the West Tennessee Vocal MEA as past president and state choral chair for Tennessee MEA. In 2025, Maclin received the Music Educator Award presented by the Recording Academy and Grammy Museum.



2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Performing Choirs

Florida Atlantic University Vocalis



Vocalis, Florida Atlantic's treble ensemble, has been under the direction of Stacie Lee Rossow for over twenty years. The ensemble comprises students from across the university and has been privileged to premiere numerous works, including those by resident composer and collaborative pianist David P. Rossow and Irish composer and founder of Anúna, Michael McGlynn. Vocalis completed their first studio album in 2023, which featured a newly commissioned work by McGlynn titled *Wind in the Reeds*, and they traveled to Dublin in summer 2025 for the European premiere of the work.



Stacie Lee Rossow serves as associate chair and associate director of choral and vocal studies at Florida Atlantic University and holds degrees in choral conducting from the University of Miami and Florida Atlantic University. She has received several research and teaching awards, including the Theodore Presser Award for her work in Irish choral music and the Talon Leadership Award. Rossow has served as studio conductor for several Anúna recordings, and her ensemble just completed a new recording: *The Wind in the Reeds*. Rossow's ensembles have performed at numerous conferences, and she conducted the European premiere of Michael McGlynn's *The Wind in the Reeds* with Vocalis in 2025.

Furman University Furman Singers



Furman Singers is Furman University's flagship choir, bringing together students from diverse academic backgrounds who share a passion for choral music. Since its founding in 1946, the ensemble has captivated audiences with a wide-ranging repertoire that spans centuries, styles, and languages—expressing the human experience through the power of song. The choir maintains a strong presence on campus, tours annually across the United States and abroad, and regularly collaborates with the Furman Symphony Orchestra, Furman Symphonic Band, and Greenville Symphony Orchestra. The Furman Singers strive to build community and continue a history of excellence through the presentation of compelling musical programs.



Stephen Gusukuma is the Bingham L. Vick Jr. and Judith S. Vick Assistant Professor of Music and director of choral activities at Furman University. Under his guidance, the Furman Singers performed at the 2023 South Carolina ACDA Conference and the 2025 South Carolina MEA Conference. Ensembles under his direction have appeared across the United States and internationally. Gusukuma holds the DMA in choral conducting from the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance, and BME and the MM degrees from Baylor University.

George Mason University Mason Jazz Vocal Ensemble



The Mason Jazz Vocal Ensemble is the award-winning jazz vocal group of George Mason University. They have performed at Blues Alley, Kansas City Jazz Summit; been featured with symphony orchestras and big bands; and members have performed with Ben Folds and the National Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and Virginia Beach Symphony. They were awarded a *DownBeat* Student Music Award for Outstanding Performance-Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble and Outstanding Ensemble at the Kansas City Jazz Summit. Conference performances and presentations include the ACDA National (Dallas), JEN (Dallas and New Orleans), and Virginia MEA (Richmond).



Darden Purcell is an Origin Records recording artist and featured soloist with symphony orchestras, big bands, small ensembles, and vocal educator. Purcell has shared the stage with artists such as George Benson, Sara Bareilles, Christian McBride, Branford Marsalis, Maria Schneider, as well as ensembles National Symphony Orchestra, Airmen of Note, Metropolitan Jazz Orchestra, Navy Commodores, Army Blues, and the American Festival Pops Orchestra. She has performed throughout the world in prestigious venues. Purcell is the director of jazz studies and jazz voice instructor at George Mason University.

Lost Mountain Middle School Eighth Grade Chorus



The Eighth Grade Chorus comprises non-auditioned singers in their third year of chorus. The chorus has performed twice at the GMEA in-service conference, the Georgia State University Mid-Sing Fest, Georgia ACDA, and has received invitations to perform at Kennesaw State University and the University of South Carolina. The chorus has received superior ratings at LGPE for over twenty years at both the Class M and Class D levels. The choral department regularly maintains a membership of over two hundred singers. Lost Mountain Middle School, a Cobb County Public School in Kennesaw, GA, has a diverse population of just over one thousand students.



Jay Champion has taught chorus, general music, and music technology at Lost Mountain Middle School in Kennesaw since 1998. Champion has a long history of contributions to choral music education, most recently as GMEA District 12 Choral Chair, a member of the all-state chorus standing committee, and the state choral chair-elect. Champion earned undergraduate degrees in music education and music composition from Louisiana State University. He earned his master's and education specialist degrees at the University of Georgia. He has performed and recorded with the LSU A Cappella Choir, the Moses Hogan Chorale, and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus and Chamber Chorus, the Orpheus Men's Ensemble, and Coro Vocati.



2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Performing Choirs

Lux



Lux, derived from the Latin word for “light,” is a professional treble choir based in Northeast Georgia. Born out of a collective desire to infuse beauty and illumination into a world fraught with darkness, Lux specializes in delivering exquisite treble music that uplifts the soul. Our diverse ensemble is in its fourth season and comprises both full-time musicians and members

from a variety of professions united by our shared passion for creating musical experiences that resonate deeply with audiences. Under the direction of Ashley Conway and Emily Allison alongside Benji Stenger, collaborative pianist, Lux offers a distinctive approach to a professional-level ensemble tailored to meet the demands of busy musicians who cannot rehearse weekly.



Ashley Conway is the assistant professor of music education at Brenau University, where she directs Vocal Chamber Ensemble (lobby performing choir, GMEA, 2022), and Spectrum Singers, and teaches music education courses, aural skills, and conducting. Conway’s previous appointments have included public and private schools, colleges and universities, churches, and community music programs throughout the United States. She is an active scholar, guest conductor, and adjudicator, and is a founder and conductor of the professional treble choir, Lux (GA-ACDA performance, 2024). Conway holds a BME and MME from Brenau University and the University of Georgia. She earned the DMA in choral conducting from Arizona State University. Her research interests include women’s choirs and music and hearing loss.



Emily Allison is in her sixth year as choral director at Cherokee Bluff Middle School, following twelve years at East Hall Middle, where she was named 2019–2020 Teacher of the Year. She was also named Cherokee Bluff’s 2024–2025 Teacher of the Year and the 2025 District 14 Music Educator of the Year. Her seventh- and eighth-grade chorus performed at the 2025 GMEA In-Service Conference. Allison holds a bachelor’s in vocal performance and an MME from Piedmont University. She serves as a leadership team member, Tome Sponsor, and former Grade Level Chair (2020–2024). Outside school, she is the children’s director at Jefferson First UMC and cofounder/conductor of Lux. She enjoys reading and adventuring with her husband and two kids.



The Fifth International Meeting of the Symposium for Research in Choral Singing

A hybrid symposium held in person and remotely

April 30 - May 1, 2026

The Big 10 Conference Center
Chicago, Illinois



Marsteller Middle School 8th-Grade Women's Choir



The Marsteller Eighth-Grade Women's Choir frequently receives invitations to perform at community and county-wide events. The ensemble has performed twice at the Virginia MEA's annual conference, and in 2012 they performed for a Christmas party at the White House, where they had the distinct honor of meeting and singing for President Obama and the First Lady. They have a standing invitation to perform the national anthem at a GMU men's basketball game each season. However, if you were to ask these ladies, they would tell you that one of their favorite yearly performances is singing for their elementary feeder schools and area nursing homes. The ensemble consistently achieves superior ratings at assessment and in competition.



Julie Phelan is in her twenty-sixth year as a middle school choral director and her twenty-first year at Marsteller. Born and raised in Iowa, Phelan attended Wartburg College double majoring in music education and music therapy. Her women's choir has performed twice at the VMEA fall conference. Her choirs consistently achieve superior ratings at assessment, while individual students regularly participate in county, district, state, as well as regional and national honor choirs. She is a frequent adjudicator for honor choir auditions and assessment. She is a member of her church's worship team and has served as a worship leader for several churches and ministries in Michigan and Northern Virginia.

Miami Arts Studio 6-12 @ Zelda Glazer Maverick Singers



The Maverick Singers are the premier SATB ensemble at Miami Arts Studio, a performing arts magnet school in Miami, FL. Students are predominantly first- or second-generation immigrants from Latin America, which parallels the community in which the school is situated. We make it our mission to bring Miami's English, Spanish, and Haitian culture to audiences throughout the United States. The ensemble has recorded for several artists and award shows, including the Latin Grammys, the American Music Awards, and a performance with Jacob Collier on his DJESSE Volume 4 World Tour.



Ryan Ellis is a jazz pianist and director of vocal music at Miami Arts Studio. In addition to leading the vocal magnet, he is also piloting a sound engineering program that connects students with leading music professionals to provide a relevant music education in a rapidly evolving industry. Ellis's mixed ensembles have performed throughout the United States with concerts at FL-ACDA, Washington DC, Chicago, Atlanta, Orlando, and New York, including five featured concerts at Carnegie Hall. Ellis is published as a contributing author on Jason Max Ferdinand's *Teaching with Heart and Teaching Beyond the Music* (GIA). As a professional jazz pianist, Ellis has worked extensively in the Caribbean, Florida, and Hawaii.



2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Performing Choirs

New Manchester High School Jaguar Singers



The New Manchester High School F.A.M.E. “Jaguar Singers” is one of the premier choral ensembles within the FAME (Fine Arts Magnet Education) program at New Manchester High School. The choir comprises students in grades nine through twelve who consistently earn superior ratings in performance and sight-reading at the Georgia MEA Large Group Performance Evaluations. Members of the ensemble are actively engaged in district honor choir, all-state chorus, and all-state reading choir. The Jaguar Singers’s accomplishments include a featured performance at the 2025 GMEA State Conference and the honor of performing with three-time Grammy Award-winning jazz artist Samara Joy during her 2023 holiday tour at Atlanta Symphony Hall.



Antwain Holman is a music educator with over twenty-five years of experience. He is in his third year as the choral director of the FAME chorus at New Manchester High School. Holman holds a BM from Philander Smith College and an MME in choral music and conducting from The Florida State University. Holman’s choirs have been prominently featured at Florida ACDA and have earned first-place honors at Heritage Festivals in Washington DC and Atlanta, Georgia. Most recently, his advanced choral ensemble, the Jaguar Singers, performed at the 2025 Georgia MEA Conference.

Shenandoah Valley Children’s Choir



The Shenandoah Valley Children’s Choir of Harrisonburg, Virginia, is in its thirty-third year and nurtures young people by developing excellent musicianship, creating artistic choral performances, and fostering meaningful relationships. SVCC currently serves 175 youth, ages five through eighteen, in four auditioned choirs and two non-auditioned music explorers classes. Founded by Julia J. White in 1991 and under Janet M. Hostetter’s direction since 2014 with assistant director Joy Anderson since 2001, SVCC continues to inspire audiences worldwide. Concert Choir tours annually, having participated domestically in events and videos from their own valley to Pike’s Peak to the Pacific Rim, and internationally.



Janet M. Hostetter received her doctorate and master’s in choral conducting from James Madison University and her BME from Eastern Mennonite University. Her published research project, “Tone Production, Musicianship Training, Repertoire Development, Performance Practice: A Pedagogical Overview of Selected International Children’s Choirs,” provided her the joy of interacting with respected children’s choirs in Australia, the Czech Republic, Canada, and the Philippines. SVCC choirs under her direction have performed nationally and internationally, collaborated with renowned children’s choirs, performed in elite venues, and produced numerous YouTube music videos.

Stetson University Concert Choir



The Stetson University Concert Choir is one of four choral ensembles in the Stetson University School of Music. It is a highly selective principal vocal touring ensemble made up of forty-eight vocalists. The Concert Choir has performed concerts throughout the United States and Europe. The group has appeared in performances for NCCO, Southern ACDA Region, MEA, and at numerous conventions of the Florida Vocal Association, Florida ACDA, and Florida MEA. Concert Choir comprises upper-class music majors and singers representing numerous academic areas.



Timothy Peter is a professor of music at Stetson University. He is a native of Minnesota, received his undergraduate degree from Luther College, and completed his DMA at the University of Arizona.

Before coming to Stetson University, he was professor of music at Luther College and served as the head of the music department. He has been a high school choral director and church musician in Minnesota, Iowa, Arizona, and Florida. Peter joined the faculty of the Stetson University School of Music in the fall of 2012 and conducts the Stetson Concert Choir. He has held positions as the ACDA regional R&R chair for college and universities and the state and regional chair for TB choirs.

University of Memphis University Singers



The University Singers is the flagship SATB ensemble at the University of Memphis. The ensemble includes auditioned graduate choral students and undergraduates from across the campus. Through conceptual programming and diverse repertoire, University Singers engages audiences in thought-provoking performances. The ensemble maintains a robust schedule that empowers its members to grow as artists and citizens. Recent performances include the 2024 National CMS Conference, 2024 TnMEA Conference, a 2023 international tour to Greece, and tours throughout the United States.



Francis Cathlina, DMA, is a Vietnamese American conductor. He is the director of choral activities at the University of Memphis, where he received the dean's award for creative achievement. He leads

the choral area, the MM/DMA choral conducting program, and conducts the University Singers. A two-time Grammy-nominated educator, Cathlina draws on his Eastern heritage to foster excellence and collaboration. He conducted in Brazil and the Philippines in 2025 and was the headliner for the 2025 Alabama MEA Conference. The University Singers, under his direction, have been invited to perform for national and state conferences. Cathlina has over sixty presentations worldwide, international publications, and a robust conducting schedule. He earned degrees from UNT, Michigan State, and Baylor.



2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Performing Choirs

University of Tennessee Men's Chorale



The University of Tennessee Men's Chorale is open to all UT students and focuses on building community through the choral tradition while exploring a wide range of repertoire written specifically for tenor and bass voices. In addition to regularly scheduled seasonal concerts, the Men's Chorale performs outreach concerts across east Tennessee and performs for UT Volunteer Men's and Lady Volunteers sporting events. They occasionally join with the UT Symphony Or-

chestra and other UT choirs to perform masterworks of the choral repertoire.



Andrew Skoog made his Carnegie Hall debut as tenor soloist in Handel's *Messiah* with the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir John Rutter. Skoog has sung with orchestras all across the United States, including the American Symphony Orchestra in Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center. Skoog made his international debut singing *Carmina Burana* with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra in Bergen, Norway. Critics hail him as ideal in *Carmina Burana*, which he has performed forty-eight times across the United States and abroad. Twice a Metropolitan Opera regional finalist, Skoog made his professional operatic debut as Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* with Opera San Antonio. Skoog is professor of voice at the University of Tennessee, where he also conducts the UT Men's Chorale.



2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Interest Sessions

Access and Belonging in Adult Choirs as a Societal Benefit

How does the promotion of belonging in choirs benefit not only singers but also the larger society as we face increasing loneliness, high levels of anxiety, and sociocultural divisions? This presentation summarizes current social science findings on the effectiveness of group singing at improving well-being and bridging social differences. This session presents data collected from interviews of prominent directors who lead

non-auditioned choruses, including a pop choir in the UK, a university-affiliated community ensemble, a children's choir program, a suburban women's choir, a large city community choir, and a family of choruses based around a single genre. Session attendees will leave with suggested practices for use with their own ensembles.



Helena von Rueden is Elliott Associate Professor of Music at Hampden-Sydney College, a small liberal arts college in VA, where she teaches conducting, pia-

no, music history, and music as social behavior. Under her direction, the tenor-bass Hampden-Sydney College Chorus has toured major cities, including New York, San Juan, New Orleans, Boston, Quebec City, and Montreal. She is the past assistant director at the Institute of Composer Diversity. A past presenter at national ACDA and NCCO and a *Choral Journal* contributor, she researches programming trends and best practices for creating belonging in singing groups. Creator of the Expanding Choral Practice Database, von Rueden curates a collection of resources on practices and music outside the Western European tradition. She is founder/director of The Piedmont Singers of Central Virginia, a professional octet in central VA.

Adding Strings, Subtracting Stress

This practical session offers an introductory pathway for choral conductors aiming to refine their gestural faculties and develop the shared language needed for meaningful collaboration with string musicians. Engaging with a curated selection of choral-orchestral works by historically marginalized composers from Europe and Latin America as both lens and laboratory, the session will explore techniques that deepen artistic expression and illuminate historically informed performance practices. Viewed through the prism of inclusivity and intentional artistry, this session underscores the critical role of purpose-driven score study in fostering thoughtful musical interpretation.



Ryan R. Fellman is an American conductor based out of the greater Atlanta area who serves as interim director of choral activities at Kennesaw State University. There he conducts the KSU Chamber Singers, University Chorale, Men's Ensemble, Community and Alumni Chorus, and teaches courses in conducting. Fellman is a graduate from Michigan State University, where he served as assistant conductor to several prominent university ensembles. Prior to his time at MSU, Fellman earned an MM in choral conducting from Ithaca College. From 2013 to 2019 he served as

choir director at Oñate High School in Las Cruces, New Mexico, significantly expanding the program's enrollment. Fellman holds a BM in vocal music education from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, where he sang in The Concordia Choir under the direction of Dr. René Clausen.

Being the Best... or Being Your Best Self?

The life of a professional musician is inherently connected to evaluation and competition. How do these, along with cultural phenomena like stereotypes or social media, affect our self-perception and growth? How can we be discerning in our evaluation of ourselves and others in ways that result in positive, valuable contributions to the choral art? Unrealistic expectations, professional disappointment, and self-doubt may inhibit our progress toward becoming our best selves. Instead, we can cultivate a positive self-image based on the implementation of our values. This session will offer honest conversation and guidance about self-image and defining professional success. The goal is to help conductors navigate their careers with wellness, integrity, and courage.



Alicia W. Walker is professor of music and director of choral studies at the University of South Carolina, where she directs the Concert Choir and Garnet Chorale (SSAA) and supervises the graduate conducting program. Walker has taught continuing education workshops for choral directors in South Africa, and she is frequently invited to conduct and teach in the UK and in Taiwan. She has conducted at major venues, including Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center in New York, Southwark and Canterbury Cathedrals in England, and St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Her choirs have been selected to perform for NCCO (2021, 2023); SCMEA (2016, 2018, 2022); and South Carolina ACDA (2018, 2022, 2024). Walker's pedagogy and professional interactions are marked by a commitment to excellence, collaboration, and inclusion.



2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Interest Sessions

Bring a Friend to Choir Day: Reframe, Recruit, and Reflect

As choral directors, we are often tasked with balancing the current needs of our programs with pressure for growth in numbers. Beginning with an identification and reframing of the ways in which we assess the growth of our choral programs, this session will provide a recruitment event model to implement at your school or organization. This session is suitable for elementary, middle, high, collegiate, church, and community choral programs and is adaptable to meet you where you are in your program's journey. This session will prepare you with tools and resources to address your desire for significant growth in numbers while enhancing the quality of your program in a way that is sustainable for you as the director.



Victoria Alvarez is completing her seventh year at Grovetown Middle School, located outside of Augusta, Georgia. She holds a BME and MM in choral conducting from Mercer University. She also

holds an education specialist in advanced educational studies with an emphasis in P-12 music from Augusta University. Alvarez creates a learning environment with shared responsibility; because she is actively engaged in learning every day, she expects the same of her students. She serves as the Georgia MEA District 10 choral chair and was Grovetown Middle School's 2024–2025 Teacher of the Year.

The Choral (...and Orchestral?) Conductor

Choirs and orchestras are the perfect pair! Have you wanted to add instrumental or orchestral accompaniment to your choral pieces? Are you intimidated by stepping in front of a professional orchestra? This session will focus on demystifying working with an orchestra. Discussion will be on preparation for the first

(and maybe only) rehearsal, how to communicate with an orchestra for a more efficient rehearsal, and reviewing instrument specific terms and techniques that the orchestra is used to hearing. This session will include a survey from both the Alabama Symphony Orchestra and the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra with feedback for choral conductors on how we can better communicate with orchestra players.



Daniel deShazo is the director of music and worship at Riverchase United Methodist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. There he conducts the sixty-voice sanctuary choir and oversees handbells and children's music as well as conducts the instrumental ensemble. He has previously served Alabama ACDA as R&R chair for music in worship and is currently on the executive board as lifelong learner chair. He has a BME from Loyola University New Orleans and a master's in choral conducting from the University of Alabama.

Get into the Groove: Diverse Beats, Unified Voices

This interactive session explores rhythm as a key to unlocking stylistic fluency and cultural depth in choral music. This session offers practical strategies to improve rhythmic reading and performance across Western and non-Western traditions. Attendees will engage with diverse rhythmic patterns—both written and taught by rote—and learn how genre-specific beat emphasis can shape authentic, expressive performances. From gospel to African, Latin to pop, participants will discover tools to help choirs internalize groove and connect more deeply with the music. This session highlights rhythm as a bridge between cultures and a pathway to more expressive, stylistically informed performance.



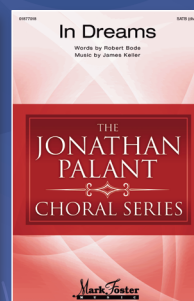
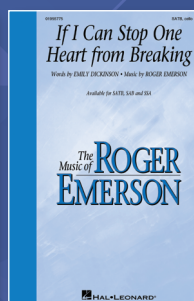
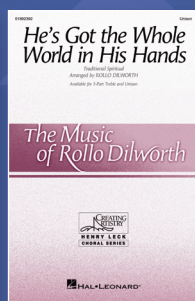
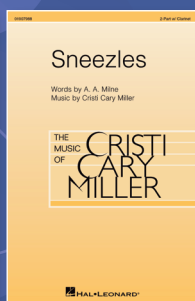
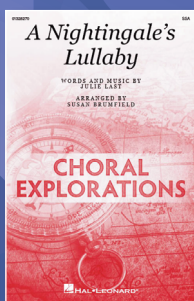
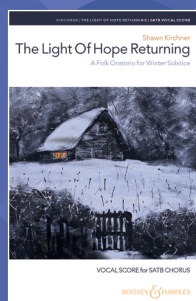
Willis Rosenfeld is the choir director and fine arts department chair at Loudoun County High School in Leesburg, VA. His choirs have earned superior ratings at festivals in Chicago, Orlando, New York, and Williamsburg. He also serves as director of music ministries at Sterling United Methodist Church, where his teams have led music for Virginia state and district Methodist events. Rosenfeld has worked as a music director, actor, and technician in numerous productions and is active as a collaborative pianist across northern Virginia. He earned his DMA in choral conducting from George Mason University, where his research focused on pedagogical repertoire selection. He also holds a BM from George Mason and degrees from Messiah University and Regent University.

I Sing! You Sing!

We All Sing with Solfège Harmonization

There are many ways to access musical language beyond the visual method of sight-reading. Sole focus on visual aptitude of sight-reading may isolate singers who excel at aural skills or struggle with visual processing of music notation. Utilizing her method of solfège harmonization, Michelle Folta will demonstrate ways that singers can analyze music, predict harmonic structure, and create unique arrangements. Session attendees will perform a solfège harmonization exercise before learning how to create one. In collaboration with colleagues, attendees will design their own exercise by identifying chords, creating a roadmap, and making artistic choices. We discuss practical uses of the solfège harmonization method in differentiating instruction,

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Interest Sessions

inclusive pedagogy, accompanying choirs, composing and improvising, predictive sight-reading, and building a collaborative culture in your choral program.



Michelle Folta is professor of choral/general music education at Columbus State University and the artistic director for the Voices of the Valley Children's Chorus. Folta earned her master's and PhD in music education at the University of North Texas and a BM from the University of Texas at Austin. Graduates of Folta have earned the title of teacher of the year on their campuses and have been named finalists for their district's top educator award. The Voices of the Valley Children's Chorus has performed internationally, at Georgia MEA, and Southern ACDA. Folta has served as the guest clinician nationally and serves on the Georgia ACDA board of directors and is president-elect for Georgia ACDA.

Just Sing!

Informal Choral Music for Non-Performers

To the outside world, choral music is practiced with the end goal being a performance. But this is not always the case, and informal singing experiences that lack the expectation of a performance can create special moments for participants. This session will explore why singing for singing's sake is important and why we should create more opportunities for people to do it. This session will also provide methodology for creating these opportunities based on the tried-and-true methods of sacred harp singings as well as newer informal singing organizations. These techniques help establish a welcoming choral environment for singers of any age and skill level. Come and explore the ways we can facilitate growth in our singers as we offer freedom from the expectation of performance.

Christopher Powell is the director of choirs at Georgetown College. Powell previously spent ten years as choir



director and music teacher at public high schools in Louisville and Shelbyville, KY. He has held several part-time or interim church positions, most recently as director of contemporary music at First United Methodist Church in Frankfort, KY. Powell has led interest and reading sessions at the KMEA's annual conference and has served multiple times as all-state choir and large ensemble assessment judge. He has been a guest clinician/director at all-district or all-county choirs across the state of Kentucky. He holds a BME and MME from WKU and UK and is a DMA candidate in choral conducting at UK.

KoroNation:

A Culturally Informed Filipino Reading Session

As Filipino choral music becomes more visible in conference concert setlists and all-state programs, sharing Filipino geographic and historical context, language pronunciation, and composer knowledge becomes necessary. Session presenters will lead participants as they explore various Filipino works through the Choral Allyship Framework, applicable to music from any borrowed culture, aiming for a more informed approach and process from programming to performance. Attendees will read a selection of accessible Filipino choral pieces from traditional folk songs to contemporary compositions and immerse themselves in the unique musical idioms of the Philippines. Each piece will be accompanied by insightful commentary on its place within the Filipino choral space and live diction coaching from a Tagalog speaker.



Roger David Jr. is a Michigan State University graduate student pursuing a DMA in choral conducting and is a recipient of a University Distinguished Fellowship. He serves as assistant conductor for Singing Spartans and assists choral conducting courses. David enjoys working with and meeting new people as

a presenter, clinician, and guest conductor. Originally from Alaska, he is a product of the Anchorage School District and the University of Alaska Anchorage. After teaching middle school in ASD, he completed a master's degree at Wichita State University, and served as a clinician and adjudicator for middle and high schools in Kansas. His interests include culturally informed processes, conductor leadership styles, and Korean BBQ.



Kyra Stahr is a visionary conductor, educator, and vocalist passionate about the transformative power of choral music. She serves as an assistant teaching professor at Syracuse University and is a DMA candidate in choral conducting at the University of Miami. She is a conducting fellow with Spire Chamber Ensemble and assistant conductor of Seraphic Fire. At Syracuse, Stahr conducts the premier treble ensemble, Crouse Chorale, and teaches conducting, rehearsing, and voice courses. Known for motivating ensembles with authenticity, courage, and determination, Stahr is an active guest conductor, clinician, and presenter. She has shared her work at conferences including National ACDA, TMEA, and the World Symposium on Choral Music. She holds an MM from the University of Southern California and a BM in vocal performance and music education from Miami University. Stahr co-founded the podcast *conduct(her)*, amplifying women's voices in choral music.

Making Treble: Empowering SA Choirs in a Mixed Choir World

Despite their prevalence in secondary and collegiate settings, soprano-alto (SA) choirs are often undervalued in the choral field, viewed as stepping stones rather than artistic destinations. This session challenges the traditional choral hierarchy by making a research-informed case for the empowerment of soprano-alto singers and the elevation of SA choirs. Through demographic insights, repertoire exploration, vocal pedagogy, and programmatic strategies, we will examine how to create and advocate for equitable opportunities for

SA ensembles; and how shifting the narrative can transform the identity and experience of SA singers in our choral programs.



Elizabeth (Libby) Hearn is an assistant professor of choral music education at the University of Mississippi, where she conducts Women's Glee and University Chorus. She also teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in choral music education, conducting, and qualitative research. Additionally, Hearn serves the MidSouth Music Organization as conductor of the Mississippi River Chorale. Before joining the faculty at Ole Miss, Hearn received a PhD in music education from the University of Alabama. In addition to teaching and conducting, she has presented her research in published journals and at international, national, regional, and state conferences. She is currently the president of Mississippi ACDA.



Alicia Vorel serves as assistant professor in music education in the Department of Music in the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate music education majors. A Georgia native, she earned a BME at Mercer University, an MME from Texas Tech University, and PhD from the University of Mississippi. Vorel is an experienced public school educator focusing primarily on elementary general music and children's choirs teaching. She is Orff Level 1 and 2 certified. Her research interests include SA choirs, music teacher education, assessment, teacher effectiveness, acquisition of teaching skills, and turn-of-the-twentieth-century singing schools.



2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Interest Sessions

Mind the Gap:

Building a Bridge to the Tenor-Bass Head Voice

This session equips choral directors with a clearer understanding of head voice in tenor-bass singers and how to help them build a resonant, lifted, and in-tune choral tone. Using peer-reviewed research, the session defines head voice, clarifies terminology, and explains what occurs anatomically and acoustically in this register. Attendees will explore video and vocal examples, practice targeted exercises, and learn how to access head voice through both falsetto and non-falsetto approaches. The session also explores passaggio and offers strategies for guiding singers through this difficult part of the range in ensemble settings. Participants will leave with practical tools and vocal exercises to support developing singers.



Braden Rymer is a DMA candidate in choral conducting at the University of Miami Frost School of Music, where he serves as a graduate teaching assistant.

He earned an MM in choral conducting and performance and pedagogy from the University of Georgia (UGA). While at UGA, he conducted the Repertory Singers, Men's Glee Club, and Women's Glee Club while also serving as the choir director and organist/pianist for the Commerce Presbyterian Church. He also served as the instructor of record in aural skills and music theory. Prior to that, he worked for six years as the choir director and AP music theory instructor at Maple Mountain High School in Utah. Choirs under his direction were invited to perform at various concerts and state conferences, including Utah ACDA and UMEA.

Modeling Balance in Rehearsals

As choral conductors and educators, we regularly model essential skills: breath, phonation, phrasing, engagement, etc. Vocalists rely on posture and alignment

for resonance and support, making it crucial that we exemplify these principles from the podium. This session explores how conducting gestures, breath management, and body alignment influence ensemble sound and reinforce healthy movement. It also examines how physical engagement shifts across repertoire styles and how holding music can impact vocal production. By integrating these principles into our conducting, we provide a clear model that empowers singers to develop sustainable performance habits.



Amanda Moreno serves as the choral music education specialist at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. She has served as a teacher and choral director in Oregon, California, Washington, North

Dakota, and Germany. She has also maintained a private voice and piano studio, worked with church and community choirs, adjudicated for local and state festivals, supported musicians as a collaborative pianist, and music-directed for musical theatre productions at all age levels. Moreno holds a BME from California Baptist University, a master's in teaching from George Fox University, and a PhD in music education from the University of North Dakota, where she completed the first fully quantitative research study on the use of body mapping instruction for singers. She is a licensed body mapping educator with the Association for Body Mapping Education.

Pathways to Curricular Pacing: Developing Choral Skill Sets

Musical literacy is the backbone of a successful choral program. However, the sequencing of those skills is not always laid out in a clear manner that works for most students through some popular sight-reading curriculums. As educators we often struggle to empathize with our singers, as we are trained to just do it and forget how overwhelming the tasks can be for beginners. The same struggles can also be found in the approach

to developing harmony through quality repertoire. Many teachers often ask, “Why can’t my singers perform music in parts?” The answer is in selecting the proper repertoire to meet students where they are. This session seeks to walk participants through the developing and pacing of many different musical skill sets as we build harmonic independence in our singers.



Eric G. Johnson is the assistant professor and coordinator of music education for Gardner-Webb University. Prior to pursuing a PhD in music education with a choral conducting emphasis from the University of Mississippi, he was the choral director at Holmes Middle School in Eden, NC, where he directed a vibrant choral for ten years. With a BM in music education and sacred vocal performance from Appalachian State University and an MME from The Florida State University, Johnson is active as an educator, clinician, and presenter. He has presented at national conferences for both NAFME and ACDA and conducted honor choirs in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia. He serves as the president-elect for North Carolina ACDA and supports churches in the region as an interim music minister.

Prism of Perspective: Cultivating Transgender Vocal Identity

This session convenes a diverse panel of experts to support choral directors at all stages of their teaching. Featuring a medical doctor, a DMA-trained voice teacher and performer, and a PhD professor of vocal music education, the panel will address key aspects of working with transgender voices. Topics covered will include vocal health, repertoire, pedagogy, terminology, and identity all aimed at fostering inclusive and affirming choral environments. The session will explore relevant literature and resources for deepening understanding while also providing an opportunity for open dialogue and questions.



Jill Campbell works in choral/vocal music and music education at Eastern Kentucky University, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate classes in pedagogy, research, and sociology of music. She also directs choral ensembles and supervises student teachers. Campbell is a direct and actively engaged ally for all students and singers. She is a frequent guest adjudicator and clinician for district and all-state honor choirs; she has also presented clinics and workshops in numerous states on topics of music education, church choir leadership, vocal health, performance-based assessment, dyslexia and music reading, and sight singing. Campbell is the state research chair for Kentucky MEA. Recent invitations include the 2024 Southern ACDA Region Conference and the 2024 KMEA Conference.



Sarah Marks is the director of family and community medicine at the University of Kentucky, including the Transform Health Clinic. A native of Lexington, Marks holds degrees from the University of Kentucky and UNC Chapel Hill. She completed her family medicine residency at St. Joseph Family Medicine Residency in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She worked in medical student education and the interprofessional teaching clinic at the University of Kansas before coming to the University of Kentucky in 2019. At UK, Marks is the associate program director and maternity care director in the Department of Family and Community Medicine and is focused on residency education and curriculum design. She is one of the primary physicians with the Transform Health program at the University of Kentucky, an interprofessional health-care home for LGBTQ+ patients of all ages.



Brittany Benningfield is a lifelong performer and teacher with an overflowing vocal studio of singers of all ages, including many transgender students both trans-masc and trans-femme. She received her undergraduate degree in music education from Campbellsville University and received master’s and doctoral degrees in vocal performance from the

Interest Sessions

University of Kentucky. Benningfield has performed several operatic roles, including three of Mozart's most well-known leading ladies: La Contessa in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, and Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*. Professional performances include programs with Cincinnati Opera and the Southern Illinois Symphony Orchestra. She is the program director of vocal music with the Governor's School for the Arts of KY and a lecturer of voice at Berea College.

Rehearsing for Understanding: Educating All Singers

Church choirs and non-auditioned community choruses unite musicians of all experience levels, offering a unique opportunity for directors to nurture growth through integrated music literacy and contextual learning. Instruction can go beyond vocal technique to include score marking, theory, IPA, and culturally informed performance practices. By exploring diverse musical styles and traditions, directors create inclusive, accessible, and meaningful rehearsal environments. Though instruction may progress more slowly than in academic settings, this intentional, practical approach fosters expressive, collaborative growth. These ensembles become spaces where all singers connect deeply with music, each other, and a broad spectrum of cultural and emotional experiences.



Jennifer Adam is in her twenty-third year of teaching and is the director of choirs at Christian County High School in Hopkinsville, KY, having previously taught in elementary through college classrooms

in Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Adam possesses degrees and certifications in music education, violin and vocal performance, Kodály methodology, and choral conducting. Making and teaching music is her passion, and she greatly enjoys working with a variety of musicians every day. Outside of school, she is active in her church, singing in her

church choir, and spending time with her family.



Matt Caine is director of traditional music at St. John's United Methodist Church, Aiken, SC. In addition to being an active conductor of orchestras and church, community, professional, and symphonic choruses, Caine has served as interim director of choral activities for St. Petersburg College and Allen University. Both a Fulbright Scholar and a FLAS Fellow in Bulgarian Language of the US Department of Education, his published research in Bulgarian music is frequently cited by scholars in both Bulgaria and the United States. Caine has presented interest sessions at two ACDA national conferences as well as regional and state conferences.

Spirituals, Anthems, and Gospel Music: Is There a Difference?

Concert spirituals, ethnic anthems, and gospel music are distinct styles of sacred choral songs by African American composers influenced by Western European classical music. While unique, these styles do share musical characteristics, leading to the incorrect interchangeable use of terms and mislabeling. This miscategorization overlooks contributions to the classical music tradition and leads to inappropriate performance practices. The learning outcomes of this session are to provide general characteristics of spirituals, gospel, and ethnic anthems, and to assist in categorizing, describing, and performing these songs more appropriately and respectfully.



William Powell is the director of choral activities at Auburn University, where he teaches choral courses and conducts the Chamber Choir, Men's Chorus, Concert Choir, and Gospel Choir. He is a guest conductor for various choral events in the United States and abroad, including performances at Lincoln

Center through Distinguished Concerts International New York. Powell adjudicates state and regional choral festivals and frequently judges for Festival Disney. His choral arrangements are published by Hal Leonard, Oxford University Press, and Fred Bock Music, which also publishes *The William Powell Choral Series*.



Rosephanye Powell has been hailed as one of America's premier women composers and the most performed African American female composer of choral music internationally. She serves as professor of voice at Auburn University, where she teaches courses in voice, vocal pedagogy, and vocal literature, and conducts the Women's Chorus and Concert Choir. She is a graduate of The Florida State University, Westminster Choir College, and Alabama State University and is in high demand as a composer and conductor. In addition to her choral works, Powell is also known for her art songs and spiritual arrangements for solo voice and piano. Her numerous awards and honors include the 2025 Brock Commission, Honorary Life Member of NCCO (2023), the National Vanguard Award from the National Association of Negro Musicians, Inc. (2023), and the Luise Vosgerchian Teaching Award presented by Harvard University (2022).

The Tenor-Bass Choir: A Tennessee Directors' Panel

Tenor-bass (TB) choirs at the collegiate level are thriving in distinct and innovative ways. This session brings together three conductors from diverse regions in Tennessee to share strategies, challenges, and inspirations unique to leading tenor-bass collegiate ensembles in the modern era. The session highlights how the multifaceted identities, sounds, and experiences within TB ensembles can be celebrated and elevated. Through the lens of regional practice and shared values, presenters will explore: approaches to programming and performance, supporting developing TB voices with thoughtful pedagogy, inclusive language, and community building in TB ensembles.



Angela Tipps has taught in the MTSU School of Music for twenty-eight years. A graduate of MTSU and Scarritt Graduate School, Tipps conducts the SOAL (Soprano-Alto) and TEBA (Tenor-Bass) Chorales, coordinates the music appreciation courses, and serves as musical director for shows in the department of theatre and dance. During the 2021–2022 academic year, her choirs went through a student-led name change, from Women's and Men's Chorales to SOAL and TEBA. This is the first ACDA appearance by the TEBA Chorale; the SOAL Chorale has performed twice at Southern ACDA Region in 2018 and 2024.



Emily Frizzell is assistant professor of music education at the University of Memphis, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate music education courses, supervises music residents, and directs Tigerchor Tenor/Bass Choir. Frizzell is an active presenter, adjudicator, clinician, and researcher, with writings featured in *PLOS One*, *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, *Choral Journal*, and GIA Publications.



Lauren Ramey is associate director of choral activities and director of music education at East Tennessee State University, where she conducts BucsWorth Tenor Bass Choir. She also teaches courses in choral conducting and music education. Ramey maintains an active guest conducting and presenting schedule throughout the country. Recent conference presentations and poster sessions include topics such as preparation of the EdTPA, acoustic configuration of ensembles, impostor phenomenon in music educators, cultivating community through relationship building, and inclusivity for diverse learners in the choral classroom. She serves as the tenor bass R&R chair for Tennessee ACDA and has held many leadership positions in TNMEA and ACDA.



2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Interest Sessions

Through a Different Lens: Empowering Neurodiverse Conductors

Many conversations in music education focus on supporting neurodivergent students, but what about the educators? This session explores the experiences of neurodivergent choral directors through both research and lived perspective. Presenters Rebekah Bridges and Jacob Ven Huizen will highlight common challenges neurodivergent educators face, such as executive dysfunction, social navigation, and masking, while offering insights for neurotypical colleagues to foster empathy and support. The session will also provide practical strategies for neurodivergent educators to manage their workload, reduce stress, and focus on what matters most: making music. Join us for a candid, empowering discussion within the vibrant Prism of Voices.



Rebekah Bridges is a middle school choir director in Bethesda, Maryland. A Texas native, she grew up in a strong culture of music education with her mother as her first music teacher. Bridges is a ten-year educator with experience primarily at the elementary and middle school levels, including eight years in public schools. She performs regularly as a singer with The Washington Chorus, where she is also a soprano section coach. She holds a BME from Baylor University and an MM in conducting from Simpson College.



Jacob Ven Huizen is a conductor, educator, and composer based in Lincoln, NE. A native of northwest Iowa, he spent six years teaching grades seven to twelve at West Lyon CSD, where his ensembles earned consistent division I ratings. His Wildcat Jazz Choir became a top competitor, earning multiple first-place finishes and a top-three finish at the 2024 Iowa Vocal Jazz Championships. He holds degrees from Northwestern College and Simpson College and is pursuing a DMA in choral conducting at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where he conducts the All-Collegiate Choir and teaches undergraduate conducting.

Tone and Style: Using Pop Music to Build Better Singers

Why should we perform popular music with our choirs? How can we use contemporary music to build stronger singers and diverse programs while expanding traditional technique and challenging choral norms? This session will reveal the benefits of popular and contemporary music to choral singers and their communities while addressing the most common roadblocks directors face while teaching it. Participants will leave the session with a better understanding of the importance of culturally native pop music in the choral program, strategies to successfully and authentically teach this music to their singers, and practical ways to incorporate it into their programs.



J. D. Frizzell is the director of fine arts at Briarcrest Christian School in Memphis, TN. He earned the DMA from the University of Kentucky. His ensembles have performed by invitation at state, regional, national, and international conventions. Their music has been downloaded and streamed over 120 million times worldwide. They have performed at the Emmy's, competed on *America's Got Talent*, and collaborated with multiple Grammy winners, including The Swingles and Foreigner. Frizzell is the cofounder and president of the A Cappella Education Association and the founder of the National A Cappella Convention. He is a member of The Recording Academy and a published composer, arranger, and author. In 2024 and 2025 he was named a top-ten national finalist for the Grammy Music Educator Award.



2026 ACDA Southern Region Conference

Honor Choir Conductors

4th-6th Grade Children's



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 by honor choirs and at 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 Senior High TTBB



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 Chorale 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.

7th-9th Grade Junior High SATB



Jessica Nápoles is professor of choral music education at the University of North Texas, where she teaches undergraduate choral methods, supervises graduate research, and conducts the UNT Concert Choir. A native of Florida with a Cuban American background, Nápoles taught in Miami and Orlando, FL. She received three degrees in music education from The Florida State University. Prior to her appointment at UNT, she taught at the University of Utah for eleven years. Nápoles frequently engages in guest conducting opportunities locally, regionally, and nationally. She has conducted all-state and honor choirs in over twenty states. In addition to her work as a conductor, Nápoles is a well-known researcher, with numerous publications. Nápoles serves as National ACDA president-elect.

10th-12th Grade Senior High SSAA



Nicole C. Lamartine is the director of choirs at Central Washington University. She conducts the flagship CWU Chamber Choir, integrates twenty-first-century relevancy into MM choral studies, and teaches conducting, voice, and music education. She has conducted over twenty all-state, international, and ACDA honor choirs; her own ensembles have appeared on ACDA, MEA, NCCO, and CMS regional and national conferences. She has headlined choral conferences in Hong Kong and Costa Rica and seven US states. Lamartine conducts Chor Anno, comprising choral music educators, and she is the founder of the Santa Barbara Gay Men's Chorus. She is a past president of Northwest ACDA Region. The *Nicole Lamartine Choral Series* is published with Santa Barbara Music Press.