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CHORAL JOURNAL



**Playful
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Applying Elementary
Music Strategies
in Secondary Choirs

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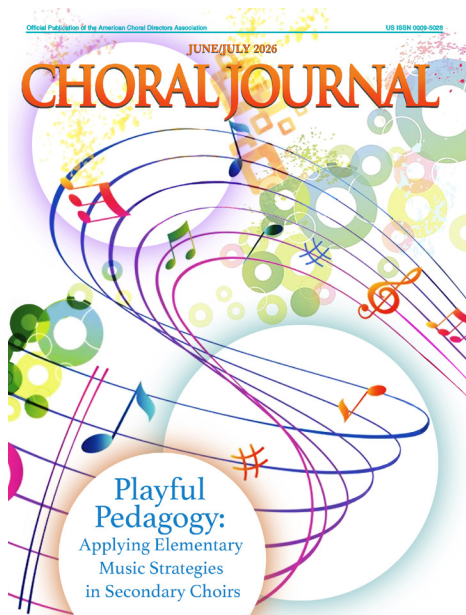
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Feature

6 **Playful Pedagogy: Applying Elementary Music Strategies in Secondary Choirs**

by Saleel Adarkar Menon and Karen Salvador

Articles

15 **Research Report**

From Principle to Practice:
Woman-to-Woman Mentorship in Choral Conducting
by Kaitlin DeSpain

21 **IJRCS Excerpt**

Embodying the Music: A Survey of Choral Music Educators
on Conducting Injury and Wellness Techniques
by Ryan W. Sullivan, Colleen McNickle, Brianne Wehner, and Stephanie Li

25 **World Musics & Cultures**

Choral Music in Paraíba, Brazil: An Exploratory Case Study
by Elisa M. Dekaney, John F. Warren, Wendy K. Moy, and José "Peppie" Calvar

33 **Oswaldo Lacerda's Choral Legacy: Shaping the Sounds of Brazilian Choral Music**

by Matheus Cruz

43 **Rehearsal Break**

Chasing Perfection: Better Harmonic Tuning for Choirs by Ross W. Duffin

55 **Choral Review: Empathy and Musical Dialogue in James Buonemani's *Missa Miamiensis***

by Emerson Eads

News

14 **Julius Herford Dissertation Prize Call for Nominations**

20 **IJRCS Call for Editorial Board Members**

24 **ICEP Call for Applications**

42 **In Memoriam - Ramon Meyer**

59 ***Choral Journal* Index for Volume Sixty-Six**

Editorial

2 **From the Executive Director**

3 **From the President**

4 **From the Editor**

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ADVOCACY STATEMENT

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

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

From the Executive Director



Robyn Hilger

The Quiet Work of Summer

Summer is often framed as a time to get ahead. This is time to plan repertoire, map out next year's calendar, attend summer conferences, and redo those things that didn't quite go as we wanted last year. Don't get me wrong. This work matters and must be done. But...there is another kind of work that is just as essential and far less visible.

Summer is when we make sense of the year we just lived. It's a real chance to reflect on what we did as a leader, what our singers accomplished (or didn't), and also to celebrate small victories while we make our next plan. For me, the crush of the region conferences is over. The national conference is not yet upon us. There's more flexibility to the days and less work on the weekends. There are some great, wonderful, welcome gaps that allow time for reflection and also creative time. There's no pressure to solve that problem today or have all the steps worked out just yet. I can ease into it, let it sit, revise, and reconsider pieces. It's a blessing to be able to move from having task after task in front of you into a quieter space.

As we drift into summer, does your spouse or partner act like you've come home from a long journey? Do your non-choral friends greet you like a long-lost pal? Maybe you are going to learn something new and completely unrelated to music. Personally, can anyone help me crochet? Or is this just about buying yarn? Why do those videos look so easy? Send help.

In a profession that asks us to constantly give, summer offers an invitation to receive. We are replenished by the very things that drew us to music in the first place: curiosity, connection, and the simple act of creating. Summer asks less of our productivity and more of our attention to the things that we have, rightfully so, neglected during the long winter and busy spring.

As you move into these summer months, I hope you plan what needs planning and prepare for what's ahead. But also leave room for the quieter work—the kind that restores your energy, sharpens your purpose, and reminds you that what you do matters. Because when we return, it is not just with new repertoire or revised lesson plans. It is with renewed clarity about the role we play in the lives of our singers and the communities we serve.

And that is the work that sustains us.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robyn Hilger".

From the President



Edith Copley

For many of us, summer is a respite from our hectic day-to-day schedule. This season often provides an opportunity to travel to new places (both here and aboard) or to visit family and friends. Before I retired, June was when I would discover new repertoire and plan the upcoming concert season. Of course, this activity was interspersed with walks in the Flagstaff mountains and rounds of golf. July

was often a time to attend one or more summer choral workshops. It's not too late to register for a professional development opportunity, so please check the summer workshop listings found on page 95 in the March/April issue of the *Choral Journal*. You can also scan the QR code to view.



On July 1 we welcome our six new region presidents to the ACDA National Board: Aimee Stewart, Western; Bill Campbell, Northwestern; Zachary Durlam, Midwestern; Damion Womack, Southern; Joshua Openheim, Southwestern; and Penelope Cruz, Eastern. Thank you for your continued and dedicated service to ACDA, and I look forward to working with you in the days ahead.

This spring, ACDA committees worked tirelessly to evaluate the interest session and performing choir applications for the 2027 National Conference in Minneapolis (March 7–9). Final selections are made by the National Conference Committee in June, and presenters and conductors are notified in July. Special thanks to Gretchen Harrison, our National Repertoire and Resources Chair, who coordinated this massive process, and to Scott Davis, ACDA's IT Project Manager, who made these evaluations easier by redesigning Rob Natter's 2024 honor choir portal prototype.

Recently while looking through repertoire for a summer reading session, I rediscovered “Tabula Rasa” for mixed chorus by Don MacDonald. The Spanish text describes a mother holding her child and seeing limitless possibilities—the freedom to breathe, grow, learn, imagine, and love. The Spanish word to breathe (“respira”) kept entering my thoughts for this column. As choral musicians, we understand the importance of the breath. Efficient breath connection creates a free and full choral sound. Deep breathing can calm racing thoughts as we sometimes struggle to fall asleep. After sustaining a back injury, I discovered expansive, slow breathing can literally help one heal. “Respira” also means to take a pause (“to take a breath”). I hope you can take a breath this summer to relax and recharge, and then to reflect and re-engage for the coming year.

Edie Copley

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Amanda Bumgarner

This month's June/July issue concludes Volume 66. I want to thank all the authors whose work appeared in the pages of *Choral Journal* this year for sharing their research, their expertise, and their passion for the choral art with all of us. While I realize that not every article in every issue will be of interest to every reader, my hope is that you are able to find at least one piece of content in each issue that is relevant to your work. I also want to thank those behind the scenes whose editorial comments and insight help shape the articles you read in each issue.

Finally, I would like to thank Scott Dorsey for his continued work on the *Choral Journal* index. The Volume 66 index is printed in this issue and will be added to the master index, which is available at acda.org/choraljournal. Look for the link on the left sidebar. This invaluable resource includes all articles in the *Choral Journal* archives and will assist you in locating previous *Journal* content.

For anyone interested in contributing to the work of *Choral Journal*, we have open calls for Book Review and Recorded Sound Review contributors. We are also seeking submissions for the On the Voice Column and the Lift Every Voice Column. There will be several editorial board members rotating off the *Choral Journal* board as term limits end over the next two years. More information on applying to be part of the editorial board will be available in the weekly newsletter and in this column closer to the end of 2026. If you have any questions, direct them to: abumgarner@acda.org. There is also an open call for proposals for a special issue of ACDA's research publication, the *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing*. You can find out more information about this on the next page of this issue, or visit acda.org/ijrcs to view the full call and evaluation rubric.

The current issue of *Choral Journal* features articles related to pedagogy, mentorship, Brazilian choral music and culture, tuning, and an extended choral review on James Buonemani's *Missa Miamiensis*.

I invite you to consider how you might contribute to *Choral Journal* in the coming year and earn a place in the Volume 67 index. We accept submissions throughout the year and welcome the chance to discuss an article idea with you. Find submission guidelines online at acda.org/choraljournal.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Bumgarner". The signature is fluid and cursive.

IJRCS International Journal of Research in Choral Singing

The Scientific Research Journal of the American Choral Directors Association

Call for Proposals – Special Issue International Journal of Research in Choral Singing

The IJRCS seeks proposals for a special issue titled “Profiles in Choral Singing” or “Place-Based Choral Music-Making.” The special issue will contain 5-6 articles each describing a unique case of choral singing around the world. Articles will be published in the “short-form” of 10 pages double-spaced, not including references and may contain up to one image. Collaborations between practitioners (choir directors) and writers (researchers) are encouraged, particularly when such a collaboration produces a manuscript which might not otherwise be feasible. Submissions may describe the work of other people in other settings, or they may describe one’s own work in a particular place and time in the present or past. The timeline will be:

Proposals due: August 1, 2026

Authors notified of acceptance: September 15, 2026

Manuscript due for editorial board review: December 15, 2026

Feedback to authors: January 15, 2027

Final draft submission due: February 15, 2027

Beyond the criteria above, submissions should otherwise adhere to the journal’s general submission guidelines and must not be under current consideration or previously published at another journal. The format of the proposal and final manuscripts, if accepted, should include a description of the locale, the founding and subsequent successes and challenges, leadership structure, pedagogy, performance structures, and choir membership. Proposals may or may not cite specific ethnographic or historical research methods. Critical Incidence Analysis may be useful for extended reflection on the setting.

For more information, email the IJRCS editor: ijrcs@acda.org

Full rubric information is available at acda.org/ijrcs

Playful Pedagogy: Applying Elementary Music Strategies in Secondary Choirs

SALEEL ADARKAR MENON
and KAREN SALVADOR

Many beginning teachers rely on the traditional ensemble rehearsal model: structured warm-ups, then sequential sight-reading exercises, followed by repertoire-focused instruction.¹ These methods, however, are not always effective for student learning, particularly with students who are uncertain singers or new to choral singing. While common in advanced choirs, traditional rehearsal structures might fail to provide immersive, exploratory learning experiences that help students build foundational skills and intrinsic motivation.

Seeking more productive rehearsal strategies, we turned to general music methods, which promote movement, play, and exploration as core instructional strategies.² These approaches can encourage students to engage with music in ways that are active, kinesthetic, and intuitive, fostering both skill development and a positive relationship with music making/learning.³ When integrating select techniques from elementary music education—such as variety in instructional delivery, sequencing learning from sound to sight, movement-based learning, games, and play-based social learning opportunities—we observed that some students became more engaged, more willing to take risks, and more confident in their musical abilities.

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Having noticed that elementary strategies produced more engagement and improved singing in choral settings, we examined research on play, movement, improvisation, and other informal learning techniques in a variety of music learning settings.⁴ Scholars have demonstrated that elementary and play-based techniques can develop musicianship throughout the human lifespan. Specifically, researchers found that adults who see themselves as “non-singers” or “nonmusicians” benefit from pedagogical approaches that emphasize playful engagement, social connections, and interactive vocal exploration.⁵

Scholarship on play-based music learning suggests that interactive, exploratory approaches can enhance motivation and skill development in children⁶ and that integrating movement into choral instruction can improve vocal production and phrasing, reinforcing the connection between body and voice.⁷ Moreover, play-based approaches to sight-reading can increase notational literacy skills and reduce anxiety in developing musicians. By applying these strategies in rehearsals, teachers might observe improvements in some students’ musicianship and also a shift in rehearsal culture, away from a focus on compliance and toward curiosity, confidence, and collaborative music making.⁸

Drawing on our own teaching experience as well as extant research, in this article we explore the pedagogical benefits of incorporating elementary general music strategies in secondary choral classrooms. By examining the ways in which play-based instruction supports vocal development, musical skills, and ensemble cohesion, we aim to provide practical, research-supported strategies for choral educators seeking to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. We suggest that by adopting a more immersive and interactive rehearsal approach, secondary choir directors can improve both musicianship and long-term student investment in choral singing.

We will begin by describing some elementary concepts, then illustrate how we use these concepts in the context of a secondary choral rehearsal. In this article, *secondary learners* are defined as those who move from an elementary general music curriculum into an ensemble-based rehearsal modality, typically starting in fifth or sixth grade.

Elementary Concepts for Secondary Learners: Four Core Principles

Incorporating elementary concepts into the secondary choral classroom involves leveraging research-supported strategies that align with secondary learners’ developmental needs while making rehearsals more engaging and musically enriching. In a previous *Choral Journal* article, Saleel Menon suggested a number of games to build music literacy proficiency in choral ensembles.⁹ While those activities are helpful for building specific literacy skills through social interaction and play, this article will focus on how similar play-based pedagogies might reinforce learning when applied to repertoire. Specifically, four core principles from elementary music education—variety, sequence, movement, and social interaction—can be particularly effective in enhancing secondary choir instruction. After describing what each term can mean, we will offer concrete examples of each principle applied in a choral context using two pieces: “Hamisha Asar” and “Hota-ru Koi.”¹⁰

Core Principle #1: Variety

One of the most immediately applicable concepts from elementary music education is a teacher’s intentional use of variety in instructional activities. Young children benefit from frequent shifts in focus that engage different musical skills, learning modalities, and cognitive processes.¹¹ While secondary students may be more capable of sustained attention, they can still benefit from a diverse rehearsal structure that holds engagement throughout the lesson. In our own practice, we have found that incorporating varied activities—such as alternating between vocal warm-ups, exploring various meters and tonalities, skill building games, and movement—keeps students more engaged than a static, predictable rehearsal structure.

Additionally, variety in musical tasks expands students’ musical vocabularies by exposing them to a broader range of musical experiences. From an elementary perspective, performing in a variety of tonalities and meters is important because it expands the students’ musical vocabularies for things they might enjoy or create. When students are given opportunities to create, improvise, and move, they may develop deeper

understandings of musical elements in ways that extend beyond notation and performance, while also enhancing their literacies and performing abilities.¹² From the secondary choral perspective, as teachers strive to move beyond the Western classical canon, attending to variety can also increase accuracy and fluency outside of major/minor or duple/triple, increasing students' capacities for performing a variety of non-canonical works. Increasing variety (both in terms of rehearsal strategies and musical content) also aligns with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which encourages teachers to design instruction that incorporates multiple means of engagement, representation, and action to support all learners, including those with diverse needs and musical backgrounds.¹³

Core Principle #2: Sequence

Teachers using elementary music pedagogy prioritize developmentally appropriate sequences, often adhering to a “sound before sight” approach. Sound before sight, where students first experience music aurally and kinesthetically before associating it with notation, can also improve music learning in the secondary setting.¹⁴ When introducing a new piece, teachers can start with informal immersion, where students engage with new musical concepts through exploratory listening, movement, and vocalization. This can create a low-risk, playful environment for skill development. In our experience, when students internalized melodies and rhythms before reading them, they approached sight-reading with greater confidence and musical intuition.

As students build a vocabulary of sounds and learn how those sounds connect to notational symbols, teachers can then play with notational literacy and eventually sight-reading. Sequencing in this way might allow students to develop musical understanding organically rather than relying solely on visual decoding, leading to more expressive and accurate performances. We found this particularly true of music coming from oral or dance traditions, such as folk songs like “Hamisha Asar,” which will be discussed later in the article.

Core Principle #3: Movement

Movement is a fundamental component of elementary music instruction. Researchers found that move-

ment is developmentally appropriate for the cognitive and attentional needs of students and has direct benefits for musical outcomes.¹⁵ Therefore, teachers might encourage their students to move more and play more while learning, regardless of their age. In her research on movement and music, Marja-Leena Juntunen found “the spirit of play and enjoyment has potential to motivate participation, and enhance courage, imagination, and expression.”¹⁶ We have observed that when students embody musical concepts physically, whether through gesture-based phrasing exercises, rhythmic movement games, or postural adjustments, they develop a more intuitive sense of musicality. Additionally, we found that our students' vocal technique and ability to express meaning through singing improved when they connected movement to singing. Movements can also cue applications or extensions of concepts that teachers have previously covered. For example, if a teacher created movements that students implemented in rehearsal to teach a particular articulation or phrase shape, the teacher could later mimic those movements to remind students to sing with that articulation or phrase shape. Similarly, if a teacher has used movements to increase breath support and tone projection, they can imitate those movements while conducting to affect the students' sound.

Core Principle #4: Social Interaction

Many students are social learners, and many secondary choir students seek social connection as a primary motivation for participation.¹⁷ Elementary teachers incorporate social interaction through activities like musical games, dancing, and groupwork, including improvisation and composition activities. In our experience, incorporating social interaction in secondary choral settings strengthened ensemble cohesion and even increased students' sense of belonging. When students interact musically through low-stakes games, partner activities, or improvisational exercises, they can develop musical skills and collaborative and communicative abilities that align with their musical and social motivations for being in choir. Teachers can create a more inclusive and motivating environment by designing rehearsals that foster interaction and cooperative music making.

Applying Elementary Music Strategies in Secondary Choirs

Integrating Elementary Strategies in Secondary Settings

Practical Application: “Hamisha Asar”

When applying elementary strategies in choirs, varied repertoire can challenge students musically and engage their interest. In this section, we describe a rehearsal sequence for “Hamisha Asar,” a Sephardic folk song as recorded by Flory Jagoda, arranged for three-part treble choir by Nick Page.¹⁸ This piece provides a rich opportunity to explore meter and tonality (variety) using movement, attending to sequence, and considering social interactions. Students who are unfamiliar with diverse meters and modes might sing inaccurately, so we designed sound-before-sight movement and improvisation activities that preceded singing the melody or engaging with notation in the meter and tonality. This method may be particularly applicable for songs that come from less familiar cultural backgrounds, including aural traditions, dances, and various meters and modes.

Internalizing Meter Through Movement

Teachers can introduce the 7/8 meter by playing a recording of Flory Jagoda singing the folk-song version of “Hamisha Asar” and incorporating movements to guide their students’ listening on three separate occasions. A recording link is available on YouTube by scanning the QR code or visiting the link in the notes.¹⁹



“Hamisha Asar” Recording Link

- **Day 1: Flow Movement**—While standing in one place, students experiment with large, flowing movements, intentionally moving through beat subdivisions as they listen (gaining familiarity with the sound before they try to be “right”).
- **Day 2: Flicking Gestures**—Seated students mirror the teacher’s small, light flicks (using scarves, flicking with a flowing movement throughout) that emphasized the meter: 123-45-67.

- **Day 3: Full-Body Locomotion**—Students move freely through the room, stepping with the meter in a long-short-short pattern. The teacher can encourage students to step in ways that match the lightness of Jagoda’s singing and accompaniment.

After students demonstrate fluency in moving with the meter, teachers can gauge students’ readiness for transferring to notation, if that aligns with their goals. Without embodied experience, students tend to either drag into a duple feel (1-2-3-4-5-6-7 [8], 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 [8]) or perform (123-45-67) too mechanically. Talking about the beat groupings does not solve this issue; movement must come first. While often a go-to rhythmic exercise, clapping the pattern can be counterproductive in this context, as it emphasizes percussiveness rather than the fluid, dancing quality of the meter in this folk song.

Teachers can also reinforce the meter with a choral beatboxing warm-up. Starting in 4/4, students internalize a simple “boots and cats and” rhythm, then repeat it in 6/8, 5/8, and 7/8. This exercise helps reinforce meter fluency and encourages consonant articulation and breath coordination/support. Our students enjoyed this activity, which emphasizes play and social interaction.

Internalizing Tonality Through Vocal Exploration

“Hamisha Asar” is in the Phrygian Dominant mode²⁰ (sometimes called Spanish Phrygian), which was unfamiliar to our students. In many recordings we found, choirs do not accurately sing the lowered second scale degree that characterizes this tonality. To address this, teachers can structure their warm-ups to acclimate students to the tonality before they attempt to sing the melody.

- **Drone:** the choir sustains a drone on the home tone while the teacher improvises in Spanish Phrygian. Then, half of the choir sustains the drone while the other half of the choir echoes the phrases that the teacher improvises (and switch).
- **Chord Roots:** Half of the choir sustains a pattern on the characteristic chord roots (scale degrees 1 and 2, which in this case meant D and E^b). The

teacher improvises melodic fragments over these changes for the other half of the choir to echo. This can also turn into a question/answer improvisation.

- **Stacked Harmonies:** To reinforce the unique harmonic language of the mode, students can stack the primary triads (I and II, which in this case were D major and E^b major) and create a triad pattern over which the teacher (and any students who want to) can improvise.
- **Scale Exploration:** Only after students have played with the tonal center and harmonic relationships could the choir warm up using the Phrygian Dominant scale, much as one would with a major scale.

This tonal scaffolding might help prevent the common issue of singers defaulting to minor out of habit.

Social Interaction: Centering Story and Style

In elementary music education, the story and cultural contexts of a piece are not considered supplemental; they are central to why and how students engage with the music. Similarly, secondary choral teachers can use music to explore social and cultural contexts of the music they perform and create.²¹ “Hamisha Asar” has cultural and historical significance. Flory Jagoda, a Sephardic Jewish musician and Holocaust survivor, learned this and other folk songs from her grandmother in an aural tradition.²² Understanding this lineage transforms the way students approach the piece; it is not meant to be sung rigidly from notation but rather through an aural tradition. Taking time to discuss the cultural and emotional significance of the piece—such as how it represents survival, memory, and identity—may deepen students’ investment.

Practical Application: “Hotaru Koi”

“Hotaru Koi” is a Japanese children’s song arranged for three-part treble chorus by Ro Ogura. This piece provides an opportunity for integrating movement, aural immersion, and interactive composition exercises

through playful approaches that facilitate social interaction.²³ Because it features a pentatonic scale with some chromaticism, imitative polyphony, and text painting, “Hotaru Koi” presents both conceptual and technical challenges that teachers can scaffold through playful, exploratory approaches before introducing the score.

Engaging the Body: Warm-Up Activities

To establish a connection between the piece and its imagery, teachers can begin their rehearsal sequence with movement-based warm-ups that encourage singers to embody the playful nature of fireflies.

- **Stretching and Imaginative Movement:** Students mimic the slow, floating motion of a firefly, reaching and gliding through space with their arms. As they move, they can adjust their levels and speed, responding to the imagined breeze or the flickering rhythm of light pulses. This not only warms up their bodies but also introduces the concept of unpredictability in musical phrasing, particularly the difference between a quarter note and eighth note coupled with an eighth rest over one beat.
- **Breathing:** To reinforce relaxed and supported breath, students can emulate the hum of insects with lip trills and buzzing sounds. Then, the teacher can introduce whispered and humming vocalises to represent fireflies’ quiet and elusive nature, building dynamic control before singing.
- **Pentatonic Vocalises:** Since “Hotaru Koi” features a pentatonic scale, the teacher can lead warm-ups using descending and ascending scale patterns. Framing those sounds as a “firefly scale,” the teacher might ask students how it feels different from a major scale. This built familiarity before addressing theoretical terminology.

Expanding Musical Creativity: Tonal and Rhythmic Games

Teachers can use interactive exercises to provide students with an opportunity to engage with the musical elements of “Hotaru Koi” before introducing the score.

Applying Elementary Music Strategies in Secondary Choirs

Exercise #1: Tonal Trading Cards

Each student receives a “tonal card” with a short melodic phrase (notated or written in solfège) extracted from “Hotaru Koi.” To create these cards, the teacher might use fragments that are all four beats long and start on the tonic, emphasizing the intervals students will encounter in the piece. Logistically, the teacher readies the class after students find partners. Then, the taller partner sings their patterns to the shorter partner over four beats. The “shorts” then respond to the “talls” over the next four beats.

Next, the students trade their cards and have eight beats to find a new partner, and the cycle repeats again. Teachers might find that keeping the tempo moving helps students learn to move forward in time with their patterns instead of stopping when they make mistakes. Additionally, this activity allows social interaction in low-stakes musicking because it is too fast for the teacher to notice mistakes or insecurities, or for the students to care about making mistakes. The goal of this exercise is exploration, not necessarily perfection.

Exercise #2: Rhythmic Conversations

Teachers can provide structured opportunities for generating musical ideas within specific parameters. One possible way to start is by leading rote imitations of rhythmic patterns in the meter of “Hotaru Koi.” These patterns span four beats. Once students demonstrate fluency with these patterns, teachers can introduce question-and-answer improvisations by singing a rhythmic question and having the class respond simultaneously with their own improvised answers. This encourages a low-risk environment where individual ideas are not exposed, but rather oriented toward exploration in the meter. As students grow more confident, they can engage in paired “rhythmic conversations,” taking turns improvising questions and answers.

These creative and social exercises can help students internalize tonalities and meters, fostering aural independence and expressive fluency. For example, using playful and creative activities to introduce the musical meter and tonality of “Hotaru Koi” can help students become more comfortable with the piece’s melodic and harmonic language. Similarly, question-and-answer improvisation in 7/8 meter can prepare students for the asymmetrical phrasing in “Hamisha Asar.” By linking

musical creativity to repertoire, teachers can provide meaningful experiences that support student independence and engagement.²⁴

Sound Before Sight: Rote to Notation

After these preparatory activities, teachers might introduce their students to the main melody of “Hotaru Koi” using a rote song process informed by Music Learning Theory (MLT).²⁵

1. The teacher models the melody on solfège. We used *la*-based minor because that aligned with our pedagogical goals, but teachers should use whatever system is familiar to their students. (Note: Teachers can possibly expose students to text in this step if solfège is not a good match for their instructional goals, but it will add another layer of cognition.)
2. The teacher sings the melody for the students again while the students quietly pat their legs or tap their feet to the macrobeat.
3. The teacher sings the melody for the students again while the students pat their legs or tap their feet to the microbeat.
4. The teacher sings the melody for the students again while the students choose to feel either the macrobeat or the microbeat.
5. The teacher asks students to audiate the melody (sing it in their head).
6. Students sing the melody as a class. Importantly, the teacher does not sing so they can listen to the class. Teachers can correct any errors that occur as they assess the students.

Once students internalize the melody, the teacher can show them how the melody looks in notation using a unison vocal line on the staff. Once students can track how the melody fits with notation, the teacher can divide the class into three groups and put the melody in canon (as the arrangement requires). Make sure that each group experiences starting at every entry point in the canon. Once students can sing the melody in can-

on, they can transition into the full score. Following this sequence allows students to connect their experiences with sound to the notation in the score.

Considerations

Teachers incorporating play-based elementary music strategies into secondary choral classrooms must be intentional with planning and reflection. Offering students opportunities for musical variety, sequential learning, movement, and increased social interaction challenges some traditional rehearsal structures. To effectively integrate these methods, educators might consider the following.

Clarify Learning Objectives

When planning to use elementary strategies in secondary choral classrooms, teachers should begin with clear learning objectives that go beyond merely learning repertoire, focusing instead on developing transferable musical skills that empower students to become independent musicians. We found that these approaches are particularly effective when learning goals include phrasing, style, accuracy in specific tonalities or meters, vocal technique, and fostering a positive classroom climate.

To maximize their effectiveness, teachers should identify the specific skills or concepts they want to address and select activities that align with these outcomes rather than using elementary techniques for novelty's sake. For example, exploring irregular meters through movement in "Hamisha Asar" can help students internalize complex rhythms, a skill they can transfer to other repertoire, while tonal trading cards can support aural independence and intonation accuracy by reinforcing pitch patterns. To ensure that these skills are generalized, educators should consistently connect playful activities to broader musical concepts and encourage students to reflect on how these strategies enhance their learning.

Managing Time Constraints

Secondary choral educators might encounter challenges balancing elementary strategies with time pressures related to performance preparation. Elementary strategies often require repeated exposure and informal immersion, which can seem at odds with performance

timelines. However, we find play-based approaches to be an efficient method to both practice musical skill and rehearse repertoire. For example, students might spend just a few minutes on each of three separate days exploring 7/8 meter through movement, and additional time improvising in Spanish Phrygian before teachers introduce the notation for "Hamisha Asar." However, because students embodied the meter and modality of the song, those students' grasp of style and tonal accuracy may not require remediation or over-rehearsing. We find elementary strategies to be a "both/and" approach to teaching musical skills within repertoire.


Affirming Diverse Interests, Traditions, and Contexts

Elementary strategies, like emphasizing stories, can provide opportunities for teachers to affirm and incorporate students' cultural backgrounds, interests, and lived experiences in their classes.²⁶ In both "Hamisha Asar" and "Hotaru Koi," learning the music through movement and by rote can allow students to engage with the music in a way that honors cultural contexts of orality. Teachers should be mindful of the cultural and social implications of movement and play, selecting repertoire that reflects diverse cultures, and encouraging students to bring their own experiences into improvisation and composition activities.

Conclusion

When teachers integrate play-based elementary music strategies into secondary choral classrooms, they enhance musical skill development and foster a more engaging and inclusive learning environment. By integrating techniques like incorporating movement, using playful activities, and encouraging social interactions, teachers can support their students' musical development and cultivate their independence. These approaches are particularly effective when anchored to clear learning objectives that go beyond mastering repertoire.

Many secondary teachers, regardless of time in the field, tend toward a traditional teaching model. As music educators continue to seek meaningful ways to engage diverse student learners, embracing play-based strategies offers a pathway to more dynamic and engaging teaching. By recognizing the value of balancing

exploratory learning and connecting these experiences to broader musical concepts, teachers can bridge the gap between elementary modes of learning and secondary ensemble structures. Ultimately, we believe this approach supports students' musical growth while nurturing their creative expression, social interaction, and joy in music making. 

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2025 JULIUS HERFORD PRIZE CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Each year the Julius Herford Prize Subcommittee of the Research and Publications Committee accepts nominations for the outstanding doctoral terminal research project in choral music. Projects are eligible if they comprise the principal research component of the degree requirements, whether the institution defines the project as a "dissertation," "document," "thesis," or "treatise," etc. The submitted projects are evaluated entirely blind with regard to dissertator, assisting faculty, institution, or any other identifying material, by an unpaid panel of choral conductor-scholars.

When a dissertation may be nominated: The year 2025 indicates the year in which the relevant doctoral degree was conferred. Dissertations must be nominated in the calendar year following the year in which the degree was conferred. The prize is awarded in the calendar year following the year of nomination. Thus, the dissertation of a student with a 2025 degree can be nominated through June 10, 2026; the prize will be awarded at the 2027 ACDA National Conference.

The award: The winner will receive a \$1000 cash prize and a plaque. The committee reserves the right to award two prizes or no prizes in any given year.

Nomination Requirements and Procedure:

1. An institution may submit only one document for that year's prize. In the event that there are two nominations of equal merit from one school, the letter from the dean, director, or chair of the music school must justify the additional nomination. The submitting faculty member, institution, and/or the writer must be currently a member of ACDA in good standing.
2. Links to the nomination form and instructions for uploading the dissertation are found on the prize webpage: visit acda.org; under "About," select "Award & Competitions."

The nomination form will require the following uploads:

- PDF abstract of the dissertation WITHOUT any material identifying the student, faculty, or institution. The redacted version should be carefully tested before being submitted.
 - PDF title page of the dissertation WITH identifying information, including the dissertator's name and institution.
 - PDF of a signed letter of recommendation from the dean, director, or chair of the music school. Letters from the chair of the choral area are not acceptable. The letter must include the following: (1) the full name of the student, (2) the year in which that student's degree was granted, and (3) the full title of the dissertation.
 - PDF page with contact information (full name, title, mailing address, email address, telephone number) for (1) the faculty member making the submission and (2) the dissertation author.
 - PDF of the complete dissertation WITHOUT any material identifying the student, faculty, or institution. The information can be removed or blacked out. The redacted version should be carefully tested before being submitted.
3. **The dissertation and all accompanying materials must be uploaded by June 10, 2026, noon CST. If one or more of these requirements is not met, the dissertation will be eliminated from consideration.**

Research Report

Elizabeth Hearn and
Elizabeth Cassidy Parker, editors

From Principle to Practice: Woman-to-Woman Mentorship in Choral Conducting

by Kaitlin DeSpain

Gender inequities in choral conducting have been well documented, with numerous studies and organizational reports demonstrating that women remain underrepresented as choral conductors.¹ Recent data from the College Music Society indicates that the percentage of women choral conductors in higher education has declined over the past fifteen years, from 32.95% in 2006 to 25.9% in 2020.² This disparity persists despite the fact that women comprise roughly half of undergraduate and graduate music degree recipients and earn doctoral degrees in choral conducting at rates exceeding those of men.³ Patterns of participation further suggest that gender inequity in choral conducting is unevenly distributed across professional contexts. A 2017 Chorus America report found that men disproportionately lead community, school, volunteer, religious, and professional choruses, while women are more frequently represented in children's choruses.⁴ Similarly, Stohlmann observed that women choral conductors are more prevalent at the elementary, middle, and high school levels than in collegiate positions.⁵ These findings suggest that the gender gap lies not at the point of entry into the field but rather in access to advancement, visibility, and leadership.⁶ Thus, the question now is not whether inequity exists in choral conducting but how the profession might address this persistent imbalance.

Mentorship is among solutions most frequently cited

in the literature; however, discussions often stop at the level of principle, offering general endorsement without detailing how mentorship is enacted in practice. Scholars and professional organizations often identify mentorship as a critical pathway for addressing gender disparities in conducting, yet few explore specific or effective mentorship strategies. Even fewer studies specify woman-to-woman mentorship as a distinct practice worthy of investigation. This lack of specificity limits the field's ability to understand how mentorship functions and how mentorship might meaningfully support women's advancement. A synthesis of existing research is needed to move discussions of mentorship beyond aspiration and toward intentional practice. To that end, the following article examines existing scholarship across three areas: access and pathways to professional advancement for women in choral conducting; the structural barriers that shape those pathways; and the role of woman-to-woman mentorship as an equity-oriented strategy.

Access and Pathways to Professional Advancement

Although women enter the choral music field in numbers equal to or greater than men, their opportunities for professional advancement are shaped by uneven access to mentorship, representation, and infor-

mal professional knowledge. Researchers have affirmed the transformative potential of mentorship for women, particularly as a mechanism through which professional norms, expectations, and leadership pathways are transmitted.⁷ In her 2023 study about gender inequity in the choral conducting profession, Farquhar-Wulff stated, “most of the interviewees listed previous teachers from their master’s or doctorate programs” as mentors, with some noting that studying with a woman for the first time after previously only having male mentors “made every difference in the world.”⁸ This suggests that access to mentors with shared professional and lived experiences can meaningfully influence women’s perceptions of viable leadership trajectories.

This finding underscores the importance of early access to mentors whose professional and lived experiences align with those of their students, particularly within instructional settings. Research indicates that students benefit when they see themselves reflected in their instructors.⁹ For example, those from marginalized backgrounds are more likely to persist and succeed when taught by teachers with similar identities and experiences, and women students often perform better under same-gender faculty.¹⁰ Beyond academics, mentoring relationships play a crucial role in student retention, particularly during the vulnerable first year of college, a critical juncture that can influence whether women remain on pathways leading toward advanced study and professional leadership.¹¹

Work-life balance further intersects with professional pathways for women in choral conducting by affecting access to time-sensitive opportunities for advancement. Research shows that women’s most critical career-building years often coincide with childbearing years, while men are more likely to gain professional momentum during the same stage.¹² This is particularly pronounced in academia, where the demands of graduate study, the pursuit of terminal degrees, and tenure processes frequently overlap with caregiving responsibilities, constraining women’s ability to pursue professional opportunities, maintain professional visibility, or meet institutional expectations at the same pace as their male peers. As a result, women may delay advancement, modify career goals, or exit leadership pathways altogether.¹³

Structural Barriers in the Profession

Systemic barriers may also narrow professional pathways for women choral conductors and restrict potential opportunities, such as access to particular ensemble types and high-visibility conducting opportunities. For example, researchers have documented the underrepresentation of women among conductors of tenor-bass choirs. In his 2016 survey, Graf reported that some male conductors questioned whether women could effectively connect with or direct tenor-bass ensembles, and suggested they lacked the necessary vocal connection or the social authority to succeed.¹⁴ Similar patterns appear in guest conducting invitations: women are less frequently selected to lead honor choirs, and when invited, are more often assigned to elementary, junior high, or treble choirs rather than tenor-bass or mixed groups. McClean found that between 2000 and 2020, only 23% of all-state mixed choir guest conductors were women.¹⁵ Likewise, Nagoski’s analysis of the 2017 ACDA National Conference revealed that just 28% of invited ensembles were conducted by women, and within that group, only 6% directed ensembles classified by Nagoski as “non-conforming.” In this context, “non-conforming” refers to conductors who cross the gendered expectations of their profession, conducting choir types conventionally associated with the opposite gender—i.e., men conducting children’s, youth-treble, or women’s choirs; and women conducting college/university or mixed choirs. In comparison, 26% of invited male conductors led “non-conforming” ensembles.¹⁶

Extant studies on hiring and evaluation reveal additional layers of gendered bias that shape women’s professional experience in choral conducting. Women conductors are often evaluated through contradictory expectations regarding demeanor across multiple contexts, including student evaluations and peer judgment. They may feel pressure to adopt a more stereotypically masculine façade to be taken seriously, while simultaneously being expected to display stereotypically feminine traits such as warmth, patience, and empathy.¹⁷ In contrast, women who resist the caretaker role are judged harshly by students and colleagues, while those who decline to adopt a stronger persona are dismissed as weak leaders, creating a double bind in which behav-

iors praised in men are penalized in women.¹⁸ Scholarship also notes that women professors frequently receive more negative teaching appraisals on student evaluations than men with comparable qualifications and behaviors.¹⁹

Women conductors may also experience more scrutiny related to their attire and appearance than male conductors, reflecting gender-normative expectations rather than purely musical or professional criteria. Edwards highlighted ongoing challenges related to attire and professionalism for women conductors, while Bryan noted that young women conductors must be prepared to navigate commentary about appearance throughout their careers.²⁰ In a dissertation by Stohlmann, one conductor recalled being advised to alter her dress to be taken seriously on the podium.²¹ These patterns illustrate how gendered expectations regarding demeanor, authority, and appearance function as structural barriers that affect evaluation and restrict access to opportunities for women in choral conducting.

Woman-to-Woman Mentorship

Mentorship has emerged as a potential mechanism to support women's advancement in choral conducting and confront structural barriers. Research suggests that women often lack access to consistent, high-quality mentorship, contributing to unclear expectations for advancement, limited professional visibility, and feelings of isolation.²² Woman-to-woman mentorship has been identified as a relevant form of support for navigating these barriers, offering guidance grounded in shared professional experiences and gendered realities.

Although numerous researchers have proposed models of effective mentorship, Deng and Turner note that the "understanding of these models is limited due to the multidisciplinary and fragmented nature of the literature."²³ To address this, they conducted a comprehensive review of quantitative studies examining which mentor characteristics most strongly influence successful mentoring relationships. Their analysis identified five key traits associated with positive outcomes: competence in relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities; commitment and initiative; strong interpersonal skills; a pro-social, other-focused orientation; and an openness to development, exploration, and growth. These

categories offer a useful framework for examining effective mentorship in choral conducting, particularly within the context of women mentoring women.

The first characteristic—competence in context-relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities—refers to a mentor's capacity to draw upon relevant expertise and apply it effectively to a mentee's professional context. In choral conducting, this competence includes not only musical skill and rehearsal technique but also knowledge of institutional structures, professional norms, and career pathways, among others. As such, mentors serve as a source from which women gain access to tacit professional knowledge that is rarely addressed in formal training, including how conducting opportunities are allocated, how professional reputations are formed, and how informal barriers influence professional growth. By understanding these informal systems, mentors can help mentees interpret professional feedback, anticipate obstacles, and make strategic decisions regarding their visibility and career positioning. Women mentors who possess this contextual knowledge may be particularly well positioned to support other women as they navigate gendered barriers related to authority, ensemble assignment, and professional evaluation.²⁴

The second characteristic, commitment and initiative, emphasizes the mentor's willingness to invest time, maintain ongoing contact, and actively nurture the relationship over the long term. In choral conducting, this may include ongoing advising across career stages, continued engagement beyond formal educational settings, and proactive efforts to connect mentees with professional opportunities. Such sustained involvement shifts mentorship from reactive guidance to proactive preparation, which is particularly important in a field where professional opportunities often emerge unpredictably because they are tied to job openings, invitations, or short-notice engagements. By encouraging early planning for auditions, applications, and career transitions—and by demystifying professional decision-making processes—mentors help mentees develop the capacity to self-advocate and pursue opportunities intentionally. Over time, this sustained commitment supports autonomy by equipping women conductors to navigate professional systems independently.

Interpersonal competence, the third characteristic identified by Deng and Turner, includes skills like ac-

tive listening, trust-building, clear communication, empathy, and the ability to provide constructive feedback. In choral conducting, these skills are essential for fostering mentoring relationships in which women can openly discuss challenges related to gendered expectations. Within woman-to-woman mentorship, interpersonal competence may involve creating space for candid discussion of sensitive topics common to the field, including authority on the podium, communication style, appearance, and work-life balance. Mentors who listen attentively, ask clarifying questions, and frame feedback within broader professional contexts can help mentees interpret critique accurately and respond strategically, particularly when distinguishing between feedback rooted in musical or pedagogical skill and feedback shaped by expectations of demeanor, authority, or gender conformity. Over time, interpersonal competence supports professional confidence by helping women develop clearer self-assessment and resilient leadership identities.

The fourth characteristic, a pro-social orientation, refers to a mentor's other-focused concern and their genuine investment in a mentee's success and well-being. In choral conducting, this orientation may involve advocating for other women's visibility, sharing opportunities, and contributing to a professional culture that values collaboration over competition. This other-focused orientation is particularly relevant in discussions of equity, as it frames mentorship not as an individual advancement strategy but as a tool for collective progress. In practice, pro-social mentorship may include recommending mentees for guest conducting engagements, clinics, residencies, or leadership roles; sharing professional networks; and advocating for women's inclusion in high-profile professional positions. Such practices counter competitive norms that can limit women's advancement in male-dominated leadership fields by normalizing advocacy and opportunity-sharing as professional responsibilities.

The final characteristic identified by Deng and Turner—openness to development, exploration, and reciprocal growth—reflects a mentor's willingness to engage in mutual learning, curiosity, and the reciprocal exchange of ideas. When applied to choral conducting, this perspective recognizes that mentorship can evolve across career stages and that mentors themselves


continue to learn through engagement with emerging professionals. Openness to reciprocal growth allows mentoring relationships to adapt as mentees gain experience and professional agency, and over time, mentorship may shift from directive guidance toward mutual exchange. This openness enables mentors to remain responsive to changing professional norms, technologies, and institutional contexts, reinforcing mentorship as an ongoing professional practice rather than a fixed role and supporting continuity across generations of women conductors.

Together, these five characteristics provide a useful framework for understanding effective mentor relationships in choral conducting. Applied specifically to woman-to-woman mentorship, Deng and Turner's framework clarifies how mentorship can function as more than encouragement or informal advice, serving instead as a mechanism through which women gain access to professional knowledge, navigate structural constraints, and build agency within the field.

Mentorship alone cannot resolve systemic inequities; however, research suggests that mentorship may serve as an equity-oriented strategy when supported by intentional structures and sustained engagement. By clarifying some of the characteristics of effective mentorship, choral leaders can become better positioned to design and implement mentorship practices that support equitable pathways for women conductors.

Summary

Despite decades of scholarship documenting gender inequity in choral conducting, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles across educational and professional contexts. To address these inequities, continued synthesis and dissemination of research remain essential. This research review examines how mentorship functions within existing structural and cultural constraints. In doing so, this review clarifies the role of woman-to-woman mentorship as a critical need rather than an assumed good. As Kay Hoke wrote in her discussion on the gender gap in higher education, "the goal of redefining patterns and adopting a new ideology of work in the public sphere is unlikely to happen as soon as it should; therefore, the issue...is what we can do to help other women bridge the gender gap in the meantime."²⁵ Clarifying the characteristics and func-

tions of woman-to-woman mentorship represents one way the field can move discussions of mentorship beyond aspiration and toward intentional practice in choral conducting. 

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**Embodying the Music: A Survey of Choral Music Educators
on Conducting Injury and Wellness Techniques**

by Ryan W. Sullivan, Colleen McNickle, Brianne Wehner, and Stephanie Li

Editor's Note: This is an excerpt from an article published in Volume 12 of the *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* (IJRCS). IJRCS is a publication of ACDA focused on studies that apply rigorous, systematically grounded methodologies, either quantitative or qualitative, to investigate phenomena of potential interest to all who sing in, work with, or are otherwise interested in choral ensembles. Read or download this complete article in Volume 12 at <https://acda.org/archives/6100> or visit acda.org/ijrcs to view the full IJRCS archive.

Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory study was to identify the most common choral conducting related injuries and determine the ways conductors completing the survey have adapted their physical gesture to accommodate or avoid pain and discomfort. Utilizing a researcher-designed online survey, we asked choral music educators to identify and describe musculoskeletal and vocal injuries sustained throughout their careers, and the effects of these injuries on their conducting and teaching practices. Results from respondents (N = 75) indicated a high prevalence of upper-body repetitive stress injuries amongst participants caused by classroom ergonomics, misuse and overuse, poor technique, and tension. In response to their injury or injuries, participants reported altering alignment, change of technique, rest, and avoid-

ance. Preventative responses included classroom modifications and therapy and/or treatment. We discussed the workplace culture of the typical American choir conductor, the state of wellness education in pre-service teacher training, and considerations for future research. Such findings could help inform conductors, teachers of conducting, and medical providers to understand more about injury prevention and management for conductors.

Researchers have established that choir ensemble directors (used interchangeably here as choral directors, vocal music teachers, or choral conductors) encounter a wide range of physical rigors including repetitive motion of conducting (Daley et al., 2020), standing for multiple hours on hard floors (Cham & Redfern, 2001), functional voice disorders (Byeon, 2019; Naqvi & Gupta, 2022), and other occupational risks such as moving equipment and student-inflicted injury (Schofield et al., 2017). Practitioner articles have instructed music educators in a variety of injury response and prevention including stretching and breathing (e.g., Wis, 2021), body mapping (e.g., Johnson, 2008), vocal health (e.g., Salvador, 2010), and self-care (e.g., Kuebel, 2019). There are extensive bodies of extant literature within performing arts medicine research regarding musician injury and prevention and specifically vocalist injury and prevention. Empirical research addressing injury and prevention for choral conductors, however, is less prevalent.

Conductor Performance-Related Injuries

Ensemble conductors, like other musicians previously discussed, are also susceptible to injury. Due to “the facilitative nature of the conducting instrument, the lack of practiced movement patterns, and the environmental and occupational stresses inherent in the role” (Daley et al., 2020), very few scholars have examined choral conductor injury. In a 1985 pilot study of 153 choral conductors, Simons found that choral conductors suffered from mental stress, general fatigue, and vocal strain. Twenty-seven percent of respondents also reported back and shoulder problems that affected their conducting.

Prevention and Treatment Strategies

To date, most osteopathic research for performing arts medicine has emphasized the diagnosis and treatment of the musculoskeletal system (Shoup, 2006). Shoup explained that “performing artists require near perfect function of the musculoskeletal system to meet the high demands of performance” (p. 854). Therefore, an osteopathic approach considers all causes of injury and provides a rational and multi-disciplined treatment plan to prevent or treat injury. This treatment plan may include approaches such as medication, physical therapy, surgery, lifestyle modifications, examination of practice habits, osteopathic manipulation, yoga, and deep muscle massage among other treatments (Shoup, 2006). Osteopathic treatment often combines several manipulative modalities in order to obtain the best results. Although playing-related injuries pose a real threat to musicians, Bosi (2017) reported that musicians often ignore the symptoms, sometimes hindering their own recovery. Franklin (2016) noted a “surprising lack of an empirically verified method of teaching healthy movement of the body in music making, especially at a young age” (p. 2). As conductors often do not learn conducting technique until they are adults (Daley et al., 2020), this is counter to the culture of many disciplines where technical skills and knowledge of risk/ injury prevention are developed simultaneously. Furthermore, employees with positions in manual labor (warehouses, construction, line production, etc.) typically receive training every three years to maintain a safe workplace environment (Training Requirements in OSHA Stan-

dards, 2015). No such broadly implemented education or employer-based training in choral conducting is known to these authors or has been reported by previous researchers.

There have been a few different prevention models that have been introduced over the last decade to help conductors avoid vocal and physical injuries. Diaz (2021) posited body mapping as a method to prevent injury and address quality of movement for instrumentalists, singers, and conductors. A somatic method designed for musicians, Body Mapping encourages individuals to explore their perception of their bodies through anatomical information, self-observation, and self-inquiry (Diaz, 2021). An incorrect map of a body, Diaz explained, can produce rigid or uncoordinated movements that may lead to injuries. The Alexander Technique is another method to approach injury prevention and learn about the physiology of the body (Franklin, 2016). A psychophysical method, the Alexander Technique led to the most efficient use of the body while conducting through “directed thinking activities and heightened kinesthetic awareness” (p. 4). Physiology and knowledge of how to utilize their bodies to communicate is of the utmost importance, as choral conductors rely heavily on nonverbal methods of communication.

Taylor’s (2016) practitioner guide to injury prevention and wellness for music educators, *Teaching Healthy Musicianship*, stressed the importance of ergonomics for musicians and music educators. Its five rules of ergonomics were to maintain good posture, avoid repeated twisting and reaching, avoid hunching, create a comfortable environment, and move continuously (Taylor, 2016). Music educators should consider their desk and computer ergonomics, the height of the conductor’s stand and podium, the size and weight of their baton, and ergonomics within the music library, car, and home. One full chapter of the book was dedicated to conductor back and shoulder pain, as Taylor said, “pain disorders of the shoulder and back are a common problem for conductors” (p. 135). Taylor addressed conductor injury, causes, and preventative and reactive stretches to address the pain. MacDonald (2004) encouraged choral conductors to care for their voices through awareness of spinal alignment, core muscle groups, coordinated breaths, and ease and flow

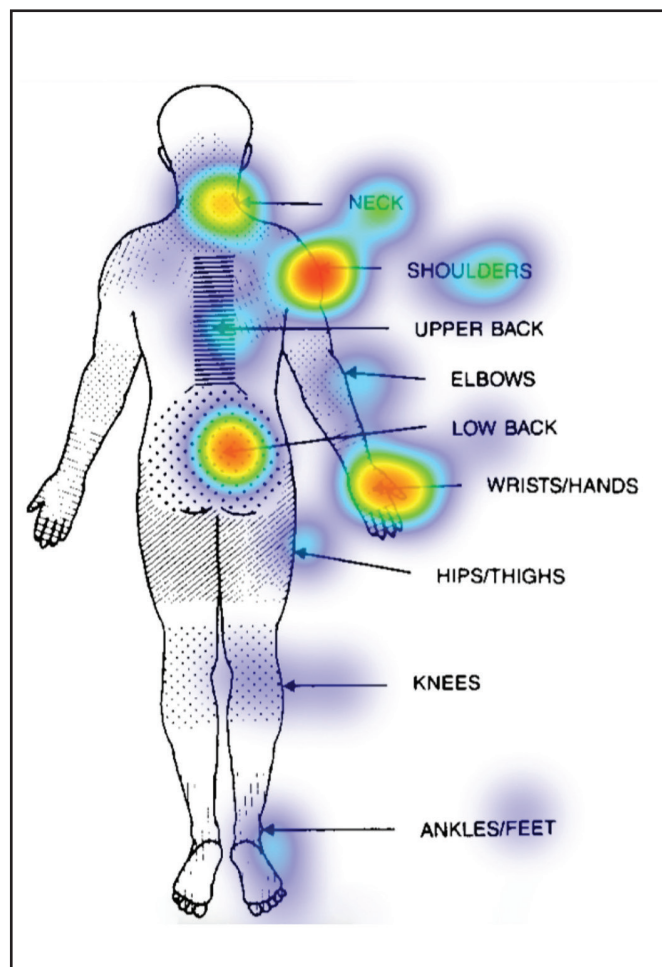
of phonation. Care for the voice is not limited to the singing voice; rather, care for speaking habits is equally important for a choral conductor. MacDonald cited additional vocal abuse factors such as daily stress, environmental conditions, allergies, psychological factors, and diet and exercise.

When prevention of vocal injury is no longer possible, the modality of treatment needs to be discussed. For individuals already experiencing a vocal injury, vocal rest is an “effective therapeutic option” if a full recovery with or without therapy is expected (Haben, 2012, p. 166). However, Haben advised that vocal rest is a short-term solution that often prevents singers from addressing the underlying problem. The author called

for more clear guidelines regarding voice rest regimens for singers. The decision to seek therapy or resort to vocal rest can sometimes be controversial because of the difficulty to determine the efficacy of voice therapy with its wide array of symptoms and treatment methods. However, Carding et al. (1999) found strong evidence supporting direct treatment for patients with non-organic dysphonia, which was caused by overuse or misuse and a frequent diagnosis for vocal music teachers. In response to the specific healthcare needs of performing artists like choral conductors, the Performing Arts Medicine Association (PAMA) was founded in 1989 (Performing Arts Medicine Association, n.d.). Through this association, medical professionals, artist educators, and music administrators collaborate to work toward the goal of improving health care for performing artists. PAMA members treat performing artists, serve as medical consultants, showcase research, and serve as a resource for performers who need healthcare and support. The organization’s website, artsmed.org, houses a variety of resources including webinars, online courses, articles, and information about their annual international symposium (PAMA, 2024).

Although several researchers have examined the liability of musician or teacher injury and practitioner articles have provided injury-response advice to music teachers, no studies have investigated patterns of injury and prevention by choral conductors. Therefore, in this study, our team of two music teacher educators, one osteopathic physician, and one osteopathic medical student sought to identify the most common choral conducting-related injuries and determine the ways conductors completing the survey have adapted their physical gesture to accommodate or avoid pain and discomfort. Research questions included (a) What injuries did choral conductors experience throughout their careers?; (b) How did conductors adapt their gesture to account for injury?; and (c) What preventative responses did conductors utilize as a result of their injury?

Figure 1.
Participant Responses to Nordic Musculoskeletal Questionnaire (NMQ)



To read the complete article—including results, discussion, and references—visit acda.org/ijrcs and choose Volume 12.



INTERNATIONAL CONDUCTORS EXCHANGE PROGRAM New Zealand 2027 CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

ICEP provides opportunities for the next generation of choral leaders to represent the United States as ambassadors to the world in the exchange of music, ideas, and cultures. Established in 2010 and coordinated by ACDA's International Activities Committee, the program has connected choral conductors in the United States with counterparts in Cuba, China, Sweden, South Korea, Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Uruguay, Kenya, South Africa, Germany, the Philippines, and Portugal. Over 90 American conductors have participated in the exchange program, hosting an international conductor and traveling abroad to observe and lead rehearsals and performances, present lectures and master classes, and take part in conferences and other activities.

ACDA is pleased to announce New Zealand as the next partner for the International Conductors Exchange Program. In 2026, six American and six New Zealand conductors will be selected to participate in a bilateral, mutual exchange to take place in 2027. Conductors will be paired based on backgrounds and interests, and will visit each other's choral communities, sharing techniques and learning best practices. Visits by the New Zealand conductors will be centered around the 2027 ACDA National Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 7-10, 2027. U.S. conductors will guide their counterparts at the Minneapolis conference, and host them in their local communities for region visits 3-5 days either before or after the conference.

In turn, American conductors will be hosted for the Big Sing, a nationwide competition and New Zealand's largest choral event held August 26-28, 2027, in Auckland. While at the competition the U.S. delegation will observe rehearsals and attend seminars with local choral leaders introducing New Zealand's unique music culture. Following the Big Sing, regional visits across New Zealand will take place approximately August 28-September 2, 2027 (exact dates TBD). American delegates must commit to attending the Minneapolis conference (March 7-10, 2027) and the New Zealand visit, August 26-September 2, 2027.

ICEP OBJECTIVES

1) To create connections between leaders of the U.S. choral community and colleagues across the globe. 2) To forge stronger relationships between ACDA and choral associations around the world. 3) To raise the visibility and leadership role of ACDA in the global choral community.

Application Period: April 5 – May 30, 2026

SELECTION CRITERIA - EMERGING CONDUCTOR

The Standing Committee for International Activities is charged with the selection of emerging leaders of the choral profession to represent the United States. The Committee has developed the following list of criteria:

1) Is a current member of ACDA, 2) Is an active choral conductor in a professional (remunerative) position, 3) Leads choirs with a demonstrated level of excellence, 4) Exhibits a high level of human understanding, tact, and cross-cultural sensitivity, 5) Has a minimum of 3 years and a maximum of 20 years in the profession

Candidates may reflect a wide diversity of interests and accomplishments (church/synagogue, community/professional choir, primary/secondary/higher education).

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Application deadline: May 30, 2026

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Choral Music in Paraíba, Brazil: An Exploratory Case Study

by Elisa M. Dekaney, John F. Warren, Wendy K. Moy,
and José “Peppie” Calvar

Singing in a choir is a multifaceted and transformative experience—simultaneously artistic, physical, emotional, and cognitive. In the United States, organizations such as ACDA play a vital role in sustaining choral traditions, particularly those rooted in Western European music traditions, built on a music literacy foundation. However, communal singing practices across the globe often diverge considerably from these conventions.

This study investigates the experiences of four choral conductors from the United States—three of whom have participated in ACDA’s International Conductors Exchange Program—as they engage with seven Bra-

zilian choirs in João Pessoa, Paraíba. These ensembles reflect a broad spectrum of missions and values, including aesthetic expression, community engagement, inclusivity, and sociopolitical activism. The conductor-singer relationships, rehearsal practices, and selected repertoire within these groups are uniquely tailored to their respective contexts. Notably, these choirs place a pronounced emphasis on their core values and social missions over technical performance outcomes. As a result, their approaches to music learning prioritize collective identity and belonging, producing significant and distinct benefits for each ensemble.

This experience was possible because an institutional agreement developed between Syracuse University and the Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB). Signed in 2019 to promote intercultural and academic collaboration among faculty and students, this partnership enables sustained engagement with a diverse range of choral groups in João Pessoa through a series of artistic residencies. Central to this initiative has been the leadership of Eduardo de Oliveira Nóbrega, Professor of Choral Music at UFPB and founder of the Festival Paraibano de Coros (FEPAC). The initiative offered valuable insights into João Pessoa’s choral landscape, which, for the purpose of this study, is categorized into four principal domains: university-based choirs, workplace or corporate choirs, correctional facility choirs, and community-based choral groups. To better under-



stand this choral landscape as we contextualize these four domains, we must begin with FEPAC.

Festival Paraibano de Coros

One pivotal element in choral music in João Pessoa is the Festival Paraibano de Coros. Established in 2002, FEPAC has emerged as one of Brazil's leading platforms for inclusive choral expression. The festival convenes choirs representing a range of institutional affiliations—including universities, businesses, correctional facilities, religious organizations, and healthcare facilities—fostering cross-sector dialogue through collective musical performance. Founded and directed by Nóbrega, FEPAC is grounded in the principle that all choirs, regardless of size, skill level, or musical genre, are welcome. Ensembles are encouraged to define their own standards of excellence according to their distinct missions, fostering an ethos of inclusion and mutual respect.

University-based Choirs

In both the United States and Brazil, choral singing remains a vibrant and integral component of university life, with thousands of students regularly participating in campus-based vocal ensembles. In João Pessoa, the capital of the state of Paraíba, Brazil, our research engaged with two such university choirs that exemplify the diversity and vitality of choral practices in higher education.

At UFPB, the *Coral Universitário Gazzzi de Sá*—founded in 1967—functions as an inclusive ensemble welcoming students, faculty, staff, and community members. Under the leadership of Professor Eduardo de Oliveira Nóbrega, the choir has cultivated a mission centered on fostering human connection and social integration through collective music making. The ensemble's repertoire foregrounds Brazilian cultural identity, regularly featuring compositions by José Maurício Nunes Garcia alongside arrangements of Brazilian folk and popular music. Their performances are frequently characterized by sophisticated staging and expressive interpretation, reflecting a commitment to theatrical and musical integration. Nóbrega is widely recognized as a leading

advocate for choral music in João Pessoa, and the *Coral Universitário Gazzzi de Sá* serves as the anchor ensemble for FEPAC, traditionally opening the festival in collaboration with the local symphony orchestra.

A short distance away, at UNIPÊ—Centro Universitário de João Pessoa (University Center of João Pessoa), the *Coral Universitário do UNIPÊ* brings together more than sixty students who rehearse three times per week. Their repertoire spans a wide array of musical traditions, including northeastern Brazilian folk genres such as *xote* and *baião*, sacred motets from the Western European canon, and selections from American popular music. A distinctive feature of this ensemble is its incorporation of choreographed movement, often designed and taught by student leaders, to enrich the visual and expressive dimensions of performance. Notable presentations include extended medleys from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* and arrangements of classic rock songs, performed with dynamic vocalism and choreographed staging. Under the direction of João Alberto Gurgel, the choir fosters an inclusive and collegial rehearsal environment where students are encouraged to contribute creatively, form social bonds, and deepen their engagement with musical performance. One ongoing challenge faced by the ensemble is the high turnover rate of singers due to academic schedules and graduation, necessitating frequent rebuilding of the ensemble's cohesion and skill base.

Workplace or Corporate Choirs

Workplace or corporate choirs have a longstanding tradition in Brazil and are gaining increasing recognition in other countries as part of a broader global trend in communal workplace singing.¹ Like community or religious choirs, these choirs serve multiple purposes: some perform at company functions and public events, while others focus more explicitly on fostering interpersonal relationships and workplace cohesion. In contrast to institutionalized models of community music making, workplace choirs have specific goals and objectives that differ from other choral groups. A workplace choir may exist under a certain management team and then be dismantled with changes in leadership. They may come together to record a project that will be distrib-

uted at the company's end-of-year party or to address human resources goals. Their formation, leadership, and sustainability often rely on the conductor's ability to adapt to each organization's culture and needs.

While musical engagement is a central activity of these choirs, their significance extends far beyond artistic output. Participation in workplace choirs often results in positive extra-musical outcomes, including shifts in organizational hierarchies, individual identity redefinition, and increased empathy among colleagues. For instance, it is not uncommon for a custodian to assume a featured solo while the CEO—despite holding the highest rank within the workplace—may require more musical support. Such role reversals can humanize colleagues, foster mutual appreciation, and reshape professional relationships.²

Brazilian music educator, researcher, performer, and

composer Eduardo Lakschevitz has written extensively about the unique demands and social functions of workplace choirs in Brazil. He argued that effective leadership of such ensembles requires competencies that do not always conform with the traditional Western European choral training model.³ Most participants in Brazilian workplace choirs, for instance, have not been trained in Western music notation and instead rely primarily on oral literacy and musical intuition. As a result, conductors must adapt and facilitate participatory rehearsal processes that program repertoire in collaboration with singers. Choosing repertoire becomes a collaborative activity where participants' suggestions are welcome and valued and aligned with the choir's identity and company principles.⁴

Lakschevitz shared that his work with company choirs demanded a shift in both pedagogical practice



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and philosophical orientation. Rehearsals often included rearrangements and improvisations initiated by choir members, meaning that the final performances frequently diverged significantly from the original written scores. Furthermore, workplace choir members regularly performed for small audiences, or at times, for no external audience at all—functioning as both performers and listeners. These realities led Lakschevitz to adopt a sociological perspective, acknowledging that the interpretive process and audience-performer dynamics in corporate choirs diverge significantly from conventional choral paradigms.

A case that illustrates these dynamics is the Coteminas Inclusive Choir, which Nóbrega founded in March 2002 at the textile manufacturer in João Pessoa. Coteminas operates twenty-two plants with over thirteen thousand employees and produces approximately 20 percent of Brazil's cotton. The choir was established to provide an inclusive artistic outlet for factory workers. It was open to all employees regardless of rank or musical background. Notably, fifteen deaf members participated in the ensemble using Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) to contribute expressively during rehearsals and performances. Rehearsals occurred twice weekly for one hour and emphasized egalitarian participation—whether through vocal performance or expres-

sive gesture.

The Coteminas Inclusive Choir embodied an ethos in which inclusion was not an ancillary feature but a core value. Artistic excellence was not prioritized over engagement and enjoyment; rather, musical participation itself was celebrated as a mode of personal expression and collective identity. As with other inclusive ensembles, Coteminas choir members were socially invested, enthusiastic, and attuned to audience response. The choir aligned with the broader objectives of the company's human resources department, aiming to build a sense of community among employees and to affirm sign language as a legitimate and valued form of communication.

The long-term success of workplace choirs often hinges on institutional support, leadership alignment, and strategic integration into organizational culture. Despite its vibrancy and commitment to inclusion, the Coteminas Inclusive Choir was disbanded following administrative restructuring in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This underscores the vulnerability of such initiatives, which are heavily dependent on fluctuating corporate priorities. Nevertheless, the Coteminas Inclusive Choir case provides a compelling example of how music can serve as a vehicle for equity, communication, and workplace transformation.

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Correctional Facility Choirs

Music making in correctional facilities offers a powerful means of self-expression, emotional processing, and community building for individuals who are incarcerated.⁵ Community-based initiatives in prisons require music leaders to recalibrate their pedagogical and relational approaches, often prioritizing restorative practices over traditional performance outcomes. While music skills such as conducting and music literacy remain important, effective leadership in these environments draws heavily on interpersonal intelligence and cultural sensitivity, aiming to restore participants' humanity.⁶

Arts programs in correctional facilities have emphasized the potential of music to improve self-image, re-establish human dignity, and cultivate communication within and beyond the walls of confinement. Through

the cultivation of positive group dynamics and artistic agency, prison choirs can become transformative spaces for personal development and belonging.⁷ In our study, these practices were observed in the work of Daniel Berg, a choral conductor who leads ensembles at two correctional institutions in João Pessoa, Paraíba.

According to the Secretaria de Estado da Administração Penitenciária da Paraíba, as of January 2025 the state held 16,452 individuals across multiple custodial contexts including permanent detention (7,551); temporary detention (3,082); work release programs (827), home detention (1,425), and electronic monitoring curfews (3,567).⁸ Our interactions happened with choirs in two facilities: Penitenciária Desembargador Sílvio Porto, a male correctional institution; and Penitenciária de Recuperação Feminina Maria Julia Maranhão (Bom Pastor), a women's facility.

At Penitenciária Desembargador Sílvio Porto, inmates serving long-term sentences participate in *Vozes Para Liberdade* (Voices for Freedom), a prison choir led by Berg. Rehearsals occur weekly for 1 hour and 45 minutes, including thirty minutes of music theory, a fifteen-minute vocal warm-up, and one hour of ensemble practice. The repertoire spans spirituals, such as “Let My People Go,” as well as inmate-composed and arranged pieces. The ensemble's name captures the emotional and symbolic weight of singing in prison, where, as Berg notes, “they cannot sing *piano* because for them, singing is freedom—it must be loud, full-blown.”

Inmate testimonials reinforce the choir's role in restoring a sense of humanity. Participation alleviates emotional isolation and creates a temporary reprieve from carceral realities. Singing allows members to access and express feelings often suppressed in prison environments, providing a unique pathway to a sense of community and belonging.

Vozes Para Liberdade has performed at churches, schools, and FEPAC, and has been directed by Eduardo Nóbrega since 2002. Their early appearances at FEPAC were heavily restricted: singers were held in guarded dressing rooms, performed under supervision, and were returned immediately to the correctional facility. Over time, advocacy efforts by Nóbrega and Berg led to the gradual humanization of their participation. By 2023, singers were permitted to perform without

handcuffs, and security staff wore civilian clothing. That same year, the governor of Paraíba authorized a visit with family members post-performance—an unprecedented gesture of dignity and trust.

At the *Penitenciária de Recuperação Feminina Maria Julia Maranhão*, the women's choir *Vozes Passageiras* (Transient Voices) involves approximately twenty-five incarcerated women in a fluid, transitional format. The facility houses 173 individuals—120 already sentenced and 73 awaiting sentencing or enrolled in work programs. Unlike the structured curriculum of *Vozes Para Liberdade*, this choir engages participants in a two-week series of music lessons, encompassing both instrumental and vocal instruction. Though their musical training is less intensive, participants in *Vozes de Passageiras* also experience the transformative potential of communal music making. Their performances—both within the prison and in community venues including FEPAC—offer moments of visibility, social engagement, and personal affirmation.

These two choirs demonstrate the varied models of music engagement in correctional facilities and the role of choral music as a vehicle for restoration, agency, and dignity. While structural differences exist between the two ensembles, both serve as platforms for social reintegration and emotional well-being. The leadership of Daniel Berg exemplifies the multidimensional skill set required for effective prison music programs, where artistic practice meets the complexities of correctional life. Through music, incarcerated individuals reclaim a part of their identity often denied within institutional systems—reminding us that even behind bars, voices can rise.

Community-based Choirs

In João Pessoa, community-based choral singing plays a significant role in enhancing both individual well-being and collective social cohesion. One such example is *Coral Nova Voz* (New Voice Choir), housed at *Clínica Nova Diagnóstico*, a medical imaging center. Founded in 2016 by eighteen employees and directed by Hélio Nunes, the ensemble rehearses weekly and performs in diverse venues including churches, hospitals, institutional events, and FEPAC. As with other



inclusive choirs in Brazil, *Coral Nova Voz* intentionally seeks to dismantle hierarchical structures within professional settings by fostering connections between doctors, nurses, administrative staff, and patients. The ensemble is notably multigenerational, with many of its members being older adults who have engaged in community music making for several years. Observations revealed that participation in the choir fostered a strong sense of pride, purpose, and identity. Members frequently articulated that singing within this ensemble contributed to their emotional resilience and sense of belonging. Despite the inherent distractions of rehearsing in a busy hospital lobby, the choir's presence provides a source of comfort and emotional uplift for individuals awaiting medical procedures.

Similarly, the *Coral do Instituto de Previdência Municipal*,

a municipal government-sponsored choir, exemplifies the integration of music and social care. Comprising approximately thirty members between the ages of sixty-five and ninety, this ensemble convenes twice a week for morning sessions involving vocal music, folk dance, and shared meals. Their repertoire is accompanied by accordion, bomba, and triangle, and centers on Brazilian folk and popular music, arranged by local composer and conductor Yuri Ribeiro. Choir members frequently emphasized how participation enables them to remain active, engaged, and socially productive—key indicators of successful aging and well-being. Members of this ensemble engage in social activities outside the rehearsal time, where music continues to be an integral part of the gathering through singing and dancing.

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Conclusion

This exploratory case study sought to investigate the sociocultural and artistic dynamics of choral singing in João Pessoa, Brazil. Three of the researchers participated in ACDA's International Conductors Exchange Program, which served as a catalyst for immersive fieldwork involving rehearsal participation, performance, and dialogue with local choral communities. Employing a methodology grounded in participant observation, this study aimed to generate insights into the varied functions of choral music across social, institutional, and cultural contexts.

Findings underscore the diversity of choral practice in João Pessoa, highlighting ensembles that diverge from traditional Western models in terms of structure, goals, and musical pedagogy. However, it is important to note that this model is not reflective of all choral music in Brazil—a large, vast, and diverse country with many choral ensembles whose musical goals are aligned with Western European music traditions. In João Pessoa, the choirs studied pursued multiple aims, ranging from artistic excellence to community building, emotional expression, healing, and self-affirmation. While generalizations should be avoided, the narratives emerging from this inquiry point to a shared emphasis on collective identity and mutual support.

FEPAC served as a central node in this network of choral engagement, bringing together participants from all walks of life—including students, elders, health professionals, incarcerated individuals, factory employees, and religious practitioners. Through these encounters, we witnessed how group singing operates as a tool for dismantling social hierarchies, fostering emotional resilience, and cultivating belonging. Regardless of setting or demographic composition, the choral ensembles observed demonstrated the transformative capacity of music to bridge divides and generate community—affirming choral practice as a vital component of cultural and civic life in João Pessoa. 

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- ⁶ Inês Lamela and Paulo Maria Rodrigues, “Understanding Leadership in Community Music-Making Projects Behind Bars: Three Experiences in Portuguese Prisons,” *International Journal of Community Music* 9, no. 3 (2016): 257–71. https://doi.org/10.1386/ijcm.9.3.257_1.
- ⁷ Lamela and Maria Rodrigues, “Understanding Leadership.”
- ⁸ Tribunal de Justiça do Estado da Paraíba, “Sistema Prisional,” accessed April 10, 2025, <https://www.tjpb.jus.br/gmf/sistema-prisional>.



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Oswaldo Lacerda's Choral Legacy: Shaping the Sounds of Brazilian Choral Music

by Matheus Cruz

Oswaldo Costa de Lacerda (1927–2011) was a distinguished Brazilian composer, educator, and advocate for a national musical style that merged regional influences, such as Brazilian folklore and popular music, with broader twentieth-century art music. His choral compositions are influenced by Catholic liturgical traditions, Afro-Brazilian musical elements, and Brazilian poetry. Lacerda's body of work reflects Brazil's nationalist movements, drawing inspiration from his mentor, Mozart Camargo Guarnieri (1907–1993), who encouraged the integration of folk and popular music elements into his compositions.¹ In addition to compositions, Lacerda's contributions to the musical field include founding several artistic societies and authoring several music theory textbooks.²

Understanding the Brazilian cultural influences in Lacerda's choral music is crucial for conductors to provide a truthful interpretation of his compositions. This involves recognizing his use of specific harmonies, rhythms, and instrumentation derived from Afro-Brazilian traditions and folklore. While much of Lacerda's choral music is available only in Brazil, there is an effort to publish it in the United States,³ including three choral works discussed in this article, "Candeiro," "Ofulú Lorêê," and "Pai Nosso."

Overview

Born in São Paulo in 1927, Oswaldo Costa de Lacerda began his musical studies with an emphasis on

performance before pursuing composition under Camargo Guarnieri, who fostered his interest in Brazilian nationalist music. Lacerda's initial training included piano and vocal techniques, and by the age of twenty, he was already instructing students in music theory, harmony, and orchestration. His career as an educator flourished; he held faculty positions at prominent institutions, including the *Santa Marcelina* school and the *São Paulo Municipal* School of Music. He furthered his studies through a Guggenheim Fellowship awarded in 1963, which enabled him to attend the Tanglewood Music Center to study under Aaron Copland.⁴

Lacerda also ardently advocated for Brazilian music through leadership roles in organizations such as the *Sociedade Pró Música Brasileira* and the *Centro de Música Brasileira*. He made substantial contributions to the cultural development of Brazilian music, serving as both a composer and educator, integrating classical styles with Brazilian elements in his compositions. His extensive catalog encompasses works for orchestra, choir, chamber ensembles, and solo performances.⁵

Lacerda's choral compositions embody a distinctive synthesis of religious and nationalist influences, drawing upon a multitude of cultural and spiritual traditions. His musical works integrate elements from Catholic liturgical practices and Afro-Brazilian religions, including *Candomblé*,⁶ *Quimbanda*, and *Umbanda*.⁷ This integration signifies a profound cultural amalgamation in which Lacerda uses music as a medium for personal expression while addressing broader social themes.

The inclusion of these diverse musical elements highlights Lacerda's dedication to capturing the intricate fabric of Brazilian identity.⁸

Lacerda's work centers on Brazilian nationalism, which goes beyond a political or ideological stance. It reflects a deep devotion to Brazil's cultural heritage, a sentiment shaped by Mário de Andrade (1893–1945), a key figure in Brazilian musical nationalism. Andrade's influence on Lacerda and his teacher, Camargo Guarnieri, was pivotal in shaping Brazil's nationalist musical movement. Lacerda himself expressed a strong, inherent connection to Brazilian music, claiming that nationalism was embedded in his musical identity from the very first piece he composed.⁹

In his choral compositions, Lacerda exemplifies this sense of nationalism through active engagement with Brazil's popular music, notably *Música Popular Brasileira* (MPB). MPB comprises genres such as *samba*, *baião*, and folk music, and serves as a crucial medium for the cultural and political expression of the Brazilian populace. Lacerda's integration of these musical genres into his choral works enabled him to forge a distinctly Brazilian sound. The texts of Brazil's eminent poets and writers are frequently incorporated into his compositions, anchoring Lacerda's music within the broader literary and cultural landscape of the nation.

Syncretic Roots

David Appleby and Mário de Andrade each explored the development of Brazilian music through acculturation, in which European, African, and Indigenous musical traditions converged during the colonial era.¹⁰ This began in the 1550s with the arrival of Jesuit missionaries, who systematically introduced European instruments and music theory to the indigenous peoples. Additionally, they established Brazil's first music conservatory in 1559, marking the beginning of a complex evolution of musical forms in which European styles integrated with local traditions, predominantly African and Indigenous elements such as melodies and

rhythms.¹¹

The influence of European music became even more pronounced when the Portuguese court relocated to Rio de Janeiro in 1807, establishing the city as the cultural nucleus for European arts within Brazil.¹² Following Brazil's independence in 1822, European musical structures such as the suite, sonata, symphony, and variations began to interweave with Brazilian folk music. This synthesis produced a distinctive Brazilian adaptation of European Romanticism, combining classical forms with the emotional intensity characteristic of the Romantic era and integrating uniquely Brazilian melodies, harmonies, and rhythms.

By the early twentieth century, Brazilian musical nationalism had begun to transition away from European influences and embrace diverse folk traditions. Alberto Nepomuceno (1864–1920) emerged as a significant figure who integrated Brazilian folk rhythms and melodies into his compositions. The 1922 *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Week of Modern Art) in São Paulo marked a crucial milestone for this movement, serving as a platform for esteemed composers such as Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887–1959), Oscar Lorenzo Fernández (1897–1948), and Camargo Guarnieri. Guarnieri exerted considerable influence over Oswaldo Lacerda, ensuring that Brazilian folk and popular music remained central to the aesthetic discourse of tradition and thereby shaping the future trajectory of Brazilian music.

Brazilian Folklore: Candieiro

Brazilian folklore is deeply connected to the nation's musical identity, and traditional songs passed down through generations play an essential role in this cultural fabric. Composers such as Oswaldo Lacerda have been instrumental in safeguarding and adapting these traditional melodies, particularly those originating from northeastern Brazil, including *Cirandas* and *Cantigas de Roda* (children's singing games). Lacerda's incorporation of these folk elements into his compositions has contributed significantly to preserving Brazil's rich cultural heritage within its art music.¹³

Ciranda, a traditional musical and dance form originating from the state of Pernambuco, occupies a cen-

tral position in Brazilian folk music. Historically, it was performed by women awaiting the return of fishermen. The participatory nature of *Ciranda*, characterized by its rhythmic beat and synchronized movements, reflects both the dance itself and its communal action. Similarly, *Cantigas de Roda*, which are children's singing games, incorporate African, European, Indigenous, and Portuguese influences, exemplifying Brazil's syncretic cultural roots. Lacerda's choral folk adaptations integrated traditional elements with a classical style, promoting Brazil's nationalist movement while preserving cultural authenticity.

Oswaldo Lacerda's "Candieiro" (Figure 1 on the next page), composed in 1958 and published in 1972, is a distinctive choral work that blends cultural influences from northeastern Brazil, particularly from the *Cantigas de Roda*. These songs are deeply embedded in Brazilian folklore and skillfully incorporate elements from African, European, and Indigenous cultures. The work is written for an unaccompanied SATB choir, in which the vocal lines convey folk-traditional melodies while maintaining artistic sophistication, primarily through the harmony.

Figure 1 shows the opening refrain of "Candieiro" (mm. 1–9), which features a folk-inspired melody derived from the *Ciranda* dance mentioned previously. The composition begins with a soprano and alto duet that expands into a homophonic four-part texture, establishing the dance's collective spirit. In section A (mm. 9–21), the soprano voice assumes the primary melodic role, while the remaining voices sustain an ostinato accompaniment, maintaining rhythmic vitality despite a change in tempo. The use of Portuguese text accentuates the work's cultural roots, while the inclusion of an English translation enhances its accessibility.

Candieiro [candlestick] translation:

Cocoroco lamp Sinha,

I am not a Candlestick Sinha lamp.

Candieiro enters the circle and enters the loop without stopping;

whoever takes the lamp, the lamp will stay.

Lacerda revisits the refrain in an altered form at

measures 21–29, designated as A', transferring the initial duet to the tenor and bass voices. Section B (measures 29–41) further develops the material by assigning the melody to the tenor line, accompanied by a soprano-alto duet that functions as a countermelody. The final statement of the refrain (measures 41–54), functioning as a coda, presents the melody in the bass line before culminating in a unified homophonic texture. Throughout "Candieiro," Lacerda's manipulation of tempo, texture, and vocal distribution mirrors the *Ciranda*'s cyclical juxtaposition of reflective moments with energetic passages.

Sacred Music:

Catholic and Afro-Brazilian

Lacerda's sacred music can be classified into two principal categories: compositions for the Catholic Church and those influenced by other religious traditions, notably those rooted in Afro-Brazilian practices. While Afro-Brazilian music is often regarded as part of the broader Brazilian folkloric heritage, a significant portion of it derives from specific religious customs, such as *Candomblé*. These traditions are profoundly linked to the forced African migration to Brazil during the colonial era, wherein enslaved Africans brought their cultural practices and religious convictions, including forms of ritual music and dance.

Lacerda's works "Ofulú Lorêrê" and "Xangô" exemplify his admiration for Afro-Brazilian religious practices by integrating rhythms and melodies from *Candomblé* and other Afro-Brazilian traditions into his sacred compositions. In these two examples from Marc Meistrich Gidal's *Ethnomusicology* article,¹⁴ *jéje* and *macumba* (Figure 2 on page 37) illustrate the connection between African rhythms and Lacerda's "Ofulú Lorêrê," particularly in the melody's rhythms, first presented in the baritone solo (Figure 3 on page 37).

Lacerda demonstrates the lasting influence of the African diaspora in Brazil through the incorporation of *Yoruba*, *Bantu*, and *Fon* languages, which are associated with *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*. His compositions integrate African linguistic elements with Brazilian folklore and Western classical music, illustrating a synthesis of diverse influences that define twentieth-century Brazil-

Allegretto ♩ = 92

mp *f*

Soprano
Có - có - có - có, can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Eu não sou ca - sti - çal can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! *f* Có - có - có -

Alto
mp *f*
Có - có - có - có, can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Eu não sou ca - sti - çal can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! *f* Có - có - có -

Tenor
f
Có - có - có -

Bass
f
Có - có - có -

Allegretto ♩ = 92

Piano

Menos movido ♩ = 80

S
có, can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Eu não sou ca - sti - çal can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Can-di - ei - ro en - trai na ro - da en - trai - na

A
có, can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Eu não sou ca - sti - çal can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Oi en - trai, en -

T
có, can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Eu não sou ca - sti - çal can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Oi en - trai, en -

B
có, can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Eu não sou ca - sti - çal can-di - ei - ro, Si - nha! Oi en - trai, en -

Menos movido ♩ = 80

Piano

Figure 1. Oswaldo Lacerda, *Candieiro*, mm 1–11.

ian classical music.

“Ofulú Lorêrê” represents Osvaldo Lacerda’s distinguished synthesis of Afro-Brazilian musical traditions and Western choral practices. Based on a *Candomblé* melody collected by Camargo Guarnieri in Bahia, the composition incorporates elements such as syncopation, ostinato, and layered vocal textures to evoke the ritualistic, trance-like qualities of Afro-Brazilian religious music. Lacerda’s treatment of the melody—initially presented as a baritone solo and subsequently redistributed among the voices—reflects the ceremonial call-and-response and stratified sonorities central to

Candomblé practice. The use of a hybrid Afro-Brazilian text further reinforces the work’s cultural authenticity and spiritual resonance.

Formally, the composition unfolds through contrasting sections that intensify rhythmic and textural complexity. In the B section (mm. 19–25), rhythmic tension is heightened through contrasting patterns between the upper and lower voices, while the C section (mm. 37–41) shifts melodic focus to the tenor line against a sustained ostinato in the remaining voices. An *accelerando* leading into the coda amplifies momentum and culminates in a powerful closing sonority. Through these compositional strategies, Lacerda integrates Afro-Brazilian rhythmic vitality expression within a refined choral framework.

Lacerda’s sacred music reflects a deep engagement with Catholic and Afro-Brazilian traditions, shaped by Brazil’s historical synthesis of European, Indigenous, and African influences. By integrating these elements within a nationalist framework, his religious works unite spiritual devotion and cultural identity.¹⁵

The National Commission for Sacred Music

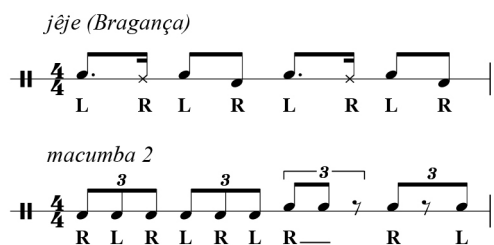


Figure 2. African Rhythms: *jêje* and *macumba*

Figure 3. Osvaldo Lacerda, *Ofulú Lorêrê*, mm. 1–5.

(NCSM) in Brazil was active during the 1960s and played a vital role in advocating for the integration of Brazilian popular culture into the ecclesiastical music repertoire, thus moving away from restrictive European traditions. This transition enabled composers to develop sacred music that more accurately reflected Brazil's national identity by incorporating elements from folklore, popular music, and Afro-Brazilian traditions, making the music more pertinent to the country's cultural and social milieu.¹⁶

In 1965, the 1st National Meeting of Sacred Music took place in Valinhos. Four fundamental principles for this musical renewal are observed: the faithful's participation, the ministerial function of sacred music, the creation of liturgical chant in the vernacular, and the expression of our people.¹⁷

Through his compositions, Lacerda contributed to the development of a distinctly Brazilian sound within the sacred music canon, which is both authentic to the nation's musical heritage and deeply intertwined with its spiritual life. As a distinguished member of the NCSM, Lacerda's efforts supported the integration of folk traditions into sacred music under the conviction that these elements conveyed authenticity and fostered a connection with the community.

Following the Second Vatican Council's reforms, which permitted the integration of vernacular languages and regional musical elements, Lacerda recognized the opportunity to incorporate Portuguese and regional Brazilian elements into his sacred compositions. While adapting to these modifications, he preserved the core of traditional liturgical music, as exemplified in his 1978 piece "Pai Nosso" (Our Father), which features unaccompanied voices and counterpoint lines (Figure 4).

The musical score for "Pai Nosso" by Oswaldo Lacerda, measures 1-3, is presented in a five-staff format. The top four staves are for the vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The bottom staff is for the Piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Moderado" with a quarter note equal to 62 beats per minute. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/2. The lyrics are: "Pai nos - so, que es - tais no céu, san - ti - fi -". The vocal parts are marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The piano accompaniment is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score shows the first three measures of the piece, with the vocal parts and piano accompaniment.

Figure 4. Oswaldo Lacerda, *Pai Nosso*, mm. 1–3.

“Pai Nosso” exemplifies Lacerda’s capacity to harmonize musical innovation with liturgical intent, culminating in a composition of substantial spiritual and expressive profundity. The alternation between 3/2 and 2/2 meters introduces rhythmic versatility that reflects the natural prosody of the Lord’s Prayer, while the recurrent utilization of 3/2 may symbolically indicate the Holy Trinity. Primarily set in D minor, the work establishes a contemplative tone that intensifies with a crucial harmonic shift in measure 22, where an F7 chord resolves to F minor at the start of the B section, heightening emotional tension during the invocation for forgiveness.

This harmonic and rhythmic disruption emphasizes the prayer’s urgency and penitential character. Reflecting the liturgical reforms following the Second Vatican Council, “Pai Nosso” combines vernacular text and textual clarity with elements reminiscent of early sacred music. As André Guimarães Rodrigo observed, Lacerda’s perceptive treatment of meter, dynamics, and harmony closely interlinks musical structure with textual significance.¹⁸ Through this synthesis, “Pai Nosso” represents Lacerda’s notable contribution to Brazilian sacred choral music and underscores the enduring influence of Catholic tradition on Brazil’s cultural and musical identity.

Nationalism

Oswaldo Lacerda’s compositions are profoundly shaped by Brazilian nationalism and modernism, reflecting the nation’s cultural identity through folk traditions, regional rhythms, and vernacular texts. While Lacerda may have rejected the nationalist label, his works unquestionably embody key aspects of the movement, as musicologist Vasco Mariz emphasizes, noting that Lacerda’s music is inherently linked to his Brazilian heritage.¹⁹ The nationalist movement in Brazilian music, championed by figures such as Mário de Andrade, sought to establish a distinct Brazilian aesthetic by integrating folk and indigenous music into classical compositions. This shift gained considerable momentum following the Week of Modern Art in 1922. As a disciple of Guarnieri, Lacerda was significantly influenced by this fusion of folk traditions with

classical techniques.

Lacerda’s works were also influenced by prominent Brazilian literary figures such as Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902–1987)²⁰ and Manuel Bandeira (1886–1968),²¹ whose writings mirrored the nationalist and modernist currents in literature. Lacerda’s “Oração para Aviadores” (Prayer for Aviators), set to a text by Bandeira, exemplifies his ability to fuse personal and collective dimensions of Brazilian culture through music (Figure 5 on the next page). The dedication to Marcos Julio Sergil on the title page further underscores the work’s connection to literary and national contexts, reflecting the broader intersection of modernism and nationalism in twentieth-century Brazil.

“Oração para Aviadores” (1997) demonstrates post-Vatican II experimentalism by integrating Brazilian poetry and sacred choral music within a modernist aesthetic. Through the utilization of changing meters, homophonic textures, and meticulous attention to text prosody, Lacerda enhances the expressive potential of Bandeira’s poem. A partial English translation of the poem appears below:


Saint Clare, make clear;
These skies.
Grant us steady winds,
well aligned.
These seas, these skies,
make clear.
Saint Claire, grant us sun.
If the fog descends,
Illuminate
my eyes within the mist.
These mountains and horizons,
make clear.
Saint Claire, make clear.

Rhythmic flexibility mirrors natural speech patterns, while techniques such as text painting, voice pairing, and a concluding modulation from D minor to D major emphasize the work’s emotional development, moving from uncertainty to clarity and serenity.

Conclusion

Oswaldo Lacerda's contributions to choral music, deeply rooted in Brazilian culture and modernist aesthetics, merit widespread international recognition. His compositions were produced during a period marked by cultural nationalism and the ascendancy of modernism, and go beyond merely integrating traditional Brazilian elements with innovative compositional techniques. Lacerda's choral works skillfully incorporate Brazilian folk melodies, rhythms, and literary references, complemented by influences from Catholic liturgy, especially following the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. This synthesis exemplifies his artistic vision and stands as a testament to his significant contribution to Brazil's cultural heritage, offering a distinctive and profound voice in choral music.

This article aims to explore how Lacerda's vocal compositions integrate Brazilian folk and Western classical elements, thereby capturing the essence of Brazil's cultural evolution during a significant period. As an increasing number of Lacerda's works are published and performed internationally, his contributions to the choral repertoire of the twentieth and twenty-first cen-

turies will be suitably recognized. In addition, it is hoped that a study of Lacerda's compositions will lead to further investigation into the diverse nature of Brazilian choral music. 

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NOTES

- ¹ André Acastro Egg, "Fazer-se compositor: Camargo Guarnieri 1923–45" (DMA thesis, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, 2010).
- ² Lacerda wrote four textbooks: *Compêndio de Teoria Elementar da Música*, *Exercícios de Teoria is Elementar da Música*, *Curso Preparatório de Solfejo e Ditado Musical*, and *Regras de Grafia Musical*. He is also a member of the *Academia Brasileira de Música* and the *Centro de Música Brasileira*.
- ³ A significant portion of Oswaldo Lacerda's choral works, initially published in Brazil by Irmãos Vitale, are cur-

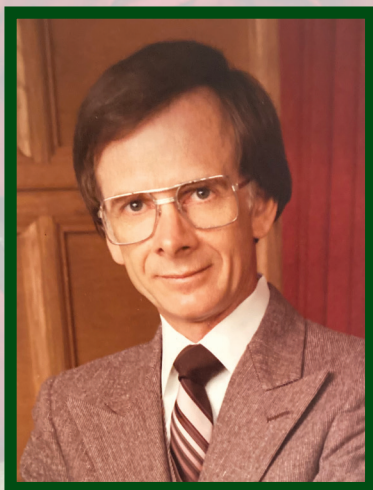
The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of 'Oração para Aviadores' by Oswaldo Lacerda. The score is in 2/4 time, marked 'Andante lento' with a tempo of quarter note = 48. It features three parts: Soprano Alto, Tenor Bass, and Piano. The Soprano Alto and Tenor Bass parts have lyrics: 'San-ta Cla-ra cla-re-ai es-tes a-res. Dai-nos ven-tos re-gu-la-res de fei-'. The Piano part provides harmonic support with chords and some melodic lines. The dynamics are marked 'f' (forte).

Figure 5. Oswaldo Lacerda, *Oração para Aviadores*, mm. 1–4.

- rently out of print and no longer readily available. This limited accessibility underscores the need for publication and distribution in the United States to ensure broader availability for performers and scholars.
- ⁴ Osvaldo Lacerda's Short Biography. See: Gerard Béhague, "Lacerda, Osvaldo," Grove Music Online (2001); accessed April 15, 2025.
- ⁵ Osvaldo Lacerda's full catalog of works can be accessed at: https://abmusica.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/catalogo_o.lacerda_v2_web.pdf.
- ⁶ In Salvador there is a long history of recontextualizations of *Candomblé* musical elements and symbolism into carnival, capoeira, popular music, jazz, and art music. J. D. D. Meneses, "Listening with the Body: An Aesthetics of Spirit Possession Outside the Terreiro," *Ethnomusicology* 60, no. 1 (2016): 90, <https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.60.1.0089>.
- ⁷ Umbanda and Quimbanda are spirit-mediumship religions that were formed by combining Kardecist Spiritism, folk Catholicism, and local Afro-Brazilian religions such as Macumba in Rio de Janeiro, Candomblé in Bahia, and Batuque in Rio Grande do Sul. Marc Meistrich Gidal, "Musical and Spiritual Innovation, Participation and Control in Brazil's Umbanda and Quimbanda Religions," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 22, no. 2 (2013): 236.
- ⁸ Since the early twentieth century, Brazilian composers have engaged in ethnomusicological exploration of Afro-Brazilian religious practices and Indigenous musical traditions to incorporate these diverse sonic elements into their work as part of a broader project to construct a distinctly national musical identity.
- ⁹ Andréia Anhezini da Silva, "A Relação Poesia e Música nas Obras Corais de Osvaldo Lacerda sobre Poemas de Carlos Drummond de Andrade: Uma Abordagem Analítica-Interpretativa" (Master's thesis, University of São Paulo, 2009): 333.
- ¹⁰ David P. Appleby, *The Music of Brazil* (The University of Texas Press, 1983); Mário de Andrade, *Ensaio sobre a música brasileira*, 3^a ed. (Vila Rica; Brasília: INL, 1972).
- ¹¹ Maria José Bernardes di Cavalcanti, "Brazilian Nationalistic Elements in the Brazilianas of Osvaldo Lacerda" (Monograph, Louisiana State University, 2006).
- ¹² The Portuguese court with Queen Maria I, Prince John, and the Braganza royal family moved from Lisbon, Portugal, to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, because of the threat that Napoleonic forces were attacking other countries in Europe.
- ¹³ This practice of collecting tunes from different cultures within Brazil goes back to Nepomuceno, later Villa-Lobos, Guarnieri, then Lacerda. Those composers traveled and stayed with those tribes and participated in religious rituals to better understand and collect the tunes and the particularities accompanying them, such as dance, prayer, and ritual.
- ¹⁴ Marc Meistrich Gidal, "Musical Boundary-Work: Ethnomusicology, Symbolic Boundary Studies, and Music in the Afro-Gaucho Religious Community of Southern Brazil," *Ethnomusicology* 58, no. 1 (2014): 83–109. <https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.58.1.0083>.
- ¹⁵ Carlos Eduardo Audi, "Osvaldo Lacerda: His Importance to Brazilian Music and Elements of His Musical Style" (DMA diss., The Florida State University, 2006).
- ¹⁶ Marcelo Urias, "Osvaldo Lacerda's Mass of the Holy Cross (1967) in the Historical Context of Brazilian Sacred Music and the Second Vatican Council" (DMA diss., Indiana University, 2014): 95.
- ¹⁷ Eduardo Manoel Lustosa Reis, "Missa Diligite de M. Camargo Guarnieri: Aspectos Interpretativos" (MM thesis, University of Campinas, 2018).
- ¹⁸ André Guimarães Rodrigo, "Quatro peças religiosas de Osvaldo Lacerda: uma leitura interpretativa para performance." [Four sacred pieces by Osvaldo Lacerda: an interpretative writing for performers] (Master's diss., University of São Paulo, 2016).
- ¹⁹ Vasco Mariz, *História da Música no Brasil*, 6th ed. (Nova Fronteira, 2005).
- ²⁰ Carlos Drummond de Andrade explored themes of identity, modernity, and the Brazilian experience. Lacerda frequently set Drummond's poetry to music, drawn to its lyrical clarity and emotional depth. See: Humberto Werneck, *Vida e Obra: Carlos Drummond de Andrade*. [Life and works] (2016), <https://www.carlosdrummond.com.br>.
- ²¹ Manuel Bandeira was known for his lyrical explorations of sorrow, love, death, and national identity.

In Memoriam

Ramon Meyer (1933–2026)



Ramon Eugene Meyer passed away in Greenville, South Carolina, at the age of ninety-two on February 18, 2026. He earned a bachelor's degree in music education from the University of Louisville, a master's in music history from the College-Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati, and a PhD in music theory from The Florida State University. Ramon was a member of the music faculty at The Florida State University from 1956 to 1971, teaching percussion, conducting, and serving as one of the choral and opera conductors. His career included performing as an orchestral percussionist with the Louisville Orchestra, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra, and several regional and festival ensembles. He wrote numerous articles for professional journals and published two pedagogical books for percussion instruments as well as several compositions.

In 1971 he joined the faculty at Indiana State University as a professor of music until his retirement in 1996. He conducted the University Singers, taught choral conducting and choral literature, and was an administrator in the School of Music. Ramon was music director and conductor of the Terre Haute Symphony Orchestra from 1978 until 1995. He served as music director at Memorial United Methodist Church in Terre Haute, Indiana, for twenty-four years.

He was active in the Indiana chapter of ACDA and in 1977 initiated Indiana's first college choral festival sponsored by the Indiana Choral Directors Association. He served as president of ICDA from 1979 to 1981. Following his retirement, Ramon founded and conducted the Farrington Grove Chorale in Terre Haute for eight years, and the ensemble continues to this day.



Rehearsal Break

Jennifer Rodgers, editor

Chasing Perfection: Better Harmonic Tuning for Choirs

by Ross W. Duffin

Column Editor’s Note: *This Rehearsal Break article is the second in a three-part series on intonation from three different authors. Their approaches span from tuning practices and exercises in harmonic context to the detailed management of alternative tuning systems. Read part one, “Choral Singing in Tune” by Jameson Marvin, Choral Journal (May 2026).*

The sound of a choir can be affected by many elements such as blend, vowel treatment, and balance, but I suspect there are many choral directors who would like to learn more about tuning in particular and how best to achieve a good tuning result with their groups—perhaps not perfect, but better. This article is for those people. Some aspects of tuning may seem daunting, with unfamiliar numbers and terminology; but don’t be discouraged—the basic message is pretty simple:

1. sharpened notes low; flatted notes high
2. major intervals narrow; minor intervals wide
3. diatonic semitones wide; chromatic semitones narrow

Surprising as it may seem, these three precepts are all you really you need to know, and the pages that follow explain why. After the basics of tuning theory, I address Just Intonation, a term known to most choral directors as an ideal for Renaissance music, and then tuning for music from more recent periods—not Just Intonation, but a system sharing some of the same characteristics.

I have been writing about historical tuning and temperament for a long time, as may be seen in the list of resources linked in the notes.¹ In this article, I will explain how to make the tuning of your choir sound better in virtually any repertoire that uses some form of modal or tonal harmony. That encompasses a lot of music, from the late Middle Ages to the present day, but the precepts recommended here are offered to help make your choir sound better in tune, and thus simply better overall. The good news is that, in spite of all the complicated-sounding explanations, conductors and singers don’t need to be experts in these historical tuning systems, and they don’t even have to adhere to one specific historical system to make a difference. Simply keeping a few things in mind will help singers begin to find purer harmonic intervals and, eventually, sing better in tune more intuitively.

Being “In tune”

The concept of what constitutes being in tune has changed over the centuries. One constant is that unisons that are “out of tune” have noticeable “beats”—pulsations caused by interference between the vibrations of the notes, equal to the speed of their difference in frequency. The faster the beating, the more disagreeable and out of tune the sound appears to us. Notes that are in tune have no such beats, making the sound stable and tranquil. Nobody is going to argue for unisons that are not in tune, and everyone would want to hear them corrected in a vocal ensemble, but the predominant tuning system in use today, Equal Temperament (12-ET), features intervals with beats that many musicians don’t notice or don’t consider offensive, even though some of them beat quite a lot. But why do we have to suffer beats at all? Why can’t we just have pure, beatless intervals everywhere? One reason is that, contrary to what you see on a piano keyboard, twelve acoustically pure fifths do not equal seven pure octaves, and three pure major thirds (M3rds) do not equal a pure octave. As a result, compromises are necessary in order to make the tuning systems work within our musical system.

In the case of Just Intonation, where the goal is pure, beatless intervals everywhere, the compromise is a complicated juggling of intervals sizes depending on the context (as will be explained below). The compromise that 12-ET makes is a slightly altered 5th and a drastically altered M3rd. Other tuning systems throughout history used alternative compromises as a way of making the tuning work with the music based on what sounded best to them. Some of the intervals of those systems may sound out of tune to us merely because they’re different from 12-ET, even though they’re in tune within their system. We’re used to 12-ET and how it sounds, and it’s undeniably efficient even though its biggest compromises are with intervals that make up the triads and simple chords that are central to both modal and tonal music. Why you might want to explore non-ET solutions as a path to better harmonic tuning is the subject of this article. As the historical tuning police might say (if there were such a thing): “Put down the piano, and slowly back away.”

First Principles

The first thing to understand is that the pure M3rd is narrower than the 12-ET M3rd. Some people say “flatter” (as in the common expression, “flat thirds”) but I do not find that helpful because sometimes the root must rise to narrow the interval, rather than the third coming down. It is true that the third of a major triad must often be sung lower than in 12-ET, however. One useful signpost for such notes in an individual voice part is an accidental sign altering the note, such as a G^\sharp when there’s a G^\natural in the signature, or B^\flat when there’s a B^\natural in the signature. In those cases, the G^\sharp would need to be lower against a E root, and the B^\flat would need to be lower against the G. But in the case of a B^\flat -D M3rd, the D is a more stable note, and it is the B^\flat that needs to rise in order to narrow the M3rd and make it pure—or if not pure, at least better than in 12-ET. The basic message for good harmonic tuning (as given in the first precept above), is that sharpened notes need to be sung lower, and flatted notes higher.

The narrower M3rd ought to mean, conversely, that the minor 3rd (m3rd) should be wider in order to fill out the pure 5th in a triad, and so it is: the pure m3rd is wider than in 12-ET. So, the tendency of singers to make m3rds narrower in order to make them more “mournful” in “sad” music goes against the requirements of purer tuning—besides having a tendency to make the ensemble go flat. A note like B^\flat , for example, is likely to be a m3rd in a G-minor triad, and therefore should be sung higher than in 12-ET. This also helps to narrow the M3rd between B^\flat and D in that triad, so the harmony is better. Note that this applies also to notes like C and F as m3rds in A-minor and D-minor triads, respectively. Having the score—an innovation that singers in the past did not often enjoy—is useful for seeing the notes in the chord, and making adjustments as necessary.

There are melodic implications to all of this that are helpful even when a singer is concentrating on a single voice part. Obviously, melodic M3rds need to be sung narrow and melodic m3rds need to be sung wide. But just as important, the diatonic semitone— F^\sharp to G, B to C, A to B^\flat , etc.—needs to be wide. If the G is descending to an F^\sharp which is the low M3rd of a D-major chord, or if the A is rising to a B^\flat , which is the high m3rd of

a G-minor chord, the semitone must be wider than in 12-ET. (And it goes both ways: if your progression is G–F[♯]–G, for example, make sure you get all the way back up to the initial G again!) That is a common mistake when first starting to use narrow major 3rds and wide diatonic semitones.

On the other hand, the chromatic semitone (within one note name) should always be narrow. If you sing from F up to F[♯] and the F[♯] is low, or from B down to B[♭] and the B[♭] is high, then the semitone must be narrow. In strings of chromatic notes, furthermore, you will usually find large and small semitones occurring in alternation—a much more energizing and directional melodic progression than perfunctory and directionless successive semitones in 12-ET. Exemplifying the third precept, above, Figure 1 is an exercise for singing large (diatonic) and small (chromatic) semitones in each voice part, with opportunities for hearing and adjusting thirds.

Making distinctions in semitone size, I've found, means that singers are more aware of where they are in the scale, and are less likely to drift sharp or flat—an added benefit to the improved quality of the harmony. Significantly, all those chromatic distinctions remain true, though with different sizes of enharmonic intervals, whether you're attempting to use Just Intonation or Harmonic Intonation. (In other words, they always

foster better harmonic tuning.) So, what's the difference between those systems, and how do you choose between them?

Just Intonation

We know from theorists that singers of the Renaissance endeavored to perform in Just Intonation, with harmonic intervals tuned pure according to the ratios of the notes in the harmonic series (2:1 octave, 3:2 fifth, 4:3 fourth, 5:4 M3rd, 6:5 m3rd, etc.). The effect of this tuning in performance is extremely gratifying, with chords “locking in” to tune and resonating beautifully, especially in a live acoustic. In 1985, I consulted on historical English Latin pronunciation for the Hilliard Ensemble when they were recording the Tallis *Lamentations of Jeremiah*. It was enjoyable to contribute in that way, but when the recording arrived, what really stunned me was the purity of the tuning! Listen to Part 1 of that recording on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/nuZpHpQgbo?si=0sZb779LOUt82Wv5&t=440>. I had never heard such extraordinary vocal ensemble tuning before, and when I played it for a class, one student said the tuning was “shocking”; another said it sounded like “the aliens had landed!”

Just Intonation is complicated, however, because it is not a fixed system with twelve notes to the octave (like

The image shows a musical score for a semitone exercise in 4/4 time. It consists of four staves, each with a different clef: the first three are treble clefs and the fourth is a bass clef. The lyrics are: "Large and small se - mi - tones work like this." The melody is written across the staves, with various note values and accidentals (sharps and flats) used to illustrate large and small semitones. The lyrics are placed below the notes on each staff.

Figure 1. Semitone Exercise.

12-ET), and because it features two sizes of whole tone (9:8 and 10:9) and no less than four sizes of semitone that must be coordinated in performance. My favorite passage for demonstrating the two whole tones is the opening of *Ave Maria* by Josquin des Prez (Figure 2): the notes annotated with 0 are pure to each other as pure 4ths, 5ths, or 8ves, while those with -1, are one comma (about one-fifth of a semitone) lower than they would be using all pure 4ths and 5ths. You can see that this requires a smaller whole tone (10:9) in each voice part between D and E than between C and D (9:8). That stepwise progression makes it possible to arrive at a pure M3rd—10th in this case—above the C (10:8 = 5:4). You can also see in the last two measures that the A in the top part must begin at 0 above the D in the bass, then change to -1 (a comma below) as a pure M6th (5:3) above, then a pure m3rd (6:5) below, the C. That is consistent with major intervals being narrow and minor intervals wide (the second precept above) and also provides a glimpse of how the flexibility of Just Intonation inevitably demands a whole lot more than twelve notes per octave!

Another complication of Just Intonation is that maintaining pure intervals in every instance can lead to “microtonal migration,” where the pitch of a piece could rise or fall by tiny increments—comma by com-

ma—depending on the succession of pure harmonies.² One famous piece where that danger exists is William Byrd’s *Ave verum corpus*: Maintaining pure intervals in the opening phrase would result in the piece rising by a comma, as shown in Figure 3a on the next page. The soprano G in bar 3 needs to be at +1 over the C+1 in the alto and tenor, but then it is trapped there for the remainder of the phrase, and the whole piece has migrated up one comma in the space of a few measures.

Whatever the quality of the harmony, microtonal migration is not a desirable outcome, both for the perceptions of the singers and the listeners and the fact that performance in alternation with a keyboard, for example, could find the singers wandering far off pitch. The solution in this case, I believe, is to compromise the pure intervals in two places in order to maintain the starting pitch, as shown in Figure 3b on the next page. The soprano G in bar 3 does need to begin at +1 over the C in the alto and tenor, but it then uses a very wide descending semitone to F[♯] at -1. (This is one of the four sizes of semitone in Just Intonation.) The other small compromise in the example is that the E[♯] in the bass is allowed to be at +1 for melodic reasons, rather than at +2 against the C+1. Those are brief compromises, but they enable a resolution to G at 0 and allow the piece to maintain its original pitch.

The figure shows a musical score for the opening of Josquin des Prez's *Ave Maria*. It consists of four staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The lyrics are: "A - ve Ma - ri - a gra - ti - a ple - na, A - ve Ma - ri - a gra - ti - a ple - na, A - ve Ma - ri - a gra - ti - a". Above the notes, there are microtonal annotations: '0' indicates a pure interval, and '-1' indicates a comma below the standard interval. For example, in the first measure, the interval between C and D is marked as 0, while the interval between D and E is marked as -1. This pattern repeats in subsequent measures, showing how the intervals between notes are adjusted to maintain purity in a Just Intonation system.

Figure 2. Josquin des Prez, *Ave Maria*, Opening.

With such momentary adjustments, Just Intonation can work beautifully in any repertoire based on triadic harmony, but it is not designed for music with an abundance of diminished triads and seventh chords—like much later tonal music. That is because two stacked pure m3rds ($6:5 \times 6:5 = 36:25$) do not make a pure tritone or diminished 5th ($45:32$ and $64:45$, according

to the ratios given by historical theorists), and those intervals are the essential driving force of functional harmony. So, the simple ratios of Just Intonation don't work as a system in music with complex harmonies (like Bach, for example). For those intent on using Just Intonation extensively for the purity of its harmony, the resources listed at the end of this article may be helpful.

0 -1 0 +1 0 +1 0 0 0 +1
 A - ve ve - rum cor - pus,
 0 0 +1 +1 +1 +1
 A - ve ve - rum cor - pus,
 +1 0 +1 +2 +1 0
 A - ve ve - rum cor - pus,
 0 0 +1 +2 +1 +1
 A - ve ve - rum cor - pus,

Figure 3a. William Byrd, *Ave Verum Corpus*, Opening. with comma ascent

0 -1 0 +1 -1 0 -1 0 -1 0
 A - ve ve - rum cor - pus,
 0 0 +1 +1 0 0
 A - ve ve - rum cor - pus,
 +1 0 +1 +1 0 -1
 A - ve ve - rum cor - pus,
 0 0 +1 +1 0 0
 A - ve ve - rum cor - pus,

Figure 3b. William Byrd, *Ave Verum Corpus*, Opening. justified

Indeed, there are progressions, passages—even whole pieces—of later tonal music where the intervals of Just Intonation can help clarify the tuning. The opening of Herbert Howells' *A Spotless Rose* in Figure 4 demonstrates how Just Intonation might be applied to a more modern piece.

A Just Intonation approach generally works well here, with frequent wide m3rds and diatonic semitones. Sharped notes, including those in the key signature, are almost always low, as we might predict, although F[♯] needs to be somewhat flexible because of its varying harmonic context. Also, unlike the Josquin example, the stepwise motion above the tonic, E–F[♯]–G[♯], usually has the minor tone as the first whole step, and the major tone above it (the reverse of C–D–E in the Josquin). There are complications from complex chords like the dominant ninth in the final cadence (last bar, second chord). For example, the altos' C[♯] is low above the A (and melodically below the E tonic), and it needs to match the F[♯] in the top voice; but that F[♯] doesn't match the bass there. The interval is just passing, and in a complex dissonant harmony, so it would not be very noticeable.

What singers might do to avoid such conundrums

in repertoires with more complex harmonies and modulations is to use a system that irons out some of the complications—one based on a mild form of meantone temperament. This raises the question: what is meantone?

Meantone

Quarter-comma meantone temperament originated in the Renaissance as a way for keyboards to approximate Just Intonation, understanding that tuning four pure 5ths creates a major 3rd that is much too wide. In order to make pure major 3rds—that sweet and desirable sonority in so much Renaissance music—what keyboard players did was to narrow (temper) each one of the pure 5ths so that four of them in series (like C–G–D–A–E) created a pure M3rd above the starting note, narrowing each 5th by one-quarter of the discrepancy—the comma—between a pure M3rd and the wide M3rd created by four pure 5ths. Meantone has the advantage that it eliminates the major and minor whole tones that complicate Just Intonation. In 2008, I was explaining Just Intonation to a class at Juilliard, when one student, trying to take it all in, astutely asked,

The image shows a musical score for the opening of Herbert Howells' *A Spotless Rose*. It consists of four staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. Each staff has a piano (p) dynamic marking and a series of numbers (0, -1) above the notes, representing Just Intonation adjustments. The lyrics are: "A Spot-less Rose is blowing, sprung from a tender root,". The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The Soprano staff starts with a 0, followed by -1, -1, 0, -1, -1, -1, 0, -1, -1, 0, -1, 0, -1, 0, 0, -1, -1, 0, -1, -1. The Alto staff starts with -1, 0, -1, -1, 0, -1, 0, -1, 0, 0, -1, 0, -1, 0, 0, 0, -1, -1, 0, 0. The Tenor staff starts with 0, 0, 0, -1, 0, -1, 0, -1, 0, -1, -1, 0, -1, 0, -1, 0, 0, 0, -1, 0, 0, -1, 0, 0. The Bass staff starts with 0, 0, -1, -1, 0, -1, 0, -1, 0, -1, 0, 0, -1, 0, 0, 0, -1, -1, 0, -1, -1, 0, 0, 0, 0.

Figure 4. Herbert Howells, *A Spotless Rose*, Opening.

to use less narrowing of the 5ths, so that the resulting M3rds are not as narrow as pure but still somewhat narrower (and therefore more euphonious) than in 12-ET, and the whole steps, again, divide the M3rd in half. The advantage of this milder, smoother form of meantone (in my book I make the case for extended sixth-comma meantone as a standard) is that complex harmonies sound fantastic; and, in fact, Alexander Ellis in 1885 called sixth-comma meantone the “True Tritonic” system because it features the acoustically pure forms of both the tritone (45:32) and diminished 5th (64:45)—not the same interval! What could be better for functional harmony than pure tritones and diminished 5ths resolving to euphonious triads? And if singers or non-keyboard instrumentalists want to mix in an occasional pure 5th or 3rd, why not? After all, unlike keyboards, they have that flexibility.

I have come to refer to this hybrid approach as

“Harmonic Intonation.”³ In contrast to “Expressive Intonation” which advocates for high leading notes, Harmonic Intonation employs higher flats and lower sharps, occasional pure intervals, and a general goal of more euphonious harmonies.

The Payoff

Here, once again, are the basic points from the beginning of the article (perhaps useful as banners in the rehearsal hall):

1. sharpened notes low; flatted notes high
2. major intervals narrow; minor intervals wide
3. diatonic semitones wide; chromatic semitones narrow

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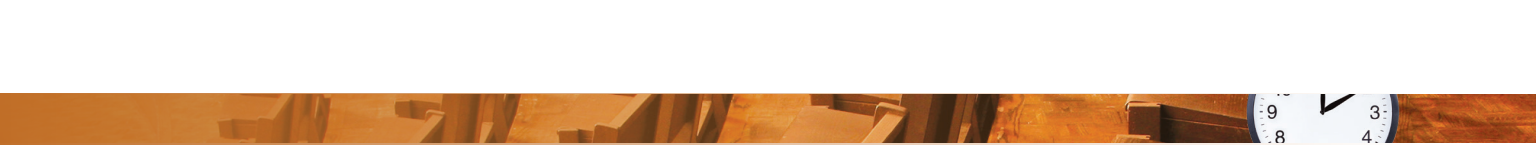
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Hopefully, the reasons and justification for them are clearer now, but some may still seem counter-intuitive following decades of striving for “high leading notes” (raising sharps and lowering flats). Most modern singers, furthermore, are not accustomed to narrow M3rds and wide m3rds, for example, or to a distinction between wide diatonic semitones (like F[#]–G or D–E^b), and narrow chromatic semitones (like F–F[#] or B^b–B). I guarantee, however, that whether your goal is Just Intonation or Harmonic Intonation or simply improved harmonic tuning along those lines, following these three precepts will enhance the quality of the music making, regardless of the repertoire. It may not be perfect—if such a thing is even possible—but it will be better.

That principle was brought home to me through an experience with a student string quartet in 2015. String quartets are famous among instrumentalists for obsessing about tuning, and this fine young group was having trouble with a late-Beethoven quartet—a challenging repertoire, to be sure. The first violinist had studied historical tuning with me and suggested they try extended sixth-comma meantone, narrowing their open strings slightly more than for 12-ET, and observing the low-sharps/high-flats principle. They did, and it worked magnificently, even though three of the players didn’t understand why they were doing it; but in order to avoid a wholesale retuning mid-concert, they had to use Harmonic Intonation for their entire program, which also included Shostakovich and Webern! To everyone’s surprise, including the players, it sounded wonderful, and they actually placed highly in a national quartet competition while performing that way!

Important Note

Implementing these tuning precepts in choirs means that the music should ideally be sung unaccompanied from the start, not using the equal-tempered piano in rehearsal, even for the starting pitches (unless, of course, the piece is meant to have piano in performance). The interval sizes in 12-ET, quite simply, will draw the singers away from better harmonic tuning, and once they learn the music that way, it will be difficult to relearn it with a more harmonic approach. If help is needed at first to learn the notes, having the bass line played alone is a reasonable compromise for rehearsals. In that case,

it is preferable to use some melodic bass instrument, like cello, bassoon, or trombone, observing the same tuning precepts as the singers.

Final Thoughts

When *How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony* was published in 2007, there was a lot of pushback. Over the years since then, however, many musicians have come to realize that a more harmonic approach to tuning works beautifully for the repertoires they perform, far surpassing the equal-tempered default of recent times. At the very least, I hope you consider following the advice of my late friend, performer, instrument-maker, scholar, and philosopher, Bruce Haynes. He was writing to me about tuning in Mozart, but it is applicable to tuning in composers from all eras of modal and tonal music. Citing the “Serendipity Principle” (where accidental discoveries lead to new insights), he observed that if the composer “expected it that way, there was probably a good reason (which may not be evident to us until we give it a good try).” A “good try” is all I can ask. **□**

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NOTES

- ¹ For further reading and listening suggestions from the author, visit: <https://acda-publications.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/CJ/JuneJuly2026/SupplementalMaterials.pdf>.
- ² For more, see “Just Intonation in Renaissance Theory and Practice,” *Music Theory Online* 12.3 (2006): <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.06.12.3/mto.06.12.3.duffin.html>.
- ³ I coined this term in *How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony (and Why You Should Care)* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2007).

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37 with resolve *mf* 7



Cheí - a de gra - ça, cheí - a de for - ça,
 Cheí - a de gra - ça, gra - ça, cheí - a de for - ça,
 Cheí - a de gra - ça, cheí - a de gra - ça, for - ça,
 Cheí - a de gra - ça, gra - ça, cheí - a de for - ça, cheí - a de a-


41



me da seu co - ra - ção a - ber - to pra ver be - le - za,
 me da seu co - ra - ção a - ber - to pra ver be - le - za,
 me da seu co - ra - ção a - ber - to pra ver be - le - za,
 mor, co - ra - ção a - ber - to pra ver be - le - za,

Where Are My Unnumbered Days? 5

all S&A singing independently, ad lib. louder & faster each time *molto accel.* *all 4 parts together for approx 10", crescendo to ff, cut off mid phrase* *sudden cut-off: G.P. + 2"*



S *mp* 1 an a num - ber. *(S1)* 1 an a num - ber. *(A1)* 1 an a num - ber. *mf*
 A *mf* 1 an a num - ber. *mf*
 T num - ber. *mp* 1 an a num - ber. *mf*
 B *mp* 1 an a num - ber. *mf*
mf *molto accel.*
cresc. *ff*

* where no dynamics are given for a hairpin, it's just a slight crescendo - not as far as *f* - and then back to the original dynamic

With a dark energy (♩ = c. 120) *mf* *angry, heavy*



S *mf* *angry, heavy* Na - tion talked to na - tion and
 M *mf* *angry, heavy* Na - tion talked to na - tion and
 A *mf* *angry, heavy* Na - tion talked to na - tion and
 T *mf* *angry, heavy* Na - tion talked to na - tion and
 B *mf* *angry, heavy* Na - tion talked to na - tion and
 With a dark energy (♩ = c. 120) *mf*
mf *angry, heavy*



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Choral Review

Empathy and Musical Dialogue in James Buonemani's *Missa Miamiensis*

by Emerson Eads

James Buonemani's *Missa Miamiensis* (1993) occupies a distinctive place within the contemporary choral canon. Reverent without being doctrinal and rhythmically vital without diminishing its gravity, the work is deeply rooted in ancient tradition while speaking in an unmistakably modern musical language. Scored for choir, soloists, organ, piano, soprano saxophone, and field drum, *Missa Miamiensis* invites conductors to engage the Mass, not merely as a liturgical form, but as a profoundly human act—one shaped by dialogue, tension, and a shared search for mercy and peace.

The title itself offers a revealing point of entry into the composer's intent. Buonemani has explained that the work took shape during a 1993 sabbatical in Miami, and he recalls a formative conversation with organist Bill Trafka that encouraged him to think about naming practices in the manner of Herbert Howells. Howells frequently distinguished sacred works through Latin titles that referenced either their intended venues or the locations of their composition—*Collegium Regale*, for example (literally “the King's College”), a collection of choral service settings written for King's College, Cambridge—thereby anchoring universal liturgical texts in specific sites of memory, labor, and lived experience. In adopting the title *Missa Miamiensis*—“the Mass from Miami”—Buonemani initially signaled little more

than the work's geographic point of origin. Yet the decision to name the piece after its place of composition ultimately does more than label: it situates the Mass within a tradition in which “where” a sacred work is written quietly shapes “what” it comes to mean. At the same time, the understated specificity of *Miamiensis* offers a kind of strategic modesty: rather than announcing itself as a “Mass for...” something—war, peace, the armed man, or any other explicit program—its title slips gently beneath the rhetoric of monumental, agenda-bearing Masses, inviting the listener to discover its expressive and ethical claims from within the music itself.

Across its four movements—“Kyrie,” “Gloria,” “Sanctus/Benedictus,” and “Agnus Dei”—Buonemani animates the Ordinary through contrast: separation and unification, movement and stillness, exuberance and restraint. Recurring musical ideas such as chant, ostinato, and incipit gestures function as ethical and expressive signposts, inviting performers and listeners alike into participatory engagement. Conductors should consider the work, not only for its musical richness, but for its capacity to foster communal listening and reflection among contemporary ensembles and audiences.

Kyrie: Dialogue and Distance

The “Kyrie eleison,” the only Greek text in the Latin Mass, opens the work with a clear nod to antiquity. Buonemani’s chant-derived melody, cast in the Dorian mode, situates the listener within the long arc of sacred tradition. Yet the opening gesture resists homogeneity. Basses and tenors are separated from the treble voices, creating a spatial and registral division that emphasizes dialogue rather than unanimity. Mercy, in this context, is something requested across distance.

This separation persists until the entrance of the soprano saxophone and mezzo-soprano soloist on “Christe eleison.” Their appearance functions as a

point of mediation, prompting the eventual unification of upper and lower voices in the returning “Kyrie eleison.” The movement concludes with the same unbroken pedal ostinato with which it began—a gesture less of momentum than of continuity, linking the present utterance to centuries of prior supplication.

From a pedagogical perspective, the “Kyrie” demands restraint and patience. Conductors must resist teleological drive; the ostinato serves as memory, not propulsion. Successful interpretation depends on cultivating sustained line, modal clarity, and a disciplined sense of temporal spaciousness.

Gloria:

Exuberance and Interruption

If the “Kyrie” is contemplative, the “Gloria” is kinetic. The tenor soloist opens with a florid incipit—“Glory to God in the highest”—reminiscent of the illuminated letters of medieval manuscripts. The choir’s *a cappella* response, “and on earth, peace,” arrives in stark contrast, reframing proclamation through vulnerability and restraint.

What follows is propelled by shifting meters and dance-like rhythms, as piano and organ trade pulses that slip fluidly between duple and triple groupings. Buonemani repeatedly arrests this exuberance, drawing the ensemble inward into moments of supplication. The movement thus oscillates between celebration and humility—between communal affirmation and the intimacy of collective plea.

The “Gloria” concludes in D major with an extended “Amen,” yet the final cadence is gently unsettled by the soprano saxophone’s inflection of the minor seventh. Even at the moment of apparent arrival, resolution is tinged with ambiguity; certainty remains provisional. For conductors, the movement is a tour de force for both pianist and organist—demanding endurance and virtuosity (including moments of near-pyrotechnic pedal work). It is also, by most standards, the most technically challenging movement of the Mass, requiring rhythmic coordination, stylistic agility, and a disciplined approach to balance so that kinetic energy never overwhelms textual clarity.

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Sanctus and Benedictus: Ascent and Foreshadowing

The “Sanctus” parallels the “Gloria” through its opening incipit, this time entrusted to the soprano saxophone and answered by the treble voices. The soprano soloist extends this gesture upward, supported by a rolling field drum that evokes the celestial imagery of assembling angels and archangels. The climax—a trio involving low choir voices, saxophone, and percussion—grounds transcendence in physical sound, reinforcing the Mass’s emphasis on embodied experience.

The “Benedictus” turns inward, introducing a quintuplet ostinato in the piano that is later reinforced by the organ. Though understated, this texture serves a crucial structural role. The ostinato remains unresolved, anticipating its more consequential function in the final movement. Conductors should attend carefully to balance and pacing here, allowing the repetition to accumulate meaning without becoming inert.

Agnus Dei: Difficulty as Meaning

The “Agnus Dei” returns to the chant material of the “Kyrie,” now reharmonized and presented *a cappella*. While the familiarity of the material offers reassurance, the technical demands placed on the choir intensify. The second invocation of the prayer is led by the soprano soloist and builds toward a climactic plea that tests range, blend, and endurance.

The reentry of the saxophone, piano, and organ introduces the quintuplet ostinato first heard in the “Benedictus,” now transformed into a four-measure vamp that expands and contracts. This motion resists triumphalism, creating instead a space for sustained reflection. The final return of the chant leads to a radiant close in A major. Peace, here, is not granted abruptly; it is approached gradually, through persistence and trust.

The difficulty of the “Agnus Dei” is thus expressive rather than incidental. Buonemani suggests that peace—musical or human—is not easily attained but must be cultivated through patience, discipline, and dialogue. For performers, the physical demands of maintaining long line, stable intonation, and delicate balance become inseparable from the work’s ethical argument. Conductors may also consider antiphonal

placement of the soloists to heighten the spatial resonance of the room, while drawing the listener’s ear toward the movement’s underlying dialogue: heaven and earth, living and dead, visible and invisible.

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Missa Miamiensis encourages conductors to move beyond binary distinctions between tradition and innovation. Its strength lies in its ability to employ ancient forms in service of contemporary questions: how communities listen, how joy and grief coexist, and how mercy is sought without assurance of response.

For ensembles willing to engage deeply with text, texture, and meaning, Buonemani’s *Missa Miamiensis* offers more than a compelling concert work. It becomes an act of communal listening—an invitation to place oneself within a tradition that values attentiveness, vulnerability, and shared responsibility. In Italian, to be in *buone mani*—“in good hands”—is to be held in care. In Buonemani’s Mass, mercy and peace become those hands, emerging through voices that listen to and sustain one another. In this sense, choral music is not merely a vehicle for meaning, but a practice of trust—one that invites performers and listeners alike into a shared, human search for grace. Perhaps there has never been a more fitting time to return to this Mass—and to give it the performances it quietly demands. ■

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1. Choral Composition, Arranging, Editing and Publishing

“The New Canon Project: Bringing New Voices to the Canon,” by Robyn Hilger. October 2025, page 34.

“*Chamber Music* by James Joyce: A Choral Commissioning Project,” by Desmond Earley and Jo-Michael Scheibe. May 2026, page 6.

“The ACDA Soprano-Alto Choirs National Commission Consortium,” by Erin Plisco. May 2026, page 35. REP.

2. Composers and Their Choral Music

“Almost Lost to History: Ethel Smyth’s Extraordinary *Mass in D*,” by Honey Meconi. August 2025, page 6.

“Bridging Centuries, Crossing Borders: An Introduction to Dutch Choral Music,” by Madlen Batchvarova and Michel Hogenes. August 2025, page 51.

“Lionel Daunais’s *Figures de danse*: An Accessible & Theatrical Québécois Choral Gem,” by Brian C. Murray. August 2025, page 59.

“The Life and Choral Works of Jester Hairston,” by Micah Bland. October 2025, page 17. REP.

“Rollo Dilworth’s *Weather*,” by Sarah Campbell. October 2025, page 69.

“Especially Do I Believe: A Conductor’s Guide to Margaret Bonds’s *Credo*,” by Justin Smith. November-December 2025, page 6.

“Felicitas Kukuck: Composing Against All Odds,” by Shekela Wanyama. November-December 2025, page 58. REP.



“Damien Geter’s *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*,” by Jordan M. Shomper. November-December 2025, page 68.

“The Life and Music of Tzvi Sherf,” by Dane Carten. February 2026, page 70.

“Four Selected Advocacy Works of Mari Esabel Valverde,” by Fabián Rodríguez Castro. February 2026, page 82.

“Nosotros Existimos: Mexican Choral History & Repertoire,” by Raul Dominguez. March-April 2026, page 6.
REP.

“*Terza Messa* by Marianna Martines: Examining Historical Sources of a Forgotten Masterwork,” by James Higgs. March-April 2026, page 60.

“The Choral Music of Hye-Young Cho,” by Youngeun Kim. March-April 2026, page 76.

“Empathy and Musical Dialogue in James Buonemani’s *Missa Miamiensis*,” by Emerson Eads. June-July 2026, page 55.

“Osvaldo Lacerda’s Choral Legacy: Shaping the Sounds of Brazilian Choral Music.” by Matheus Cruz. June-July 2026, page 33.

3. Choral Conducting and Choral Techniques: General

“The Superpower of the Introverted Choral Conductor,” by Chris Maunu. November-December 2025, page 43.

“Women Choir Directors’ Experiences with Emotional and Invisible Labor,” by Jessica Nápoles. February 2026, page 6.

“From Principle to Practice: Woman-to-Woman Mentorship in Choral Conducting,” by Kaitlin DeSpain. June-July 2026, page 15.

6. Choral Conducting and Choral Techniques: Conducting Technique

“Embodying the Music: A Survey of Choral Music Educators on Conducting Injury and Wellness Techniques,” by Ryan W. Sullivan, Colleen McNickle, Brianne Wehner, and Stephanie Li. June-July 2026, page 21.

7. Choral Conducting and Choral Techniques: Rehearsal

“The Choir as Garden: A Dynamic Singer-Centered Approach to Choral Leadership,” by Jennifer C. Hutton. August 2025, page 22.

“Ask a Conductor,” edited by Amanda Bumgarner. August 2025, page 63.

“Running a Vocally Efficient Rehearsal,” by Elena Bird Zolnick. September 2025, page 37.

“Beyond the Attendance Sheet: Addressing Assessment in the Choral Classroom,” by Skyler Bluemel. October 2025, page 39.

“Fostering Connection: Fifteen Social-Emotional Learning Strategies for Building Community in the Choral Classroom,” by Michael Gutierrez. May 2026, page 55.

8. Choral Conducting and Choral Techniques: Vocal Technique, Vocal Production and Tone

“Group-Voice Pedagogy in the Choral Setting,” by Amelia Rollings Bigler. August 2025, page 37.

“The Scat Singing Dialect: An Introduction to Vocal Improvisation,” by Michele Weir. September 2025, page 61.

“Warming Up the Choir: Bridging the Domains of Singing Voice Pedagogy and Voice Science,” by Melissa Forbes, Diane Hughes, and Regina McAllen. October 2025, page 51.

“Four Practical SOVT Exercises to Support Healthy Choral Singing,” by Zerrin Agabigum Martin. February 2026, page 21.

12. Choral Conducting and Choral Techniques: Intonation

“Choral Singing in Tune” by Jameson Marvin. May 2026, page 49.

“Chasing Perfection: Better Harmonic Tuning for Choirs,” by Ross W. Duffin. June-July 2026, page 43.

13. Choral Conducting and Choral Techniques: Musicianship

“From Groans to Grins: A Play-Based Approach to Teaching Music Literacy,” by Saleel Adarkar Menon. October 2025, page 6.

15. Choral Conducting and Choral Techniques: Repertoire Selection

“ACDA Repertoire and Resources: Who We Are, What We Do, and How You Can Become Involved,” by Gretchen Harrison. August 2025, page 45.



“Examining Shifts in Repertoire Programming Practices: Pre- and Post-Pandemic,” by Mark Helms. September 2025, page 6.

“Many Voices: Resources for Diversifying Choral Programming,” compiled by Erik Peregrine. March-April 2026, page 87.

34. History of Choral Performance, Histories of Choral Organizations, and Biographies of Conductors

“In Memoriam: Conan Castle (1927-2025).” August 2025, page 35.

“In Memoriam: Donald Oglesby (1947-2025).” August 2025, page 44.

“In Memoriam: Alan Harler (1940-2025).” September 2025, page 36.

“In Memoriam: Thomas Wright Jr. (1975-2025).” September 2025, page 66.

“In Memoriam: Phyllis Merritt (1939-2025).” October 2025, page 15.

“In Memoriam: James Laster (1934-2025).” October 2025, page 49.

“In Memoriam: Joe Huszti (1936-2024).” November-December 2025, page 41.

“In Memoriam: Michael Wade (1949-2025).” May 2026, page 33.

“In Memoriam: Ramon Meyer (1933-2026).” June-July 2026, page 42.

43. Interviews

“Teaching and Leading with TLC: An Interview with Dr. Tim Seelig,” by Dustin S. Cates. August 2025, page 49.

“Rising Voices: Perspectives from Early-Career Choral Directors in Higher Education,” by Eric Rubinstein. September 2025, page 22.

“A Conversation with Mark Lawley,” by Donathan Chang and Yoojin Muhn. October 2025, page 61.

“It’s All About the Singers: An Interview with Clinton Hardy Ferrie and Philip Brown,” by Gretchen Harrison. November-December 2025, page 21.

“A Conversation with Cindy Ellis,” by Erin Plisco. February 2026, page 47.

47. Literature on, and Music for Various Types of Choruses: Elementary School and Children

“Lifting Up the Littles: Highlighting Your Youngest Singers Through Commissioned Works, Effective Rehearsal, Performance Opportunities, and Student Composition,” by Jess Edelbrock. November-December 2025, page 31.

“Children and Youth: Inspirational and Practical Articles in the *Choral Journal*,” by Donna Thomasson Smith. February 2026, page 33. BIB.

48. Literature on, and Music for Various Types of Choruses: Middle School, Junior High School, High School and Boychoir

“Living in Harmony: Classroom Management in Middle and High School Choirs,” by Kevin Lackie. February 2026, page 39.

“Playful Pedagogy: Applying Elementary Music Strategies in Secondary Choirs,” by Saleen Adarkar Menon and Karen Salvador. June-July 2026, page 6.

49. Literature on, and Music for Various Types of Choruses: Junior College, College and University

“Meeting the Moment: Reimagining Collegiate Choral Engagement in a Time of Change,” by Jenny Bent. March-April 2026, page 21.

“Supporting Transfer Students Between Two- and Four-Year Institutions,” by Carolina Flores and Arlie Langager. May 2026, page 27.

“The Growing Voice: Collegiate Voice Students and the Large Ensemble,” by Matthew Myers. May 2026, page 30.

55. Literature on, and Music for Various Types of Choruses: Folk, Pop, Jazz, and Popular

“How to Choose Repertoire for Contemporary A Cappella,” by Robert Dietz. August 2025, page 47.

“Strategies for the Vocal Jazz Ensemble,” by John Stafford II. September 2025, page 43. REP.

“Pedagogy for the Jazz Singer,” by Justin Binek and Diana Spradling. September 2025, page 52.



“The Collegiate Vocal Jazz Ensemble: A Foundational History,” by Gregory Amerind. September 2025, page 55.

“The Choral Music Teacher as Artist: Vocal Jazz and Improvisation as Expressions of Artistry,” by Patrice Madura Ward-Steinman. September 2025, page 58.

“Starting a Vocal Jazz Ensemble,” by Roger Emerson. September 2025, page 59.

66. ACDA Activities and Other Professional News

“2025 Brock Prize for Student Composers Winner: ‘In effect it is this: that I love you’ [sic] by Ethan Soledad.” September 2025, page 5.

“Overview and Editorial Transition,” by Elizabeth Hearn and Elizabeth Cassidy Parker. November-December 2025, page 49.

“Special Conference Issue.” January 2026.

“The Winner of the 2024 Julius Herford Dissertation Prize: James Higgs for ‘*Terza Messa* by Marianna Martines: Significance, Style, and Critical Edition.” February 2026, page 19.

“Writing Your Next Chapter: Tips and Tricks for ACDA Collegiate Student Chapters,” by Jami Lercher and Elizabeth Swanson. March-April 2026, page 24.

69. Reference Materials: Bibliographies of Literature on Choral Music

“*The International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* Volume 13 Abstracts,” edited by Bryan Nichols. March-April 2026, page 29.

“*The Choral Journal: An Index to Volume Sixty-Six*,” by Scott W. Dorsey. June-July 2026, page 59.

71. Book Reviews

Leo Sowerby, by John Sargent. Donald Callen Freed, reviewer. September 2025, page 67.

The Conductor’s Toolbox: Transforming Yourself as a Musician and Conductor, by Richard Sparks. Kenny Kabak, reviewer. September 2025, page 69.

Berlioz’s Requiem, by Jennifer Walker. Gregory M. Pysh, reviewer. September 2025, page 70.

Choral Reflections: Insights from American Choral Conductors-Teachers, edited by Brandon Williams. Dustin S. Gates, reviewer. March-April 2026, page 36.

Rethinking Bach, edited by Bettina Varwig. Gregory M. Pysh, reviewer. March-April 2026, page 36.

Music, Religion, and Politics at Worcester Cathedral, 680-1950, by Richard Newsholme. Donald Callen Freed, reviewer. March-April 2026, page 37.

Music is More than Technique: A Guide to Why and How, by Dennis Shrock. Gregory M. Pysh, reviewer. March-April 2026, page 38.

72. Recording Reviews

Tomás de Torrejón y Velasco: Musique à la Cité des Rois (Music in the City of Kings) / Musica per la monache di San Vito (Music for the Nuns of San Vito). Coros de Niños Cantores de Córdoba: Gabriel Garrido, conductor. CJ Madsen, reviewer. November-December 2025, page 67.

Are You Looking for Me? Elevation: Arreon A. Harley-Emerson, conductor. Erik Peregrine, reviewer. February 2026, page 81.

Sulpitia Cesis: Motetti Spirituali, 1619. Cappella Artemisia: Candace Smith, conductor. Daniel David Black, reviewer. March-April 2026, page 75.

Legends and Legacies. Rutgers University Kirkpatrick Choir and Rutgers University Glee Club: Patrick Gardner, conductor. John Guarente, reviewer. May 2026, page 65.

Where Waters Meet. Canadian Chamber Choir: Julia David, conductor. C. Michael Porter, reviewer. May 2026, page 66.

74. Choral Activities in the USA and Abroad

“Cantonese Choral Music: From Lack of Interest to Rising Prominence,” by Michelle Kwok. May 2026, page 21.

“Choral Music in Paraíba, Brazil: An Exploratory Case Study,” by Elisa M. Dekaney, John F. Warren, Wendy K. Moy, and José “Peppie” Calvar. June-July 2026, page 25.



AUTHOR INDEX

— A —

Amerind, Gregory, September 2025, page 55

— B —

Batchvarova, Madlen, August 2025, page 51
Bent, Jenny, March-April 2026, page 21
Bigler, Amelia Rollings, August 2025, page 37
Binek, Justin, September 2025, page 52
Black, Daniel David, March-April 2026, page 75
Bland, Micah, October 2025, page 17
Bluemel, Skyler, October 2025, page 39
Bumgarner, Amanda, August 2025, page 63

— C —

Calvar, José “Peppie”, June-July 2026, page 25
Campbell, Sarah, October 2025, page 69
Carten, Dane, February 2026, page 70
Cates, Dustin S., August 2025, page 49; March-April 2026, page 36
Chang, Donathan, October 2025, page 61
Cruz, Matheus, June-July 2026, page 33

— D —

Dekaney, Elisa M., June-July 2026, page 25
DeSpain, Kaitlin, June-July 2026, page 15
Dietz, Robert, August 2025, page 47
Dominguez, Raul, March-April 2026, page 6
Dorsey, Scott W., June-July 2026, page 59
Duffin, Ross W., June-July 2026, page 43

— E —

Eads, Emerson, June-July 2026, page 55
Earley, Desmond, May 2026, page 6
Edelbrock, Jess, November-December 2025, page 31
Emerson, Roger, September 2025, page 59

— F —

Flores, Carolina, May 2026, page 27
Forbes, Melissa, October 2025, page 51
Freed, Donald Callen, September 2025, page 67;
March-April 2026, page 37

— G —

Guarente, John, May 2026, page 65
Gutierrez, Michael, May 2026, page 55

— H —

Harrison, Gretchen, August 2025, page 45;
November-December 2025, page 21
Hearn, Elizabeth, November-December 2025, page 49
Helms, Mark, September 2025, page 6
Higgs, James, March-April 2026, page 60
Hilger, Robyn, October 2025, page 34
Hogenes, Michel, August 2025, page 51
Hughes, Diane, October 2025, page 51
Hutton, Jennifer C., August 2025, page 22

— K —

Kabak, Kenny, September 2025, page 69
Kim, Youngeun, March-April 2026, page 76
Kwok, Michelle, May 2026, page 21

— L —

Lackie, Kevin, February 2026, page 39
Langager, Arlie, May 2026, page 27
Lercher, Jami, March-April 2026, page 24
Li, Stephanie, June-July 2026, page 21

— M —

Madsen, CJ, November-December 2025, page 67
Martin, Zerrin Agabigum, February 2026, page 21
Marvin, Jameson, May 2026, page 49
Maunu, Chris, November-December 2025, page 43
McAllen, Regina, October 2025, page 51
McNickle, Colleen, June-July 2026, page 21
Meconi, Honey, August 2025, page 6
Menon, Saleel Adarkar, October 2025, page 6;
June-July 2026, page 6
Moy, Wendy K., June-July 2026, page 25
Muhn, Yoojin, October 2025, page 61
Murray, Brian C., August 2025, page 59
Myers, Matthew, May 2026, page 30

— N —

Nápoles, Jessica, February 2026, page 6
Nichols, Bryan, March-April 2026, page 29

— P —

Parker, Elizabeth Cassidy, November-December 2025,
page 49
Peregrine, Erik, February 2026, page 81; March-April
2026, page 87
Plisco, Erin, February 2026, page 47; May 2026,
page 35

Porter, C. Michael, May 2026, page 66
Pysh, Gregory M., September 2025, page 70; March-
April 2026, page 36; March-April 2026, page 38

— R —

Rodríguez Castro, Fabián, February 2026, page 82
Rubinstein, Eric, September 2025, page 22

— S —

Salvador, Karen, June-July 2026, page 6
Scheibe, Jo-Michael, May 2026, page 6
Shomper, Jordan M., November-December 2025,
page 68
Smith, Donna Thomasson, February 2026, page 33
Smith, Justin, November-December, 2025, page 6
Spradling, Diana, September 2025, page 52
Stafford, John II, September 2025, page 43
Sullivan, Ryan W., June-July 2026, page 21
Swanson, Elizabeth, March-April 2026, page 24

— W —

Wanyama, Shekela, November-December 2025,
page 58
Ward-Steinman, Patrice Madura, September 2025,
page 58
Warren, John F., June-July 2026, page 25
Wehner, Brianne, June-July 2026, page 21
Weir, Michele, September 2025, page 61

— Z —

Zolnick, Elena Bird, September 2025, page 37

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Angel City Chorale	27	Musicfolder.com	28
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MidAmerica Productions	IFC, 54	Zamir Choral Foundation	58



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