





International Conductors Exchange Program

United States-Germany Recap

In 2023, six conductors from the United States traveled to Germany as part of ACDA's International Conductors Exchange Program (ICEP). Five US participants share some of their experiences on the following pages.

Learn more about how to apply for the 2025 exchange with the Philippines on page 45 or visit <https://acda.org/resources/icep>.



Meg Stohlmann is the director of choral and vocal studies at Gonzaga University, where she conducts the Glee Club, Concert Choir, Discantus Treble Choir, and coaches the Big Bing Theory a cappella pop ensemble. In addition,

Dr. Stohlmann also serves as the director of the Spokane Symphony Chorale.

The opportunity to travel to Germany and participate in the exchange program was genuinely life changing. During this experience, I not only forged meaningful connections with five other collegiate choral colleagues from various parts of the United States, but also established lasting relationships with six new colleagues in Germany.

This chance to cultivate friendships with individuals who share the same passion and enthusiasm for our work cannot be underestimated. Often, we find ourselves moving within social and professional circles tied to our alma mater, our geographical location, and the nature of our positions. However, thanks to the thoughtful design of the exchange program by our German colleagues, all six of the ICEP fellows were able to spend a significant amount of time together in

Germany. This shared experience has resulted in some of the strongest professional relationships I have encountered.

As the sole conductor representing the Pacific Northwest region, the likelihood of connecting with my five colleagues would have been minimal due to geographical and social constraints. Now, I have a circle of friends—both socially and professionally—with whom I share a unique and lasting bond. And this is just with my American colleagues. Our German hosts were welcoming, generously sharing their time, choirs, and friendship. I am already in the process of planning ways to bring my choirs to Germany in the future, confident that my students and I will reap the benefits for years to come through these newfound friendships and connections.

In a profession where the emphasis is on creating connections, we often fall short in establishing them for ourselves. The ICEP is the epitome of a place where genuine connections happen, and I cannot recommend it highly enough.



John McDonald is the director of choir and vocal studies at Washington University in St. Louis. He also conducts the St. Louis Children's Choirs tenor-bass ensemble, Cantus, and is artistic director and founder of the St. Louis-based professional group, Continuum Vocal Ensemble.

It was an honor to be selected for the 2023 International Conductor's Exchange Program with Germany, but I could not have imagined how life changing the experience would be. The program resulted in an incredible educational exchange for my regional choral community; and also provided two amazing weeks in Germany, a lifelong bond with my peers in the American cohort, and the establishment of ongoing international relationships.

I had the pleasure of being paired with Tristan Meister, a prolific freelance conductor based in Mannheim, Germany, as my exchange partner. During

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his residency in the St. Louis area, Tristan shared his extensive expertise in choral tone and musicality with singers at multiple universities, high schools, and the St. Louis Children's Choirs. The opportunity to bring an international perspective to students of all ages in my community was truly special.

My time in Germany commenced at the iconic international choral competition in the picturesque Bavarian city of Marktoberdorf. This was a choral nerd's dream, featuring daily sessions with some of the world's finest choirs. It was also the setting where the American cohort had the chance to bond and come together as peers and friends. After the competition, I traveled with Tristan for my residency with his choirs.

Over the next four days, I observed a conducting symposium with Frieder Bernius, conductor of Kammerchor Stuttgart, rehearsed with the Univer-

sity of Mannheim choir, coached the Ludwigshafen Beethovenchor on *Carmina Burana*, worked with conducting students at the University of Frankfurt, led a reading session of American choral music, and had countless conversations—usually over a pint—on trends in choral music and music education. Our journey concluded in Hannover for the German National Choral Competition, where we rejoined the other American conductors to share our regional visit experiences.

While the unique experiences, cultural exchanges, and musical moments of this program were deeply meaningful, it was the personal and professional connections that made it truly special. I am forever grateful to ACDA for providing me with this exceptional opportunity.





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Erin Plisco is the associate director of choral studies at Missouri State University, where she conducts multiple choirs and teaches undergraduate and graduate choral conducting and literature. She is a frequent guest clinician across the United States and abroad, and has presented and performed with her choirs at state, regional, and national ACDA conferences.

Participating in ACDA's International Conductors Exchange Program was one of the highlights of my musical career thus far. I feel so fortunate to be a part of an organization that fosters these kinds of international exchanges. Spending three weeks in Germany was inspiring and affirming, offering an invaluable source of professional growth that endures far beyond the time I spent "in country." Some of the benefits included engaging in cultural exchanges, rehearsing, leading mas-

terclasses, attending concerts, performing in concerts, learning new things about myself and my craft, having family dinners with my hosts, and teaching others about American choral music. The connections formed during the program have endured, as I exchange texts and engage in daily conversations with my ICEP friends.

Having the opportunity to sing with the Kammerchor der Künste Berlin in competitions in both Marktoberdorf and Hanover was yet another highlight. I immediately felt like a member of their family and learned so much from immersing myself in several hours of rehearsals (conducted exclusively in German!) I also walked away with some epic new repertoire.

Hosting our German counterparts during the ACDA National Conference renewed my appreciation for American choral music and all the wonderful opportunities and resources we have access to as members of ACDA. I welcomed two of our German counterparts back for the Southwestern ACDA Conference in February 2024, and look forward to returning to Germany

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to reconnect with my colleagues there in May. Words cannot do this experience justice; it is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I encourage all ACDA members to apply for!



Jennifer Sengin is the visiting assistant professor of choral studies at University of Missouri-Kansas City, where she leads the graduate choral conducting program and conducts the flagship ensemble, Conservatory Singers and

Choral Union. Dr. Sengin most recently served as the associate director of choral activities at Georgia State University, where under her direction, the Treble Choir won The American Prize in performance and was invited to perform at NCCO and GMEA conferences.

I had a phenomenal experience participating in the International Conductor Exchange Program to Germany. I hosted my exchange partner Friederike Stahmer at the ACDA conference and later during a visit in Atlanta. The week-long exchange program we organized in my region resulted in benefits for my local choral community, as we learned from Friederike and shared our culture through teaching opportunities, musical performances, and experiences that highlighted the best parts of our area—both musically and beyond.

In Germany, I loved being able to connect with conductors from across the country and immerse myself in both national and international choral competitions. Our exchange partners arranged fascinating opportunities for us to collaborate, lecture, and teach alongside them in their university settings. We were fortunate to be able to attend the Marktoberdorf International Chamber Choir Competition, which featured some of the top choirs from around the world. The festival hosts were welcoming and hospitable, and we met many wonderful conductors during our time there. We also attended the German Choral Competition in Hannover that included many choirs from across the country.

I learned so much from this experience that I have

been able to bring back to my home institution and share with the singers, especially the opportunities to listen to and explore German choral music. One of the wonderfully unanticipated joys was meeting and bonding with my fellow ICEP conductors. We continue to explore additional collaborations with our colleagues both stateside and abroad. Participating in exchange was transformative, and I am so grateful for the opportunity.


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Ryan W. Sullivan is the director of choral activities, coordinator of vocal studies, and assistant professor of music at Arkansas State University, where he conducts the flagship ensemble Concert Choir, Jonesboro Chorale, and Singing Statesmen, and teaches coursework in conducting and music education. He has been a regular clinician for region and all-state festival choirs and serves as current ACDA past president for the Southwestern Region.

I was thrilled to have the opportunity to participate in the 2023 International Conductor Exchange Program, to serve as instructor and lecturer at the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Stuttgart and the

Hochschule für Kirchenmusik in Rottenburg. I cannot recommend this program enough. Being embedded with a colleague from another part of the world, staying with them, and meeting with their students and choirs provided invaluable insights into German repertoire, music processes, and education. Additionally, it shed light on significant cultural and personal values rooted in Germany's history. Germany ICEP was doubly an informative and defining experience!

The exchange taught me a lot about myself and aspects of American choral culture that I took for granted. As a result, I am reexamining my own choral practices and incorporating what I learned into my professional work. ICEP was extremely worthwhile, informative, and resulted in both pedagogical benefits and relationships that I will treasure for years to come. 🇺🇸

For more on previous exchanges, see the following *Choral Journal* articles:

April 2013 - "Choral Symposium 2012: Building Cultural Bridges in the Twenty-First Century"
by Jose Rivera

January 2014 - "International Conductors Exchange Program: Building Bridges to China"
by TJ Harper

December 2014 - "Building Bridges with China: An Overview of the 2014 International Conductors Exchange Program" by TJ Harper

March 2015 - "Choral Connections with Sweden" by TJ Harper and Fred Sjoberg

February 2016 - "Choral Connections with the Republic of Korea (Land of the Morning Calm)"
by TJ Harper

November 2016 - "Reflections from the 2015 ICEP: Choral Connections with Sweden"
by Kimberly Dunn Adams

February 2017 - "ICEP of the Americas" by TJ Harper



INTERNATIONAL CONDUCTORS EXCHANGE PROGRAM PHILIPPINES 2025 October 17-27, 2025 CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

ACDA is pleased to announce the Philippines as the next partner for the International Conductors Exchange Program (ICEP). In 2024, six American and six Filipino conductors will be selected to participate in a bilateral, mutual exchange to take place in 2025. 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 Filipino conductors will be centered around the 2025 ACDA National Conference (Dallas, Texas, March 19-22). U.S. conductors will host their counterparts in their local communities for region visits 3-5 days before or after the conference. In turn, American conductors will be hosted in the Philippines October 17-27.

ICEP is providing 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, and Germany. Between 2012 and 2024, 75 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.

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 1- May 31, 2024

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) Has completed at least a master's degree, 4) Leads choirs with a demonstrated level of excellence, 5) Exhibits a high level of human understanding, tact, and cross-cultural sensitivity, 6) 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). Participants must be available to travel for their residency October 17-27, 2025. For more information, and to apply, visit the following link. (Application deadline: May 31, 2024)

<https://acda.org/resources/ICEP>