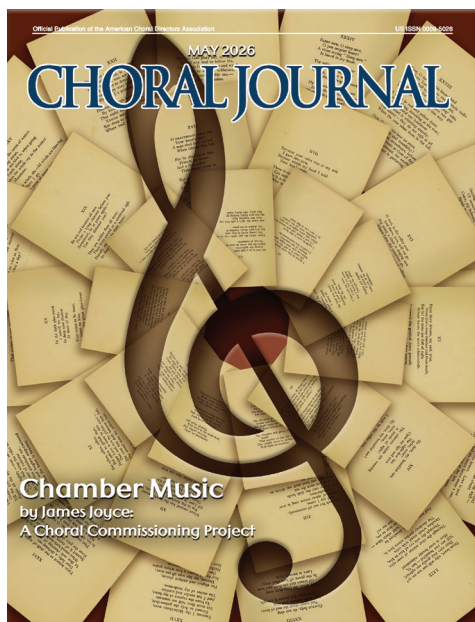




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The human spirit is elevated to a broader understanding of itself and its place in the world through the study of and participation in choral music. Singing in a choir produces more active and involved citizens. It affects self-worth in youth and adults. 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: Guest Columnist



Edryn J. Coleman

The Space After the Sound: Why ACDA Matters More than We Admit

By Edryn Coleman

After every ACDA conference—regional or national—I have a quiet ritual.

On the very last day, when most people have already left, I go back to the exhibit hall. And I walk.

It's empty. Booths have been dismantled. The energy that once filled the space is gone. But in my mind, it's still alive. I can see the conversations, hear the laughter, feel the music that surrounded us for those conference days. And in that moment, I feel two things at once: deep joy... and a real sense of loss. Because what we experience at ACDA is special.

For a few days, we are completely immersed in what we love—music, people, connection, purpose. We are surrounded by colleagues who get it without explanation. We hear incredible performances that remind us what is possible. We engage in conversations that challenge us, affirm us, and push us forward. We are, in every sense, filled up. And then... it ends. Just like that.

We go from nonstop music making and connection to airports, emails, lesson plans, and real life. And if I'm being honest, there's always a little bit of a crash. A quiet kind of sadness. Missing the people. Missing the music. Missing the feeling of being fully seen and understood in this work.

I've come to realize that feeling is not a bad thing. It means it mattered. We don't miss things that are insignificant. We miss the things that impact us. ACDA reminds me why I do this work. It reminds me that I'm not alone. It reconnects me to a community of people who care deeply about singers, about music, about creating something meaningful together. And while the conference ends, the impact doesn't. It shows up later—in how I teach, how I program, how I lead, how I listen. It shows up in renewed energy, fresh ideas, and a deeper sense of purpose.

So yes, I walk through that empty exhibit hall every time. Because I need that moment to pause and say, this mattered. And even though there's a little sadness in the ending, there's also lots of gratitude. Because we get to do this work. Because we get to make music. Because we get to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

And the best part is knowing that we will gather again! Different date. Same spirit. Same love for this art form that continues to bring us together. Until then, y'all...

Dr. Edryn J. Coleman

Oakland Mills High School, Columbia, MD

ACDA East Membership Chair

Co-Author of *Accessible and Beautiful:*

Repertoire for Mixed Voices to Encourage Connection and Growth

From the President



Edith Copley

I write this month's column after attending the Western ACDA Region Conference in San José, California, where I heard an inspiring keynote given by Melanie DeMore, memorable performances, and informative interest sessions. The last time the Western Region conference was held in San José was forty years ago. Congratulations to ACDA Western Region President, Julie Dana; Conference Chair, Cari Earnhart; and the entire conference committee for planning and executing this successful event for our membership. Congratulations also to the five other region presidents and their committees for their vision, leadership, and service that provided memorable ACDA conferences all across the nation.

During the Western Region concerts, I watched expressive singers and conductors, but every so often I would close my eyes and just listen to the sounds that filled the Cathedral Basilica of St. Joseph. Listening is one of the most important things we do as choral conductors. Our ability to hear guides us in rehearsal and gives us a deep and visceral connection to the music. Our sense of hearing is an incredible gift that is foundational to conductors and to everyone who sings in our choirs. There are a number of ways we encourage ensemble listening, such as changing standing formations on the risers and rehearsing voice parts in circles. Sight-reading with solfège and audiation during our daily rehearsals builds the singers' aural skills. One of my favorite ways to encourage listening is to stop conducting, slowly turn my back to the choir, and slightly tilt my head. Singers immediately "turn their ears on." The follow-up question is "What did YOU hear?"

Simon Carrington, former member of The King's Singers and professor emeritus at Yale University, says singing in a choir is 60% listening and 40% singing. It takes time for the choir to discover the importance of this proportion. A cohesive ensemble is only possible when individual singers critically listen and discover their unique and important individual contribution to the choir. It is only then the ensemble becomes a nurturing community where singers listen, are heard, and belong.

Edith Copley

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ACDA's Repertoire & Resources national chairs take turns contributing content for the R&R section of *Choral Journal*. Last month you read articles about collegiate student activities, and this month we continue with articles under the collegiate umbrella, with contributions about two- and four-year universities. You will also find an R&R article for World Musics &

Cultures in this issue on Cantonese choral music. We have several articles coming up this year in the World Musics section, and we welcome continued submissions in this area.

This issue also includes a special highlight of the Soprano-Alto Choirs National Commission Consortium. This project is a "long-standing collaborative initiative through which treble choirs pool financial and artistic resources to commission new works specifically designed for soprano-alto ensembles." Read through the list of works commissioned since 2007 and find out more information about the upcoming call for the 2026/27 Consortium.

Our feature article is a conversation between Jo-Michael Scheibe and Desmond Earley on a decade-long project to commission thirty-six composers to set *Chamber Music*, James Joyce's collection of thirty-six poems that was published in 1907. This article describes the scope of the project, the composers, and the recording process.

Also included in this issue: the first in a series of articles on tuning for the Rehearsal Break Column, a *ChorTeach* article on social-emotional learning strategies for the classroom, and recorded sound reviews. The *Choral Journal* is seeking reviewers for both our Recorded Sound Column and our Book Review Column. For more information, email me at abumgarner@acda.org. We would love to add to our list of contributors for these review columns.

If you missed the annual listing of summer festivals and workshops, find it in last month's March/April issue or online at acda.org/choraljournal. Log into your membership account and choose the March/April issue.

I had the privilege of attending this year's Eastern Region Conference in Providence, and something that always excites me about the conferences is anticipating the article submissions that will come from the interest sessions, poster sessions, and other presentations. The 2026 editorial calendar is filling up, and I invite you to consider an article submission. If you have feedback or questions related to past articles or future submissions, you can send a Letter to the Editor to: abumgarner@acda.org.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Bumgarner".

Call for Submissions for ACDA Publications

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

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

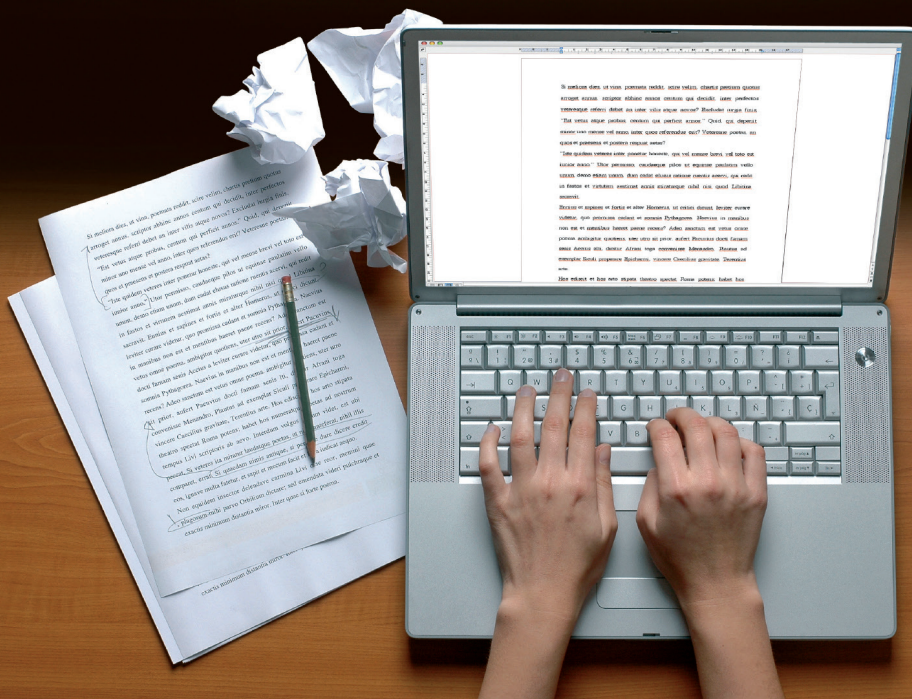
<https://acda.org/choraljournal>

ChorTeach – regular section published as part of Choral Journal offering practical strategies for the classroom and community choirs, specifically those working with grades K-12.

<https://acda.org/chorteach>

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

<https://acda.org/ijrsc>





Solstice and Choral Scholars of University College Dublin Recording Session. Photo by Sanda Semeika.

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Chamber Music by James Joyce: A Choral Commissioning Project

Jo-Michael Scheibe and
Desmond Earley

James Joyce (1882–1941) was one of Ireland’s most influential writers, with major works including *Ulysses* (1922) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Though not as well known for his poetry, in 1907 he published a collection of thirty-six poems titled *Chamber Music*. A fine tenor himself, Joyce hoped the collection might one day be set to music.¹ Desmond Earley, the founding artistic director of Choral Scholars of University College Dublin, is working to realize Joyce’s dream in a decade-long project to commission thirty-six composers from around the world to set these poems. Recordings of half the newly commissioned works were recently released as *Chamber Music by James Joyce Vol. 1* on the Signum Classics label. The group has eight more commissions completed, which were recorded in February 2026. In this interview, Desmond and Jo-Michael Scheibe discuss the scope of this major project, the selected composers, the voicing and instrumentation, and the recording process.

Chamber Music by James Joyce: A Choral Commissioning Project



Jo-Michael Scheibe: Was James Joyce a graduate of University College Dublin?



Desmond Earley: Yes, Joyce was a graduate of University College—now known as University College Dublin—where he studied French and English literature and languages. Although he spent his later years abroad, Dublin was his primary paradigm and the fountain of his inspiration.

His works give voice to the idioms and the sounds that Dubliners make... the Hiberno-English speech patterns, idioms, twists, and sounds of Dublin. He presents what it is to have that Dublin speech pattern and sounds the pattern in his texts, and I love that. In many ways, we are still intimately connected to Joyce through the music of spoken speech. I like to think that some of the phrases we use today (and their music) connect us to an older Dublin and to Joyce himself.

Joyce left Ireland in 1904 at the age of twenty-two and lived the rest of his life abroad (Trieste, Zurich, Paris). Yet his literary imagination remained fiercely tethered to Dublin, and he wrote about the city with such clarity. After the publication of *Ulysses*, he famous-

ly said: “For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin, I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world.”²

Some may consider it deeply ironic that James Joyce wrote so extensively, and so exactly—with an almost forensic precision—about Ireland after leaving her. Joyce’s Dublin was quite a vibrant city (and still is), and the Joyce family enjoyed theatre and opera at Dublin’s Theatre Royal and the Gaiety Theatre.

Scheibe: I read that Joyce was a singer, so it seems music was quite important to him.

Earley: Yes, it’s not widely known, but Joyce was a fine singer. He won a bronze medal for solo singing in 1904 at the Dublin “Feis Ceoil” competition, which is a music festival competition that started in Dublin in 1897. According to a review of the competition in the *Irish Daily Independent*: “Mr. Joyce showed himself possessed of the finest quality voice of any of those competing.”³

We know Joyce was exposed to quite a lot of music in his early life. His use of language was itself musical, but certainly, references to music appear throughout Joyce’s literature. For example, in the story “The

Listening Links

Sample: Track 3, “O cool is the valley now,” poem XVI. Composed by David Walters.



Sample: Track 12, “Silently she’s combing,” poem XXIV. Composed by Desmond Earley.

Sample: Track 17, “Lean out of the window, Goldenhair,” poem V. Composed by Jocelyn Hagen.



Chamber Music by James Joyce



Dead” from his short story collection titled *Dubliners*, his characters enter a deep discussion on the health of the opera scene in Dublin.

Scholars find evidence that Joyce could very well have investigated musical sources at the National Library of Ireland. I find it useful to peek into *Ulysses*, where he specifically mentions John Dowland, William Byrd, Thomas Tompkins, and John Bull. What’s interesting in relation to Joyce’s knowledge of these English Renaissance composers is that some of their music (and Elizabethan lyrics for songs) were available at the National Library of Ireland. It is thought that he probably read the poetry of some of Dowland’s lute songs there.

Instrumental music was also available: an edition of the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book* was found there, hence such references in *Ulysses*. This connection to old music—and specifically older English music—is confirmed in a letter Joyce wrote to Irish composer Geoffrey Molyneux Palmer: “The book is in fact a suite of songs and if I were a musician, I suppose I should have set them to music myself.”⁴

Scheibe: Are there any other composers and projects you have found that answered Joyce’s invitation to set movements from *Chamber Music*?

Earley: There are multiple projects where composers set *selections* from the collection. I believe Geoffrey Molyneux Palmer was the composer closest to setting the collection: he produced thirty-two of thirty-six in composition. Joyce himself held Palmer’s settings in high regard. In a 1934 letter to his brother, Joyce wrote: “Thirty or forty composers at least have set my little poems to music. The best is Molyneux Palmer. After him are Moeran and Bliss.”⁵

Scheibe: Luciano Berio also set music to some of these poems. Are there other settings of *Chamber Music* we might wish to mention?

Earley: Irish composer Brian Byrne’s project with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra (Raidió Teilifís Éireann: Ireland’s National Television and Radio Broadcaster) *Goldenhair*, where he brings an orchestral sound and the solo voice of Kurt Elling to twenty-one settings from

the collection is a substantial project that showcases a diverse range of musical styles, including jazz, classical, and folk.

Scheibe: What drew you to this particular book of poetry?

Earley: Looking at the poems of *Chamber Music*, I drew immense inspiration from the fact that Joyce refers to “choirs” and “singing” quite often. There are particular references to choirs, for example “the soft choring of delight” from poem XXVI, or “the wise choirs of fairy” from XV, and “for many a choir is singing now” from XVI. It seems that Joyce had some conception of voices together making harmony, and I thought to myself, as far as I know, there has not been a choral project of this magnitude attempting to set all of these Joyce poems in one project. And so the journey began.

— — — — —

The Composers

Scheibe: In Volume 1 of the recording, I noticed that the poems are not in the order they appear in Joyce’s 1907 published collection by Elkin Mathews. It’s clear to me that you had a thought process in the way you laid that album out—that the poems would not be presented numerically 1, 2, 3, etc., but rather there was a sonic aspect to the order of the program, much in the way that a conductor would program a concert. Can you tell us about that?

Earley: Well, here is my confession: the project evolved organically and not in numerical order of the poems included in the 1907 edition. The works included in Volume 1 are settings of poems that were chosen by each of the eighteen composers involved rather than assigned. When it came to choosing an order of tracks for the album, the works have been organized to take the listener on a stylistically contrasting sonic journey. I hope Joyce would be pleased.

As we embark on Volume II, we have now recorded eight poems, including those set by Kristina Arakelyan (UK), Oliver Davis (UK), David Downes (IRL), Paul

Chamber Music by James Joyce: A Choral Commissioning Project

Frost (IRL), Kim Porter (UK), Kenneth Edge (IRL), Judith Ring (IRL), and Caterina Schembri (Columbia). I have commitments from the following composers: Michael McGlynn (IRL), Caroline Shaw & Danni Lee Parpan (USA), and Bill Whelan (IRL). We plan to record and release the remaining eighteen tracks on a second album by the end of 2027 so that we have *Chamber Music*, all thirty-six poems! Asking thirty-six different

composers to join the project brings a unique compositional and stylistic voice to each of the poems, with the consistency provided by the artists—and Joyce’s poetic voice—throughout. I thought this approach was stronger than inviting one composer to set all thirty-six poems.⁶

Scheibe: All the works are accompanied in some form

Table 1. *Chamber Music by James Joyce Volume 1*

Track	Title	Poem	Composer	Nationality	Voicing	Instrumentation
1	From dewy dreams, my soul, arise	XV	Matthew Emery	Canada	SATB	as
2	When the shy star goes forth in heaven	IV	Tim Stephens	USA	SATB up to SSAATTBB	as, bc, fag, hn, hp, v, vc, cb, tutti
3	Oh cool is the valley now	XVI	David Walters	USA	SATB up to SSAATTBB	hn, v, vc, cb
4	Winds of May, that dance on the sea	IX	Mark Armstrong	Ireland	SATB up to SSAATTBB	cl, hp
5	Rain has fallen all the day	XXXII	Eoghan Desmond	Ireland	SATB (with S solo passage) up to SATBarB	clar, as, fag, hn, hp, v, vc, cb +guitar
6	All day I hear the noise of waters	XXXV	Andrej Makor	Slovenia	SMsATB (with S solo passage)	as
7	Gentle lady, do not sing	XXVIII	Damien Geter	USA	SSAATTBarB (splits are only temporary)	cAng
8	Oh, it was out by Donnycarney	XXXI	Owen Brady	Ireland	SSATBarB (S split is for a few measures)	cl, fag, hn, hp, v, cb +guitar
9	The twilight turns from amethyst	II	Ivo Antognini	Switzerland	SAATBarB	cAng, as, fag, hn, hp, v, cb

by members of the Solstice Ensemble, noting that the full Solstice Ensemble was used at times. Can you tell us more about the ensemble and why it is so prominently featured on the album?

Earley: At Choral Scholars of University College Dublin, we have a history of collaboration with professional groups on previous releases with Signum Classics. Solstice Ensemble is a professional group comprising instrumentalists and singers. And, you know, some of

my own graduates are doing work with that group now, which is meaningful to me.

Another reason it is useful to include instruments is that the responsibility for motoric and harmonic elements of the music can be removed from the choir. Accompaniment aids singers with intonation, which can help keep a recording session dancing along, which is great! In an unaccompanied piece, the harmonic and motoric responsibility is solely on the shoulders of the singers, but when working with the combined colors

Track	Title	Poem	Composer	Nationality	Voicing	Instrumentation
10	Sleep now, oh sleep now	XXXIV	Natasa Paulberg	Australia	SSAATBarB (sometimes SATB)	as, bc, fag, hn, hp, v, vc, cb
11	Dear heart, why will you use me so?	XXIX	Dale Trumbore	USA	SSATTBarB (often SATBarB)	bc
12	Silently, she's combining	XXIV	Desmond Earley	Ireland	SS soli (duet), SATB coro	as, bc, fag, hn, hp, v, vc, cb +harp
13	In the dark pinewood	XX	Elaine Agew	Ireland	SSAAATTBarB (*A splits into three parts)	hn
14	Because your voice was at my side	XVIII	Kevin Whymys	Ireland	A solo, SATTBarB coro	hp, cb +guitar
15	Now, oh now, in this brown land	XXXIII	Laura Shells	Ireland	SSAATTBarB	as, bc, fag, hn, hp, v, vc, cb +guitar
16	My love is in a light attire	VII	Ēriks Ešvalds	Latvia	SATBarB	vc
17	Lean out the window, Goldenhair	V	Joceyln Hagen	USA	SSATB	v, vc, cb
18	My dove, my beautiful one	XIV	Seán Doherty	Ireland	SSAATTBB	clar, fag, hn, hp, v, vc, cb

of the instrumental group, more possibilities present themselves for textural contrast and variation of timbre.

Scheibe: Did the composers choose the instruments? Did you give them a palette of instruments, or did you add instruments to what they wrote?

Earley: Each composer was offered use of the entire palette of Solstice Ensemble's lineup. Some composers chose the entire group: alto saxophone, oboe, cor anglais, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, horn, harp, guitar, and three strings (violin, cello, and contrabass). It's a nice combination to add the full instrumental ensemble to the choral timbre, providing an "untexted" expression.

Other composers picked one or more instruments rather than the full ensemble. Dale Trumbore's setting of "Dear heart, why will you use me so?" (Poem XXIX) uses the bass clarinet. The text is dark and shadowy, and to have the sound of that darkness represented by the bass clarinet worked extremely well, evoking a serpentine element in a poem about a "shadowy garden."

Scheibe: I noticed several scores had a new date, so it was apparent you had revised the scores. Were those revisions done after you'd worked with the ensemble? Were you revoicing to make things stronger for the ensemble you had in front of you? Was there ever a need to contact a composer about their writing for the voices or instruments?

Earley: My training as a baroque musician has taught me to think about who the exact player (person) is sitting at the music desk. For example, questions such as, *who* was the instrumentalist who played for Handel or *who* played for Bach? These composers—being acclaimed instrumentalists in their own right, composer-musicians—thought about the musician's capabilities for whom they were composing at the time. It's the same thing here. For this project, I continually asked myself, who will play this line? When the capability of the player and the sound that they make is known to you, you can introduce change and flourishes that

bring the piece to life even more.

With a living composer, it really is so exciting to collaborate, to have the piece really sparkle. I asked every composer at the outset if they would be happy enough for me to come back if there was anything that might require revision or tweaking for this specific ensemble; I wanted to be respectful. It might only have been a single note or a phrase, or it might have been significant, but each time we agreed to a change, I produced a new edition with new parts. These were dated accordingly and printed on a different colored paper so that we could identify them easily and make sure everyone was using the same edition in a rehearsal or recording session.

Scheibe: You did some rewriting as well in some of the choral writing, adding in baritone lines or some second soprano lines where you needed a little more... voice, I think, in there. And you had no problem with any of your composers saying, oh, I don't like that?

Earley: I was very fortunate. Every composer was open to collaborating, even those who had never worked with us before. For one composer, this kind of collaboration was a new experience, and I think—at first—they were a little defensive until they realized that we were really working to have their incredible piece fit our ensemble like a glove. Then I think they were happy. As a composer myself, I understand why any composer would be protective of their work. I appreciate all of it.

Scheibe: Do you think the Irish composers have a different view of Joyce—reading the poems with an understanding of their cultural heritage—and that perhaps those you've commissioned from, for example, Latvia or Australia or the United States do not? Is there a different writing?

Earley: As to whether non-Irish and Irish composers treated the texts differently from each other, I would say they all treated the texts with consideration, particularly when thinking of questions of inflection or syllabic stress or in musically painting the direction of a poetic line.

Joyce had deep Irish roots, but as I mentioned ear-

lier, he also had a life lived outside Ireland. This is why I ensured for the first volume release that half of the composers were Irish—so that they could speak to the Irish sensibility—and the other half were from beyond our shores. I like to think Joyce would appreciate this decision.

I had been working on this project for years, researching and planning. As a composer myself, I had set a couple of Joyce's poems. I thought, why not kick off this project by commissioning a well-known international composer? So we invited Ēriks Ešņvalds, and out of the thirty-six poems, he chose "My love is in a light attire" (Poem VII).

Scheibe: Did the other composers you selected follow that same process when choosing a poem to set?

Earley: Typically, I offered three texts and asked each composer to pick one. That seems to have worked well, but as we go through the project, it's going to become more difficult as the number of available poems decreases.

Scheibe: Can you tell me about one of the composers you invited from the United States?

Earley: It was a great delight to have American composer Jocelyn Hagen write a piece for the project. Jocelyn's setting of "Lean out of the window, Goldenhair" (Poem V) creatively captures the vibrant spirit and playful romanticism inherent in Joyce's poem. She told me that she aimed explicitly to convey "the sensation of a cool wind blowing through their hair and the joy and excitement of meeting someone new," and her composition beautifully realizes this vision. She employs sophisticated scoring for string trio (violin, cello, and double bass) and integrates elements reminiscent of energetic American folk music—to my ear, at least—creating a spirited and engaging atmosphere. Her intimate understanding of both vocal and string-writing techniques allows her to craft intricate passagework and lively rhythmic patterns. Jocelyn describes "Goldenhair" as a "delightful dance," and her string instrumentation significantly heightens the playful exuberance (Figure 1 on the next page).

Additionally, her setting subtly acknowledges Joyce's sophisticated intertextuality, particularly the potential reference within Joyce's poem to Dante's *Inferno*, *Canto V*:

- Dante (Inf. V. 137–138): *Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse: quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.* "Galeotto was the book and he who wrote it: / that day we read there no further."
- Joyce (Ch. Music. V. 5–6): "My book was closed, / I read no more."

The numeric alignment—this poem being the fifth in Joyce's collection and Dante's fifth canto—invokes a literary and symbolic resonance, echoing Dante's epiphanic treatment of courtly love literature. Jocelyn enriches the listening experience, not only capturing the immediate joy of romantic encounter, but also embedding a deeper, reflective dimension that resonates with Joyce's own complex literary allusions. (Listen to a sample of this track by scanning the QR code on page 8.)

Scheibe: Are there other composers from the United States involved in Volume 1?

Earley: David Walters chose "O cool is the valley now" (Poem XVI), Dale Trumbore chose "Dear heart, why will you use me so?" (Poem XXIX), Damien Geter set "Gentle lady, do not sing" (Poem XXVIII), Tim Stephens composed music for "When the shy star goes forth in heaven" (Poem IV). All of these composers connected with the music in Joyce's text. I really appreciated their willingness to dig into and understand the text.

Scheibe: Can you speak about David Walters and his setting?

Earley: Atlanta-based composer David Walters chose strings and French horn for his setting (Figure 2 on page 15). A slow-burning cello solo introduces David's atmospheric miniature, immediately evoking a profound sense of longing and nostalgia. Joined gradually by violin, double bass, and horn, this instrumental introduction gently envelops the listener. When the choir enters, its homophonic texture emerges softly, heightening the

Chamber Music by James Joyce: A Choral Commissioning Project

8
S *mf*
Lean out of the win - dows, Gold - en -

Vln. *f*
Vlc. *mf* pizz. *mp*
Cb. *mf* *mp*

10
S
A hair, *Tutti mf*
Lean out of the win - dow, Gold - en - hair,

Vln. *mp* *mf* 3
Vlc. *mf*
Cb. *mf*

12
S
A I hear you sing - ing Ah...
T *mf*
B *mf*
I hear you sing - ing A mer - ry air.

Vln. 3
Vlc. *mf*
Cb. *mf*

Figure 1. Jocelyn Hagen, *Goldenhair*, mm. 8–14.
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♩. = ca. 55, with wistfull affection

Piano *pp*

4

♩. = ca. 65

7 **A**

S *p* *still* *mp* *pp*
 O cool is the val - ley now

A *p* *still* *mp* *pp*
 O cool is the val - ley now

T *p* *still* *mp* *pp*
 O cool is the val - ley now

B *p* *still* *mp* *pp*
 O Cool is the val - ley now

A *ppp* *p*

♩. = ca. 65

Figure 2. David Walters, *O Cool Is The Valley Now*, mm. 1–11.
 Copyright © 2022 by David Walters. Used by permission.

sense of melancholy. The instrumental accompaniment momentarily recedes into an organ-like timbre, reinforcing the reflective quality. David then strategically foregrounds the cello and violin once more, intensifying the piece's emotional depth before the choir's dramatic proclamation—"for many a choir is singing now"—pierces the introspection. His music thoughtfully mirrors the poem's tension between memory and loss, deliberately resisting resolution. (Listen to a sample of this track by scanning the QR code on page 8.)

Scheibe: I note as well that you were inspired to set one of the poems yourself. Can you tell us about Poem XXIV "Silently, she's combing, combing her long hair?"

Earley: This poem evoked an image of the Rapunzel story for me, with an imagined mirror (in my mind's eye), suggesting a duet structure about the choir: one soprano line the person, the other the reflection.

Silently she's combing,
Combing her long hair,
Silently and graciously,
With many a pretty air.

I wanted to create a sonic mirror that suggests two selves: a literal reflection and a metaphorical introspection. Hopefully the vocal interplay mirrors this duality, enhancing the reflective atmosphere. Joyce's poetic reference to "witchery" later in the poem gave me the idea to include a harpsichord. In this context the sound of the harpsichord—other than the fact that it is my primary instrument—evokes a magical ambiance.

Another reason I included the harpsichord is because an engraving of one appears on the half-title page of the Elkin Mathews first edition (Photo 1). Because I used the entire Solstice Ensemble (plus harpsichord), I could introduce a tonal shift during an instrumental interlude, which features a lyrical French horn solo, momentarily shifting the piece's emotional center to add harmonic contrast and depth.

The Recording Sessions

Scheibe: How do you plan the recording sessions?

Earley: We typically schedule five three-hour sessions each recording patch, starting on an evening, which allows for sound balance, fixing the mics, etc. This is usually followed by two full days of recording. You know, the tradition—or the way we do it anyway, certainly in Ireland and in the UK—is a three-hour session with a twenty-minute break included in the middle of the session. This is then followed by lunch, then another three-hour session with a break in the middle. There

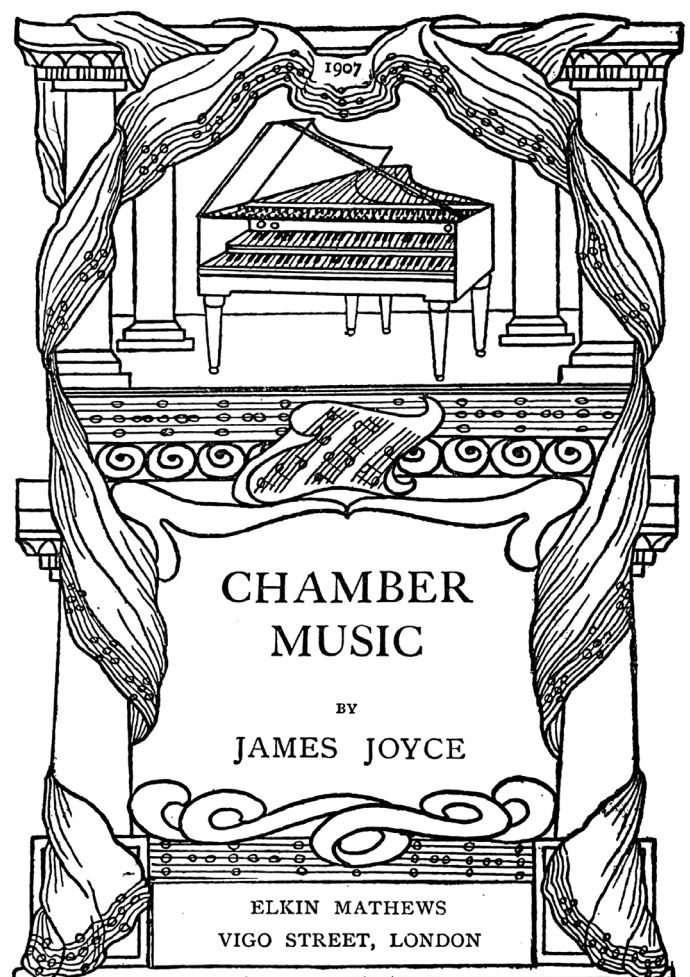


Photo 1. Title page of the original Chamber Music collection.

are generally two three-hour sessions per day. You could have three sessions if you wanted, but you have to pace it so that the singers are not burnt out by the next day.

The whole experience is great for the students, as they're learning from the professionals. They're listening and collaborating with the engineer, the producer, with me. They get to hear the questions from the professionals and watch the action in real time. They seem to value the experience.

Scheibe: Watching your students work with the pros, as you said, and not only the instrumental pros, but a few of the choral singers in the ensemble as well, was quite wonderful. A number of your students in the session were off-book, and so it was terrific to watch and observe their “buy-in,” if you will, to this entire process and project. And, it seemed to me that you're offering students a window into the professional world of choral music, which is much more difficult, I would think, in Ireland than it is in the States. In many cases in the States, we're trying to establish a choral professional where you walk in and do a concert maybe in Pennsylvania, and then you go to Texas, and then you go to San Diego. This seemed to me like a great experience for a choral singer at the university level in Dublin to reflect and see what they might do when they walk out of university.

I also enjoyed watching Nick Parker and Andrew Mellor, the producer and the engineer, who were positive when they spoke to you, the students, and when they spoke to the instrumentalists. It became a symbiotic relationship, and the students understood that. Have you recorded albums with Nick and Andrew before?

Earley: Every single Signum Classics album I have recorded was with Andrew Mellor, so that amounts to more than a decade of working together. We have a great relationship. He is also the sound engineer for

the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Metropolitan Opera of New York. He has recorded many UK choral groups as well. In the past he has commented that we have a warm, open sound that's quintessentially Irish. He truly cares about our sound.

Add our producer, Nick Parker. I mean, these two guys are like recording royalty, you know? Nick Parker



Rehearsing in Blackrock College Chapel.

has produced I'd venture over a thousand albums. Recording is in his DNA, as his father worked for EMI, etc. Nick once told me that the Beatles sang him “Happy Birthday” when he was four years old in Abbey Road Studios! I love Nick's approach: like me, he's into an organic sound and wants to hear that the music has been internalized and is being emoted. He also strives to make as few edits as possible.

Scheibe: I want to discuss the recording space. I loved the space where you recorded the album in Blackrock College Chapel.

Earley: The Blackrock College Chapel is small. It is narrow, so it should probably come with a warning sign for an acoustician. It is extremely beautiful for unaccompanied repertoire, but it becomes more challeng-

ing as more instruments are added. Thankfully, Andrew Mellor was able to handle the complexities of the space.

Scheibe: Yes. It is a smaller rectangular space. It has an anteroom, or a foyer, in the front. And I love the fact that your recording engineers were not in the room, and they were able to be outside in the back of the sacristy.

Earley: If the engineer and producer are in the same space as the musicians, it becomes muddy in their headphones. They need that isolation so they know if what they are hearing—what the mics are doing or what’s happening in the room—is accurate and clean. Personally, I don’t think anybody should ever record anything with the engineer and producer in the same space as the microphones and musicians.

Scheibe: I agree with you one hundred percent. Not always possible in some venues, but it certainly was there, and it was a great place to sit in back with them and listen to them and hear their banter of what needed to be addressed. What do you believe is the role between conductor, producer, and engineer?

Earley: We all know that a conductor’s job is to get the best out of the performers, both by rehearsing them really well and by gesturing on the night in a way that offers them what they need. Leading up to a recording, of course, the conductor’s job is to rehearse, put an artistic shape on the music, provide nuance, and prepare the musicians.

When you get into the recording session itself, it becomes important to trust your producer, because the producer becomes your ears. They’re on the other side of the microphones and ideally in a different space. The conductor might have the instinct—because of the conductor’s role in rehearsal—to want to say, “No! Let’s just do that again!” or “Let’s not!” It can be challenging for some conductors to trust the producer when they get into a recording studio. Trust is the most important aspect of the producer/conductor relationship, and if you can achieve this, your entire process is elevated.

Scheibe: Who decided where the instruments should

be and the mic placements? Is that all done by your engineer and producer?

Earley: Yes, mostly by the engineer. However, we do collaborate with the players, who sometimes ask to move their position for a particular piece or reason. And it’s always best to accommodate the players and singers if possible. At Blackrock College Chapel, it turned out best to have the instrumentalists face the choir. This demonstrated Andrew’s expertise in managing the space. He folded the space in on itself, in that way.

Scheibe: You’re working primarily with the university ensemble, which changes year to year. So, you had the 2020, 2021, 2022 group, and then you had the 2022 and 2023 group. You basically had a two-year window with COVID in there, but you’ve managed to keep the quality. When you listen to the album, you can’t tell it’s a different group from one piece to another.

Earley: It was essential that there was consistency over the life of the project. Central to my sound-concept of this predominantly student choir is a warm, open, relaxed technique, and this is something that has been cultivated over our twenty-plus years of existence. Vocal coach Síle [pronounced “Sheila”] McCarthy has been instrumental in helping to achieve an identifiable sound. Our approach to teaching the technique of the Choral Scholars to each new class, year after year, also involves having alumni come back to sing with the younger singers. They slot into the sound with ease. It’s also advantageous that Solstice Ensemble includes stellar singers.

Scheibe: I met Síle in the recording session. Desmond, you opened up such a window of opportunity to see the choral conductor and voice teacher cooperating together to produce a great choral recording.

Earley: Yes. Síle has been involved, and the students have been going to her for vocal lessons for the better part of two decades. She is a phenomenal singer in her own right and a renowned educator. She has a very clear sense of performance and how to motivate

students to incorporate emotions in their singing. Síle is usually at our recording patches and has become our shining mother figure in the sessions. She works to get the students to limber up and to relax into the sessions, and it is always wonderful to watch.⁷

The Permissions

Scheibe: Back to the James Joyce *Chamber Music* project. Did you secure licensing to publish these new compositions in print?

Earley: The right to record was woven into the agreement with each composer, so having them with us and Signum Classics was no issue. Some of these composers have their own publishers. I am with Seolta Music as editor of their College Choral Series, and Seolta's executive, Mark Armstrong, is working with the composers so that we might be in a position to release a limited-edition commemorative book of the music. Depending on how those negotiations progress, Mark is making many of these scores available in octavo format.⁸

Scheibe: In closing, can you summarize why you took on such a major project?

Earley: This is really a special project, a once-in-a-lifetime project. The poems are entertaining and musically thrilling, and the new settings are beautiful but also challenging in some cases. As I write in the liner notes of the album, the artists are proud of our unique connection to Joyce's Dublin story. Not only do we hear and create the accents and speech patterns of his literary characters, but we also understand their cultural history. Hopefully, other directors will see fit to include selections in their future programs. It is a pleasure and honor for us to be the first choral ensemble to wrap James Joyce's "suite of songs" in an Irish choral voice. □

NOTES

- ¹ James Joyce in conversation (often cited from a 1953 remark to Claud Sykes), quoted in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce: New and Revised Edition* (Oxford University Press, 1983), 505. See also: Adrian Paterson, "After Music," in *The Poetry of James Joyce Reconsidered*, ed. Marc C. Conner (University Press of Florida, 2012), 127.
- ² This quote is well noted to be attributed to Joyce, although there does not appear to be a specific citation reference for when or to whom he said this.
- ³ *Irish Daily Independent* (May 17, 1904). As quoted in: James Joyce, *James Joyce: A Brief Life*, ed. Richard Ellmann (Oxford University Press, 1982), 16.
- ⁴ James Joyce, *The Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Stuart Gilbert and Richard Ellmann, Vol. 1 (Viking Press and Faber & Faber, 1966), 67. Letter written July 19, 1909.
- ⁵ James Joyce, *The Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Stuart Gilbert and Richard Ellmann, Vol. 3 (Viking Press and Faber & Faber, 1966), 340. See also: Axel Klein, "The Influence of James Joyce on Irish Composers," paper presented at the Contemporary Music Centre's ReJoyce in Music Seminar (June 2004), <https://www.cmc.ie/features/distant-music-mournfully-murmereth-influence-james-joyce-irish-composers>.
- ⁶ This project was funded over many years from some operating budget taken from each year, from some special internal university funds for which the ensemble applied, and with some help from private donors. See album liner notes for more specifics on the funding acknowledgments.
- ⁷ There were two composers present during the recording sessions: Tim Stephens traveled from Oregon. Kevin Whyms played on his own composition.
- ⁸ Seolta Music, <https://www.seoltamusic.com/collections/chamber-music-james-joyce>. The website also refers anyone interested in these settings to the composers or publisher's websites for this project so that all scores can be found by the reader for purchase.



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.

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Cantonese Choral Music: From Lack of Interest to Rising Prominence

by Michelle Kwok

Over the past decade, there has been increased scholarly attention toward Chinese choral works.¹ Much of the research, however, centers around works sung in Mandarin Chinese. Although Cantonese is one of the official languages spoken in Hong Kong, Cantonese choral works have not been a prominent genre in choral performances. Until 2000, most of the choral repertoire in Hong Kong consisted of either Western works or Chinese works performed in Mandarin. Between 1998 and 1999, Daniel P. L. Law from the Chinese University of Hong Kong published an eight-volume work titled *Hong Kong Vocal Music Collection*. Out of approximately one hundred works included in the collection (choral, solo, and chamber music work combined), only five were written in Cantonese.²

Cantonese is mainly an oral language but has slowly grown into a written Chinese vernacular. It is not mutually intelligible with Mandarin, the national language of the People's Republic of China. In terms of official writing, the grammar and lexicon are derived from Modern Standard Chinese, which is compatible with Mandarin's written system. In other words, though Mandarin and Cantonese use the same writing system, the same character can be pronounced differently.

Cantonese has a long, vibrant history dating back to the seventh through tenth centuries during the Tang Dynasty. Its rich tonal system makes it one of the most tonal languages in the world. Modern Cantonese preserved many ancient sounds, such as the unreleased final consonants -p, -t, and -k that no longer exist in Mandarin. Currently, there are around 85.5 million Cantonese speakers in the world.³ Cantonese is spoken in the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi, Hong Kong, Macau, and Chinese communities in Singapore, Malaysia, Toronto, Vancouver, Sydney, New York, San Francisco, Ho Chi Minh City, and Kuala Lumpur, among others.⁴

Although the choral scene in Hong Kong was quite active at the end of the twentieth century, Cantonese choral music had yet to become prominent. This is likely due to three reasons: the delayed emergence of a local identity, lack of local composers' interest in setting Cantonese texts, and the difficulty of setting Canton-



ese to music due to pronunciation challenges. There has, however, been a heightened interest in the composition and performance of Cantonese choral works within the Cantonese-speaking community in the last two decades. Since 2019, at least six concerts dedicated to Cantonese choral works have been held in Hong Kong.⁵ The purpose of this article is to investigate the factors behind the delayed development of Cantonese choral music and explore its growing prominence. Resources are offered at the end of the article for those interested in learning more about this genre.

Factors Behind Delayed Development

One. Delayed Emergence of a Local Identity

The combination of British colonization and China's political affairs delayed the development of a local identity in Hong Kong. Cultural critic Chiu Loifat commented that pre-World War II colonial Hong Kong never established a cultural identity independent of China.⁶ Things changed in the 1970s, when Chinese finally became the second official language, along with English, in Hong Kong.⁷ Postwar baby boomers who grew up and were educated in Hong Kong shifted from a migrant mentality to being in active search for their own identity and sense of belonging in Hong Kong.⁸ It was only then that the call for local cultural art started to emerge. In the 1970s, Cantopop, a contraction of "Cantonese pop music," became increasingly popular in Asian countries, reaching its height between the 1980s and 1990s. Cantonese choral art music, however, was slow to develop.

Two. Lack of Composer Interest

Multiple factors led to composers' lack of interest in Cantonese choral music writing in the late twentieth century. First, the British government had no concrete policies to promote Cantonese cultural development in Hong Kong. During British rule, music development was promoted by churches and individual musicians. The repertoire performed by church choirs and missionary organizations mainly served liturgical purposes, focusing on preexisting Western music, and was only occasionally translated into Chinese text for evan-

gelical purposes.

When Chinese musicians immigrated to Hong Kong from China in the 1950s, most of them only knew Mandarin. They did not know Cantonese and thus did not compose works in the language. The political background of China's resistance against Japan created a trend for composing patriotic pieces in Mandarin. Some examples of these political works include "Protect China" (保衛中華) and "Full River Red" (滿江紅) by Lin Shengyi (林聲翕). Between the 1950s and 2000s, a second and third generation of Chinese composers completed their studies and wrote music in various genres. Although choral works existed, most of these composers' musical output was instrumental, chamber, or traditional Chinese music. Any choral works of the period were mostly in Mandarin, not Cantonese.

Three. Difficulty of Setting Cantonese Text to Choral Music

Cantonese is a tonal language, meaning the pitch or pitch pattern to which a syllable is pronounced is crucial to understanding the word's meaning.⁹ Words are differentiated by the change of pitches. One must raise, maintain, or lower the relative pitch to accurately pronounce the words. Unlike musical tones, linguistic tones are not set at an absolute pitch. Instead, the change of pitches is relative. Although Cantonese and Mandarin share the same written characters, they cannot be set to music in the same manner. While both are tonal languages, Cantonese has two more tones than Mandarin. Using melodies initially set for Mandarin to sing texts in Cantonese creates a problem of unintelligibility. A classic malapropism can be heard in the first three words of Paul Paino's hymn "He's Able" (Figure 1). The first three notes of the tune are *sol-do-do*, sung on the text *zhǐ* (The Lord) *néng gòu* (is able). If



Figure 1. Paul E. Paino, *He's Able*, mm. 1–4.
New York: John W. Peterson Music Co., 1958

the words are sung with the same upward melodic contour in Cantonese, the meaning differs radically. “The Lord” in Mandarin becomes “pig” in Cantonese, and “is able” in Mandarin sounds like swear words (in a hilarious manner) in Cantonese.

Scholars have commented on the difficulty of setting Cantonese-texted choral music over the last few decades. In the preface of the *Hong Kong Vocal Works Collection*, Law observed:

Cantonese, as a speaking voice, is throaty and the resonance [is] rather flat. But it is very musical in terms of pitch and relative length of each syllable. Composers working with Cantonese lyrics usually have already taken into consideration the intonation problems. It is, however, more difficult to have a more precise phonetic system to romanize the Cantonese words.¹⁰

In his essay “Writing Choral Music in a Tone Language: Problems, Practices, and Potentialities,” Chan Kai-young argued that the scarcity of choral repertoire in Cantonese can be attributed to the constraints that the language has posed on text-setting.¹¹ For Cantonese to be accurately understood in a musical setting, two conditions have to be met: the melodic intervals must align with the lexical contours of the language, and the musical intervals of the words must be optimal.¹² Intervals that are too narrow or wide affect the intelligibility of the word. In European languages like Latin or English, the melodic contour has less impact on the audience’s understanding of the text. For example, regardless of how “Gloria in excelsis Deo” is set to music, the listener still can comprehend the meaning of the text. That is not the case for tonal languages like Cantonese. Thus, it is more challenging to compose in Cantonese than in non-tonal languages.

An Evolving Genre

Despite the many challenges of setting Cantonese to music, there has been increasing interest in creating and performing Cantonese choral works. Two existing databases are available for interested parties to look up choral works with Cantonese text settings: the Data-

base of Cantonese Choral Works by Chan Kai-young¹³ and the Cantonese Christian Choral Database by Leung Yat-hin.¹⁴ Chan’s database documents around three hundred works, and Leung’s database has around nine hundred works.¹⁵ Chan’s database includes contact information for some composers, enabling further exposure to individual composers’ works, and all music on Leung’s website is available for purchase or free download. In the “complete list” of Chan’s database, only one documented work (Chan Kam-biu Joshua’s “Heart of Love”) was written before 2000. Fourteen were written between 2000 and 2009, 124 were written between 2010 and 2019, and seventy-five were written between 2020 and 2024.¹⁶

In the past decade, choirs in Hong Kong have started to commission, program, and promote Cantonese works. This might be linked to the rise of a new generation of local composers and conductors who are interested in promoting the genre to the international community through organizing workshops, presentations, and concerts. Many of them studied music in foreign countries such as the United States and Canada. They share a similar vision of promoting Cantonese choral works to Cantonese-speaking communities outside Hong Kong and to the international choral community who are not yet aware of the genre.



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The Hong Kong Children's Choir, one of the city's foremost children's choirs, regularly commissions pieces by local composers. Currently, the choir has more than twelve books of published works for treble voices, many in Cantonese. They also have available songbooks for sale listed on their website.¹⁷ Some notable collections include *Steve Ho Choral Collections* and *Alex Tam Choral Collections for Treble Voices*. Since 2019 there have been at least six concert programs dedicated to Cantonese choral works by collegiate and community choirs in Hong Kong, including those by the Hong Kong Baptist University Choir (2019), Hong Kong Youth Choir (2021), the Chinese University of Hong Kong (2022, 2025), Fluente Chorus (2024), and Die Konzertisten (2025).¹⁸ These performances consisted of original compositions, commissioned works, and arrangements of Cantonese pop songs.

A conference on Cantonese choral works, "Decoding Cantonese Creativity," was held in Hong Kong in 2023. This three-day conference consisted of lecture-demonstrations, presentations, and concert showcases.¹⁹ The conference also had a call for new Cantonese choral compositions.²⁰ In 2024, musicians in Hong Kong started actively sharing Cantonese choral works internationally. St. Paul Co-educational College performed Alex Tam's "No Woundless World" as one of their four competition pieces at the World Choir Games in 2024.²¹ St. John's Cathedral choir premiered Chan Kai-young's "Love Never Fails" in the United Kingdom in July 2024. In June 2025, the Chinese University of Hong Kong Chorus performed a lecture-recital on Cantonese Choral Music at the Indiana Choral Directors Association's Summer Conference.

Currently, only a few Cantonese pieces for non-native speakers are available in the United States in two separate collections. Both collections include performance notes, a diction guide, and English translations. The first is *Half Moon Rising*, edited by John Winzenburg.²² This collection contains two Cantonese pieces: "Street Calls" by Leung Poon-yin and "Under the Mid-autumn Moon" by Chan Kai-young. The second collection is *Tang Poetry for Choirs*, edited by Richard Tsang.²³ There is one Cantonese piece in this collection, "Autumn Night" by Chan Kam-biu Joshua. Chan Kai-young published a series of his works as *Con-*

straints/Creativity: Cantonese Choral Works für Studienzwecke (Studienpartitur) in 2024.²⁴ The Chinese University of Hong Kong Chorus also publishes individual Cantonese choral octavos on its website.²⁵

Summary

There has been increased interest in Cantonese choral music in the past two decades. However, most choral music performed in Hong Kong before then was performed either in Western European languages or Mandarin, and Cantonese-texted choral music was slower to develop. Cantonese choral works have traditionally been scarce, but there has been a growing demand for this genre since the 2000s. More composers are setting Cantonese texts, while more choirs are performing Cantonese choral works around the world. While this article centers on works composed in Hong Kong, it is worth noting that Cantonese choral works may also originate from other Cantonese-speaking communities such as Singapore, Macau, and Malaysia. One example is "Street Calls" by Singaporean composer Leung Yoon-pin.²⁶

As most existing Cantonese choral works are accompanied, they are suitable for performance by choirs of varying levels. The language itself would usually pose the biggest challenge but could be overcome with a diction guide, which are increasingly provided by composers, especially for works composed after 2015. The author hopes this article can serve as an introduction to Cantonese choral music, and that more musicians and educators will consider programming this beautiful, unique genre. A good starting point would be the two databases mentioned in this article, along with the scores and recordings provided in the notes. ■

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NOTES

¹ Some dissertations on the topic include Hana Cai, "Making

- Chinese Choral Music Accessible in the United States: A Standardized IPA Guide for Chinese-language Works” (DMA diss., Indiana University, 2020); and Pingyi Song, “A New Approach to Mandarin Chinese Lyric Diction in Choral Music” (DMA diss., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2023).
- ² The five pieces are “Niannujiao: Reminiscence at Chibi” by Vincent Yip (Vol. I), “Remapping by Mak Chi-piu” (Vol. VI), “Ave Maria” by Clement Kong (Vol. VI), “Benevolent” by Paul Lau (Vol. VI), “The Lamb that was Slain” by Antonio Riganti (Vol. VI).
- ³ “Frequently Asked Questions,” Cantonese Language Association, Brigham Young University, accessed December 17, 2024, <https://cantoneseLanguageAssociation.byu.edu/frequently-asked-questions>.
- ⁴ Stephen Matthews and Virginia Yip, *Cantonese: A Comprehensive Grammar* (Routledge, 2011), 3.
- ⁵ The information about the concerts is based on research conducted up to June 2025 to the best of the author’s knowledge.
- ⁶ Shin-fung Hung, “From Singing ‘Out-of-Tone’ to Creating Contextualized Cantonese Contemporary Worship Songs: Hong Kong in the Decentralization of Chinese Christianity,” *Religions* 15, no. 6 (2024): 3.
- ⁷ The term Chinese is commonly understood as a written language, versus Mandarin or Cantonese, which are commonly understood as a spoken language.
- ⁸ Hung, “From Singing ‘Out-of-Tone,’” 5.
- ⁹ Matthews and Yip, *Cantonese*, 18.
- ¹⁰ Daniel P. L. Law, *Hong Kong Vocal Music Collection I* (Chinese Christian Literature Council, 1998–1999), x.
- ¹¹ Chan Kai-young, “Writing Choral Music in a Tone Language: Problems, Practices and Potentialities,” *TEMPO* (forthcoming), 3.
- ¹² Chan, “Writing Choral Music,” 3.
- ¹³ “Database of Cantonese Choral Works,” Decoding Cantonese Creativity, last updated May 9, 2024, <https://www.cantoneseComposition.com/canto-choral-database2429126481354412151221809360392600924235.html>.
- ¹⁴ “Cantonese Christian Choral Database,” Christian Renaissance in Motion, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://choirdb.hk/>.
- ¹⁵ Numbers recorded as of January 2025. Leung’s database has more works than Chan’s because many of the works in the Cantonese Christian Choral Database are short hymns in hymnals.
- ¹⁶ Numbers recorded as of January 2025. If there are multiple editions of a work, the latest version is used for calculation. As Chan Kai-young’s database relies heavily on a composer’s submission through a Google form, works written before 2000 might have existed but not been documented.
- ¹⁷ “Songbooks,” Hong Kong Children’s Choir, accessed December 4, 2024, <https://www.hkcchoir.org/en/songbooks>. Prices range from \$8 to \$18 USD.
- ¹⁸ The information about the concerts presented is based on research conducted up to June 2025, to the best of the author’s knowledge. One of the concerts, performed by Fluente Chorus, can be found at https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLO8_dz6noKzo3TUfV1QDjay0U76c5IYix&si=A52U3S6L0zL0PqCf.
- ¹⁹ “Schedule,” Decoding Cantonese Creativity, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://www.cantoneseComposition.com/schedule-2608531243.html>.
- ²⁰ The full concert program of the Decoding Cantonese Creativity conference can be viewed here: Chan Kai-young, “From Constraints to Creativity: Cantonese Choral Showcase 2023,” uploaded November 18, 2013, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-s_7EQvA-s.
- ²¹ To listen to the recording, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_A-CsJdyK5k&list=RD_A-CsJdyK5k&start_radio=1.
- ²² John Winzenburg, ed., *Half Moon Rising: Choral Music from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan* (Peters Edition, 2015).
- ²³ Richard Tsang, ed., *Tang Poetry for Choirs: A collection of original choral compositions by Hong Kong composers based on Tang-Dynasty poetry, Volume II: for mixed and male voices* (InTuition Creative Learning, 2017).
- ²⁴ Chan Kai-young, *Constraints/Creativity: Cantonese Choral Works für Studienzwecke* (Studienpartitur) (Universal Edition, 2024), vocal score.
- ²⁵ “CU Chorus Choral Series,” the Chinese University of Hong Kong Chorus, accessed December 4, 2024, <https://www.cuchorus.org.hk/scores?lang=en>.
- ²⁶ John Winzenburg, ed., *Half Moon Rising: Choral Music from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan* (Edition Peters, 2015).



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.**



Repertoire & Resources

Two-Year College Choirs



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Supporting Transfer Students Between Two- and Four-Year Institutions

by Carolina Flores and Arlie Langager

Music majors at community colleges nationwide represent an increasingly diverse and nontraditional student population. Stronger collaboration between two- and four-year institutions is vital in order to remove existing barriers toward students completing their education; otherwise, we will continue to overlook talented artists who could enrich undergraduate choral programs and shape the future of the choral community.

This concern was central to a panel discussion titled “Reimagining Transitions between Two-Year and Four-Year Colleges” at the 2025 National Collegiate Choral Organization Conference (NCCO11). As moderator, Dr. Arlie Langager invited panelists Dr. Carolina Flores, Dr. Raymund Campo, and Dr. Anne Lyman to share perspectives and solutions for directors of both four-year and two-year programs. Following the NCCO presentation, Dr. Flores invited Dr. Langager

to coauthor this article to share insights and further examine actionable solutions for change.

Core Challenges

In the article “An Examination of Student and Faculty Perceptions Regarding Music Education Transfer Student Preparedness and Experiences,” Natalie Steele Royston and her coauthors shared that “college music faculty members perceived transfer students as unprepared for the rigors of a four-year institution.”¹ Transfer students often deal with challenges outside the classroom, including limited training opportunities prior to transfer, financial pressures, and family obligations that require them to work twenty to thirty hours per week while managing a full course load. While many students succeed within the resources available on campus at a two-year institution, they frequently encounter barriers when transferring to four-year programs.

Even if they’ve completed similar coursework, students may not be used to being around advanced students or navigating a larger campus. They may also have come from programs with fewer options—such as a limited selection of electives and repertoire—resulting in uneven experience levels. Incoming students may struggle with self-confidence, feel isolated, or even feel like they don’t belong at all in a four-year setting. Several additional challenges include:



Repertoire & Resources: Two-Year College Choirs

- Frequent turnover of singers in two-year college choirs, which hinders choral experience growth before transfer.
- Inconsistent transfer articulations between institutions.
- Difficulty acclimating to a new cultural environment.

Shifting Perspectives

As our environment in higher education expands, the key to addressing these challenges is the need for conductors and students to shift their mindset. When conductors shift toward asset-based thinking and away from deficit-based thinking, they see their local community colleges as valuable resources that can enrich, expand, and challenge their programs. That perspective also changes traditional recruitment processes. In addition to recruiting traditional voice majors, conductors should include opportunities to discover students who show potential as music educators (not always demonstrated in a sightreading exercise), who bring expertise in other languages and musical genres (not always apparent in an art song performance), and who bring special life skills and experience (not always apparent on a transcript).

As postsecondary enrollment trends continue to evolve, even traditional recruitment models at four-year institutions may inadvertently overlook some community college populations. For example, a traditional audition might only happen on one long, on-campus day, which can be challenging for working students or caregivers to attend. University conductors could recruit a broader cohort of music students by encouraging expanded student chapter activities to include interested community college students and establish a relationship long before a vocal audition.

Some university conductors we spoke with already have fruitful relationships with their community college conducting peers. They collaborate in joint concerts and tours, and invite their colleagues as judges, clinicians, and guest presenters in their classes. Beyond viewing the local community college solely for recruitment, these four-year conductors recognize the wealth of knowledge and experience in their peers. The choral faculty at all institutions must be persistent and intentional in design-

ing and reviewing curriculum to align with the first two years of nearby four-year degrees. Accreditation with the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) can ensure the program meets national standards and facilitates seamless student transfer. The academic and career guidance community college students receive is critical, and conductors at four-year programs who are familiar with curriculum at both institutions, and who establish early recruitment relationships, will ensure future success.

Most significantly, the mindset of the transferring student is one of the most important indicators of future success. Disproportionately impacted students are most successful when instructors use interventions that aid students in developing a “growth mindset.”

Creating Meaningful Change

Making a shift our mindset also means changing how we do things. Below are some ideas university conductors can implement to support transferring students:

- *Structured orientation for transfer students:* Take time to identify what a new student can expect to experience in your ensemble and clearly communicate expectations for upperclassmen.
- *Peer mentoring:* Student leaders in choirs may not always be older than incoming transfer students, so consider matching students with peers who share other demographics or backgrounds.
- *Modification, not remediation:* Isolating transfer students in remedial coursework is usually not as effective as finding ways to support singers within the ensemble through structured or small-group work.
- *Articulation agreements:* Reach out to community college colleagues for specific degree plans, and advocate for articulation between colleges and universities.
- *Collaborative opportunities:* Find ways to work with other institutions and choral organizations such as sharing resources and performances spaces.

Conductors at community colleges can also contribute to the successful preparation for transfer by:

- Offering masterclasses and professional mentorship.
- Expanding performance collaborations within the community at large.
- Seeking partnerships with local professional and semi-professional ensembles. These collaborations can give community college choirs access to annual performances of major orchestral works, an opportunity typically reserved for university programs.
- Create and advise a music club or a two-year ACDA student chapter.
- Pursue grants and other avenues of funding for student travel or community collaborations.

Collaborative Opportunities


Choral singing is all about community—an art form built on working together, including everyone, and sharing a common purpose. That’s why collaboration isn’t just helpful; it’s a game-changer for growing programs. When choirs team up, students get the chance to sing alongside other musicians, expand their networks, and gain confidence. These experiences make singers feel connected and proud, turning the choir into a real community where everyone belongs.

Community college choirs can join forces with university choirs, community groups, or even church choirs for tours and performances. These partnerships create amazing intergenerational ensembles and give students opportunities they might not have otherwise. Collaborations show how powerful community partnerships can be. They bridge the gap between school and the professional arts world, giving students experiences that stay with them, boosting confidence, creating lifelong connections, and inspiring a love for music that lasts and nurtures passionate singers who will keep advocating for choral music for years to come.

Conclusion

To ensure our choral field becomes larger, richer, and more inclusive, we need to create smoother transitions for community college students. To make this happen, we must be willing to reimagine what success looks like, and at the heart of that work is a shift in mindset.

Every student deserves the chance to thrive, and accessibility for all students must be a priority if we truly seek a more equitable world. This means breaking down barriers, rethinking traditional audition processes, engaging with transfer curricula and articulation, committing to student-centered teaching, and collaborating. We can dismantle systemic obstacles and provide transformative experiences that empower students to succeed by working together across institutions. These partnerships strengthen the talent pipeline, enrich educational journeys, and create choral programs that reflect the diversity and richness of our communities.

Our responsibility as educators goes beyond training future professionals. It includes nurturing lifelong advocates for choral music—individuals who will carry the art forward with passion and purpose. Together, we can build a choral landscape where every student feels seen, supported, and inspired. 

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NOTES

¹ Natalie Steele Royston, Philip D. Payne, Adrian D. Barnes, and Kate Bertelli-Wilinski, “An Examination of Student and Faculty Perceptions Regarding Music Education Transfer Student Preparedness and Experiences,” *Research & Issues in Music Education* 16, no. 1 (2021): 22. <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/rime/vol16/iss1/5>



Four-Year University Choirs



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The Growing Voice: Collegiate Voice Students and the Large Ensemble

by Matthew Myers

One of the many joys of working with choral ensembles is witnessing singers' growth over time. Choral directors often work with the same students for several years and see them develop from beginners to leaders. Whereas middle school and high school choral directors typically work with students through their voice changes, college directors meet students whose voices are a bit more stable in range—though they are still bound to develop and change rapidly.

The experience levels of singers in a non-auditioned college ensemble can be especially vast: the ensemble may include new music majors with years of performance experience, nonmajors who have been in choir for several years and may have taken voice lessons, some instrumental music majors who read music well but have never sung in a formal setting, and some beginners who have always wanted to learn to sing and signed up for the class as an arts credit. The ensemble will grow together and develop skills over the semester, and then in January the ensemble will look completely different as some students move into another choir, some remain, and some new students arrive.

The ever-changing landscape of the choir is a challenge for the conductor, but it also provides opportunities to establish a baseline of vocal training that is helpful for both beginners and seasoned singers. For many of the non-music majors, their choral directors serve as their only music professors, so we can provide them opportunities to grow in all the standards of music education. For the music majors, they may be in as many as eight to ten classes with different music professors and will gain a wealth of knowledge and perspectives. Their voice lessons, like choir, will provide them with consistent work with a mentor they will have for a few

years. Developing a positive relationship with the voice students and their teachers can improve the learning and performing opportunities for all students in the choir.

Many voice majors come into their college studies with a wealth of experience in their middle school and high school choirs, with stage experience from musical theatre and a performance background from solo/ensemble contest, but many of them have never had a private voice lesson. As they enter their weekly voice studies as college students, their voices often grow rapidly in size and range, and sometimes this can cause confusion, as the way they sing in an ensemble begins to feel different. They experience cognitive dissonance and may grow frustrated when their voice doesn't work in the same way it once did. Rather than shying away from these changes, we should embrace them and talk about them regularly! Singing in choir, whether it is twice a week or five times a week, is a great way for these students to develop their skills, and a repertoire with varied ranges, tessituras, languages, articulations, and styles will help them to grow in each part of their voice. Differentiating collegiate choir instruction to help individual singers grow will enhance the variety of tone colors the choir can draw upon in their repertoire.

One challenge of working with young voice students is the concept of a stable voice type. A student who enters college having only ever sung alto in choir may soon realize with their voice teacher that they ought to work on soprano repertoire in voice lessons. This student may still feel most successful singing alto parts in choir or may benefit from switching to soprano II. This could change after a semester. Most students can successfully sing several voice parts without causing strain or vocal damage, and this may need to change by the year or by the semester depending on their vocal growth as well as the needs of the ensemble.

It can be particularly helpful to encourage students to identify themselves just as singers rather than growing attached to their voice types (e.g., "Susie Jones, voice" rather than "Susie Jones, mezzo-soprano"). It is also helpful for the whole choir to understand that many alto I's will perform soprano literature in voice lessons,

many tenor II's will perform baritone literature in voice lessons, and so on. The solo voice type and choral part do not need to—and often should not—match. The voice type may also shift as the voice continues to develop. To ensure that students do not feel pigeonholed into one voice part, listen to their voices each semester or quarter and record their ranges and comfortable tessituras. This is a great way to observe their growth and document it quantitatively, as so many elements of their growth are more qualitative.

Another challenge of working with students with differing experience levels is finding a uniform level of projection within the choir. Some students, in their attempt to “blend,” use only a small portion of their vocal power most of the time and may not even be heard within the choral texture. On the contrary, some students in voice lessons may use their fullest dy-

namics most of the time, as they have learned to create more colorful and powerful sounds in their lessons. To achieve a uniform sound, singers do not all need to sing “off the voice.” A first step toward a more unified sound can be to encourage the singers with smaller voices to sing out more. When they can be heard within the choir, the larger voices will not stick out as much. It is also vitally important to take the choir through a voice placement process to match the tone qualities of the singers with those around them. (I highly recommend viewing Weston Noble’s “Achieving Choral Blend through Standing Position” and Charlene Archibeque’s “How to Make a Good Choir Sound Great” to get some examples of how to implement a voice placement process.)

When the voices have been matched across their sections, the students with bigger voices will be able

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to project healthily without sticking out of the choir, and the students with lighter voices will be able to hear themselves. Of course, there may be a student or two who projects beyond the dynamics in the score, and an individual recommendation for that student to back off a bit can be helpful. Often, using a mathematical percentage (“10% less sound on this note”) can guide them to match the desired dynamic better than simply saying “softer” (which could result in them singing at half voice).

Students who are in voice lessons and choir may have more music to memorize in a semester than they ever imagined might be on their plates. Singers love to get involved in many aspects of music making, and some will find themselves in multiple choirs, an opera or musical theatre production, an a cappella group, and a paid church position. They may have forty or more pieces to memorize within a semester. If they haven’t yet developed solid practice habits, this can feel extremely overwhelming. Luckily, we as choral directors can help them build the skills to manage all the music on their plates without burning out—or losing their voices.

First, prioritizing music literacy in choir is vital to students’ ability to learn their music efficiently. While some choral students will likely be concurrently enrolled in music theory and ear training, many are not, so even two minutes of sight singing in a choral rehearsal could prove helpful in building and maintaining the literacy skills they need to learn their music. Second, we can teach the music in a streamlined manner that promotes retention and mitigates the need for copious additional memorization practice. By teaching the music in small enough “chunks” and regularly rehearsing the transitions from one section to the next, we make the memorization process easier. In-class memory checks midway through the rehearsal process can also help more than simply expecting students to have everything memorized by concert week. Giving them different memorization dates for each piece can lower the pressure and help focus their practice as well. These memorization techniques can work just as well for the students as they learn the music for their other performance opportunities; sometimes it can be helpful to give them a quick reminder to transfer this knowledge from the choral re-

hearsal to the practice room.

Another way to assist students who are taking voice lessons is to speak the language of the voice teacher in choir. When rehearsing pieces in other languages, provide International Phonetic Alphabet guides. This will help them to build their diction skills and can save a lot of time that would otherwise be spent speaking every syllable repeatedly. Be aware of the transition spots in students’ vocal ranges and be prepared to offer vowel modification options so that they can sing healthily and without strain in those challenging spots. Stay current on vocal pedagogy by attending voice-based sessions at your next ACDA conference or attend a NATS conference to deepen your knowledge. Reminding singers that their voice is one instrument used in both choir and voice lessons—not two distinct voices—will help to mitigate the cognitive dissonance they undergo as college voice students.

It is a unique pleasure to be able to work with a student from the time they enter your school until their graduation. From a student’s first college choir audition to their final voice recital, their voice will grow immensely in size and flexibility. Being part of that vocal growth is an honor that should not be taken for granted. Helping students to maximize their individual development within the group setting of choir is a challenge, but in time, it will improve the sound of your choir, assist in positive relationship building between choral and vocal areas, and provide a more structured growth experience for the singer. 

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In Memoriam

Michael Wade (1949–2025)



Michael “Mike” Wade passed away in October 2025 at the age of seventy-six. Mike was a dedicated high school choir director at Crown Point High School and Elkhart Memorial High School, where his choirs advanced to the final round of state-level competition on numerous occasions. He often appeared as a guest conductor at middle and high school level choral festivals and frequently served as an adjudicator at both solo/ensemble and choral contests. In his capacity as music coordinator for the Crown Point Community School Corporation, he spearheaded creation of the string/orchestra program.

He served on the boards of Indiana Music Educators Association and Indiana Choral Directors Association. In his role as president of the American Choral Directors Association’s Central Region, he presided over the 1986 Region Con-

ference, served on the national board, and later served as region archivist.

Mike was actively involved in local choral ensembles and community theater productions. He was a charter member of Playmakers in Crown Point and a member of the South Bend Chamber Singers and St. Joseph Camerata Singers. He served as the choir director for over thirty years at First Congregational Church in Elkhart.

After his retirement, he continued to share his love for music by directing the Elkhart Community Chorus for several years, teaching private voice lessons at Elkhart Memorial and Penn High Schools, as well as teaching as an adjunct professor at Indiana University South Bend, Valparaiso University, and Saint Mary’s College at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

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The ACDA Soprano-Alto Choirs National Commission Consortium

by Erin Plisco

The ACDA Soprano-Alto Choirs National Commission Consortium is a long-standing collaborative initiative through which treble choirs pool financial and artistic resources to commission new works specifically designed for soprano-alto ensembles. By distributing the cost of commissioning across many participating ensembles, the consortium makes the creation of high-quality new repertoire both feasible and accessible, while ensuring that the resulting works enter immediate and widespread performance circulation.

Founded in 2007 by Debra Spurgeon, then the ACDA SSAA R&R chair, the consortium was conceived to address the relative scarcity of advanced, high-quality repertoire for treble choirs. Since its inception, the consortium has convened nearly every year, continuing under the leadership of Iris S. Levine and later Phillip Swan, with a brief pause in 2020 through 2023. Participating directors and ensembles contribute a commission fee, which grants them access to and performance rights for the works created through that specific consortium cycle.

At its core, the consortium exists to promote the creation of new treble choir literature by established composers while providing choirs with an affordable and meaningful opportunity to engage directly in the commissioning process. By focusing exclusively on soprano-alto choirs, the consortium addresses a long-standing imbalance in the availability of repertoire and affirms the artistic legitimacy of treble ensembles across educational and community contexts.

Commissioned Works, 2007–2019

The ACDA Soprano-Alto (formerly Women's/SSAA) Choirs Consortium has generated a substantial and stylistically diverse body of repertoire by many of today's leading choral composers. Following is a list of the commissioned works between 2007 and 2019:

2007 – *Softly, Little Child* by Daniel Gawthrop

2008 – *The Singing Place* by Joan Szymko

2010 – *Tundra* by Ola Gjeilo

2010 – *Reasons for the Perpetuation of Slavery*
by Elizabeth Alexander

2011 – *Moon Goddess* by Jocelyn Hagen

2011 – *Chapo Pou Fanm* by Sydney Guillaume

2011 – *Leshana Haba'a BiYerushalyam*,
arr. Shawn Kirchner

2012 – *Full Fathom Five* by Paul Carey

2012 – *Flare* by Dale Trumbore

2012 – *Carmel Highlands* by Daniel Kallman

2013 – *I Want to Die While You Love Me*
by Rosephanye Powell

2013 – *Yellow Twig of Willow* by Stephen Smith

2013 – *Mother O' Mine* by Lauren McLaren

2014 – *Truth* by Andrea Ramsey

2014 – *Spring Shall Bloom* by Susan LaBarr

2014 – *A Blessing of Cranes* by Abbie Betinis

2015 – *Patito* by Gabriela Frank

2015 – *Two Friends Like Fireflies* by Joseph Gregorio

2015 – *I Have a Voice* by Moira Smiley

2016 – *At the Heart of Our Stillness* by Kathleen Allan

2016 – *Patterns on the Snow* by Mari Esabel Valverde

2016 – *Rise Up!* by Jake Runestad

2017 – *Fall, Sweet Music* by Eric William Barnum

2017 – *I Am the Wind* by Elaine Hagenberg

2017 – *You Are the Light of the Stars* by Joanne Metcalf

2019 – *Lux Veritatis* by Daniel J. Hall

2019 – *We Are the Ones* by Marie-Claire Saindon

The 2024–2025 Consortium: Scale, Community, and Renewal

The consortium was reactivated in 2024 with the intention of commissioning two to three new works, contingent on participation levels. The response from the choral community far exceeded expectations: more than 130 ensembles from across the United States elected to participate, resulting in an unprecedented thirteen newly commissioned works for treble choirs.

This extraordinary level of participation speaks to the vitality of the ACDA Soprano-Alto community and to a shared, collective commitment to shaping the

future of the repertoire. The scale of the 2024–25 consortium reflects a field-wide recognition that repertoire development is a communal responsibility—one best undertaken collaboratively rather than individually. In this way, the consortium functions not merely as a funding mechanism but as a model of artistic citizenship, fostering connection, shared ownership, and long-term investment in the treble choral tradition.

A defining feature of the 2024–25 consortium was the introduction of two distinct commissioning tracks: one for developing ensembles and one for advanced ensembles. This model was designed to broaden participation and ensure that newly commissioned works address the pedagogical and artistic needs of a wide range of treble choirs.

Developing Ensemble Consortium

- Cristian Grases, *Cha Cha Cha Elemental*
For SS or SSA choir and piano (alto part optional for two-part version)
- Daniel Brinsmead, *Paper Plane*
For SA choir with optional descant and piano
- Sherry Blevins, *To Run in the Wild*
For two-part treble choir and piano
- Tracy Wong, *I Am Here*
For three-part treble choir, piano, and optional audience participation

Advanced Ensemble Consortium

- Ambrož Čopi, *When Wistful Swings Forget to Dream...*
Three songs for SSAA and piano:
I. “Spring Rains”
II. “There Will Come Soft Rains,”
III. “Evening Rain”
- Carlos Cordero, *Thaima*
For SSAA a cappella

- Hyowon Woo, *Sul-lae-don-da* (솔래돈다)
For double SSAA choir with piano
- Jennifer Lucy Cook, *Fair-Weather Friend*
For SSAA a cappella
- Kyle Pederson, *Are You Listening?*
For SSAA with piano and optional soprano saxophone or clarinet
- Laura Jēkabsons, *The Winds*
For unaccompanied SSAA choir, soprano solo, rain stick, and bass drum
- Matthew Lyon Hazzard, *The Redwood*
For SSAA choir and piano
- Melissa Dunphy, *nymphs*
For SSAA choir with piano and güiro
- Reginal Wright, *Songs for the People*
For SSAA choir and piano

Looking Ahead: The 2026–2027 Consortium

Plans are underway for the 2026–27 ACDA Soprano-Alto Choirs National Commission Consortium, continuing the dual-track model for developing and advanced ensembles. The number of works commissioned will again be determined by participation levels, with composers announced by the fall of 2026. Upon completion, each participating choir will receive manuscript copies with the right to reproduce materials for premiere performances, and all ensembles and directors will be acknowledged in the published scores and on the ACDA Soprano-Alto Choirs webpage.

How to Participate

The call for participating choirs will be announced on the Soprano-Alto choirs R&R page and in the ACDA e-newsletter in the coming months. Submit the call for participation for the project of your choice when it becomes available. An invoice will be sent to

the director/organization following the close for participation. The submitting director must be an active, retired, or life member of ACDA in order to participate. For questions, contact Erin Plisco (erinplisco@missouristate.edu).

Concluding Reflection

As choral musicians continue to examine questions of equity, representation, and sustainability within the repertoire, the ACDA Soprano-Alto Choirs National Commission Consortium offers a compelling model for collective action. Its history demonstrates that meaningful repertoire development does not need to rely solely on individual institutions or isolated commissions but can emerge through shared investment and collaborative vision.

The extraordinary participation in the most recent consortium underscores the strength and cohesion of the treble choral community. When more than 130 ensembles commit resources to a single commissioning initiative, the result is a remarkable body of new literature and a reaffirmation of the artistic value of treble choirs at every level. Through its longevity, adaptability, and remarkable recent participation, the ACDA Soprano-Alto Choirs National Commission Consortium stands as a powerful example of how collective action can meaningfully shape the artistic future of choral singing. We look forward to seeing what we can do in 2026 and beyond. ■

Erin Plisco is associate director of choral studies and associate professor of music at Missouri State University. erinplisco@missouristate.edu

Singing Through the Ages

ACDA

MINNEAPOLIS

MARCH 7-10

2027

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE!

Calls for Performing Choirs, Interest Sessions & Insight Choirs open in February 2026.
Full information and deadlines can be found on the following pages.

Honor Choir audition information and deadlines will be released in Summer 2026.

NEW SCHEDULE!

The conference will take place Sunday-Wednesday, opening with a *Welcome to Minneapolis* concert in the evening on Sunday, March 7.

Full conference offerings begin in the morning on Monday, March 8.

The conference concludes in the early afternoon with Honor Choir performances on Wednesday, March 10.

Additional *free* post-conference offerings will be available in the late afternoon on Wednesday, March 10, for all who wish to remain in town.

Visit acda.org/conferences for the most up-to-date information.



Submission Guidelines for Performing Choirs 2027 ACDA National Conference Minneapolis, MN March 7-10, 2027

The 2027 National Conference theme is Singing Through the Ages. We will gather in Minneapolis to celebrate our rich choral heritage, its evolution across time, and our hope for singers to engage in the choral art across their lifespan. We call upon our membership to share performances that demonstrate excellence and expertise highlighting a broad spectrum of choral repertoire, including music prior to 1850, historically excluded composers, and newly commissioned works. We seek applications for performances that will actively engage our ACDA membership. Conductors from all R&R areas are strongly encouraged to apply. It is an important priority that ensembles from every R&R area be seen and heard on the concert stage at this national conference.

I. Eligibility

Conductors must be current members of ACDA at the time of application, registration, and performance. For Contemporary A Cappella Scholastic Ensembles with student conductors, conductors or faculty advisors must be current members of ACDA at the time of application, registration, and performance. Scholastic ensembles are defined as ensembles affiliated with an educational institution whose majority membership is made up of students.

Conductors must be employed in the same position with the same organization since fall 2023, excepting student conductors of Contemporary A Cappella Scholastic Ensembles. No choir or conductor may perform on successive national conferences as a performing choir or insight choir. However, a different choir from the same school or organization can submit an audition as long as the conductor is different (e.g., a treble choir from University A is still eligible to audition as a 2027 performing choir if the mixed choir from University A performed at the previous conference, but only if the treble choir conductor is not the same person who conducted the mixed choir and the conductor meets the other eligibility requirements.)

Co-conductors for a particular ensemble will submit ONE application for performance if all of the following conditions apply:

- Both conductors are ACDA members and have been co-conductors of the ensemble for at least three years (since fall 2023)
- Both conductors share an equal or similar leadership role with the ensemble

Each conductor must submit THREE recordings and programs that represent their own performances with the choir. The complete submission (six recordings total—three recordings from each conductor) will be assessed as one performance application. If the application is submitted incorrectly, the ensemble will not be considered. Programs must clearly show that co-conductors have an equal or similar role in performance with the specific ensemble.

Contemporary A Cappella Ensembles and Show Choirs are exempt from the co-conductor recording requirements and will submit only three recordings.

II. Registration and Travel Information

It is understood that ACDA will not assume financial responsibility for travel, food, or lodging for ensembles or directors. Completing the online application implies that the conductor and the ensemble will obtain the necessary funds to travel and perform at the conference if accepted.

Conductors are expected to officially register for the conference at the posted registration rates.

III. Application Process

All materials listed below will be submitted and uploaded through the online platform at www.acda.org. no later than 11:59 pm CST on April 15, 2026. Help desk support is available until 5:00 pm CST on April 15, 2026. After that time, no support will be provided, even if technical issues are encountered. Applicants are encouraged to plan ahead to ensure they can complete the submission process. Late submissions will not be accepted for any reason.

The online platform assigns each submission a number, assuring confidentiality until after the National Adjudication Committee has completed its consideration. At no time will the choir/conductor identity be known to any of the screening committee members. An incomplete upload of the audition materials listed below will not be considered.

The following is the list of requirements for the application:

For all submissions **except** Contemporary A Cappella & Show Choir:

1. A list of your proposed repertoire for the 2027 conference. The proposed program should include the following:
 - a. The title, composer and/or arranger, poet/lyricist, complete publication information for each piece, and website link (if available) to publisher/distributor, and;
 - b. The approximate performance time of each piece. Total program time should not exceed 25 minutes total on stage, including applause.
2. Accepted choirs are expected to perform the program proposed in the application, as the proposed program is evaluated in the final screening rubric.
 - The program should reflect the conference theme by presenting a historic program and/or a combination of eras and styles. Programs highlighting historically excluded and/or twenty-first-century composers are also welcome. Only one manuscript (not commercially available) piece may be included, and a maximum of two pieces by any particular composer may be presented.
 - The proposed repertoire listing must be accurate. Take care to confirm the spelling of titles and names, correct attributions of composers, arrangers, poets/lyricists, and detailed publisher information. An inaccurate submission will impact the final score and may be grounds for disqualification.
 - In the event of a duplicate selection, preference will be given to the application received first. Impacted conductors will be notified and required to make a substitution in their program; failure to do so by the deadline will result in cancellation of the invitation to perform.
 - In special circumstances, the Conference Committee may consider petitions to change repertoire after invitations have been issued, between August 15 and October 1, 2026. Changes impacting more than 20% of the total performance time will not be considered. Approval of changes are at the discretion of the Conference Committee Chair.
 - The use of photocopies or duplicated music at ACDA conferences is strictly prohibited.
3. Three audio recordings (or six recordings for co-conductors—see Section I) in digital format are to be submitted. The combined total duration of the three recordings should be no longer than 15 minutes in length (30 min if co-conductors are submitting six recordings).

- a. The three audio submissions (six for co-conductors) should include representative examples of the choir's performance in each of the last three academic years (September through August), and each submitted recording must be conducted by the same conductor.
 - i. One selection from the 2025–2026 academic year or 2026 calendar year
 - ii. One selection from the 2024–2025 academic year or 2025 calendar year
 - iii. One selection from the 2023–2024 academic year or 2024 calendar year
- b. For each piece included in the recording, include a PDF file of one concert program when that selection was performed. Each PDF file should display the program page that includes the repertoire. If the date is not shown on the repertoire page, also include the page that shows the date of the performance. Redact information that identifies the ensemble and conductor.
- c. The uploaded audio files should contain only complete pieces (each 5 minutes or less). If a multi-movement work is excerpted, include an entire movement.
- d. Submissions must be unedited recordings performed by the same conductor and the same ensemble; live in-concert performances are preferred and encouraged.
- e. Recordings may not be enhanced or engineered in any way.
- f. Recordings should reflect repertoire similar in complexity and style to the program proposed for the national conference performance, but they need not be pieces on your proposed program.
- g. Submit files in .mp3 format as three separate audio files.

For Contemporary A Cappella and Show Choirs Only:

1. A list of your proposed repertoire for the 2027 conference. The proposed program should include the following:
 - a. The title, composer and/or arranger, poet/lyricist, complete publication information for each piece (if available), website link (if available) to publisher/distributor, and;
 - b. The approximate performance time of each piece. Total program time should not exceed 25 minutes total on stage, including applause.
 - c. It is understood that many ensembles will not have their final sets or arrangements determined at the time of application. If accepted, a final program including all song titles, songwriter credits, and arranger names is due to ACDA no later than October 1, 2026. This document should also include information about any technical needs from the venue such as the number of handheld microphones required. A production meeting will be scheduled with each performing group to consider logistics and other technical details. Proof of copyright compliance may be requested at any time. This includes proof of licensing for all custom arrangements, which can include: a) a receipt of purchase showing one copy per ensemble member from a publisher or retailer, or b) a license certificate from the publisher or copyright owner. Please review the "Additional logistical information if selected" section for more information.

2. Three recordings that have both audio and video and should include representative examples of the ensemble's performance in each of the last three academic years (September through August).
 - i. One selection from the 2025–2026 academic year or 2026 calendar year
 - ii. One selection from the 2024–2025 academic year or 2025 calendar year
 - iii. One selection from the 2023–2024 academic year or 2024 calendar year
3. The combined total duration of the three recordings should be no longer than 15 minutes in length.
 - a. Submissions must be unedited videos; live in-concert performances are preferred and encouraged.
 - b. Videos may not include any effects or enhancement added in post-production (such as tuning, EQ, reverb, compression, additional or re-recorded parts, etc). Effects used in a live, amplified performance are permissible; however, they must be captured in the live audio rather than added in later.
 - c. Files will be uploaded in mp4 format.
4. For show choirs, each of the recordings should show both singing and dancing.
5. For each piece included in the video, include a PDF file of one concert program when that music was performed. Each PDF file should display the program page that includes the repertoire. If the date is not shown on the repertoire page, also include the page that shows the date of the performance. Redact information that identifies the ensemble and conductor. If no program was produced, a PDF statement of the date, time, event, and location of the performance is sufficient.
6. Additional logistical information for those selected:
 - Each performing choir will have 30 minutes total to set up, perform, and strike their show. Additional time for dress rehearsal will not be available.
 - ACDA will provide the standard set of 4x4 risers 8', 16', 24', 32'. Performing choirs may add additional risers or set pieces but may not remove or rearrange the provided risers.
 - The stage is 52' deep and its narrowest point is 40' wide.
 - ACDA will provide 4 condenser mics for choir pickup and 5 wireless handheld mics for soloist use. Should additional mics be needed, this will be negotiated between the choir, ACDA, and the venue and cannot be guaranteed.
 - For performing choirs executing a costume change there is ample space to do this; however, it is located behind the main drape at the rear of the stage.
 - The auditorium is a union house and will therefore be responsible for loading in and out of the facility. The level of involvement by student tech crews will be determined at a later date.

For all submissions:

1. Conductor and Ensemble Biographies and Photos
 - a. The ensemble's biography (900 characters maximum)
 - b. The conductor's biography (900 characters maximum)
 - c. The conductor(s) headshot in .jpg format, 3" x 5", high-resolution minimum 300 dpi
 - d. An ensemble photo will only be requested for choirs selected to perform. The deadline is October 1, 2026.

2. Choirs will be asked to self-categorize as follows:

a. Voicing: Soprano-Alto, Tenor-Bass, Mixed Voicing

b. Ensemble Type (select the ONE R&R area that best describes your ensemble)

- Children and Community Youth
 - Singers in this ensemble are in grades 3-5; fill in % of students in the ensemble
 - Singers in this ensemble are in grades 5-7; fill in % of students in the ensemble
 - Singers in this ensemble are in grades 7-9; fill in % of students in the ensemble
 - Singers in this ensemble are in grades 9-12; fill in % of students in the ensemble
- Junior High/Middle School
 - Small school (enrollment 799 and below)
 - Large school (enrollment 800 and above)
- Senior High School
 - Small school (9-12 enrollment 799 and below)
 - Large school (9-12 enrollment 800 and above)
- Two-Year College
- Four-Year College or University
- Contemporary A Cappella
- Show Choir
- Vocal Jazz
- Community (unpaid singers, auditioned or nonauditioned)
- Music in Worship
- Professional (auditioned ensemble of at least 50% paid singers)

6. Ensemble Statement (non-adjudicated) - Applicants are asked to share a narrative about their ensemble, the type of institution/organization, ensemble history, and mission in 1800 characters or less to help the committee contextualize the ensemble.

7. Director's name, ACDA member number

8. Name of institution and name of choir as it should be listed in the *Choral Journal* and number of singers in the ensemble

9. At the National Conference, ACDA has the opportunity to premiere two new works: the Brock Commission and the Brock Professional Prize. If selected for performance, would you like for your ensemble to be considered to perform one of these pieces? Additional time is given on the concert to perform the work.

10. Non-refundable application fee of \$50 submitted by credit card/debit card only

IV. Screening Process

1. All auditions are “blind”; that is, the Adjudication Committee will not know the identity of the choir or conductor, with the exception of show choirs and contemporary a cappella groups who may be recognizable in videos. There are two levels of screening:
 1. An initial screening level at which finalists will be selected, and
 2. A final screening level at which only those recommended from the first screening will be considered.
2. Level 1: Led by the national R&R chair, an Adjudication Committee will be formed in each R&R area. The committee will consist of no fewer than seven members selected from the following: national R&R chair of the area, national & region R&R coordinator of the area, current and/or former region R&R chairs, choral directors who have previously presented at an ACDA region or national conference, past region presidents, past national officers, National Standing Committee members and others appointed by the national R&R chair to ensure a diverse evaluation committee.
3. Level 2: The National Conference Committee will review the top 10 submissions in each R&R area, unless fewer than ten are submitted in that area, in which case all submissions will be reviewed by the National Conference Committee. Every effort will be made to represent a broad range of interest sessions for each R&R area.
4. No person submitting performance audition materials for the 2027 National Conference may serve on an Adjudication Committee. The online submission process automatically tabulates responses from adjudicators and generates a list indicating the collective top ten submissions in ranked order, plus five alternates.
5. The National Conference Committee will hear the top 10 submissions in each R&R area, unless fewer than ten are submitted in that area, in which case all submissions will be heard by the National Conference Committee. Final decisions for accepted performing choirs will be made by the National Conference Committee.
6. Every effort will be made to represent a broad range of excellent performing ensembles from each R&R area and ACDA region.
7. The rubric showing the performance criteria and rating scales that will be used by the adjudicators, along with all the information included here, is available at acda.org.

V. Schedule of Dates and Application Link

- Application portal opens: February 2026
- April 15, 2026: Audition application, uploads, and payment completed by 11:59 pm CST
- Help desk support is available until 5:00 CST on April 15, 2026. After that time, no support will be provided, even if technical issues are encountered. Applicants are encouraged to plan ahead to ensure they can complete the submission process. Late submissions will not be accepted for any reason.
- By June 15, 2026: National auditions review completed
- By June 29, 2026: Applicants notified of results

Application now available through the online platform at acda.org.



Application Guidelines for Insight Choirs 2027 ACDA National Conference Minneapolis, MN March 7-10, 2027

The 2027 National Conference Committee is pleased to continue insight choirs, an initiative launched at the 2023 National Conference in Cincinnati. Insight choirs support missions that are social or community related and use choral music as a tool to reach these goals. Insight choir sessions support and inspire the membership by providing engaging research, pedagogies, practices, and repertoire. Contrasted with demonstration choirs, we consider insight choirs as inextricably linked with the presentation, where the choral ensemble is critical to the topic and the presenter is intimately tied to the ensemble. We seek proposals for a 50-minute session that will actively engage conference participants and contribute to the professional development of our membership. ACDA members in all repertoire and resource areas are invited to apply.

The 2027 National Conference theme is *Singing Through the Ages*. All topics are welcome, but the conference committee is particularly interested in those that celebrate our choral heritage, embody strong pedagogical ideas, scholarly content, and relevance to our choral community. Topics could include but are not limited to:

- Working with singers with special needs
- Working with aging voices in community and religious settings
- Living composer-conductor collaborations
- Working with students in a Title 1 school
- Multigenerational singing
- Non-auditioned choirs that operate and rehearse in alternative ways to meet the needs of their membership and community at large.

I. Eligibility

Conductors/presenters must hold life, paying life, retired, active, or student ACDA membership at the time of application, registration, and performance. Please note that all accepted conductors/presenters are expected to meet ALL posted dates and deadlines. No choir or conductor may perform at successive national conferences as a performing choir, demonstration choir, or insight choir.

II. Registration and Travel Info

It is understood that ACDA will not assume financial responsibility for registration, travel, food, or lodging for presenters or participants. Insight choir conductors must register for the conference. Completing the online application implies that the conductor and the ensemble will obtain the necessary funds to travel and present at the conference if accepted.

Presenters are expected to officially register for the conference at the posted registration rates.

III. Session Conductor/Ensemble Expectations

The conductor and ensemble will arrive 15 minutes prior to the session to establish standing positions and ensure all audiovisual equipment is working properly. Insight choirs will not have a dress rehearsal prior to their session. Ensembles must be under 75 singers and may include a pianist and four additional instrumentalists. It is the responsibility of the ensemble to set up the chairs and music stands for the instrumentalists as per the submitted application materials.

III. Application Process

Submit all application materials as listed below by 11:59 pm CST on April 15, 2026, via the online platform at acda.org/conferences. Help desk support is available until 5:00 pm CST on April 15, 2026. After that time, no support will be provided, even if technical issues are encountered. Applicants are encouraged to plan ahead to ensure they can complete the submission process. *Late submissions will not be accepted for any reason.*

The following is the list of requirements for the application:

1. **Session Title:** The title should be carefully crafted, brief, reflective of the session's content, and no longer than 10 words.
2. **Session Abstract:** A succinct thesis that clearly addresses: (1) a topic that will be helpful and/or inspire the membership, (2) a clear description of the session, and (3) learning outcomes. Please submit the following:
 - a. **Session description:** No more than an 1800-character description of the session
 - b. **Choral Journal** description: No more than a 900-character description, which will be used in *Choral Journal*
 - c. **A brief outline** in bullet points that clarifies the processes and goals of the session (limit 2 pages; single PDF upload)
 - Address the content and key learning outcomes of the session, as well as provide a clearly defined outline. This document will be used to help evaluate your session and may provide content for the conference app.
 - If your session is highlighting rehearsal techniques or something similar, your outline might include details about but is not limited to discussing:
 - Repertoire (if any) you plan to address
 - Rehearsal techniques (if any) you plan to address
 - Ensemble development
 - Community engagement
3. **Ensemble Statement (non-adjudicated):** Applicants are asked to share information about their ensemble and type of institution/organization, ensemble history and mission, and how the ensemble meets the needs of a specific population or does unique work within the choral field. The narrative should be no longer than 1800 characters to help the committee contextualize your ensemble.
4. **Three Recordings from Rehearsals or Performances**
 - a. Up to three audio and/or video recordings totaling between 10 to 30 minutes should be submitted. These recordings should provide evidence of your ensemble's ability to clearly demonstrate the mission and/or process(es) described in the session's outline.
 - b. If you wish to submit YouTube videos, you will be able to submit a direct link to your video. Please make sure there is no identifying information in the video, including announcing the choir name, or in the video file name.
 - c. Accepted file formats for uploads include: mp3, mp4

5. Headshot of conductor in .jpg format, 3" x 5", high-resolution minimum 300 dpi

6. Conductor and Ensemble Biographies

- a. The ensemble's biography (up to 900 characters maximum) as it should appear in the *Choral Journal*
- b. The conductor's biography (up to 900 characters maximum) as it should appear in the *Choral Journal*

7. An ensemble photo will only be requested if the session is selected for the conference. The deadline for ensemble photo submission is October 1, 2026.

IV. Selection Process

There are two levels of screening:

1. An initial or first screening level at which finalists will be selected, and
2. A final screening level at which only those recommended from the first screening will be considered.

Level 1: Led by the National R&R Chair, an Adjudication Committee will be formed in each R&R area. The committee that will consist of no fewer than seven members selected from the following: National R&R chair of the area; national and region R&R coordinator of the area; current and/or former region R&R chairs; choral directors who have previously presented at an ACDA region or national conference; past region presidents; past national officers; National Standing Committee members, and others appointed by the national R&R chair to ensure a diverse evaluation committee.

No person submitting an insight choir session application for the 2027 National Conference may serve on the adjudication committee. The online submission process automatically tabulates responses from adjudicators and generates a list indicating the collective top ten submissions in ranked order plus five alternates.

Level 2: The National Conference Committee will review the top 10 submissions in each R&R area, unless fewer than ten are submitted in that area, in which case all submissions will be reviewed by the National Conference Committee.

Every effort will be made to represent a broad range of interest sessions for each R&R area.

V. Schedule of Dates and Application Link

- Application portal opens: February 2026
- April 15, 2026: Insight choir application, uploads, and payment completed by 11:59 pm CST
 - Help desk support is available until 5:00 CST on April 15, 2026. After that time, no support will be provided, even if technical issues are encountered. Applicants are encouraged to plan ahead to ensure they can complete the submission process. *Late submissions will not be accepted for any reason.*
- June 15, 2026: National applications review completed
- June 29, 2026: Applicants notified of results

Application now available through the online platform at acda.org.



Connecting Top Employers with Choral Professionals.

ACDA.CareerWebsite.com

EMPLOYERS:

Find Your Next Great Hires

- **PLACE** your job in front of our highly qualified members
- **SEARCH** our resume database of qualified candidates
- **LIMIT** applicants only to those who are qualified
- **FILL** open positions quickly with great talent

CHORAL PROFESSIONALS:

Keep Your Career on the Move

- **POST** or update a resume or anonymous career profile that leads employers to you
- **SEARCH** and apply to hundreds of new jobs
- **SET UP** efficient job alerts to deliver the latest jobs right to your inbox
- **ACCESS** career resources, job searching tips and tools

*ACDA Members receive one free resume review.
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Rehearsal Break

Jennifer Rodgers, editor

Choral Singing in Tune

by Jameson Marvin

Column Editor's Note: *This Rehearsal Break article is the first 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.*

Achieving good intonation might be the most elusive of all the challenges of the choral art. Learning notes, rhythms, dynamics, and phrasing can be achieved in a relatively straightforward manner, but singing in tune requires a particular consciousness each time. Singers might be able to do it once, but there is no guarantee they can do it again!

What is singing in tune? In this article, to sing in tune means to unify the pitch, bringing all voices into like frequencies and compatible timbres. In choral singing, this means that unified pitch depends upon matched vowels; thus, the vowels and the pitch must be tuned. Singing in tune requires good ears from conductors and singers and absolutely consistent choral reinforcement.

The process of teaching a choir how to sing in tune is essentially a circular one. The conductor measures the sound produced by the choir against their “mental-au-

ral image” (the mind’s ear), part of which includes the conductor’s pitch standard, who feeds this information back to the choir, and the choir then reshapes the sound to the director’s standard. As the process continues in rehearsal after rehearsal, inevitably the choir’s sound and pitch standard begin to more clearly match the conductor’s mental-aural image. Therefore, the responsibility for maintaining good pitch lies ultimately with the singers.

The Conductor’s Ear and How to Listen

Communicating the mental-aural image to singers requires time, patience, discipline, and experience. Over time, a conductor’s ears and the singers’ ears become the channel through which all sound information is transferred. The ear is the yardstick—the “truth teller,” the intermediary—that makes possible the conductor’s capacity to realize their conception of the sound.

The better the conductor’s ear, the more effective the conductor will be in attaining that mental-aural image. Every bit of information is gathered by the ear. The information received can be categorized into four

elements: duration, pitch, timbre, and intensity. Each musical element contributes to the composite picture of the whole. The conductor's ear has the capacity to hear all four elements at the same time. The mind has the ability to focus selectively on one element at a time and the capacity to assimilate information on all levels simultaneously.

Each rehearsal presents a fresh opportunity to expand the ear's capacity. Concentration is the key. Conductors who possess the capacity to concentrate reap the rewards of increased auditory perception and will be able to identify information related to pitch, duration, timbre, and intensity more quickly, plus expand to expressive elements of dynamics, phrasing, articulation, and linear direction. As the ear improves, the conductor's and the singers' abilities to evaluate this information will be greatly enhanced. This provides the conductors and the singers a tremendous amount of knowledge around which to improve consistently.

Turning the Dial: A Tool for Accurate Listening

Picture a dial. While the choir is singing, slowly turn the dial and focus your concentration on one element of music at a time. Spend considerable time listening to a single element—*pitch*, for example. While listening to pitch accuracy, you will also hear: *timbre* and *amplitude*; thus, *accuracy* will become accurate in listening to *intonation*, *balance*, *dynamics*, *articulation*, and *phrasing*. All of these characteristics may enter into your assessment of the choir's pitch.

Next, picture the dial and turn it to *timbre*. Vowels, color, sonority, and texture all are facets of timbre upon which to concentrate. Next, listen for *duration*. This is a complex activity, because duration will overlap with pitch, timbre, and intensity. Specific aspects of listening to duration will be inevitably linked to rhythmic accuracy, ensemble rhythm, tempo, metric structure, and the speed of harmonic rhythm. The expressive elements—dynamics, phrasing, articulation, rubato, and linear direction—will be served by duration and intensity.

Now, turn the dial to *intensity*. Dynamics and color may leap into your ear; balance considerations may become immediately apparent. One may focus on each of the expressive elements of music by using “the dial”

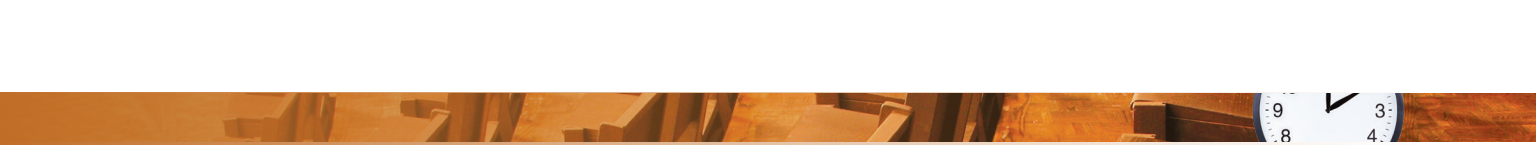
and listening for separate elements such as articulation, phrasing, linear direction, or rubato. Intensity, however, serves dynamics, phrasing, and balance most substantially.

Turning the dial focuses the conductor's auditory concentration on one element at a time. The capacity to hear increases when the conductor's full energy is focused like a laser beam, with total concentration on each element, one by one. In this manner, and with repetition through rehearsals, a conductor can build an acute degree of auditory perception. Conductors can also learn to hear on more than one level at the same time and for longer periods, given accrued experience, sufficient aural aptitude, and the ability to concentrate.

One cannot listen too long, however, without forgetting what one has heard. “Click off” in the brain each element you would like to address as you measure the choir's sound against your mental-aural image. To avoid breaking the singers' concentration, do not stop to correct them until at least three or four specific “problems” have occurred. By vocal part, measure numbers, and beat—in that order—describe what you want (positive). Compare it verbally against what the choir did (negative) and describe what you want again (positive).

Over time, this sequence will provide the choir with positive incentives for change. If the “why” of what you want is clearly explained, you will have provided the choir with substantial positive imaging to accomplish your goals. This process enables the conductor to motivate the choir to give meaningful aural life to the written composition while upholding and realizing the composer's sound image. And always remember, while correcting specific aspects of a choir's rendition, it will be important to affirm other aspects of their rendition that you like. It is particularly important to point out positive changes as they develop the tuning response you are striving for.

One can listen horizontally or vertically. Both types of listening open conductors' ears to hearing duration, pitch, timbre, and intensity. Thoroughly preparing the score, and therefore your ear, serves as a memory bell throughout rehearsal. More importantly, it is the foundation upon which we organize the way we hear. In rehearsal over time, through listening, measuring



the choir's sound against the mental-aural image, and reshaping the sound, the choir's image of the sound grows closer to the conductor's mental-aural image. When the profound experience of "matching conceptualization" occurs, it results in what this author calls ensemble mastery.

Re-hear-sing

It is in rehearsal that each element of the conductor's preparation is drawn together. The conductor will have begun preparation by studying the score. Score study and stylistic insights will have stimulated the mental-aural image. The rehearsal provides the context in which to realize that image. Through the ear, the conductor measures the chorus' sound against their mental-aural image and then implements change. This is rehearsing (re-hear-sing).

In my experience, no aspect of the conductor's process will more directly affect the performance than the conductor's ability to rehearse. Without effective rehearsing, insights into the score will not be realized. No matter how much the conductor is able to hear, no matter how visionary the interpretation, no matter how highly communicative the conducting technique may be, the principal foundation upon which the actualization of the score rests is re-hear-sing.

Score Preparation

Score preparation is key to understanding the composer's mind's ear and the aural imagery of the text/music relationship. The principal elements of pitch, duration, timbre, and intensity have been placed in specific relationship to each other by the creator of the piece. And the interaction of these elements informs a conductor's foundational approach to rehearsing that piece. Through score analysis, a conductor will understand the composer's reasoning for their use of harmony, melody, rhythm, and texture and then develop gestures to highlight expressive nuances: dynamics, phrasing, articulation, rubato, and linear direction. This process directly impacts the development of the conductor's ear for each specific piece, allowing them to evaluate each principal element during rehearsal, achieving both good tuning and aural meaning.

Rehearsing in Stages

During rehearsals, think of learning each piece in three stages: preliminary, technical/learning, and final:

1. *Preliminary stage*, in which the conductor's musical gestures and the expressive qualities are first interpreted by the singers as they get to know a composition, to be studied later in more depth. This first stage opens a window of perception of why the composer set the text with those notes and rhythms, providing a more meaningful goal for learning notes.
2. *Technical stage*, in which the conductor helps the choir to sing the right notes at the right time, in tune, with matched vowels, in balance, rhythmically aligned, to develop ensemble. The technical stage represents about 70 percent of the work.
3. *Final stage*, in which the expressive qualities introduced in the preliminary stage are overlaid with ensemble development achieved in the technical stage. The inherent expressive qualities can now be fully developed at a more sophisticated level, integrating them with the foundation of ensemble pitch, rhythm, and balance.

There are many advantages to this three-stage approach:

1. Singers will have a meaningful musical context in which to place the technical work, and their motivation for learning the notes, rhythms, and texts with good pitch, pulse, and balance will be greatly enhanced.
2. In developing from the outset a musical understanding of the composer's gestures, the singers will be more inspired to serve both the technical demands of the composition and the conductor's methods for achieving them.
3. During the final stage, a higher level of attention can be paid to the expressive elements—the dynamics, phrasing, articulation, linear direction,

and rubato—that shape and give beauty and meaning to the composition.

Throughout the technical and musical stages, the conductor makes clear to the singers that they are expected to mark their parts. When a singer feels responsible for marking their part, the singer launches a learning process that empowers each singer with the knowledge and ability to effectively make *change*—the core of the rehearsal process.

In the technical work, separate words from music. Do this early in the rehearsal process, because text impinges upon pitch, duration, timbre, and intensity. The variety of vowels in words, placed in vertical and horizontal sonorities, does not offer a unified sound continuum in which to place an aural foundation for the acquisition of good pitch, ensemble-rhythm, and balance. Find the sound first and then the text through that sound.

Specifics for Rehearsing Intonation

There are many strategies related to attaining excellence in choral tuning. Primarily, these strategies are embedded with rehearsal techniques. A conductor must understand the relationship of pitch and tuning to other rehearsal elements, such as rhythm, tempo, and acoustics, as well as the importance of rehearsal sequence to developing good intonation. The sections below offer specific strategies in these areas.

Tuning Relationship to Rehearsal Sequence

Choral singers learn faulty pitch intonation and imprecise rhythmic habits at the initial sight-reading note-learning stages. Correct the pitch of the notes and rhythmic alignment throughout these early stages. It is during the early note-learning stages that associative pitch problems develop. They arise from the subtle ear/voice coordination required in “finding the right note.” After learning the right note, a singer frequently fails to maintain the proper pitch of the note. When poor associative pitch habits continue, singers invariably and unconsciously perpetuate these habits long after the notes are learned. So, at the initial stages, correct the notes as well as the intonation of the notes.


Once the notes are well learned, have the choir sing them on a semi-staccato “doo.” Insist on a pure “oo” vowel without the diphthong associations of words like “few” or “due.” Think of the staccato as a very short sustain rather than a quick hitting attack (as this author calls it: “legato doo with space between notes”). Finally, in tune, together, and in balance, have the choir sing a true “legato doo.” Once the sound and the expressive gestures over numerous rehearsals are heard on a beautiful, pure “legato doo,” the foundation upon which the text can be placed will be set. This, in tune, produces a unified sound-image greatly improving ensemble intonation, rhythm, and balance.

Tuning Relationship to Rhythm and Pulse

Achieving ensemble rhythm is an essential part of a conductor’s focus on tuning, as it will be the foundation upon which the ensemble places pitch, balance, timbre, intensity, and the expressive elements. There are a number of techniques that can help sensitize singers to ensemble rhythm, and developing a unanimous group pulse is key. Here is one exercise for developing a shared pulse in an ensemble that is evoked through feeling silence together:

- Sing the first six bars of “My Country Tis of Thee” at a typical modest tempo and showing the pulse of three beats per bar: “My country tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.”
- Ask the singers to face away from each other and, on your cue, silently hearing that melody and text on that same pulse, sing only the last word (“Sing”) loudly when they arrive at it.
- There will likely be many different endings. Have a laugh, then repeat until enough individuals have felt an aligned pulse.
- Sing the melody together and see if the ensemble’s rhythm has improved. Most likely it has!

This is a general technique to help to sensitize singers to ensemble pulse; however, overlaying the text will impact that shared pulse considerably. Energy and



concentration must be directed toward ensuring the accuracy of ensemble rhythm when text is sung. Consonants take time. They affect vertical and horizontal alignment. Be alert to the fact that ensemble rhythm may slow down when singing with text.

Tuning Relationship to Tempo

1. Do not allow singers to “mix functions” between pitch and tempo. For example, the functions of slowing down or singing a *diminuendo* contains an associative tendency: *flattening*. Counteract these tendencies by separating those functions. For example: sing a diminuendo while sharpening the pitch or speed up the tempo during a diminuendo. Remind singers of these associative tendencies in rehearsal.
2. Avoid singing at extreme dynamic ranges until notes and rhythms are secure. Very soft dynamics require focused breath control and often invite flat pitch; loud dynamics sung for considerable time invite vocal forcing and fatigue. Rehearse at a comfortable level; I prefer *mf*. Later, incorporate the proper dynamics.
3. After the notes and gestures are well learned, if pitch problems persist, transpose the key a half-step up or down. This procedure modifies the physiological association of how the notes felt in the voice when sung in the original key. This technique counteracts many of the “associative pitch” problems that have accrued over time.

Tuning Relationship to Key and Acoustics

1. F major frequently goes flat when continuously used. After the fundamental stages of learning are complete, in a *cappella* compositions change the key to F[♯] or E depending upon vocal balance and color considerations. The key of C major often flats; change to C[♯] or B; compositions in B[♭] can flat. Change the key to B or A. The associative minor keys of d, a, and g often goes flat. Change to the minor keys of c[♯], a[♯], f[♯].

2. At the initial rehearsal, centrally placing the piano might facilitate quicker note learning; however, as soon as possible, wean singers from piano dependence. The sound of the piano greatly affects the ability of singers and conductors to accurately hear intonation, rhythm, balance, and diction. When a piano doubles all parts, singers tend not to listen to each other’s parts.
3. The piano is tuned to equal temperament to accommodate the “Pythagorean flaw.” The Pythagorean flaw is a term this author uses for a natural acoustical phenomenon: an irreconcilable “flaw” in acoustics. It is measured by the audible pitch difference between an “E” (for example), the overtone produced by the fundamental pitch “C” at the frequency ratio of 5:4, that produces a pure major 3rd in the air. Listen for that pure E!
4. Singers often tire or lose concentration in rehearsals, and energy is the key to good pitch production. Stand up, move around, exercise, be humorous, offer consistent positive support and enthusiasm; take a break!
5. Rehearse in rooms that have clear, non-reverberant acoustics yet reasonable room ambience. Avoid low ceilings, acoustical tiles, rugs, curtains, and low-roofed acoustical shells.
6. Singers often hear best when placed facing each other. They especially hear well in horseshoe standing positions that create an “acoustical cup” to resonate the choral sound. This is particularly important when singing in difficult acoustical situations (such as outdoors or in heavily carpeted rooms).
7. To attain a high degree of clarity when standing or sitting in horseshoe positions, it will be very important to have considerable space, about one arm-length, between singers.
8. Acoustical shells are especially helpful in projecting the sound of large choirs in large concert halls.

Placing the choir in an “acoustical cup” with singers an arm-length apart with or without acoustical shells considerably aids choral resonance in most concert halls.

9. Sit and stand in positions that allow each singer to take responsibility for their own pitch, rhythm, and balance without interference from another singer of the same vocal part. In rehearsals and concerts, try singing in mixed quartets, for example STAB or BATS. These positions help the acquisition of good individual intonation and independent rhythmic security.

Summary of the Rehearsal Philosophies

Rehearsing at the highest levels of the choral art is a vastly complex and rewarding process. There is something uncanny about the essence of the rehearsal process, the ability to develop in choral singers a technical and musical concept of the score that matches that of the conductor’s mental-aural image. Developing matching conceptualizations is inevitably inspiring, perhaps fundamentally spiritual. How does the conductor draw the choral singers toward the compelling image they envision? Through creating a unanimous vision of it: *a unity of ensemble*.

This unity is evident when a choir sings in tune. It is relatively easy to learn notes on a page, but singing in tune requires responsibility and dedication on the part of the conductor and the singers working together. While disagreement concerning details of interpretation and differences of opinion regarding sound ideals are as common as conductors are different, few musicians or knowledgeable listeners fail to recognize an outstanding performance when they hear one.

An outstanding performance communicates. It enriches lives and rejuvenates spirits. Good rehearsals do the same thing. How can rehearsals best serve music’s ultimate value? By focusing the energy of singers on the inherent elements of music that, when revealed, give meaning to its structure and order as it develops in time. In the process of unifying the elements of music, we create ensemble unity in *duration, pitch, timbre*, and

intensity. When the choir attains “ideal” ensemble unity, it clarifies the form, the function, and the design of the sound continuum of the music. It reveals the music’s total structure, reinforcing meaning and enhancing its capacity to communicate. And, finally, it is through meaningful communication that we realize music’s profound capacity to inspire. Following this rehearsal philosophy results in what this author considers *a mastery of choral ensemble*. Each rehearsal is an opportunity to expand (and improve) the ear’s capacity for focusing our “dial.” As we concentrate on single elements discussed in this article such as dynamics, phrasing, texture, and balance, we practice building auditory concentration, which, in turn, expands our ability to achieve good intonation.

It is important to point out that all of the principles upon which effective rehearsals are based require two essential ingredients: energy and desire. The quality of the energy that the conductor gives to the singers will be the primary motivator that stimulates them to implement the conductor’s ideas. The conductor who is motivated by the quality of the music, by the conceptual vision of it, and by the joy received in realizing the conception cannot help but project positive energy. Enthusiasm, encouragement, patience, humor, and positive reinforcement will serve the conductor well, as choral singers are engaged in the rehearsal process. The joy that students experience in singing with inspired conductors is transformed into a collective energy that creates a unanimous desire for a unity of ensemble. **□**

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Fostering Connection: Fifteen Social-Emotional Learning Strategies for Building Community in the Choral Classroom

MICHAEL GUTIERREZ



Choirs have always been an authentic form of community music making. In the K–12 setting, a choral ensemble provides fertile ground for students to develop essential social-emotional learning (SEL) skills in ways that may not be prioritized in other academic environments. Social-emotional learning encompasses the skills students use to understand themselves, regulate emotions, build empathy, form healthy relationships, and make responsible choices—skills that are actively rehearsed each time singers listen, respond, and create together.¹ Given the increased prevalence of mental health problems in students, it is necessary to deepen our understanding of protective methods that can counterbalance negative effects of isolation and address the psychological vulnerability and distress among adolescents.² Recent research has argued that resilience is a strong protective factor in mitigating internalizing problems, and partly externalizing problems, particularly as these difficulties tend to increase with age.³ Importantly, resilience should be promoted through a systemic approach that recognizes the value of family, peers, schools, and communities as key protective networks.⁴ Therefore, maintaining and nurturing supportive relationships should be a priority for promoting adolescents' mental health.⁵ Other researchers have emphasized the importance of fostering resilience

and social and emotional competencies early in life, as demonstrated by innovative programs for toddlers that have documented promising results.⁶ Continued efforts to adopt such practices within schools and communities can help equip young people to face present and future challenges with greater well-being and hope.

Because social-emotional learning is most effective when embedded within authentic, relational contexts, music classrooms—and choral ensembles in particular—offer a uniquely powerful setting for this work. While SEL research often highlights outcomes across developmental stages, the collaborative, vulnerable, and interdependent nature of ensemble singing makes choral spaces especially impactful for adolescents navigating identity, belonging, and peer relationships, while remaining relevant across K–12 and postsecondary settings. Music educators are, therefore, increasingly tasked not only with developing musical skills but with intentionally cultivating rehearsal environments where students feel valued, safe, and seen.

This article explores fifteen social-emotional learning strategies designed for use in choral settings across age levels. Some strategies are drawn directly from my own secondary choral teaching practice, while others are adaptable ideas informed by current research and pedagogical frameworks. Together, they offer practical,

flexible entry points for educators seeking to foster authentic community alongside musical excellence. The strategies are grouped into four broad categories: (1) identity and belonging, (2) voice and agency, (3) wellness and reflection, and (4) community connection beyond the rehearsal room.

Identity and Belonging

Strategy #1:

“We Are Family” or “Student Spotlight” Project

One of the most impactful strategies to foster connection is to allow students to share about themselves in structured and affirming ways. The “We Are Family” project enables each student to introduce themselves to the ensemble through a personal slideshow presentation. This method is particularly effective in environments where students may not already know each other well, such as after program turnover or in ensembles consisting of multiple grade levels, unlike other academic subjects where students are grouped by grade level. By incorporating key personal elements—such as name, pronouns, hobbies, musical interests, and family—students are invited to be seen holistically by their peers.

When introduced in my own classroom during the spring of 2023, this activity helped combat the fragmentation caused by our hybrid model of instruction. Presentations occurred at the start of each class with one student sharing per day, and classmates were encouraged to ask respectful questions or find common ground. This normalized a routine of daily personal connection and encouraged empathy, reduced social anxiety, cultivated new friendships, and fostered peer validation.

An additional benefit of this activity is that it provides a structured and meaningful way to start rehearsal while allowing the teacher to take attendance or check in with students as needed. Because the activity is student led and engaging, everyone is naturally tuned in and invested. Administrators who visit during these presentations often witness authentic, unscripted

moments of student-to-student appreciation, making it an excellent showcase of classroom culture and SEL in action. Research supports the effectiveness of peer-sharing activities in building classroom community and empathy.⁷

Strategy #2:

Musical Identity Collages

This strategy invites students to visually express their unique musical identities by creating personal collages using magazine cutouts, drawings, or digital tools. Students showcase their favorite genres of music, artists, cultural influences, and formative musical memories. Sharing these in class helps students appreciate the diversity of their peers’ musical backgrounds, fostering deeper empathy and inclusion. It also allows introverted students a meaningful avenue to share more about themselves. Rooted in culturally relevant pedagogy, this strategy affirms each student’s musical voice and creates a foundation of mutual respect, showing students that all musical paths are valid and worthy of celebration. Consider offering multiple modalities for students to choose, for example: Google Slides, Canva, or simply a posterboard.

Strategy #3:

Creating a Choir Code

At the start of the year, students can cocreate a set of class commitments that reflect their collective values, such as kindness, focus, effort, honesty, and vulnerability. These shared agreements—sometimes called a “Choir Code”—serve as a foundation for ensemble culture and accountability. Students are more likely to honor expectations they helped create, and revisiting the commitments throughout the semester helps reinforce positive norms. Posting the commitments publicly creates a sense of ownership and pride. This process promotes responsible decision-making and social awareness, ensuring that classroom management isn’t top down, but rather a shared, student-led commitment to a safe and supportive space.

Strategy #4: **Peer Pair-Ups and Musical Mentorship**

This strategy pairs students intentionally across experience levels to foster support and mentorship during sectionals or sight-reading practice. Rather than random grouping, the teacher selects partners with complementary strengths, encouraging students to learn from and encourage one another. Coaching prompts guide students to give feedback rooted in kindness and curiosity. This structure reduces performance anxiety, strengthens social bonds, and models collaborative musicianship. It also helps emerging leaders develop communication skills and builds a culture of mutual respect. Over time, pair-ups become a norm that empowers every student to feel seen, heard, and capable of contributing to the ensemble's success. This is a useful activity to include during solo and ensemble contest season. It is worth noting that compliments can start out simple and work toward more complex and mature musical vocabulary.

Voice and Agency

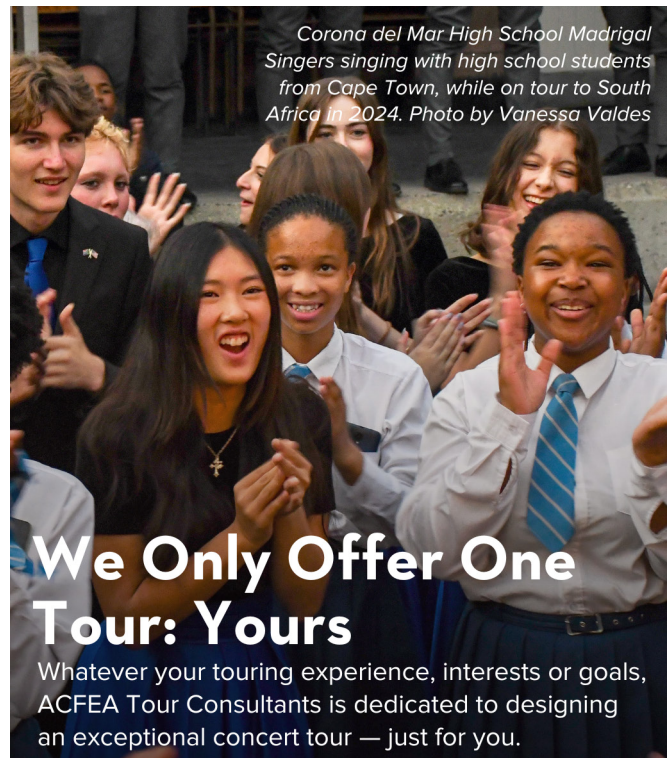
Strategy #5: **Student-Led Warm-Ups and Conducting**

Empowering students to take on leadership roles such as leading warm-ups or conducting sectional rehearsals deepens their investment in the ensemble and develops their sense of self-efficacy. Assigning rotating student leaders for these tasks fosters both musical and interpersonal growth. For instance, when one of my more introverted students was invited to lead a warm-up, they surprised the class with thoughtful vocalizations that had students wanting to build upon them day after day. It ultimately became a fun activity that students eagerly looked forward to at the beginning of rehearsals. Peer leadership within rehearsals helps students learn to support one another musically and emotionally. It also provides a platform for shy or emerging leaders to step into visibility. According to Patrick Freer,⁸ student leadership in choir develops critical think-

ing, confidence, and peer mentorship skills, all of which enhance musical outcomes and SEL competencies.

Strategy #6: **Collaborative Repertoire Selection**

Another impactful approach is giving students a voice in selecting one or two pieces of repertoire per concert cycle, which fosters ownership and agency. This process can involve a brainstorming session, listening to recordings together, or voting on pieces from a curated list that includes culturally responsive, age-appropriate works. This strategy builds the SEL skills of decision-making, perspective taking, and community awareness. When students see their input reflected in performance choices, their commitment to rehearsals



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

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and concerts increases. Culturally responsive teaching practices emphasize that shared decision-making fosters inclusion and relevance.⁹ When thoughtfully facilitated, repertoire selection can also expand students' musical worldviews and expose them to diverse traditions and languages.

Strategy #7:

SEL Songwriting Workshops

Although this strategy may seem a bit more advanced than the others, consider scaffolding this activity to suit the needs and abilities of your students. In small groups, students collaborate to write original lyrics and melodies based on themes like perseverance, identity, or gratitude. These songwriting workshops offer a creative, student-centered approach to SEL, giving students ownership of both message and music. Whether performed in class or recorded for personal portfolios, these compositions allow students to explore emotion, narrative, and teamwork. Students practice active listening, compromise, and reflection—essential SEL skills embedded in a meaningful musical experience. Teachers can offer light guidance while encouraging autonomy. These projects often become highlights of the semester, as students express authentic stories through song and develop pride in their artistry. This could be a stand-alone unit in your curriculum or can be used for the final days or week of school when all finals and end-of-the-year concerts/activities have concluded.

Wellness and Reflection

Strategy #8:

Wellness Days in the Choir Classroom

Another highly effective approach is scheduling regular Wellness Days to provide a much-needed pause in the whirlwind of students' academic and extracurricular demands. Designating a portion of one rehearsal per week (e.g., "Wellness Wednesdays") for SEL-

focused activities can significantly impact student morale and engagement. In my own teaching experience, students responded positively to activities such as guided meditations, journaling, and class discussions centered on stress management, peer relationships, and the emotional benefits of music during our late starts on Wednesdays.

These sessions help students build the SEL skills of self-awareness and self-management, two competencies that contribute directly to ensemble engagement and focus.¹⁰ Students report increased emotional regulation and a renewed focus during rehearsals following these sessions. Research highlights that musical ensembles serve as emotional safe spaces, and when music teachers incorporate wellness-focused reflection, students feel both musically and personally supported.¹¹

When implementing wellness-focused rehearsal practices, educators may encounter concerns regarding use of time, particularly in ensembles with limited rehearsal schedules. Framing these practices as instructional *supports* rather than instructional *interruptions* can help address such concerns. Brief, intentional SEL moments support students' self-awareness and self-management, which in turn enhance focus, collaboration, and rehearsal efficiency. When students are emotionally regulated and engaged, rehearsals often process *more* productively, not less.

For ensembles that rehearse once or twice a week, Wellness Days do not need to replace an entire rehearsal. Instead, educators can integrate wellness practices into existing structures through short, purposeful moments, such as a five-minute grounding activity at the start of rehearsal, a brief stretch or breathing reset after cognitively demanding work, or a reflective closing prompt that invites students to process their musical and emotional engagement. These practices can also be implemented selectively during high-stress periods, including concert weeks, testing windows, or transitions within the school year.

Importantly, integrating wellness practices does not diminish musical rigor. On the contrary, many educators find that students rehearse with greater focus and responsiveness following brief SEL-infused moments. When positioned as tools that support readiness and ensemble cohesion, wellness practices become a means



of protecting rehearsal quality while attending to students' holistic needs.

Strategy #9:
Choir Journals and Guided Prompts

A choir journal is a reflective tool that allows students to process musical and emotional growth privately. A teacher could offer simple prompts such as, “What challenged you today?” or “When did you feel most connected to the music?” Students write weekly or biweekly entries, which may be shared voluntarily or kept personal. This consistent practice strengthens self-awareness and helps students recognize patterns in their rehearsal mindset, relationships, or confidence. Journals are especially helpful for students who need time to articulate their thoughts. They also offer teachers insight into students' emotional and artistic development, making it easier to support them holistically.

Strategy #10:
“Lyric of the Day” Emotional Check-In

“Lyric of the Day” is a simple yet powerful daily ritual. A student shares a lyric that resonates with them emotionally and briefly explains its significance. The rest of the class listens reflectively or responds in writing. This activity allows for emotional expression in a structured, low-pressure way, and it connects music directly to students' lived experiences. It also builds listening skills, empathy, and emotional vocabulary. By starting rehearsals with this SEL touchpoint, students center themselves emotionally and intellectually, laying the groundwork for more focused, connected music making. Over time, the activity cultivates a sense of community through shared vulnerability.

Strategy #11:
Community Circles and Reflection Time

Community Circles offer a structured way to process rehearsal experiences, conflicts, and successes. At

the end of a rehearsal week or before a major concert, gather students in a circle and pose open-ended reflection questions: “What made you feel most connected to the music this week?” or “How have you grown as a singer or teammate?” Encouraging students to listen actively and respond respectfully supports the SEL competencies of social awareness and responsible decision-making. These moments of reflection validate students' emotional experiences and deepen ensemble trust. Reflective practices encourage students to delve into their emotional experiences during musical activities, promoting greater self-awareness and emotional expression. For instance, a 2021 study found that participants in a performing arts-based experiential learning environment developed a deeper understanding of their emotional states and those of their peers through guided reflection sessions.¹² These sessions allowed students to connect their emotional experiences with their musical performances, leading to more expressive and authentic artistry.

Community Connection
Beyond the Rehearsal Room

Strategy #12:
Sharing Positive Affirmations and Affirmation Circles

Peer-driven positive affirmations can play a vital role in fostering inclusivity and recognition in diverse choirs. The Affirmation Circle is a guided activity where students take turns sitting in the center of a circle while peers respond to reflective prompts such as, “Please acknowledge someone who made you feel included.” Physical touch (such as a gentle tap on the shoulder) is optional, and alternative non-contact methods (e.g., sticky notes, index cards) should be provided for those who prefer them.

To ensure equity and visibility across all grade levels in a mixed grade-level ensemble, I typically begin by asking each class of students to take a turn in the center of the circle—first the freshmen, then sophomores, followed by juniors, and finally seniors. This progression

structures the experience while reinforcing class identity to foster a sense of respect and appreciation across grade levels. The exercise helps build trust, empathy, and a culture of appreciation among students. SEL research underscores that affirmations support the development of emotional intelligence and belonging. When this strategy is implemented in a choir, research shows increased student bonding, reduced bullying, and improved group cohesion.¹³

Strategy #13: ***Choir Compliment Chain***

A few times each month, the choir forms a circle for a “Compliment Chain,” where students offer genuine praise to one another, either verbally or on sticky notes. Compliments must be specific and related to musical effort, character, or teamwork. For example, “I appreciated how you helped with the alto part today” or “Your positive attitude during warm-ups lifted the group.” These affirmations validate effort and promote gratitude, encouraging students to notice and acknowledge each other’s contributions. Over time, this ritual builds community, boosts morale, and fosters peer recognition as a natural part of the ensemble culture.

Strategy #14: ***Post-Concert Reflection and Celebration Ritual***

After major performances, set aside time for the choir to reflect, celebrate, and decompress. Students can write or share reflections about personal growth, ensemble success, or emotional moments during the concert. Combine this with a low-pressure celebration—such as watching a concert recording, enjoying a snack, or doing a fun musical game. This ritual honors the emotional intensity of performance while reinforcing group identity. It also models healthy closure, helping students move forward with a sense of accomplishment and clarity. When students feel that their work is seen and celebrated, their investment in the ensemble and in each other deepens.

Strategy #15: ***Choir and Family Cultural Social Event***

Another powerful strategy is to bridge school life and home life by inviting families and community members to celebrate the cultural heritage of your students/singers by incorporating family-centered events. One example is a “Tamalada and Carols” event—a culturally inclusive activity where students and their families gather to make tamales and sing holiday songs in English and Spanish. This creates a cross-generational, multilingual celebration of culture and provides space for joyful music making outside the formal concert setting.

Events like these align with the SEL core competency of relationship skills¹⁴ and allow for deeper familial investment in students’ musical lives. This type of event can be facilitated in collaboration with culinary teachers or community kitchens. Depending on the cultural backgrounds represented in your ensemble, this model can be adapted to feature a variety of foods and repertoire.


In addition to building community, these events can serve a dual purpose as fundraisers or outreach initiatives. For example, freshly made tamales can be sold for \$1 each to raise money for the choir’s travel fund, uniforms, or sheet music. Alternatively, a portion of the food can be packaged and donated to families in need within the school or wider community, fostering a spirit of generosity and social responsibility among students. Whether generating revenue or giving back, integrating food and music in this way promotes a sense of shared purpose and meaningful impact. Music education events that include families and integrate cultural food and song traditions can provide meaningful opportunities for inclusivity and intergenerational learning.¹⁵

Summary

As you begin implementing these and other SEL strategies, remember that their success depends on creating a space that is safe, respectful, and emotionally supportive. While many of the strategies outlined can help foster this environment, the foundation of trust and rapport must be intentionally built to ensure all students feel secure and open enough to engage fully.

Fostering SEL in the choral classroom is not an ancil-



lary goal—it is central to the mission of building a musically expressive, socially bonded ensemble. By intentionally and consistently integrating SEL strategies—ranging from personal storytelling and leadership opportunities to family engagement and community reflection—we not only shape the ensemble’s musical sound but also nurture a culture of belonging that endures far beyond the classroom. As choral educators, we are in a unique position to nurture students’ musical identities alongside their human development. SEL strategies give us the tools to do both with depth and intention. 

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NOTES

- ¹ Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), “What Is SEL?,” last accessed January 5, 2026, <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/>
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Related Choral Journal Content

Colleen B. McNickle and Coty Raven Morris, “Social and Emotional Learning for Choirs,” *Choral Journal* 62, no. 9 (2022): 8–19.

Lindsey Blackhurst and Robin Freeman, “Healing Our Singers, Healing Ourselves: Social and Emotional Learning in Choir,” *Choral Journal* 62, no. 9 (2022): 20.

QUARTERLY ENDORSEMENTS



JOHN CHRISTIAN ROMMEREIM

Praise beginnings, Praise the End

- SSAATTBB; a cappella; English and Latin (Joy Harjo; Latin Mass)
- 5' 33". Poet Laureate Harjo, of the Muscogee Nation, has written an expansive prayer of gratitude for the whole cycle of existence. By including a few phrases from the traditional Latin Mass, Rommereim has created a joyful, eccumenical work. Repeated small rhythmic cells contrast with melodic lines; shifting meters, largely 5/4. A must-do for skilled group! (ProjectEncore.org/john-rommereim)



JOAN JOHNSON DREWES

Three

- SSA; a cappella; English (Joan Johnson Drewes)
- 3' 45". A very personal reflection on love and loss. The composer explains in the liner notes in her score. With the numbers 1, 2, and 3 as the text, the piece includes the use of [m] and [a] to express varying ability to express the feelings of loss. Harmonies direct a journey that is unpredictable. Exquisite and deeply moving. Skilled singers needed. (ProjectEncore.org/joan-johnson-drewes)



JESSICA RUDMAN

Wind Rising

- SSAA; two tom-toms, tambourine, piano; English (Lola Ridge)
- 3' 00". Poetic description of a moment in which a powerful, disruptive force is embraced, bringing new beginnings. Use of percussion underscores the propulsive nature of the text, expressed by the voices in often sharp articulations. Independent lines, with logical progressions, making it both exciting and doable for young treble voice. Strong even as a closer! (ProjectEncore.org/jessica-rudman)



RICHARD JEREMY PEAT *(new to PROJECT : ENCORE)*

Corpus Christi Carol

- SSA; S solo; a cappella; English (16th century)
- 4' 30". Fascinating setting of this ancient text, that blends modal inflection with contemporary sonorities, creating a sense that is both ancient and modern. Hypnotic, rocking in the "Lully, lully" refrain. Transparent, delicate texture that heightens the mysterious blend of tenderness and suffering. Best in a resonant hall with very pure voices. Stunning. (ProjectEncore.org/richard-jeremy-peat)

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JOSHUA CARTER MAYNARD

Alleluia

- SSAATTBB; S solo; a cappella; Latin (Joshua Carter Maynard)
- 5' 00". A declamation of praise to the beauty and complexity of the world and the human race. Not a boistrous Alleluia; rather, quiet awe, expressed through long, arching phrases, creating a soundscape that makes use of gentle dissonance, and layered blocks of sound. Very effective, given solidity on all eight voice parts.
(ProjectEncore.org/joshua-carter-maynard)



HOWARD YERMISH *(new to PROJECT : ENCORE)*

On Our Watch

- SATB; S solo; piano, clarinet, marimba; English (Nnimmo Bassey)
- 15' 00". A challenge to the assumption that supporting countries in their transition to sustainable technologies (particularly away from fossil fuel extraction) is someone else's problem to solve. Four movements, each with unique statement and style. A call to action. Must have good soprano soloist. Manageable and inspiring for solid community ensemble.
(ProjectEncore.org/howard-yermish)



ARI MESSENGER

This amazing day

- SATB divisi; a cappella; English (E. E. Cummings)
- 3' 45". A very worthy addition to the many settings of this beloved text of quiet wonder and gratitude. Sweeping lines contrast with block chords; sense of ease with continually shifting meters. The writing is extraordinary in very understated ways. Gentle and compelling. Requires (and deserves) skilled, flexible singers.
(ProjectEncore.org/ari-messenger)



Look for the PROJECT : ENCORE display at all national choral conferences.



International Journal of Research in Choral Singing Call for Editorial Board Members

Do you know someone who has contributions to make to choral research and to ACDA publications? See below for how you can formally nominate them...or you can simply request that we reach out to someone you feel might do great work; write to IJRCS@acda.org.

The editor of the International Journal of Research in Choral Singing requests nominations for 6-year membership on the Editorial Board. Terms begin January 1, 2027. Nomination materials will be accepted through **May 15, 2026**, addressed to Bryan Nichols, IJRCS Editor, at IJRCS@acda.org with the subject line “nomination.”

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Application materials may be emailed directly by the nominee; a letter of nomination from another individual may be sent separately, if desired.

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Recorded Sound Reviews

Legends and Legacies

Rutgers University Kirkpatrick Choir

Rutgers University Glee Club

Patrick Gardner, director

2025; 2:18:00

In 2023, Dr. Patrick Gardner retired from his position as distinguished professor and director of choral activities at Rutgers University after thirty years at the institution and over forty years in higher education. Throughout his tenure, he helped shape the musical careers of countless individuals and built Rutgers into one of the major choral programs in the Northeast. With *Legends and Legacies*, Dr. Gardner and the Rutgers choirs have published a dense compendium of representative works recorded over the past fifteen or so years to help document this extraordinary legacy.

The album opens with Scott Ordway's *Three Kalevala Songs*, performed by Rutgers Kirkpatrick Choir. Though the pieces are set in English, Ordway's compositions show a clear reverence for the style of the great Finnish composers of the early twentieth century. Likewise, Gardner's preparation of the choir captures the pure intonation and resonance of traditional Finnish choral singing. Kirkpatrick Choir continues with two arresting works by Melissa Dunphy, another contemporary composer who has had residency at Rutgers. *What do you think I fought for at Omaha Beach?* bears a par-

ticular poignancy given the current political climate. The text is drawn from excerpts of public testimony given by WWII veteran Phillip Spooner in support of marriage equality. Appropriately, the sopranos of Kirkpatrick Choir deliver a more impassioned performance here but always with measured control and impeccable technique.

William Bolcom's *The Miracle* is a whimsical, orchestrated work that the Rutgers Glee Club has performed on several occasions under Gardner's direction. The poems by Arnold Weinstein describe imagined scenes in the life of Renaissance painter Paolo Ucello as well as supernatural interactions with St. Francis of Assisi. Stylistically, Bolcom draws on influences ranging from mid-century experimental to jazz and musical theater. Rutgers Glee Club effortlessly navigates the nine challenging movements, articulating the text with clarity and humor throughout. Gardner's familiarity with the work is evident, as the ensemble performs this somewhat frenetic piece with remarkable precision.

Toward the midway point of the record are four works by Steven Sametz. *Amicitia* was commissioned by longtime Glee Club patron Robert Mortensen to honor the retirement of Patrick Gardner. Sametz's choral writing features lush, diatonic harmonies and paired voicings that unfold gradually over time. In *Dulcis Amor*, Sametz explores the extreme high and low ranges of the tenor and bass voices, which are managed beau-

tifully by the Glee Club. The texts speak to the immutable power of friendship, which is a perfect context for building camaraderie and trust within a collegiate choral ensemble.

Rutgers Kirkpatrick Choir performed the a cappella version of Arnold Schönberg's *Friede auf Erden* at the 2016 Eastern ACDA Region Conference in Boston. Their impressive mastery of this capstone work is highlighted in this section of the album, along with works by three other towering figures of twentieth-century music: Luigi Dallapiccola, Olivier Messiaen, and Elliott Carter. Though not as thoroughly avant-garde as his serial works, Messiaen's *O Sacrum Convivium!* is every bit as chromatic and challenging as *Friede auf Erden*. The sopranos of Kirkpatrick Choir once again navigate the outer edges of their register with relative ease in this piece and in Dallapiccola's *Il coro delle malmaritate*, which undergoes a wide range of emotions and styles in a single movement. To round out this set, Rutgers Glee Club gives a rousing performance of Elliott Carter's propulsive *Tarantella* in classical Latin, deftly accompanied on four-hands piano by Brian Katona and Sohee Lee.

The record continues with two evocative works by the late Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Lewis Spratlan. In the three movements of *Travels*, the poetry describes such disparate scenes as the antics of Australian kangaroos and the momentary fascination of reading someone's name written in window condensation on a New Jersey train. Rutgers Glee Club is well suited to the divergent styles required for this piece, and Paul Conrad's piano playing is virtually seamless. In *New England Concordance*, Gardner once again draws contrasting methods of vocal production from the tenor-bass choir. After the elegiac first movement, the Glee Club engages in a twangy, shape-note manner of singing, as called for by the composer. This is both historically informed and a stirring experience for the listener. Rutgers Kirkpatrick Choir follows with *Two Emily Dickinson Settings* by Tarik O'Regan. These a cappella works make use of sustained pedal points with rich divisi gathering in the upper voices. Kirkpatrick choir employs a more straight-toned approach here, helping the singers maintain unwavering intonation in these highly dissonant movements.

There are still more great performances to appreci-

ate on *Legends and Legacies*, including a lovely setting by Dr. Brandon Williams, Patrick Gardner's successor as director of choral activities at Rutgers University. The scope of this album may be immense, but it does extremely well to encapsulate the achievements of Gardner and the Rutgers choral program during his tenure. *Legends and Legacies* is a journey to the absolute heights of university choral singing and a collection that warrants intentional listening.

John Guarente

Professor of Choral Ensembles & Music Theory
South Puget Sound Community College

Where Waters Meet

Canadian Chamber Choir

Julia David, Conductor

Sherryl Sewepagaham, Soloist

2024; 41:25

The Anishinaabekwe environmentalist Winona LaDuke wrote that "Water is life. We are the people who live by the water. Pray by these waters. Travel by the waters. Eat and drink from these waters. We are related to those who live in the water." This declaration is at the heart of *Where Waters Meet*, a recording by the Canadian Chamber Choir (CCC) that fuses Canadian composer Carmen Braden's five-movement eponymous work from 2019 with Indigenous chants/improvisations by Sherryl Sewepagaham and "Sun on Water," a 2015 piece by Hussein Janmohamed. *Where Waters Meet*—itself the culmination of several collaborations between the CCC, under the direction of Julia David, and a multitude of culture bearers throughout Canada—documents their desire to "learn from Indigenous ways of knowing...[and] a commitment to a deeper understanding of historical context and building collaborative relationships with Indigenous artists and elders."

This recording excels in uniting diverse repertoire into a single, cohesive product. Braden describes her composition, which serves as the album's framework, as one that "considers water as a symbol of a parallel journey—as a reminder of life and lives, as a call for ac-

tion, and as a conduit for change.” Indigenous improvisations by performer and ethnomusicologist Sherryl Sewepagaham are positioned between each of the five movements. Much like arias in Bach’s Passions, these chants expand upon texts and themes found within its neighboring choruses.

Where Waters Meet opens with “Morning Drum Song,” an invocation similar to a *Nigun* from Jewish traditions. This repetitive meditation is followed by Janmohamed’s “Sun on Water.” The universality of the recording’s message is highlighted by Janmohamed’s use of texts from Hindi and Indic Islamic Muslim traditions, Psalm 130, and Cree (the latter added especially for this project by Sewepagaham). Like a film’s “establishing scene,” these opening movements confirm the recording’s theme and tone.

The third track, “Water Memories” (movement one of Braden’s piece) is in a quasi-rondo form, alternating between sweeping lyrical lines and undulating homophonic passages that depict the motion, weight, and pull of water. Track five, “Nibi” (Ojibwe for “water”), reveals CCC’s command of vocal color and musical interpretation, as well as Braden’s expressive text-setting. For example, the spacious texture on “echo through vast expansion” is particularly notable. These economic harmonies and repeating phrases remind this reviewer of the works of David Lang and Caroline Shaw.

Just as the “Et incarnatus est,” “Crucifixus,” and “Et resurrexit” from Bach’s *B minor mass* form the structural and theological *crux* of its “Symbolum Nicenum,” tracks six, seven, and eight act as a similar focal point for this recording. “Kitaskinahk” (track six) acknowledges the original inhabitants with the text, “I am from here, I am proud to be from here,” and is followed by track seven, “In Local News, Water,” which presents prose from the 2022 *Toronto Star* article: “‘Disrespected, violated, contaminated’: Researcher says safe drinking water shouldn’t fall solely on the backs of Indigenous peoples.” This parlendo-esque movement is a clever approach to setting prose rather than poetry and resembles the technique of Anglican chant/psalm tones before morphing into an aleatoric soundscape. Using the final words of track seven as its impetus, sung soaringly by Chloé Thiessen, track eight reinforces this call for “action” by directing the listener to “Listen to the

land, it teaches us many things, we must take care of it together.”

The narrative and musical structure of *Where Waters Meet* culminate in the album’s two final tracks. While on display throughout this recording, no more is CCC’s devotion to musical excellence demonstrated than in the penultimate track, “Where Waters Meet.” CCC’s rhythmic drive is palpable, and its vocal intensity is vibrant. Serving as the recording’s epilogue, “Nipîy” (the final track, composed by Sewepagaham) is a clear example of CCC’s commitment to authentic understanding, with a culturally informed tone and performance practice.

Where Waters Meet’s texts and themes are juxtaposed in a most thought-provoking manner. By positioning a plethora of languages and sources—including Cree, Ojibwe, Latin, Hindu, the *Toronto Star*, and text from First Nation poet Yolanda Bonnell—the recording’s universal message resonates across cultures. Both Sewepagaham and the CCC excel at communication through clear and authentic diction. It is unfortunate that the tiny font size of the accompanying program notes and text/translations obstructed this message; its powerful texts, descriptive poetry, and information about the work were difficult to read, creating an accessibility issue.

Despite this, *Where Waters Meet* is an immensely moving recording that illuminates the symbiotic relationship between people and water. It stands as a testament to how respectful collaborations can produce art that honors humanity’s unique perspectives and fosters dialogue between diverse cultures. In particular, the CCC’s collaboration with Indigenous communities establishes them as a standard-bearer for meaningful multicultural musical exchanges.

C. Michael Porter
Boise, Idaho

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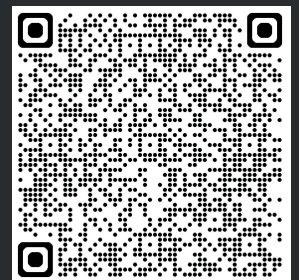
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