

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2024

# CHORAL JOURNAL



## Music, Dialogue, and Empathy:

Theories of Peacebuilding in Choral Education and Beyond





MAKE  
 Experience New York City  
HAPPEN



CONTACT US TO BEGIN PLANNING 2025 AND BEYOND!

 [NATIONALCONCERTS.COM](https://www.nationalconcerts.com)

 [INFO@NATIONALCONCERTS.COM](mailto:info@nationalconcerts.com)





Annual dues (includes subscription to the *Choral Journal*): Active \$125, Industry \$150, Institutional \$135, Retired \$45, and Student \$15. Library annual subscription rates: U.S. \$75; Canada \$80; International \$170. Single Copy Issues US/Canada: \$9; International: \$20. Circulation: 13,000. Main office: 405-232-8161

The *Choral Journal* (US ISSN 0009-5028) is issued monthly except for April, July, and December by the American Choral Directors Association. Periodicals postage paid at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and additional mailing office.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Choral Journal*, PO Box 1705, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73101-1705.

Since 1959, the *Choral Journal* has been the refereed, international journal of the American Choral Directors Association. Each issue features: scholarly articles, anonymously peer-reviewed by the editorial board; refereed articles on pedagogical or scientific issues for the choral conductor; refereed articles with practical advice and ideas for the choral conductor; reviews of books, recorded sound, and choral works by choral experts; and editorials from association leadership. The January issue previews each year's regional or national conference offerings. Articles from the *Choral Journal* can be found in the following online databases: JSTOR (Arts & Sciences XI Collection); ProQuest (International Index to Music Periodicals); University Microfilms International; NaPublishing; RILM (Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale); EBSCO music index; and WorldCat. Advertising options are available for members and nonmembers. Cover art by Efrain Guerrero. Interior art by Tammy Brummell. Musical examples by Tunesmith Music <[www.Tunesmithmusic.com](http://www.Tunesmithmusic.com)>. Copyright 2024.

## Features

### 8 Music, Dialogue, and Empathy: Theories of Peacebuilding in Choral Education and Beyond

by Benjamin Bergey

### 16 An Interview with Stephen Cleobury

by Christopher M. Smith

## Articles

### 27 Research Report

Everyday Social Change: The Importance of Daily Actions in the Choral Setting  
by Kelly Bylica and Cara Faith Bernard

### 33 On the Voice

Singing through the “Sick Season”: Advice for Choral Directors  
by Philip A. Doucette

### 39 Repertoire & Resources - Collegiate Choirs

The Choral Network Nexus: Building Connections and Support in Higher Education by Jenny Bent

Count Me In: Elevating the All-Campus Collegiate Choir by Caron Daley

Building a Choral Community in a 2-Year College by Brandon Elliott

Student Chapter Development: Conversations with ACDA Student Chapters  
by Ryan Beeken and Elizabeth Swanson

### 53 Lift Every Voice

“On the Road Again”: Traveling with Transgender, Non-Binary, and Gender Expansive Singers in Your Ensemble  
by Melanie E. Stapleton

### 61 Rehearsal Break

The Conductor Sets Time; Musicians Keep Time  
by Stuart Hunt

### 70 ChorTeach

Community, Cooperation, and Collaboration through Orff Schulwerk in Middle School Ensembles  
by Ellic Johnson

## Editorial

### 2 From the President

### 3 From the Editor

### 4 From the Vice President

### 6 IFCM Report



**PRESIDENT**

**DAVID FRYLING**  
dfryling@acda.org

**VICE PRESIDENT**

**EDITH COPLEY**  
ecopley@acda.org

**PRESIDENT-ELECT**

**PEARL SHANGKUAN**  
pearl.shangkuan@calvin.edu

**SECRETARY/TREASURER**

**TOM MERRILL**  
merrilltg@gmail.com

**PAST PRESIDENT**

**ANDRÉ THOMAS**  
athomas@acda.org

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**ROBYN HILGER**  
executivedirector@acda.org

**NATIONAL R&R CHAIR**

**GRETCHEN HARRISON**  
nationalrr@acda.org

**EASTERN REGION PRESIDENT**

**AMANDA HANZLIK**  
amandahanzlik@gmail.com

**MIDWESTERN REGION PRESIDENT**

**DERRICK FOX**  
foxderri@msu.edu

**NORTHWESTERN REGION PRESIDENT**

**STEVEN ZIELKE**  
stevenzielke@nwacda.org

**SOUTHERN REGION PRESIDENT**

**JEFFERY AMES**  
jefferyacdasouthern@gmail.com

**SOUTHWESTERN REGION PRESIDENT**

**JONATHAN D. OWEN**  
Jonathano@swacda.org

**WESTERN REGION PRESIDENT**

**JULIE DANA**  
jreydana@comcast.com

**INDUSTRY ASSOCIATE REPRESENTATIVE**

**OLIVER SCOFIELD**  
KI Concerts  
oliver@kiconcerts.com

# From the President



David Fryling

The holiday season is right around the corner, and the end of the calendar year is in sight. As things start to get more hectic for all of us, it's the perfect time to take a beat to remind ourselves what a beautiful and privileged responsibility we each have to be able to serve our choral communities.

It's the perfect time for this reminder, I think, because it's also so easy to lose sight of this privilege and beauty amidst the often chaotic and stressful months of November and December. Tightly booked singers create even tighter rehearsal schedules. Concerts and services arrive much sooner than they have any right to. These pressures can result in our feeling powerless in the face of the relentless progression of time, which can cause us to grasp wildly for more power in areas in which we have no real control.

I truly believe that when we're at our best on the podium, we act as facilitators of a unified yet deeply personal expression of the people in front of us. We don't personally make any actual musical sounds; we're very simply there to invite others to do so. When we forget this, we can find ourselves performing *at*, instead of *with*, our ensembles. This can quickly lead to a false sense of control.

My favorite metaphor to talk about the conductor-choir relationship is the metaphor of dance partners. In a nutshell, it goes like this: We each have essential and mostly separate responsibilities, and though one of us by necessity must lead the dance, both dance partners must be alive in the moment, striving to express some truth from deep within—and deeper than—ourselves.

So may we be careful that, in our pursuit of beauty and truth in our music making amid deadlines and other pressures, we never (even accidentally!) tamp down the most vital part of the joys of being a singer: creative personal expression, deep community bonds with our fellow singers, and a transcendent connection with the people who have chosen to come listen to our songs.

May we each remain humbly grounded in the joys of what we do: The joy of digging deep into the minds of humanity's most gifted poets and composers; the joy of creating something meaningful and larger than ourselves; and—perhaps most of all—the joy enabling the singers in our care to tell their stories together.





# From the Editor



Amanda Bumgarner

This November/December 2024 issue of *Choral Journal* is the final one for two editorial board members who have completed two terms serving ACDA in this capacity. Editorial board members serve behind the scenes, but the product of each month's issue of *Choral Journal* is a direct result of their work. First, William Weinert is the chair of the conducting and ensembles department, professor of conducting, and director of choral activities at the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester. He conducts the Eastman Chorale and the Eastman-Rochester Chorus while supervising the master's and doctoral programs in choral conducting. Second, Giselle Wyers is the Donald E. Peterson Endowed Professor of Choral Music at the University of Washington. Along with being an active guest conductor, she is a composer with works published by Santa Barbara Music Publishing Company, MusicSpoke, and earthsongs. Both Bill's and Giselle's expertise covered a range of subjects, and they were passionate, thoughtful reviewers as well as just being wonderful people. I want to publicly thank them for their work on behalf of ACDA. Those interested in the music of Anton Bruckner should not miss Bill's update of his 1996 *Choral Journal* article on the *Mass in F Minor*, published in June/July 2024.

The 2024 calendar year featured a variety of topics and several focus issues. January previewed the 2024 Regional Conferences. June/July highlighted the music of Anton Bruckner for the 200th anniversary year. September featured a focus on William Dawson for the 125th anniversary, a topic that was suggested by Marques Garrett at one of our editorial board meetings. Finally, the National Standing Committee for Advocacy & Collaboration curated a focus issue in their committee area for the October issue. We also had a wealth of other articles and columns, thanks to authors and column editors. As always, you can view the annotated *Choral Journal* index online to search for topics and articles from this and previous years. I am indebted to Scott Dorsey for continuing this work for ACDA. This coming January 2025 issue will feature a full preview of the interest sessions and performances available at the national conference in Dallas, and the February issue will serve as the conference program book.

Please consider how you may want to contribute to any of ACDA's publications in the coming year. Submissions are open for *Choral Journal*, *Chor-Teach*, and the *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing*. You can find out more information at [acda.org](http://acda.org) under the "Publications" dropdown. I look forward to continuing to share resources that will help you grow in your profession.

## CHORAL JOURNAL EDITORIAL BOARD

### EDITOR

**AMANDA BUMGARNER**

ACDA National Office  
405-232-8161 (ex. 205)  
[abumgarner@acda.org](mailto:abumgarner@acda.org)

### MANAGING EDITOR

**RON GRANGER**

ACDA National Office  
405-232-8161  
[rgranger@acda.org](mailto:rgranger@acda.org)

### EDITORIAL BOARD

**SEAN MICHAEL BURTON**

[seanburtonmusic@gmail.com](mailto:seanburtonmusic@gmail.com)

**MARQUES L. A. GARRETT**

[marques.garrett@unt.edu](mailto:marques.garrett@unt.edu)

**MICHAEL PORTER**

[cmporter1750@gmail.com](mailto:cmporter1750@gmail.com)

**WILLIAM SOUTHERLAND**

[williamgsoutherland@gmail.com](mailto:williamgsoutherland@gmail.com)

**DEBRA SPURGEON**

[dspurg@olemiss.edu](mailto:dspurg@olemiss.edu)

**WILLIAM WEINERT**

[wweinert@esm.rochester.edu](mailto:wweinert@esm.rochester.edu)

**GISELLE WYERS**

[wyersg@uw.edu](mailto:wyersg@uw.edu)

### COLUMN EDITORS

**MICAH BLAND**

[mbland1613@gmail.com](mailto:mbland1613@gmail.com)

**MATTHEW HOCH**

[mrh0032@auburn.edu](mailto:mrh0032@auburn.edu)

**BRYAN E. NICHOLS**

[bnichols@psu.edu](mailto:bnichols@psu.edu)

**GREGORY PYSH**

[gregory.m.pysh@gmail.com](mailto:gregory.m.pysh@gmail.com)

**JENNIFER RODGERS**

[rodgersj@iastate.edu](mailto:rodgersj@iastate.edu)

**LAURA WIEBE**

[lwiebe@marin.edu](mailto:lwiebe@marin.edu)



# From the Vice President



Edith Copley

## Celebrating the Choral Art— Past, Present, and Future 2025 ACDA National Conference in Dallas



ACDA NATIONAL  
2025  
March 18-22 Dallas, TX

Many years ago, a colleague recommended I attend the 1977 ACDA National Conference in Dallas. It was my first ACDA conference, and it was a life-changing event for me. After that weekend, I became a lifelong ACDA member. Now, forty-eight years later, I'm honored to serve as the chair of the 2025 ACDA National Conference in Dallas. Organizing this massive event has been a team effort, and I'm so thankful to the members of the conference committee, the R&R leadership, and the ACDA national office who have worked with me over the last two years to put together a conference that will feature outstanding choirs, informative interest sessions, and a new schedule that will allow more quality time to connect with colleagues.

After the 2023 National Conference in Cincinnati, attendees were sent a survey. Over 800 people responded, and I read all of the comments. Those thoughtful recommendations have guided my decisions for the Dallas conference:

- select and feature more elementary and secondary school choirs
- allow all attendees the opportunity to experience one or more of the immersion choirs
- offer interest sessions that relate to the preceding R&R forum or deep dive
- choose honor choir conductors who work with that grade level
- put the Composer Fair in a more prominent place
- offer a National Vocal Jazz Honor Choir on Jazz Night
- feature more international choirs
- choose a woman to conduct the major choral/orchestral work
- create time to sing together each day
- feature a wide variety of interest sessions that will be relevant to the entire ACDA membership

I am pleased to say that all these suggestions have been implemented for the upcoming Dallas conference. I also had one “must have” on my list: all four honor choirs will perform Saturday in one of the world’s greatest concert halls—the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center.

Conference registration opened in October, so I encourage you to register and select the purple or orange performing track. (New colors!) Interest sessions will be single-tracked and located in close proximity to the concert halls. The January and February issues of the *Choral Journal* will have all the exciting conference details.

If you’ve attended an ACDA national conference, you already know that you will discover new repertoire, gain new knowledge, and return home inspired. If you’ve never attended a national conference, I encourage you to register for Dallas. It just could be a life-changing event for you, too.

*Edie Copley*





# ACDA NATIONAL 2025

## March 18-22 Dallas, TX

Join us in Dallas for the 2025 ACDA National Conference.

**Conference registration is now open.** See the conference website to learn more about the performing ensembles, schedules, and sessions.

Be sure to keep up to date with all the conference information by checking the conference website frequently ([www.acda.org/conferences](http://www.acda.org/conferences)).

The conference opens on the evening of Tuesday, March 18, with the Welcome to Dallas Concert. This will be followed by three full days of performances, interest sessions, exhibitions, headlining performances, and the ACDA Honor Choirs. Be sure to plan to stay through Saturday evening for the full conference experience.

# International Federation for Choral Music

## Report

### **Memorandum of Strategic Cooperation Agreement signed to take WSCM to... Beijing in 2026!**

On 8 September 2024, a significant meeting occurred in Lisbon, Portugal, at the Palacete dos Condes de Monte Real, headquarters of IFCM. IFCM President Emily Kuo Vong met with Li Jinsheng, Chairman of China Arts and Entertainment Group (CAEG), to discuss an exciting possibility for the next World Symposium on Choral Music (WSCM) in 2026. Mutually committed to the goal of promoting international cultural exchange through the development of choral music, IFCM and CAEG agreed to expand their time-honoured partnership based on the principles of “resource sharing, complementary advantages, brand interaction, and mutual development.” IFCM and CAEG signed a Memorandum of Strategic Cooperation Agreement which aims to present the 14th WSCM in Beijing, China, in 2026 in collaboration with the 18th China International Chorus Festival (CICF). Stay tuned for updates.

### **New! YOUNG IFCM Podcasts**

In 2023, the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM) established YOUNG IFCM, an IFCM Youth Committee consisting of six young choral musicians from Türkiye, USA, Philippines, Cameroon, Chile and New Zealand.

One of their projects is the creation of a podcast series entirely run by YOUNG IFCM and produced by IFCM.

*Unison* is a new podcast series dedicated to celebrating choral music and showcasing the diverse experiences, insights and talents of choral musicians internationally. For these globally minded podcasts, YOUNG IFCM aims to bring together voices from around the world to share unique

choral traditions, experiences and advice.

YOUNG IFCM has got something really special coming up! Stay tuned to discover the names of the YOUNG IFCM podcast guests.

### **Online webinar:**

### **“Creating Choral Music: Talking about the Requirements of Choral Repertoire” November 23, 2024, online, 8pm CET**

The Webinar “Creating Choral Music: Talking about the Requirements of Choral Repertoire” will focus on the art of choral composition. Three well-known composers will share their ideas on how to create choral music for ensembles today, using their own compositions as illustrations.

To develop this theme, IFCM invited composers from different regions of the world:

- Marie Herrington (USA). Marie is a Ukrainian-American soprano, composer, and conductor. The winner of the IFCM Composition Competition 2023-2024.
- Jaakko Mäntyjärvi (Finland). Jaakko is one of Finland’s internationally, best-known composers of choral music with a catalog of 150 works published to date.
- Eva Ugalde (Basque Country, Spain). Eva is regularly invited as jury member in international composition competitions around the world.

This Webinar is part of the Choral TIES project coordinated by the European Choral Association and co-funded by the European Union Creative Europe programme and organised in cooperation with IFCM.



### Call for Committee Members for the Education and Communication National Standing Committee

**Deadline: January 05, 2025**

The ACDA Education and Communication National Standing Committee is seeking to fill up to three open committee positions.

You may apply by following the steps below or you may nominate someone else. When nominating, the committee will reach out to your nominee and alert them to your nomination and request that they submit an official application.

The mission of the Education and Communication National Standing Committee is to foster and support educational initiatives that provide professional development and resources for emerging, mid-career, and late-career ACDA members as well those initiatives focused on inspiring the next generation of choral professionals. The standing committee also assists with encouraging authors for online and print publication.

In addition to being committed to choral music education, successful applicants will be service-minded, have a proven track record of successful teaching experience, bring a unique and diverse perspective that reflects the richness of our communities, be willing to attend conferences and meetings, and have an interest in seeking and providing resources for the membership.

A successful candidate will demonstrate strengths including visionary leadership, strong communication, collaboration and problem-solving skills in addition to a "self-starter" mentality useful for out-of-the-box thinking. Commitment to volunteerism is a priority. Prompt, concise communication skills are a must. Candidates should have demonstrated experience in leadership at the local, state, region or national level. This experience does not have to be within ACDA but can also be within district leadership or other organizations.

Priority will be given to candidates who are actively teaching K-12 students in schools or community settings.

If selected for a leadership position, you will serve a two-year term, renewable twice, for a possible total 6-year term of service. The renewal of term is extended by the Committee Chair. The first term begins on July 1, 2025.

**To nominate someone, use the google form located at <https://acda.org/education>.** You will need to submit a name and email address for your nominee.

**To apply, use the Google form located at <https://acda.org/education>**

- Submit your CV (PDF); and
- Submit brief remarks (2 paragraphs or less) on why you are interested in this role.

Application collection will close on January 5, 2025. Applicants will be notified February 10-15, 2025. The new leaders will have the opportunity to work with the current committee through the spring and early summer and will assume their leadership responsibilities on July 1, 2025.

For questions or more information, contact John McDonald, Chair of the National Standing Committee for Education and Communication: [johnmcdonald@wustl.edu](mailto:johnmcdonald@wustl.edu)

# Music, Dialogue, and Empathy: Theories of Peacebuilding in Choral Education and Beyond

BENJAMIN BERGEY

Studying abroad in Egypt, Israel, Palestine, and Greece in 2010 sparked an interest in the intersection of music and peacebuilding. During this time, I conducted research on the utilization of music within protest movements. Although modest in scope, this exploration laid the foundation for a doctoral dissertation focusing on the nexus of music and peacebuilding. This research specifically investigated the activities of two nonprofit music organizations—The Jerusalem Youth Chorus and The Polyphony Foundation—which facilitate collaboration between Arab and Jewish youth through musical engagement and professionally facilitated dialogue sessions. Motivated by a desire to contribute to the literature of music’s role in conflict transformation, this investigation aimed to fill a gap in existing scholarship by examining the methodologies employed by these organizations, which had received no attention in academic literature.

The specific field of music and peacebuilding or conflict transformation has been expanding. Many peacebuilders already know that the arts can be a useful tool in peacebuilding, and they use the arts in different ways through their work.<sup>1</sup> Many musicians and ensemble directors work to bring musicians together and create beauty but not necessarily using these theories to describe what they do. Through research, discussion, teaching, and training, it is possible to build momentum toward more collaborations between the music community and the peacebuilding community.

Benjamin Bergey  
Assistant Professor of Music  
Director of Orchestra and Choirs  
Advisor of Music and Peacebuilding  
Eastern Mennonite University  
benjamin.bergey@emu.edu





Choral educators should not only impart musical knowledge; they are also responsible for fostering an environment where students learn to collaborate, communicate, and emote through music and with one another. Conflict, though inevitable, need not disrupt the harmony of a choral ensemble. Instead, it can serve as a catalyst for growth and transformation.

This article will examine the intersection of music and peacebuilding, exploring how choral educators can use this framework and the common-ground-building nature of music making to constructively resolve conflicts. Additionally, readers will learn practical strategies, hands-on exercises, and additional resources for implementing these concepts in their rehearsals.

## Theoretical Framework

Before discussing the overarching goals of this intersection, two keywords and framework definitions are needed.

### *Peacebuilding*

The term peacebuilding was coined in the 1970s by Dr. Johan Galtung, one of the founders of modern peace studies.<sup>2</sup> Peacebuilding refers to an active engagement of making and sustaining peace before, during, and after conflict. This term is used in contrast to “peacemaking,” which generally refers to diplomatic efforts, such as with the United Nations, and in contrast to “peacekeeping,” or the even more forceful “peace enforcement,” which is usually used when military forces are utilized to enforce states of peace.<sup>3</sup>

### *Conflict Transformation*

The field of conflict transformation is a subsection of peacebuilding. John Paul Lederach, one of its founders, notes that the framework of conflict transformation sees the immediate situation, looks toward the “deeper patterns of relationship,” and creates a “conceptual framework.” He formally defines it as such:

Conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social

structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationship.<sup>4</sup>

Using the framework of conflict transformation, four overarching goals of how music and peacebuilding interact could be summarized as follows:

#### *1. Create common ground*

This is done through shared experiences, music making (or musicking as Christopher Small says<sup>5</sup>), storytelling, and extensive time together. It takes time to build social capital, which is needed to be able to transform conflict.

#### *2. Build empathy*

Empathy is possible once common ground is experienced, such as through musicking. Sharing an experience allows us to recognize the self of another. More on the definition and types of empathy are discussed below.

#### *3. Create conditions for constructive dialogue*

Dialogue is necessary to deal with conflict, and therefore for conflict transformation. It requires listening to understand, not to debate or wait until the other is done talking to say one’s piece. Building empathy means the chance to find commonalities, or at least an ability to listen. What is at the root/heart of what they are saying? Where are their needs not being met? Dialogue will be further discussed below as well.

#### *4. Meet needs and break cycles of oppression*

Through dialogue and understanding each other’s needs, a space is created where people can come together in a place of safety to share experiences, stories, and make music together. Making music, and especially singing, is a vulnerable act, so it is crucial for one’s needs to be met and that those needs are not hindered by another. This is, by definition, the essence of nonviolence and can break cycles of oppression. When needs are withheld or hindered by others, that is a form of violence.<sup>6</sup>

As noted above, dialogue and empathy lie at the heart of conflict transformation. To better understand these four pillars, we will look further at these two critical elements. *Dialogue* enables individuals to articulate



their perspectives, actively listen to others, and seek common ground. *Empathy*, on the other hand, allows us to understand and resonate with the emotions and experiences of others, fostering compassion and connection. In choral ensembles, where listening is paramount, students are already equipped with the foundational skills necessary for empathic communication. By nurturing these skills through purposeful exercises and activities, choir directors can create an environment conducive to constructive dialogue and empathic engagement.

### Empathy

There are two sides of empathy: emotional contagion and intellectual understanding.<sup>7</sup> Emotional contagion is feeling-based, where one can perceive the emotions of another. Intellectual empathy is putting oneself in another's situation intellectually to attempt to understand another's experience without judgment, recognizing each other's shared humanity.

Building empathy is done in many ways, starting with building self-awareness, sharing narrative experiences of others to understand their contexts, validating others, and in music making. Studies show making music together helps to overcome perceptions of dissimilarity and to accept others' differences. It builds common ground. It is at the heart of many of the activities below, and it is also about building anti-oppressive competency to be aware of each other's identities and privileges.

There is also the specific subcategory of musical empathy, where the understanding of the affective and cognitive components to empathy are perceived through the sonic and contextual qualities of the music itself. This is the feature of music where a participant might interpret music through emotional responses such as happy, sad, defeated, or triumphant. Lyrics may describe something that allows us to intellectually connect with the emotions of the music. It is particularly powerful when the sonic emotional contagion complements the intellectual and contextual components. Music can tap into parts of the brain and mirror many emotions, even releasing dopamine. Music offers a potential capacity to strengthen and use the empathic response, an important tool within peacebuilding.

In the words of Johan Galtung, Norwegian sociologist and founder of modern peace and conflict studies:

Good art is like good peace: always challenging. Art and peace are both located in the tension between emotions and intellect. A false dichotomy...art, like peace, has to overcome such false dichotomies by speaking both to the heart and to the brain, to the compassion of the heart and constructions of the brain. Maybe that is where art and peace really find each other and interconnect most deeply: they both address both human faculties.<sup>8</sup>

### Dialogue

Conflict is normal to human existence. The inability to dialogue constructively is one cause of conflict. Peace and reconciliation require truth, listening, and understanding.<sup>9</sup> Dialogue builds wide-reaching relationships, allows people to share experiences and perceptions, and provides the opportunity for all to have a voice. It requires active and empathic listening, as well as honest and productive expression and assertion. Dialogue encourages the ability to understand diverse perspectives, which is critical when faced with difference or disagreement and is, therefore, central to the framework of conflict transformation.<sup>10</sup>

The French word *ensemble* translates to English as "together," which is apropos because ensemble music provides an opportunity to bring people together and practice the skill of listening. Musically speaking, players in ensembles are taught to listen to all that is going on around them as much as possible. They are trained to identify who has the melody, who has the rhythmic activity, which instruments are being played together or separately, and how each passage fits into the larger whole. Thus, the ability to listen critically is essential to quality ensemble music. Given the listening skills already ameliorated in music making, ensembles can be a musical avenue for dialogue to be taught, facilitated, and utilized to build empathy, improve relationships, and transform conflict.<sup>11</sup> These skills need to be intentionally practiced with an aim toward transferring into other parts of life. The exercises below are geared toward building empathy, collaboration, and creativity.

## Practical Strategies for Conflict Transformation

As choral educators, the following hands-on exercises may offer actionable ways to integrate conflict transformation principles into choral rehearsals or the music classroom. These activities may not only enhance students' musical abilities but also have the potential to cultivate essential life skills such as communication, collaboration, mindfulness, and empathy. Note: framing and facilitating is key to the success of these activities. How we frame experiences can either foster creativity and safety or hamper it. Likewise, facilitation can create a brave environment to try new things, or it can make it feel hostile toward participation.

### 1. *Breathing and Snapping*

Invite students to notice their natural breathing. In between the inhale and exhale, have them snap their fingers or give a light tap on their knee. Following each inhale, they can snap before they exhale. Invite them to close their eyes if that is better. What occurs is a beautiful rhythmic composition, representing each person and their breath. This exercise may be used as a prelude to rehearsal, allowing students to center themselves and establish a communal mindset. Their ability to focus may increase, as well as their awareness of connection within a group.

### 2. *Positive Visualization*

Guide students through visualization exercises where they imagine themselves successfully singing together or achieving some type of goal. Encourage students to share their visualizations and experience with one another, promoting empathy and understanding. Alternatively, lead them through a specific visualization—such as walking onstage before choral assessments—so they are prepared and know they can succeed, working toward a common goal.

### 3. *Initiate, Imitate, Observe*

The basis of this activity is to facilitate a group of students around one rule: they either initiate a sound, imitate a sound someone else initiated, or observe what others are doing. Those are the three categories of actions; otherwise, there are no other rules. This facilitation technique can be used in many creative ways, one

of which being a paper game where each person is given a piece of paper. The idea is to encourage them to find the breadth of noises one can make with a piece of paper. Crumpling, tearing, rubbing it together, blowing on it, shaking it, hitting it, etc. Students find there is an amazing amount one can do with a sheet of paper.

These three components—initiate, imitate, or observe—are actually an intentional facilitation technique, as students are encouraged to make something up or do something they saw someone else doing. By framing it as initiate, observe, or imitate, it helps the participants to conceptualize what they do as a part of the whole, even though it's an individual thing. That way, as they are making up a sound with the paper or something else, they are also thinking about it as a way to lead others to make that sound, and they are more aware of what others are doing around them.

### 4. *Group Improvisation and Drum Circles*

Improvisation can be practiced vocally, instrumentally, and in drum circles. There are many ways this can be led and encouraged, so here are just two strategies for use with voices and/or instruments. The group can be divided into smaller groups and given different simple motives. Encourage them to start to deviate or embellish, no longer needing to replicate the given motive. Alternatively, you can invite one student to come up with a simple ostinato (such as a bass line) to repeat continuously. As students hear that main line, they can start to add another line or complementary phrases. This way, all phrases and motives are developed organically. Neutral syllables are typically used. This can take time for students to feel comfortable and empowered to sing in this type of way. Group improvisation fosters creativity, communication, and adaptability, empowering students to explore new musical possibilities together.

Drum circles are one of the most effective, accessible, and popular ways to encourage group improvisation. Give each student a percussion instrument—or let them choose one—and sit in a circle. Start the group with a simple rhythm. Invite students to model that rhythm, and then start to add other complementing rhythms as they become comfortable. Encourage students to listen to one another and respond creatively. Pass the focal point around by encouraging individuals



or groups to play louder (like a solo or soli) while others play quieter, and then pass that around. You can even do call-and-response patterns, passing around the opportunity to give the “call.” This also encourages creativity, free play, listening, and improvisation.

A good leader allows people of all levels to engage and participate in the ways they are comfortable. Drum circles can be a cathartic experience open to all experience levels, and it is so effective in building common ground and removing barriers. It is important to note that good facilitation takes practice, and it is recommended to experience good drum circle leading before attempting on one’s own. There are also many wonderful resources that can aid in this learning.<sup>12</sup>

### 5. Group Songwriting

Finally, taking improvisation one step further, group songwriting can be a powerful experience. It need not have lofty expectations of being performed in front of people; it can be as simple as an activity to make a silly song. Similar to group improvisation, there are various ways this can be led. For example, start by choosing a topic; students can then provide short phrases or ideas related to that topic. Write them on a board or projected Word document and start to group them in relation to each other. Ask students to suggest moving text around to start to make verses or a chorus. Once short sentences and verses are constructed, invite students to think about how a phrase might sound to improvise a melody. Ensure from the outset that all voices are welcome in this space, and for students to be mindful of how often they are offering suggestions. Alternatively, one could start with a chosen chord progression, have students improvise a melody over it, and let a simple, shorter text come organically that way. As students hear texts around them, they can replicate and supplement what they are hearing. Group songwriting promotes self-expression, teamwork, and empathy, allowing students to share their ideas and connect with one another through music.

### Resources for Further Exploration

Beyond the confines of rehearsal rooms and concert halls, the principles of dialogue and empathy hold profound implications for students’ everyday lives. Conflict

resolution, effective communication, and relationship-building are skills that transcend musical contexts, shaping individuals’ interactions with peers, family, and society at large. By integrating these principles into choral education, educators empower students to navigate conflicts constructively and cultivate empathy in diverse settings. The books and journal articles referenced in the endnotes provide a sampling for further exploration. There are also other organizations and resources for further learning; below are just a few ideas for those interested.

Community-based initiatives, such as Musicians Without Borders,<sup>13</sup> exemplify how music can serve as a catalyst for social change and conflict transformation. By empowering individuals to use music as a tool for peacebuilding in their own communities, these initiatives foster empathy, understanding, and resilience in the face of adversity. Beyond partnering with local grassroots organizations in post-war areas, they also provide trainings for people to use music as a tool to build peace in their own communities. In a sense, this builds ad hoc ensembles out of communities that would not normally have come together to build empathy and transform conflict through music.


Another organization doing important work is MOMRI (Min-On Music Research Institute), which has a Music in Peacebuilding hub<sup>14</sup> and repository, including a directory of hundreds of organizations and practitioners, alongside research articles, community networking boards, and forums for the sharing of resources. The head of this program, Olivier Urbain, also edited the book titled *Music and Conflict Transformation: Harmonies and Dissonances in Geopolitics*.<sup>15</sup>

The curricular potential of teaching music and conflict transformation is also promising. Some universities offer interdisciplinary style majors, where students can explore core courses in musical training, along with additional coursework in peacebuilding or social change, for example.<sup>16</sup>

### Conclusion

Incorporating music as a tool for conflict transformation enhances the musical abilities of our students and equips them with essential life skills that extend beyond the rehearsal room. By fostering dialogue, em-

pathy, and creative collaboration, choral educators can cultivate harmonious ensembles where conflicts serve as opportunities for growth and connection. Through purposeful exercises and activities, choir directors can empower students to navigate conflicts with grace, understanding, and resilience, laying the foundation for a safer and more inclusive musical community that strives for balanced power through equity and giving an opportunity for all to have a voice.

As we reflect on the intersections of music, empathy, and dialogue, we are reminded of the inherent capacity for positive change within each of us. Through intentional practice and collective action, we can harness the transformative power of music to build common ground, foster understanding, and build better group dynamics. In choral education and beyond, let us embrace the journey toward peacebuilding, one note at a time. 

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Examples include: Michael Shank and Lisa Schirch, “Strategic Arts-Based Peacebuilding,” *Peace & Change* 33, no. 2 (April 2008); Sarah Beller, “Sowing Art, Reaping Peace: Toward a Framework for Evaluating Arts-Based Peacebuilding” (MA thesis, American University, 2009); Shoshana Gottesman, “Hear and Be Heard: Learning With and Through Music as a Dialogical Space for Co-Creating Youth Led Conflict Transformation,” *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy* 17, no. 1, <https://voices.no/index.php/voices/rt/printerFriendly/857/749>, 2017; Lesley J. Pruitt, *Youth Peacebuilding: Music, Gender, and Change* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Johan Galtung, “Three realistic approaches to peace: peace-keeping, peacemaking, peacebuilding,” *Impact of Science on Society* 26, no. 1/2 (1976).

<sup>3</sup> Rob Jenkins, *Peacebuilding: From Concept to Commission* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 18-21; and John Paul Lederach and Angela Jill Lederach, *When Blood and Bones Cry Out: Journeys Through the Soundscape of Healing and Reconciliation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003), 10-14.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press,

1998).

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Schirch, *The Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004), 22-23.

<sup>7</sup> Felicity Laurence, “Music and Empathy,” in *Music and Conflict Transformation*, ed. Olivier Urbain (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 14.

<sup>8</sup> Johan Galtung, “Peace, Music and the Arts: In Search of Interconnections,” in *Music and Conflict Transformation*, ed. Olivier Urbain (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 60.

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Bergey, “Music and Peacebuilding: A Survey of Two Israeli Ensembles Using Music and Dialogue to Build Understanding, Empathy, and Conflict Transformation” (DMA diss., James Madison University, 2019), 7-8.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Schirch, *Strategic Peacebuilding*, 49-50; John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, 21-22; Lesley J. Pruitt, *Youth Peacebuilding*, 71, 217.

<sup>11</sup> Lesley J. Pruitt, *Youth Peacebuilding*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Two such examples include: Arthur Hull, *Drum Circle Facilitation: Building Community Through Rhythm* (Santa Cruz, CA: Village Music Circles, 2007); and Kalani, *Together in Rhythm: A Facilitator’s Guide to Drum Circle Music* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.musicianswithoutborders.org/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://hub.institute.min-on.org/>

<sup>15</sup> Olivier Urbain, ed. *Music and Conflict Transformation: Harmonies and Dissonances in Geopolitics* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> One example is the Music and Peacebuilding major at Eastern Mennonite University (where the author teaches). There are also courses specific to incorporating musical training within peacebuilding contexts, ending in an internship and senior project of their choice. Another example is Elizabethtown College, which offers a master’s of education program that focuses on peacebuilding and social-emotional learning. Some universities are adding courses in music and peace, such as Berklee College of Music.



Discover

# FRESH CHORAL ADVENTURES

at BCI



SUMMER 2025 SEASON | [berkshirechoral.org](http://berkshirechoral.org)

*New Love Songs at Tanglewood* ANTHONY TRECEK-KING MAY 21-25

JUNE 12-15 CAMERON LABARR *Celebrating Alice Parker*

*Into the Light: Haydn, Brahms, & Runestad* ROB ISTAD JUNE 22-29

JULY 5-12 JEFFREY BENSON *Considering Matthew Shepard*

*Mozart & Bernstein in Berlin* JENNY WONG JULY 27-AUGUST 3



BERKSHIRE CHORAL  
INTERNATIONAL



# An Interview with Stephen Cleobury

CHRISTOPHER M. SMITH

Sir Stephen Cleobury<sup>1</sup> (1948-2019) was a British conductor, organist, and composer best known for his work as the director of music at King's College, Cambridge (U.K.), a post he occupied with distinction from 1982 to 2019, where he conducted one of the world's most famous choirs, the Choir of King's College. In his developmental years, Cleobury was a boy chorister at Worcester Cathedral and went on to serve as organ scholar at St. John's College in Cambridge. One of his teachers was David Willcocks, whom he later succeeded as music director at King's College. In 1974 he served as sub-organist at Westminster Abbey, and in 1979 was the first Anglican to be appointed master of music at Westminster Cathedral in London.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Choir at King's College was already well known in 1982 through worldwide radio broadcasts of A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols,<sup>3</sup> Cleobury enhanced the stature of the choir during his tenure. He expanded on its venerated tradition, instituting the annual commissioned carol for Christ-

mas Eve in 1984, making an invaluable contribution to contemporary choral composition. Examples of carols commissioned and premiered in the service include John Rutter's "What Sweeter Music," Judith Weir's "Illuminare Jerusalem," and Stephen Paulus's "Pilgrim Jesus." He also expanded activities in broadcasting, recording, and touring. Alumni have notably founded other world-renown ensembles, including Polyphony, conducted by Stephen Layton (himself an alumnus of King's), and The King's Singers.

Cleobury, fondly referred to as "Cleebs" within British music circles, conducted and recorded with other fine ensembles, including the BBC Singers (1995–2007) and the Academy of Ancient Music. He conducted the one hundredth anniversary of A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols in December 2018, his final Carols performance before his planned retirement. A few months after his retirement, Sir Stephen Cleobury died peacefully on November 22, 2019—the feast day of St. Cecilia, patron saint of music and musicians.<sup>4</sup>

Christopher M. Smith  
Director of Choral Activities & Worship Arts  
Associate Professor of Music  
MidAmerica Nazarene University  
cmsmith3@mnu.edu



*Photo used by permission. Copyright Kevin Leighton, kevinleighton.com.*

On January 28, 2016, Stephen Cleobury sat with me for a videoconference interview. He was one of six conductors whose work I was researching for my doctoral dissertation.<sup>5</sup> The contents of that interview are being published on the fifth anniversary of his passing so we may all learn from one who not only excelled in musicianship but also as a master teacher and mentor of so many. Our interview lasted about forty-five minutes, but (perhaps unsurprisingly) we covered much ground. Cleobury was personable and not at all pretentious. He had the ability to communicate a lot of information in a short time, was quite to the point, and showcased a good deal of wit and humor, albeit in the British way (he never let on when he was joking).

The interview questions were related to four distinct categories of examination: unification of sound, rehearsal technique, conducting, and leadership. In examining how Cleobury and other conductors respectively unify the sound within their ensembles, I was attempting to capture the essence of Cleobury's philosophy of training his singers to create a homogenous sound including rhythmic elements, vowels, volume, intonation, and even vibrato. In asking about rehearsal technique, I wanted to know about his strategies in planning rehearsals for such a wide range of maturity in his singers at King's.

The Choir at King's College comprises young boy choristers between the ages of six and nine as well as undergraduate choral scholars. It was important to know how he prepares choirs for weekly services as well as for frequent, high-profile concerts, broadcasts, and recordings each season. Questions about conducting were intended to glean Cleobury's basic philosophy in showing the music with non-verbal gesture. I also wanted to gain insight into the British methodology of conducting practice, since (as he had a bit to say) conducting pedagogy varies from country to country. The fourth category of examination was leadership quality, which is perhaps the central issue that separates *effective* conductors from talented conductors. The questions in this category dealt with a conductor's style or philosophy of personal leadership, including motivating musicians and managing group psyche. A summary of responses appears at the end of each category and includes some additional insight from the interview.

## Category 1: Unification of Sound

### **What do you consider to be important elements of unifying the sound of a choral ensemble?**

We're talking about blend of voices, which means trying to get everybody, first and foremost, to listen to each other and to be sympathetic to the people around them, and for the personality in front listening, trying to blend this group, it's about achieving similar vowel sounds, similar vowel colors, for example. It's about making sure everyone is singing at roughly equal volume; otherwise you have a voice obtruding and not agreeing on intonation.

### **Does the unification of vibrato play into that for you?**

Yes, it would. Of course, I should mention that. It depends on what groups you are working with, because obviously with young children, the question of vibrato doesn't arise so often, whereas it can arise in quite difficult ways in amateur adult groups. I'm often asked this question; I don't have a doctrinaire approach to vibrato, as to whether there should or shouldn't be.

**In 1998, you participated in a piece by Brian Robins in *Fanfare*, called "From Rutter to Rachmaninov."<sup>6</sup> In that interview, you are quoted as saying, "One thing that happens is that as soon as the language comes right, you start to get a change in color in the voices, particularly because of the vowels in the Church Slavonic. I very strongly believe that if you get the language right, then the color follows in its wake..." Can you elaborate?**

Well, actually, I think that happens in all languages, and I found particularly with children that someone has to work at it, even in our own language, English. Modes of speech have become lazier. I think the difference in how people speak to one another, colloquially, and how you should be pronouncing the language in, as it were, an art song is a bigger distance as every year goes by.





*Photo used by permission. Copyright Kevin Leighton, kevinleighton.com.*

I think in some ways as you say, “it’s harder,” because we don’t think we have to practice our own language, whereas if we were going to sing in Slavonic or Italian or French, we have to take some trouble about it. When I used to play for the Monteverdi Choir, we went to Ansbach, Germany, and the locals were deeply impressed by the quality of German vowels of the Monteverdi Choir.

**It’s a unique situation to be able to vocally train the singers in one’s choir. Would you please talk about your experience with this at King’s College and how you approach solo training in a choral context?**

We do employ voice teachers who are selected by me and with whom I keep in close touch. Obviously, I’ve made it my business to learn for myself about vocal technique and to impart things that can usefully be

said in the choir practice, but I have a quite strong rule, which is not to enter on matters in which I am not expert. So, I talk to our teachers so that I know how to back up what they are saying to our singers, and occasionally I would say to them, “So and so has such and such a problem; can you help us fix that?” and I would use such technical advice in technical terms as I believe I’m competent to use. You know the saying—a little knowledge is dangerous.

### **Summary of Unification of Sound Responses**

Cleobury’s approach to unifying the ensemble is not groundbreaking, especially given the fact that King’s has such a recognizable sound. Of course, the use of children’s voices contributes to their distinctive sound, but even among other cathedral choirs employing boys in the treble voices, the sound of the Choir of King’s

College is still quite distinguishable. Cleobury explains his philosophy of unifying an ensemble straightforwardly, emphasizing the importance of blending vowels and volume. Although this simple statement about blending voices may sound very familiar to the reader, it is an illustration that time-honored principles are time-honored for a reason. Further, one may ask how Cleobury approaches vowel color in blending voices.

In the interview relating to the 1999 recording of the Rachmaninov *Vespers*,<sup>7</sup> Cleobury emphasized the order of approach to language in singing, suggesting that vowel colors are not abstract nor subject to the whim of a director. Rather, the vowel colors directly precede from the sound of the language itself.

## Category 2: Rehearsal Technique

### What are your priorities in planning a rehearsal?

Firstly, that it should be conducted in the most efficient manner possible, so that means that indeed you have to plan it, as you've said. Secondly, there's a sort of predictable trajectory of attention span, as it were, particularly with the children. Each morning I have a rehearsal with the choristers of King's, which is fifty-five minutes duration. The first five minutes, we're getting everybody warmed up and switched on, ready for the work, and then I would expect to do the most valuable work, say, within the next thirty to forty minutes. So, if I'm wanting to teach a new piece or something that is particularly taxing, that would be when I would do that, and then I might try to finish with something a little bit better known.

I think you have to know your group, and you have to have a plan. You have to know what you want to achieve. You have to help them feel they've achieved something by not getting exceedingly delayed or bogged down at a particular point, knowing how much to say, how much to leave, keeping their interest. If you've got a mixed-age group such as I have with the choristers, you might have in front of you twenty-four children aged between nine and thirteen, and obviously the attention span of those varies, and you've got to try and

find a way of working quickly enough to satisfy the older ones while not working so quickly that the younger ones are completely baffled. In recent years I've increasingly split them up into groups—the younger group and the older group—so we can work at different speeds, and work on solo work and semi-chorus work with the older ones, while the younger ones work at a slower speed on basic repertoire.

### Do you have an established pattern for preparing a piece over several rehearsals? For example: when do you introduce text or articulation/phrasing in the process?

I'm told that the parts of the brain that deal with text and that deal with music (pitch, and so on) are different, so you're obviously having to engage all that. I think I can probably best answer that question by saying it depends on what the piece is—on what we're doing. In some pieces, you go straight for it, and other pieces may need separating out in the ways you described. It's not a definite pattern. It depends on the piece, and of course also it depends on the ability of the people you're directing.

### A few years ago, there was a much-talked-about piece in *Gramophone* regarding the twenty best choirs in the world.<sup>8</sup> Many British choirs were on the list, including yours. What do you think contributes to the perception of British dominance in choral music? And how is the British system of choral training different from the American system?

I don't think I really know enough about the American system. I know that here, there's an enormous variation in terms of what's taught and how it's taught. I think certainly in the cathedral collegiate tradition in which I work and professional groups like the BBC Singers, quite a strong premium is put on the ability to sight-read. The advantage of that is you can learn things quickly. You can have a large repertoire, and you don't get bogged down rehearsing the same piece for six weeks on end, or whatever it might be.

The other side of that coin is, of course, that we can

be guilty sometimes of not really getting inside the music and knowing it to a deep enough level. But that's the same certainly in the orchestral world. British orchestras are renowned for their ability to read very, very quickly. If you go to other countries, you sometimes find that the speed at which people learn and assimilate is not so quick. That doesn't mean to say that you don't get an excellent result at the end; you just arrive at it a different way. So, I would say from our point of view, what we're hoping to do in a choir like King's or a cathedral choir is to teach the members skills of musicianship so that they can read quickly and efficiently. Of course, that can sometimes be done at the expense of voice and sound. It's important to make sure that's not the end of all of it.

### **Summary of Rehearsal Technique Responses**

In the Choir of King's College, young children are singing in the same choir with developed male voices. This can cause issues related to the pacing of rehearsal and managing varying attention spans. Cleobury demonstrates a talent for understanding the disposition of his singers in musical ability and their general mood from day to day. His ability to sympathize with his singers, including how best to learn music together and keep their attention, enables him to refrain from forming rigid rules of rehearsal process.

The King's College Choir, although a chapel choir of developing musicians, functions much like a professional choir, rehearsing and performing great choral repertoire almost entirely throughout the year. And like most every other professional choir, they have developed traditions in rehearsal that reflect on their workmanship as musicians. In addition to the responses above, Cleobury also mentioned during our interview that over the years, the choir has created a system of self-correction where the choristers raise their hand during rehearsal to acknowledge a mistake they made. Apparently, this tradition started decades prior to Cleobury's residency with choristers staying after rehearsal to apologize for making a mistake. Cleobury paints this tradition in a positive light, explaining that this culture attempts to "create faculties of self-criticism" within

maturing singers and that it serves to save time in rehearsal. If he hears a problem in the rehearsal followed by a chorister raising his hand, he may discern that he can move on without stopping to correct it, depending on the experience of the singer.

### **Category 3: Conducting**

#### **How do you approach conducting gesture? What techniques do you employ in your own conducting or teaching conducting students that establish one "showing" the music?**

One of the things I most often try to stop myself doing (and certainly try to stop my students doing) is mouthing the words to the choir. I think it's not helpful particularly in polyphonic music, where all the voices are singing different words at different times. It doesn't help the basses if you're mouthing the words to the sopranos. The other thing I think we all tend to do, and should do less, is replicating with the left hand what the right hand is doing. Very often you see this double act. Sometimes I use it in church where visibility in choir stalls is difficult, but if you're standing in front of a group that's arranged in front of you, then my basic principle is to try to indicate as much as I can with my right hand.

Obviously, that's the hand that's involved with giving the beat and setting the pulse and all those sorts of things, but there are different or varying ways in which that can be done. You can affect the way a choir starts a piece by the way you give the preparatory beat and all those things. Then, if the left hand is used more sparingly, when it does enter the fray, it's more effective. If you're doing that all the time with two hands, there's nothing left for you to do.

Of course, gestures themselves are going to vary in size according to the group. If you're conducting three hundred people singing the "Hallelujah" chorus, you're going to be making more expansive gestures than if you're conducting the King's College Choir singing an Amen in evensong. Those of us who do a lot of work in the liturgical setting are to some degree constrained by



the sense that if you are overly flamboyant in your gestures, it is a distraction to the worshippers. I think that's a difficult one to balance, but if we're talking about a secular context in a concert hall, it's very different. The other thing, curiously, that one has to do with children, or with amateur choirs, is actually to teach them to respond to your gestures. I've seen lots of people in conducting classes being told how to do these wonderful gestures, but it isn't much good if the singers aren't going to follow them. On the other hand, with a really good professional choir, they'll follow everything you do, so you have to make sure you're very careful.

## **Is there a difference in the conducting styles between British and American conductors?**

I think it's true to say that in my limited experience in America, you have a much more organized instructional system of teaching, which until recently we haven't had here, but it's something that's developing. For example, in Cambridge we recently introduced a course in choral conducting...and I think, obviously, that is a good thing. When I was younger, I was never formally taught how to conduct, and most of what I do I picked up myself by looking at other people and seeing what works and doesn't work. Of course, it's true about conducting that however much you teach, and also however well you're taught, you still can actually only get your experience live on the podium. I sometimes think, however, that if the teaching method is overly prescribed, as it were, that it doesn't allow for individual expression to such a great extent.

I've also seen it in some conducting classes here [in the U.K.]; a teacher will say, "This is how you conduct. These are the gestures you use." Then you find a series of people coming out looking like that conductor. But they are different people. Gesture is incredibly important, because if you're good at showing it and you train your singers to respond to it, then you don't have to talk so much. I think the habit of talking too much in rehearsal is quite problematic. They want to see it, and the more they see it, the more they learn about the music.

## **Summary of Conducting Responses**

Cleobury views gesture as important because it prevents the conductor from having to talk too often. Music on the printed page is a logical representation of sound; but in a sense, it transforms a dynamic art, one that is revealed in time, into a static art. The way past seeing music as a static, prescribed presentation on the page is to see it in motion, which is where gesture comes in. Conducting gesture can show degrees of motion in the interpretation where the notated music falls short. When Cleobury says, "the more they see it, the more they learn about the music," he is referring to another dimension beyond rhythm, tempo, or dynamics—he is referring to motion.

When asked about conducting techniques applied in his own style and that of the students he teaches, Cleobury mentions several items to practice. One should avoid mouthing words to the choir, as it can be unhelpful particularly in polyphonic music. One should avoid mirroring with the non-dominant hand what the dominant hand is doing. Attention should be given to the size of the gestures, considering the size of the ensemble and the distance they are from the conductor. In addition, choristers young and old should be taught to respond to gestural communication from the podium.

## **Category 4: Leadership**

**Regarding nerves, you have said, "bring the choir up to a peak of performance but without making them anxious and nervous about it, so that they can give it their best."<sup>9</sup> Please elaborate on why it's important to keep in mind the psychological state of the singers in performance.**

This is extremely important. However good you are at detecting mistakes, or however good your gestures are, so on and so forth, if you misread the mood, as it were, of the room or the group, you're going to be in trouble. Certainly with children, during the course of my career, I've found that increasingly it works on "less stick and more carrot," to use that old expression. In



*Photo used by permission. Copyright Kevin Leighton, kevinleighton.com.*

other words, it doesn't do to tell them off straightaway. You need to start with encouraging or enabling compliments: "yes, very good, well done, that's getting better, now let's do this and try to improve more," rather than, "that was really awful." It's a basic didactic fact that most people will get better if they're encouraged. Of course, you can lose the attention of a room if you're too fussy with them and keep going over everything too many times. They either get quite cross or else very bored. You've got to be very conscious of reading the atmosphere. My rule to follow is that if you've tried something and it doesn't improve up to two or three times, best to leave it and come back to it. You can only exacerbate a situation like that.

Moreover, if you're working regularly with the same group of people, it's important to make sure you nurture them as people. They don't want you intruding on them or anything like that, but if I know that one of them suffered a bereavement last week, or if one of the children had been in trouble at school, just the very fact of knowing these things is important, in the sense of

how you're treating the singers. It's a difficult subject; it's more complicated really than talking about gesture. I think a high proportion of my work with any choir is how I deal with the people. You want them to do really well, but they're not machines.

### **What attributes (musical or non-musical) make a choral conductor a great leader?**

Recently we had a visit from some people in Norwich who are running some type of football academy connected with Norwich City Football Club. They were going around to various other kinds of institutions trying to look for what were the similarities. You couldn't get much more different than a chapel choir and a football club, but what the football coach had to do was the same as the conductor. It was very interesting, and it was a rewarding thing to converse with them and find out what they thought was important.

What's involved here are skills of leadership, which are expressed in different disciplines, through different


skills. Leadership is about being on top of your subject. Nobody is going to respect you if can't conduct five in a bar or if you haven't learned the score. It's about leading by precept, leading by example—being punctual, being efficient, being organized—hoping that people will want to emulate those various qualities. Obviously, some leaders are, how should we say, more forceful than others. That's the same in all walks of life, and in a way, I think what comes out in the differences in different conductors or different football managers, or whatever it is, in the end goes back to their own inherent personality.

Sometimes, of course, you've got to put on a bit of a persona. Most people who meet me in a social context think I'm reasonably a quiet and reserved person. But if you're going to conduct Mahler's *8th Symphony* in the Albert Hall, it's no good being weak and watery. You've got to project yourself. You've got to gain the respect of the people you're directing. Nowadays, by and large, I'm happy to say, respect is not accorded by virtue of the position you hold. You have to earn it, and indeed I would not want to be respected merely because I have a particular title, like Director of Music. I would prefer to be respected, if I am to be respected, by people saying, "This chap does a good job, he's professional, he prepares his work, he's efficient and doesn't waste our time, and we know that we're going to enjoy it and get a good result."

## Summary of Leadership Questions

Stephen Cleobury is keenly aware of the psychological state of his singers, particularly as it relates to performance anxiety. He learned from his viola teacher as a youngster that to overcome anxiety, he needed to concentrate 110 percent on the music to avoid thinking about the audience, and by extension, his own state of nervousness. This practice is passed along to his young singers, particularly the ones in their first year in the King's College Choir.

There is an annual tradition at King's that at the start of A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, the choristers do not actually know who will sing the opening solo of "Once in Royal David's City," which has marked

the start of each Christmas Eve service for decades. As Cleobury and previous conductors have confirmed, the soloist is chosen merely seconds before the broadcast performance begins. One can only imagine the kind of fortitude and trust that must be practiced to maintain that level of high-profile performance creativity. Cleobury appreciates the need of every musician to have some kind of relationship with their director beyond the perfunctory greetings and professional interactions, especially in groups that work together regularly. People need to feel encouraged and supported knowing that the conductor cares for the music, the ensemble, and their own well-being and development. 

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Pronounced [ˈkli:bəri]
- <sup>2</sup> Ian Carson, "Cleobury, Stephen," *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed September 11, 2015.
- <sup>3</sup> A program broadcast to listeners around the world since 1928.
- <sup>4</sup> Website of *King's College, Cambridge*, "Sir Stephen Cleobury (1948-2019)," website accessed on September 10, 2020, <https://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/news/2020/sir-stephen-cleobury-1948-2019>.
- <sup>5</sup> Christopher M. Smith, "A Comparative Study of Select Choral Conductors' Approaches to Unification of Choral Sound, Rehearsal, Conducting, and Leadership: Frieder Bernius, Tõnu Kaljuste, Stephen Cleobury, John Eliot Gardiner, Weston Noble, and Robert Shaw" (DMA diss., University of Kansas, 2016).
- <sup>6</sup> Brian Robins, "From Rutter to Rachmaninov: An Interview with Stephen Cleobury of King's College, Cambridge," *Fanfare—the Magazine for Serious Record Collectors* 22, no. 2 (November 1998): 138.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> Martin Cullingford, "The World's Greatest Choirs," *Gramophone*, accessed September 11, 2015, <https://www.gramophone.co.uk/features/article/the-world-s-greatest-choirs>.
- <sup>9</sup> Stephen Cleobury, Boris Ord, David Kremer, James Whitbourn, Philip Ledger, and David Willcocks, *Carols from King's*, Opus Arte, 2001 DVD [S.I.].





## Refine your artistry, create opportunities, and lead the way in a changing world.

At the **Peabody Conservatory**, you'll study with renowned voice faculty, including:

**Voice:** Tony Arnold • Barry Banks • Margaret Baroody  
Elizabeth Bishop • Carl Dupont • Elizabeth Futral, *Marc C. von May Distinguished Chair of Vocal Studies* • Denyce Graves • Ah Young Hong  
Randall Scarlata • William Sharp

**Opera:** Catrin Davies, *Acting* • Mary Duncan, *Artistic Director and Manager*  
Melissa Freilich, *Movement* • Laurie Rogers, *Music Director*

**Vocal Coaching & Repertoire Studies:** Eileen Cornett • Scott Crowne  
William Hobbs • Patrick O'Donnell • Claire Galloway Weber  
Wei-Han Wu • Gloria Yin

**Chorus & Choral Conducting:** Beth Willer, *Director of Choral Studies*



**Beth Willer**  
*Director of Choral Studies*



[peabody.jhu.edu](https://peabody.jhu.edu)  
667-208-6600

LEARN  
without  
LOANS

**THE PEABODY CONSERVATORY** meets **100%**  
**of demonstrated financial need** for domestic  
undergraduate students, **with no loans.**

Learn more: [peabody.jhu.edu/NoLoans](https://peabody.jhu.edu/NoLoans).





MidAm  
& International

# 2026 PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES



## CARNEGIE HALL

Dates from March - June, 2026



## HONOLULU, HAWAII

May 13 - 17, 2026



## FLORENCE

MAY 31 - JUNE 7, 2026



## PARIS

JUNE 7 - JUNE 14, 2026



## VIENNA & SALZBURG

JUNE 14 - JUNE 21, 2026



## LONDON

JUNE 21 - 28, 2026



## STOCKHOLM & UPPSALA

JULY 5 - 12, 2026

CONTACT US FOR  
MORE INFORMATION:

C.J. Harden, Director of Program  
Development at 646-484-8368  
or [charden@midamerica-music.com](mailto:charden@midamerica-music.com)

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR MORE DETAILS:





# Research Report

Bryan E. Nichols, editor

## Everyday Social Change: The Importance of Daily Actions in the Choral Setting

Kelly Bylica & Cara Faith Bernard

The current American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) Vision Statement positions choral musicians as having the potential to “create powerful artistic experiences” and become “advocates for cultural and educational change” with the hope that such practices “might transform people’s lives.”<sup>1</sup> In light of this vision, ACDA has developed numerous ways in which the organization and its members can respond to growing calls to pursue equity, accessibility, diversity, and inclusion through choral music.<sup>2</sup> This commitment has manifested at the ACDA national level, including through the creation of the Diversity Initiatives Committee and state-leveled subgroups that work to draft policies and practices that are more inclusive of multiple ways of knowing and making music in a myriad of settings.

While institutional change can be impactful, individual actions also matter. One way to frame localized change that focuses on the pursuit of equity, accessibility, diversity, and inclusion is through the lens of *social change*. We define social change as a series of ongoing, everyday practices that involve reflection and purposeful engagement with the community.<sup>3</sup> Social change has long been seen as central to arts education; however, guidance about *how* to participate in social change is limited.

We have observed similar questions about enacted social change in our work as choral educators. While

students have expressed a growing interest in social change, they often lack strategies or practices to sustainably enact such ideas. Large-scale, structural change that impacts society as a whole is an ongoing process, and measured acts can provide sustainable actions that build the foundation for more impactful, long-term transformation. One way to approach such measured acts is through the lens of *everyday* social change.<sup>4</sup> We define everyday social change<sup>5</sup> as small steps that happen daily in classrooms, rehearsal spaces, performances, and community collaborations.

In this article, we offer practical starting points for thinking and acting through everyday social change and consider how such practices might be important to the work of the ACDA community. Drawing from a larger study on social change, we ask: (1) What could reflective and reflexive practice look like in choral music?, (2) What could community look like in choral spaces?, and (3) What could working with/for the broader community look like?

### What Could Reflective and Reflexive Practice Look Like in Choral Music?

Reflective and reflexive practice are key to supporting social change in choral spaces. Though often used interchangeably, reflective and reflexive practice are not



the same. *Reflective* practice is often done after an event, rehearsal, or interaction has ended. It involves looking back on an experience to examine what went well and what might be done differently in the future. Taken critically, reflective practice can also include an examination of *why* certain choices were made and a deliberate exploration of whose experiences and voices were honored. *Reflexive* practice occurs in the moment and involves an individual's ability to evaluate a situation and make changes while the experience is occurring. This may include adapting a rehearsal plan, changing how one is dialoguing with others, or expressing vulnerability in response to something that is occurring.

Thinking reflectively and reflexively about social change requires a commitment to move beyond "checking the diversity box" through overly simplistic actions. Within choral settings, examples of simplistic actions<sup>6</sup> might include programming a single piece of literature by a composer of color (or solely for a Black/Latinx/Women/etc. History Month Concert) in order to meet diversity expectations. Social change requires a commitment to realizing that every action and decision plays into a larger purpose.

Repertoire can, and often does, play a foundational role in supporting social change goals. Imagine programming "One Foot/Lead with Love" by Melanie DeMore from the *Justice Choir Songbook*.<sup>7</sup> You believe that engaging with this piece of music will support singers' awareness of social movements throughout the world. To begin, you distribute the music and invite students to sightread using solfège, just as you do with most pieces. Singers are used to this process. One singer shares that this song feels more call-and-response in nature and suggests they might learn the song as such. Calling upon reflexive practice may lead you to acknowledge the singer's comment and switch, in the moment, to call-and-response. You notice that the singers are watching you model and, as your energy rises in the call, their energy also rises in the response.

In this example, embracing reflexivity involved taking a step back from predetermined pedagogical practices to support the learning and interest of the individuals in the room. Further, this decision also supported a way of teaching and learning that better aligned with the social movements that inspired the piece. Follow-

ing this rehearsal, you reflect on the experience, and you decide to begin the next rehearsal by presenting information about various social movements that have occurred in your local and national context.

In the next rehearsal, you share your research with the ensemble. One singer raises their hand and offers to share their story as a member of one of those social movements. You grow concerned, as you had not allotted time for a long story, and you ask the singer to hold their thought for another time. Following rehearsal, you reflect on the experience, realizing that by not responding reflexively in the moment, you may have missed an opportunity to support and honor the lived experiences of individuals within the group. The next rehearsal, you acknowledge your misstep and deliberately create space for this singer to share their experiences. In the process, the singers begin drawing connections between the story and the lines in the song, expressing a deepening awareness of how they are making meaning through this music. As a result, the musical experience is richer.

Throughout the example above, practices of reflexivity and reflection helped keep the singers at the forefront of the experience, centering them as they grew in their understanding of the various ways they fit into the larger world. Choosing to acknowledge rather than shy away from a misstep provided a model of the power of vulnerability for singers. While not every piece you explore throughout the year may be as directly related to social change as this one, learning to honor lived experience, support vulnerability, and create space for connections through dialogue are all practices that live on beyond this particular context. As such, the ensemble moves toward a realization that social change is not something to be strived for through a singular piece of music or concert cycle, but rather it is something embedded as a part of everyday life.

## **What Could Community Look Like in Choral Spaces?**

Community is critically important to understanding social change in choral spaces. While community can involve engaging beyond the ensemble (see next section), community can also be understood as the ways in

which relationships are cultivated *within* an ensemble. According to Deborah Bradley,<sup>8</sup> social change is predicated on a series of small steps that, over time, create change. Deliberately developing community within the ensemble can, and in many cases *must*, be one of those small steps.

Developing community within the ensembles often manifests as “learner-centered practices” (e.g., student selected repertoire), singer leadership opportunities (e.g., section leaders), and social activities outside the rehearsal (e.g., social mixers/events). While these experiences can help build community, finding ways to deepen communal relationships between singers can prove even more fruitful when seeking social change. As Rollo Dilworth discussed in a 2023 *Choral Journal* article, developing these relationships can allow organizations to “sort out and redefine what we think about the term ‘collaboration’ and understand that...there have to be shared goals...and an equal sense from the ensembles that there is a shared power in that infrastructure.”<sup>9</sup> A deepened sense of community might focus on pedagogical strategies to support singer awareness about themselves, one another, and their world as they learn to dialogue with one another. These pedagogical strategies may include asking open questions in rehearsal that have multiple possible responses; modeling thoughtful disagreement that allows for various experiences to be considered; and encouraging singers to embody choral works through unchoreographed movement that can create a shared experience.

One way to deepen relationships and the sense of community through repertoire is by creating partnerships with artists outside of the ensemble. This can include, for example, commissioning a piece from a composer. Throughout the commissioning process, singers can be involved in making artistic decisions with the composer and/or artistic director(s), including text choice. In the same *Choral Journal* article, Thomas Lloyd remarked that within such partnerships, “You need to take the time to really listen and understand the perspective of an ensemble you hope to collaborate with.”<sup>10</sup>

While a greater sense of community can be felt and achieved through commissions and partnerships with artists, we recognize that not every chorus has the ma-

terial resources to do so. One possibility in such situations is to partner with local composition students. Such a partnership has multiple advantages: composition students are given the opportunity to write for specific ensembles, and the chorus has the opportunity to gain a better understanding of place both within and beyond the community, something that Elizabeth Parker and others<sup>11</sup> have noted is central to community-based work.

Key to building community is also recognizing both the collective “we” within an ensemble as well as the unique individuals. Parker also noted that conductors often model care by caring for the ensemble as a whole, and they encourage singers to do the same.<sup>12</sup> While this can lead to a united belief in the chorus, it can also be a missed opportunity to care for and recognize the unique individuals within the ensemble. Caring for the individual might look like cultivating small group relationships within the choir, working to know each individual beyond their contribution to their voice part, and actively listening to the comments and ideas of individual singers.

### **What Could Working with/for the Broader Community Look Like?**

Finally, social change might occur when organizations engage with the broader community outside of the chorus. This work must be a deliberate grassroots effort,<sup>13</sup> where organizations embed themselves within the city/town and foster community and relationships with others in homegrown, personal ways. In pursuit of this work, organizations can look inward and ask themselves what their role might be in the community. Asking such a question allows the organization to consider the ways they might serve a wide range of singers and stakeholders.

A first step toward connecting with and serving the larger community can occur through examining where and how the choir is present in that community. For example, in what ways does the chorus recruit singers? How might they seek to unravel barriers to participation? Where are concerts and rehearsals typically located? Might there be alternative locations that represent a larger portion of the city/town, specifically areas that

# Research Report

have historically been underrepresented? When choosing locations, it is important to use intimate knowledge of the landscape and consider potential barriers that might hinder welcoming everyone. Such actions recognize the importance of acting as ambassadors both within and beyond their communities.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, organizations might take time to attend community events that are not directly related to the chorus. Attendance at such events can show the organization's presence and encourage building connections with those who may not be familiar with the chorus. This might include attending both arts and non-arts

organization meetings, as well as city or town council meetings or social meet and greets. These moments can provide organizations opportunities to realize how the chorus fits meaningfully into the larger community narrative.

Lastly, partnering with other local choruses that have different lived experiences can be a fruitful endeavor to connect with different parts of the community. This might occur through a performance partnership or organizing and volunteering together for non-music community events. Further, organizations might look at the needs of their singers outside of the rehearsal

## What Could Reflective and Reflexive Practice Look Like?

1. Keep the singers at the forefront of the experience.
2. Consider programming repertoire that may honor the lived experiences of singers within and beyond the ensemble.
3. Reconsider "tried-and-true" pedagogical approaches that may not be responsive to the singers in the room.
4. Embrace and model vulnerability by acknowledging actions, missteps, and feelings.

## What Could Community Look Like?

1. Use pedagogical strategies that support singer awareness.
2. Create partnerships with artists outside the organization, including composers and university students.
3. Recognize the role both individuals and groups play within the organization or ensemble.

## What Could Working with/for the Broader Community Look Like?


1. Examine how the choir is present in the larger community.
2. Attend community events that may not be directly related to the chorus.
3. Partner with other local choruses.



setting and partner with the community to support those needs. For example, students in a children's chorus might need assistance applying for college or transitioning into university settings. Soliciting assistance from those in the larger community can help singers mitigate this challenge.

### What Might Social Change Mean for Each of Us?

Social change, particularly on the local everyday level, looks different for everyone. For some, a commitment to reflexive and reflective practice may be a place to begin. A decision to employ such action may offer opportunities to embody an approach to choral music that honors singers' past and current experiences. For others, there may be a desire to begin with community. As noted, deep engagement with community is central to understanding everyday social change.

A commitment to small steps over time can help singers and conductors foster social responsibility and change.<sup>15</sup> Everyday social change cannot be the result of idealized rhetorical or isolated accomplishments but must be an ongoing practice of localized interactions.<sup>16</sup> It is these interactions that can, as the ACDA Vision Statement states, help "create powerful artistic experiences," encourage individuals to become "advocates for cultural and educational change," and move toward practices that "might transform people's lives."<sup>17</sup> 

---

**Kelly Bylica** is assistant professor of music education at Boston University. [kbylica@bu.edu](mailto:kbylica@bu.edu)

**Cara Faith Bernard** is associate professor of music education at the University of Connecticut and is the current president of Connecticut ACDA. [cara.bernard@uconn.edu](mailto:cara.bernard@uconn.edu)

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> American Choral Directors Association, Vision Statement, <https://acda.org/about-us>.

<sup>2</sup> American Choral Directors Association, "ACDA Strategic

Plan," 2021, p.1, <https://acda-communications.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/ACDA+Strategic+Plan+2021.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Kelly Bylica and Cara Faith Bernard, "Singing Social Change: An Investigation of Two U. S. Children's Choruses," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* no. 240 (2024): 7-24. <https://doi.org/10.5406/21627223.240.01>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> "Justice Choir Songbook," Justice Choir, 2024, <https://justicechoir.org/songbook>

<sup>8</sup> Deborah Bradley, "Artistic Citizenship: Escaping the Violence of the Normative (?)," *Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education* 17 no. 2 (2018): 71-91. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act17.1.71>

<sup>9</sup> J. Donald Dumpson, Thomas Lloyd, and Wendy K. Moy, "Voices of Change: Impacting the Communities We Serve—Part 2," *Choral Journal* 64, no. 3 (October 2023), 58.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Cassidy Parker, "The Experience of Creating Community: An Intrinsic Case Study of Four Midwestern Public School Choral Teachers," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 64, no. 2 (2016): 220-237; Kelly Bylica and Cara Faith Bernard, "Singing Social Change."

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Cassidy Parker, "The Experience of Creating Community."

<sup>13</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Hogan McFarland, "School-Community Partnerships in Community Children's Choir Organizations" (PhD diss., University of Missouri, Columbia, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Deborah Bradley, "Artistic Citizenship."

<sup>16</sup> Kelly Bylica and Cara Faith Bernard, "Singing Social Change."

<sup>17</sup> American Choral Directors Association, Vision Statement.



# UNIVERSITY of SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA THORNTON SCHOOL of MUSIC

## choral & sacred music

### DEGREES OFFERED

Choral Music BM, MM, DMA  
Sacred Music MM, DMA

APPLICATION DEADLINE  
DECEMBER 1, 2024



[music.usc.edu/choral-sacred-music](https://music.usc.edu/choral-sacred-music)

USC Thornton

    @USCTHORNTON





# On the Voice

Matthew Hoch, editor <mrh0032@auburn.edu>

## Singing through the “Sick Season”: Advice for Choral Directors

by Philip A. Doucette

Few performers have their art-making as significantly disrupted by respiratory illness as a vocalist. In these situations, the choral director often becomes the “first responder” to address their singers’ concerns. High-demand voice users like singers and choral directors are eager for remedies and approaches to minimize the misery of respiratory illness; however, finding reliable guidance and recommendations for care can often be challenging. This article will provide information and strategies for choral directors to personally use when their voice is impacted by illness, as well as guidance on optimal steps to take when guiding a singer through the “sick season.”

Be it from a cold, flu, or other respiratory disease, the challenges a sick singer or choral director faces are daunting. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the cold and flu season typically runs from October through March and peaks between December and February.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the common cold, several other respiratory viruses (flu, COVID-19, and RSV) become widespread during this time and can cause symptoms like the common cold.<sup>2</sup>

Colds spread easily from person to person, either directly through the air during close contact with infected people or indirectly through contact with objects in the environment and transfer to the mouth or nose. A sick

individual can remain contagious for up to two weeks, and contagiousness can begin a day or two before symptoms emerge. Most coldlike illnesses impact the sinuses and upper throat. Lower-respiratory infections are more serious and longer lasting. The symptoms experienced during these illnesses can present a variety of obstacles to normal voice use.<sup>3</sup>

### What to Do When Your Singers Get Sick

When singers get sick, stress builds and questions begin to fly. Clear education, appropriate referrals and recommendations, positive encouragement, and steady support from a trusted musical mentor throughout an illness can be as helpful as any medication available. While the details of these strategies are often specific to the nature of the illness and traits of the individual singer, the following general points can benefit all singers.

**Be patient.** All illnesses run their course. Colds and flu usually resolve in two to three weeks unless a chest infection develops. In these cases, a lingering cough and fatigue can persist for a few months. Consistent encouragement and reassurance from a trusted source can be



invaluable during this period. While colds and flus do not always merit a trip to the doctor, management of RSV, COVID, and postacute coronavirus syndrome (PACS) or “long COVID” do require the guidance of experienced medical professionals—either a general practitioner or specialists in pulmonology, cardiology, or neurology. When a singer confides the details of their illness and plan of care, being supportive in a manner that respects an individual’s right to medical privacy and deferring to the recommendations of a medical team can be the best means of assisting them.

### **Being sick doesn’t mean you are a bad singer.**

Singers are biological beings and biology is unfair. Nevertheless, changes in voice function can have a significant negative impact on an individual’s mood and sense of well-being.<sup>4</sup> While cultivating voice health and certain self-care practices can boost an individual’s immune system, the best preventative steps cannot always avoid illness.

**Accommodations are necessary.** Changes to pitch range, dynamic range, stamina, and voice quality should not be “pushed through” or seen as a problem to be solved in the short term. When you are sick, allow your voice to sound sick. Staying away from your fellow singers when you have a fever or are in the early stages of a respiratory infection can prevent the spread of illness and allow your body time to rest and recover.

If a singer can attend rehearsal but is not yet at full vocal strength, using marking techniques that limit extending range and loudness, intermittent voice rest, and relying on audiation or “mental rehearsal” should be considered and encouraged. Depending on the singer’s symptoms (i.e., changes to hearing acuity due to congestion or degree of “brain fog”), specific alternate tasks could include active listening of the ensemble while following along in the score and providing feedback according to prompts by the director; researching historical and cultural background information about the composition, composer, poet, or arranger; or silent memorization work. Frequent encouragement and reassurance that “doing less is more,” especially with singers who are passionate about singing, is incredibly important during the period of illness.

**Provide resources.** Developing a “so you’re sick... now what?” handout that includes clear explanations of what voice rest is (and is not), recommendations for optimal hydration and humidification, “dos and don’ts” to address congestion and pain—as well as referral resources for local medical professionals who specialize in the care of professional voice—can be a valuable lifeline and time saver for both a singer and director who is struggling to absorb and retain care recommendations.

**Be available to your singer.** Following up with a sick singer both several days after their initial concerns and a few weeks after a singer starts to feel better can provide important information and reassurance to a singer. In most cases of cold or flu, a singer should expect to start feeling “normal” after two or three weeks. However, it is not uncommon for chest infections in adolescents and adults to result in a lingering cough for up to two months after initial infection.<sup>5</sup> In the case of “long COVID,” recent research has identified lingering cough, shortness of breath, and chronic fatigue as significantly correlated to changes in singing voice.<sup>6</sup>

A choral director can provide a singer with a second set of ears to track the progression of their vocal concerns during an illness. While many singers “bounce back” quickly from illness, encouraging singers to expect a gradual return of pitch range, loudness range, and vocal stamina over several weeks can provide important encouragement and address what singing voice specialist Leda Scarce termed the “injury of confidence.”<sup>7</sup>

### **What to Do When You (the Director) Gets Sick?**

As choral directors, the buck often stops with us. However, “pushing through” when we are sick often sets a bad example because we are failing to practice what we preach to our singers. Being transparent about how *we* manage and accommodate illness can provide important teachable moments and growth opportunities for our singers while optimizing our voice function.

**You can come first.** Director priorities and goals are often outward facing: the music, the ensemble, and the singers come first. While taking time to develop and

implement strategies and activities that assist a director with less or no voice might seem “selfish,” the degree of individual singer expectation and agency required can lead to more empowered ensemble members. Organizing a schedule that considers periods of voice use and rest, makes time for appropriate vocalizations tailored your own voice (singing along with ensemble warm-ups does not count), advocating for optimal ventilation and humidification in all workspaces, and establishing personal hydration and reflux management are strategies to prioritize.

**Have a “silent rehearsal.”** Rehearsals that avoid talking and rely on simple written instruction, physical gestures, and visual cues can effectively conserve voice use but also increase singer awareness of and reliance on nonverbal communication. “Record, run, and review” can be an ideal activity for a silent rehearsal day. In this exercise, the ensemble records a “run-through”

of a section of music (or an entire piece) that is then played back; the ensemble singers then offer analysis and insights.

**Decrease, defer, and delegate.** Developing approaches for delegating verbal instruction on the part of the director can provide effective relief on days where voice rest is essential. Every ensemble has members capable of individual leadership or “crowdsourcing” to guide rehearsal activity. Identifying, assigning, and preparing individuals and groups with appropriate responsibilities can increase individual ownership, motivation, and agency among a roster of singers.

Tasks to delegate can include leading physical stretches and vocal warm-ups, sectional rehearsals (that are run collectively or under the guidance of a section leader), and critical listening and observing of audio and video recordings by other ensembles (with discussion prompts for members to share insights and

**JACKSONVILLE UNIVERSITY**

LEARN MORE AT:  
[www.ju.edu/music/vocalensembles](http://www.ju.edu/music/vocalensembles)

# BECOME A CROSSOVER ARTIST

- Enjoy** multiple hands-on conducting opportunities for undergraduates.
- Perform** everything from medieval chant and polyphony to the avant garde, Broadway, jazz, gospel, and more.
- Study** with a distinguished faculty of performing artists and pedagogues, knowledgeable in teaching many styles.
- Join** Infinitus, the only collegiate member of the C<sub>4</sub> Network.

Performance    Education    Therapy  
Technology    Theatre    Jazz and Commercial Music



opinions that shape their own performance choices). Providing advanced notice and written guidelines (e.g., targeting a specific section of a song or identifying goals such as memorization, text study, or pitch/rhythm accuracy) can maximize successful outcomes for all involved.

**Use amplification.** Ideal speaking voice loudness should resemble casual one-on-one conversation. Proper use of personal amplification can ensure directors provide clear verbal instruction and vocal modeling without increased strain. Using amplification is appropriate in any state of health.

**Stay home...really.** The temptation for a director who is often “at the center of it all” to manage a fever and suppress symptoms via medication is real. However, if the time off is available and there is a substitute that you trust, taking a day or two off at the height of an illness can have a tremendously positive impact toward rest and recovery. Individuals and professional networks like a state chapter of ACDA and AGO may be able to organize substitute lists for community and church choirs in advance. This collaboration can foster collegiality and communication between organizations, develop a trusted support network, and provide alternatives to canceling rehearsal.

**Remember the “five Ps”:** proper preparation prevents poor performance. The strategies discussed earlier require planning and practice. This is especially true in the case of establishing a relationship with a medical specialist before one gets sick, but establishing ensemble practices and expectations of substitute leaders throughout the concert season is beneficial as well. In addition to rehearsing, these leaders can assist in preparing handout materials and alternate assignments. Using the above strategies before one gets sick has value beyond establishing good vocal habits and offers leadership opportunities within your program. Regular and prior practice of these techniques makes them seem less novel; singers will see them as a necessary part of their routine (as opposed to seeing them as disruptive).

**“Precautions” are worth the effort.** Widely recommended steps for preventing respiratory infection include practicing optimal hydration, diet, and sleep hygiene; establishing regular physical exercise; and managing stress. Immunizations are effective methods for preventing and minimizing the severity of flu and COVID-19. During cold and flu season, providing materials to execute optimal health hygiene (such as hand gel and masks) and advocating for—and demonstrating—best health hygiene practices (such as fully covering your mouth when you cough and sneeze and frequent handwashing/sanitizing) is critically important. Several sources promote the use of vitamin C supplements during cold and flu season as a means of illness prevention and severity reduction.<sup>8</sup> Echinacea and elderberry are natural supplements that have a history of use for boosting the immune system during cold and flu season.<sup>9</sup> While current research has not revealed any ill effects of the use of elderberry, it should be noted that prolonged use of echinacea (greater than eight weeks) can have an immunosuppressant effect that is the opposite of its intended use.<sup>10</sup>

**Vocal health matters all the time—not only when we are sick.** Creating a “choir culture” where singers are encouraged to see themselves as individual athletes who impact the entire team’s performance can allow for ongoing and varied discussions about healthier choices for healthier voices. Just as serious



Some great little numbers for your choir.


**MUSICFOLDER.com**  
The world's best music folders. Since 1993.  
Toll-free: 1.877.246.7253 • sales@musicfolder.com



athletes choose to put their health and wellness first, singers should do the same for the good of themselves and the entire squad. Such choices include establishing a relationship with an otolaryngologist; learning how diet can impact reflux and hydration; avoiding irritants and allergens (such as vaping and smoking); developing effective time, stress, and sleep management strategies; and being aware of how voice use outside of the rehearsal and performance space influences singing voice function.

### Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, when the identified voice changes begin to improve, a gradual return to vocal activity with increased pitch, loudness, and time spent singing without the onset of fatigue can be expected. However, when a change in voice quality has not resolved within three to four weeks after a singer is otherwise feeling better, examination by an appropriate medical specialist with extensive experience in working with singers and high-demand voice users should be a priority.

Advanced planning and regular implementation of these singer- and director-centered strategies will make them more effective when illness strikes, and integration of them will positively impact the daily rehearsal process while simultaneously enhancing your choir culture. Clear education and recommendations, positive encouragement, and support via one-on-one “check-ins” all provide avenues to supporting a singer’s management of their optimal vocal health. Advocating for and demonstrating an “athletic level” of self-care will make tasks that address illness-related issues a matter of shifting habits as opposed to establishing new ones. Utilizing strategies that rely less on verbal instruction from the director—and implementing them before you get sick—has great value beyond voice conservation: they build individual ownership and collective responsibility within our ensembles. 

**Philip A. Doucette** is a licensed speech-language pathologist, an active singing voice rehabilitationist, and associate director of the Wilmington Children’s Chorus in Wilmington, Delaware.

### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> “Flu Season,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, September 20, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/index.html>.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> For a deeper discussion of common symptoms please refer to Mary J. Sandage and Mariah E. Morton-Jones, “I’m Sick, Should I Sing or Not?,” *Choral Journal* 65, no. 2 (September 2024): 45–49. This article seeks to build upon this discussion.
- <sup>4</sup> “Relationships,” Dysphonia International, March 13, 2019, <https://dysphonia.org/your-journey/living-with-a-voice-disorder/impact-on-relationships/>.
- <sup>5</sup> Xiaofang Gao, Guangrong Hu, and Peng Yan, “Causes of Chronic Cough in Adolescent and Adult Patients,” *Medical Journal of the Islamic Republic of Iran* 34 (2020): 136.
- <sup>6</sup> Sophia Dove, Leryn Turlington, Kate Elmendorf, Kurayi Mahachi, Christine Petersen, and David Meyer. “Singing Voice Symptomatology Following Presumed SARS-CoV-2 Infection,” *Journal of Voice*, e-publication ahead of print, November 16, 2022, doi:10.1016/j.jvoice.2022.11.012.
- <sup>7</sup> Leda Searce, *Manual of Singing Voice Rehabilitation: A Practical Approach to Vocal Health and Wellness* (San Diego: Plural Publishing, 2016).
- <sup>8</sup> Harri Hemilä and Elizabeth Chalker, “Vitamin C Reduces the Severity of Common Colds: A Meta-Analysis.” *BMC Public Health* 23, no. 1 (2023): 2468.
- <sup>9</sup> L. Susan Wieland, Vanessa Piechotta, Termeh Feinberg, Emilie Ludeman, Brian Hutton, Salmaan Kanji, Dugald Seely, and Chantelle Garritty. “Elderberry for Prevention and Treatment of Viral Respiratory Illnesses: A Systematic Review.” *BMC Complementary Medicine and Therapies* 21 (2021): 112.
- <sup>10</sup> Robert Thayer Sataloff, *Treatment of Voice Disorders* (San Diego: Plural Publishing, 2005).

### Call for National Repertoire and Resources Positions

**Deadline: January 05, 2025**

The ACDA National Repertoire and Resources team is seeking to fill seven open leadership positions:

- Youth Choirs Coordinator • Children & Community Youth Chair • 2-year Collegiate Choirs Chair
- 4-year Collegiate Choirs Chair • Student Activities (Chapter Development) Co-Chair
- Contemporary/Commercial (Show Choirs) Co-Chair • Tenor-Bass Choirs Chair

You may apply by following the steps below or you may nominate someone else. When nominating, the committee will reach out to your nominee and alert them to your nomination and request that they submit an official application.

The R&R team creates programming, curates repertoire lists, offers guidance in resource acquisition and utilization, and is driven to provide collegial and collaborative relationships for ACDA members. The team is responsible for many elements of National Conference programming, and for developing programming for non-conference-related events. Project360 is the R&R commitment to the development of year-round programming, outside of conferencing activities. R&R team members also contribute to the *Choral Journal* on a preset rotational basis.

A successful candidate will demonstrate strengths including visionary leadership, strong communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills in addition to a "self-starter" mentality useful for out-of-the-box thinking. Commitment to volunteerism is a priority. Prompt, concise communication skills are a must. It is expected for R&R team members to attend the national conference on odd years and a regional conference on even years. Candidates should have demonstrated experience in leading related R&R activities at the local, state, region, or national level.

You are encouraged to review the R&R chairs policy and procedures guide located at <https://acda.org/about-us/leadership-tools> to better understand the role and responsibilities for these positions.

If selected for a leadership position, you will serve a two-year term, renewable twice, for a possible total 6-year term of service. The renewal of term is extended by the National Chair. The first term begins on July 1, 2025.

**To nominate someone, use the google form located at <https://acda.org/repertoire>.** You will need to submit a name and email address for your nominee.

**To apply, use the Google form located at <https://acda.org/repertoire>**

- Submit your CV (PDF); and
- Submit a statement that addresses why you are interested in this role, the specific skills you will bring to this role, and a vision statement for this role.

Application collection will close on January 5, 2025. Applicants will be notified February 10-15, 2025. The new leaders will have the opportunity to work with the sitting chair or coordinator through the spring and early summer and will assume their leadership responsibilities on July 1, 2025.

Your consideration is greatly appreciated. Your desire to serve ACDA in this capacity is heroic.

For questions or more information, contact Gretchen Harrison, National Chair for Repertoire and Resources:  
[nationalr@acda.org](mailto:nationalr@acda.org)



# Repertoire & Resources

## Collegiate Choirs Coordinator



Jenny Bent  
Collegiate Choirs Coordinator  
bentjc@sonoma.edu

### **The Choral Network Nexus: Building Connections and Support in Higher Education**

by Jenny Bent

As a young professional stepping into the classroom for the first time, I vividly recall the whirlwind of emotions—excitement, nervousness, and a deep desire to succeed. However, I was also confronted with an unexpected feeling of loneliness. Suddenly, without the safety net of my mentors and fellow students, I grappled with a sense of isolation, an experience I would later learn often accompanies our profession. In the collegiate choral field, many of us find ourselves as the only person, or one of a few, within our institutions doing what we do.

Over the years, I have come to see that the American Choral Directors Association serves as so much more than a source to find repertoire and resources. It is a bridge that connects choral professionals across institutions. The challenges we face as choral directors are often universal, and ACDA creates opportunities for us to share our experiences and grow together.

We support one another, celebrate triumphs, and learn from each other's victories and setbacks. ACDA becomes our community, our sounding board, and our source of inspiration, offering a platform for networking and mentorship.

In my first year as Collegiate Choirs Coordinator, our Repertoire and Resources area has focused on enhancing and strengthening connections with our professional community by striving to better understand and address the needs of our diverse membership. In September 2023, our team launched a survey to gain insight into the current landscape of collegiate choral education. Your feedback provided information about who ACDA is engaging within our collegiate community, the platforms and resources most frequently accessed, and key areas of interest. The results of this survey directly shaped our initiatives and priorities for the year. (View survey results at: <https://choralnet.org/archives/acda-news/collegiate-choirs-survey-results>)

The survey results highlight ACDA's pressing need to connect with students, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing the pivotal role student chapters play in bridging this gap, our Collegiate Student Activities team, under the leadership of Dr. Ryan Beeken and Dr. Elizabeth Swanson, has been diligently working to simplify the process of establishing new student chapters and to improve communication between existing chapters and the broader ACDA support network. To facilitate these initiatives, ACDA is developing a comprehensive manual with practical guidance for student chapters. Additionally, we are





designing a more accessible and user-friendly student experience for the 2025 National Conference, featuring content tailored to student interests, a schedule that highlights potentially engaging and valuable sessions, and abundant networking opportunities.

In direct response to survey feedback, Collegiate R&R is also working to provide meaningful and readily accessible online content by curating a series of short videos that we hope will be informative and motivational. These videos will be delivered directly to you in ACDA's weekly Wednesday emails and available for future reference on the National ACDA website.

The ACDA Collegiate Choirs team is dedicated to providing a welcoming and supportive space for choral directors across a wide range of collegiate programs. Last year we expanded our team by welcoming Dr. Brandon Elliott into the newly established position of 2-Year College Choirs Chair. His addition has brought valuable new perspectives, enhancing our ability to connect with students at this critical stage of their educational journey and address their unique curricular needs and interests. Additionally, our Student Activities team is exploring creative alternative membership pathways for students enrolled in smaller music programs that may not have the numbers or resources to establish their own chapter. Moreover, recognizing the evolving framework of collegiate degree programs, our team has better aligned the 2025 National Conference Student Conducting Masterclass eligibility with current program structures and has worked to eliminate potential application barriers.

As our Collegiate R&R team looks to the future, we also remain steadfast in our commitment to providing the repertoire and resources for which ACDA is renowned and trusted. Following this introduction, you will read an article by Dr. Caron Daley, which offers strategies and repertoire suggestions for conductors of non-major and open-enrollment collegiate choirs, helping all students, regardless of their major or prior experience, to participate in meaningful and engaging choral experiences. Next, Dr. Brandon Elliott offers methods for building community within 2-year college choral programs. Finally, the article by Dr. Ryan Beeken and Dr. Elizabeth Swanson highlights the inspiring insights and practices of three nationally recognized

student chapters.

As conductors, we motivate and inspire our students every day—it is a fundamental element of our skill set. But we also have the power to support, uplift, and motivate one another. In conclusion, I offer one charge to our members: Be that person! Consider taking perhaps five minutes each day to go beyond merely “liking” a post on social media. If you have a running list of people you have been meaning to contact, that is an excellent place to start! A text, email, or even a handwritten note can be tremendously impactful. Whether it is a message of appreciation to a former mentor, a compliment to a colleague whose performance moved you, a note of thanks to that person who helped you start your career, or words of support to somebody just entering our professional field, your gesture can brighten someone's day and help them know they belong and are seen within our vast (and sometimes lonely) collegiate community. As we continue our collective journey, may we find inspiration and encouragement through the power of connection that defines our work in collegiate choral education.

### 4-Year College & University Choirs



Caron Daley  
National R&R Co-Chair,  
4-Year College & University Choirs  
daleycl@duq.edu

**Count Me In:  
Elevating the All-Campus Collegiate Choir**  
by Caron Daley

Collegiate-level singers participate in choirs for a host of academic and personal reasons. Some are degree-seeking and fulfilling course requirements. Others sing for enjoyment, community connection, professional preparation as conductors and educators, or to create balance within their daily schedules. This article places a special spotlight on all-campus choirs, defined as any ensemble that engages students from majors across the university.

One of my great professional joys is working with an all-campus choir. I am grateful for the incredible talent and infectious energy these students bring to the ensemble setting. Equally, I admire the efforts they take to perform with the group, including locating available ensemble opportunities; shifting class, lab, and practicum schedules; and engaging in new social and academic spaces. As I design instruction, I am eager to tune in to student's unique motivations and goals for ensemble participation in the all-campus choir. What resources, repertoire, and approaches can support their success? How might the culture of the all-campus choir promote rigor, inclusivity, and sustainability?

This summer, I took time to discuss these questions with Dr. Stephanie Tubiolo, a member of the choral faculty at Rutgers University, and Dr. Aaron Peisner, Director of Choral Activities at University of North Carolina Wilmington. Both conductors are within their

first five years of collegiate teaching and lead all-campus choirs. Tubiolo and Peisner are friends from graduate school, where all the available choirs were highly selective. On the job, the strategies they have developed are a result of careful attunement to the students, awareness of the institutional culture, and a willingness to be inventive in their choral practice. Three themes emerged in our conversation as we discussed opportunities and challenges of leading all-campus choirs: (1) serving students, (2) cultivating a distinctive ensemble identity, and (3) choosing engaging and meaningful repertoire.

### Serving Students

In her work at a large, multi-campus institution, Stephanie Tubiolo stresses the importance of tailoring instruction to the reality of student schedules. For example, students at Rutgers often need to take a bus

# CCM SUMMER CHORAL INTENSIVE

Declared "one of this country's leading conservatories" by the *New York Times*, UC's College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) offers an exceptional summer choral intensive program.

## CHORAL CONDUCTING WORKSHOP

July 6-12, 2025

Early bird registration due May 1

Registration deadline June 15

Offers a focused immersion in new pedagogies, literature and performance practice.

- Receive coaching on body mapping, voice and choral pedagogy
- Explore a wide range of historic and modern repertoire
- Gain exposure to the CCM International Conducting program and performances
- No audition required

## INTERNATIONAL CONDUCTING TRAINING PROGRAM

July 5-12, 2025

Application deadline April 4

Offers advanced training for conductors who seek to elevate their professional experience with guidance from CCM's renowned faculty.

- Refine your gesture, approach and score analysis
- Rehearse and conduct a professional chorus and orchestra
- Prepare masterworks for performances
- Audition required

### LEARN FROM RENOWNED FACULTY:



**JOE MILLER**  
Professor and  
Director of Choral  
Studies at CCM



**BRETT SCOTT**  
Professor of  
Ensembles and  
Conducting at CCM

Professional Development contract hours documentation is available upon completion of the Choral Intensive. **Apply online at [ccm.uc.edu/summer-choral-conducting](https://ccm.uc.edu/summer-choral-conducting)**

University of  
**CINCINNATI** | **CCM**



between classes and campuses, which can contribute to late arrivals to rehearsal. Tubiolo's approach is to welcome late-comers with applause, acknowledging their efforts to attend rehearsal and welcoming them into the space. At the choir's second weekly rehearsal, which often conflicts with students' STEM courses, Tubiolo rehearses another set of music. This keeps instructional momentum high and maximizes everyone's time, she explains. If students miss a rehearsal, she provides ample online resources and opportunities for extra help.

Aaron Peisner agrees that flexibility with attendance is important with his all-campus choir. In his work at a beach-side campus, he has sometimes observed a more carefree approach to class attendance. Continuity and re-enrollment from semester to semester have also been challenging. His answer is to design instruction around student's motivations for singing. He has noticed that skill building is satisfying for students, so he takes time to review music fundamentals in class such as score marking strategies. Focusing on skill development is empowering, he notes, and helps students to see themselves as essential contributors to the ensemble's growth and sustainability.

Both of these educators work to reduce barriers to entry into the all-campus choir. Tubiolo accepts all students who complete an official choral audition into the choir. She also holds open rehearsals for the first week of classes so prospective students can observe the ensemble in action. Peisner runs "voice placement hearings," rather than auditions. Changing the name is important, he explains. Students are making a big effort to seek us out and share their talent. Keeping the audition low key and exploratory sets a positive tone for their choral experiences.

### **Cultivating a Distinctive Identity**

Collegiate choral programs are traditionally hierarchical in design. The top ensemble is likely is an auditioned mixed choir that is highly visible on campus and beyond. Other beginning-level or mid-level choral ensembles may be auditioned or non-auditioned and generally have fewer performing opportunities. This framework can mean that all-campus choirs are a catch-all group, lacking a unique identity or performance agenda. All-campus choirs may also attract mu-

sic majors seeking out a second ensemble, and particularly music education majors preparing to teach. The combination of music majors and non-majors can create an additional layer of complexity in terms of group identity.

Tubiolo explains that cultivating a distinct ensemble identity is essential for recruitment, visibility, and student enjoyment in the all-campus choir. It is a disservice to the students if they are perceived as the "B-Team" or "same but worse" than more advanced choirs. Ensemble identity begins with honoring the time and effort these students are taking to be in the choir, she explains. Student leadership is another powerful tool to fortifying group identity. For Tubiolo, the more she shares leadership with the students and accompanist, the more the group's identity can rise.

Peisner is focusing his post-pandemic rebuilding efforts on establishing a unique identity for the University Chorale, which was previously viewed as the "filler choir" for major works. He takes time to do non-musical activities with the group, such as team-building games and a scavenger hunt where students write a choir mission statement together. Culture recruits students, he asserts.

### **Engaging and Meaningful Repertoire**

Tubiolo seeks to connect repertoire choices directly to the students in the ensemble. She starts each semester with a form where students can identify their musical interests, languages spoken, cultural traditions, or artistic talents. She often includes poetry and instrumental music in her programming and finds that students enjoy an interdisciplinary approach. In choosing repertoire, she is sensitive to the diverse faith traditions that are represented within the choir and tends to avoid overemphasizing sacred repertoire.

Peisner often seeks out SAB literature for his all-campus choir, and has found a trove of potential repertoire in the Georgian and Balkan choral traditions. Much of the SAB repertoire is better suited to middle school choirs, he laments. For the all-campus collegiate setting, he is seeking music that feels artistically rich but has lighter musicianship demands.

Locating suitable literature for the all-campus choir is an ever-present challenge. This June, collegiate col-



leagues across the county contributed recommended selections for all-campus choirs. That list can be found by visiting <https://acda.org/repertoire/college-and-university-choirs-repertoire> or by scanning the QR code.



### Conclusion

Peisner and Tubiolo agree that the all-campus choir can be missing from the collective consciousness. If you listen to recordings of collegiate choirs online, chances are you will hear the university's flagship ensemble, not the all-campus choir. At conferences, it is often the same. Tubiolo notes that working with this level of choir also requires a unique pedagogical skill set. If we can make all-campus choirs more visible within the wider choral community, this will equip us all for greater success, she adds.

In summary, this energizing conversation revealed the depth and breadth of possibilities within the all-campus choir setting. Correspondingly, it underscored the need for greater advocacy for these types of collegiate choirs. If you lead an all-campus choir, or would like to continue the conversation, please reach out by email: [daleycl1@duq.edu](mailto:daleycl1@duq.edu).

establishing a cohesive and sustained community complex. However, fostering a sense of belonging and community within a choral ensemble is crucial for promoting student engagement, retention, and the program's overall success. This article explores strategies for building and maintaining a robust choral community in the context of a 2-year college. While many of these strategies might perhaps be obvious to many choral directors, it always helps to reassess how we shape culture within our choral programs.

### Understanding the 2-Year College Student Demographic

Students at 2-year colleges represent various life experiences and educational backgrounds. Many students are recent high school graduates, while others are returning to education after time in the workforce or other life pursuits. This diversity extends to their musical experiences. Some students have significant choral backgrounds, while others may be encountering structured music education for the first time.

The relatively short duration of students' enrollment—often limited to one or two years, though some may stick around for several years—can complicate the process of building an enduring community within the choir. Unlike 4-year institutions, where students typically remain in the program for an extended period, 2-year colleges require choral directors to continuously adapt to a changing membership base. This fluidity can disrupt continuity and a sense of shared purpose within the ensemble.

### Recruitment and Onboarding

Effective community building begins with thoughtful recruitment and onboarding processes. Directors should aim to attract a diverse group of students by actively engaging with various campus populations and ensuring that the choral program is accessible to students with different levels of musical experience. It is essential to communicate that the choir is a welcoming space for all students, regardless of their prior exposure to choral music or major.

Once students are recruited, the onboarding pro-

## 2-Year College Choirs



Brandon Elliott  
National R&R Co-Chair,  
2-Year College Choirs  
[bellott14@saddleback.edu](mailto:bellott14@saddleback.edu)

### Building a Choral Community in a 2-Year College

by Brandon Elliott

The choral program within a 2-year college environment presents distinct challenges and opportunities. Students in these institutions often come from diverse backgrounds and have varying levels of musical experience. This transient nature of enrollment can make



cess should emphasize the importance of community within the choir. Initial rehearsals can include activities designed to foster interpersonal connections, such as structured introductions, group discussions about shared goals, and social events that allow students to interact outside the formal rehearsal setting. Establishing these connections early on helps create a foundation for a supportive and collaborative environment. Providing recruits with tangible “swag” (e.g., a water bottle with your choir’s logo) is another effective way for people to feel connected to the program immediately.

### **Creating a Sense of Belonging**

A crucial component of building a choral community is cultivating a sense of belonging among students. Directors can achieve this by organizing regular social activities that allow students to develop personal connections outside of rehearsal. These activities might include informal gatherings, shared meals, festivals, field trips, or attendance at performances as a group. By fostering relationships among choir members, directors can help create a more cohesive ensemble that works together more effectively in rehearsal and performance.

Peer mentorship programs can also play a significant role in building community. By pairing new members with returning students, directors can provide newcomers with a support system that helps them navigate the challenges of joining a new ensemble. This mentorship not only aids in the acclimatization process but also strengthens the overall sense of unity within the choir.

### **Group Travel as a Community-Building Tool**

Group travel offers a unique and powerful way to strengthen the bonds within a choral ensemble. Traveling together for performances, festivals, or workshops allows students to share experiences outside the usual rehearsal environment, fostering deeper connections and a stronger sense of unity. While the costs associated with group travel can be prohibitive for some programs, especially within 2-year colleges, creative solutions such as fundraising initiatives, grant opportu-

nities, and partnerships with on-campus resources can make travel more feasible.

By involving students in fundraising—whether through organizing events, seeking donations, or collaborating with campus organizations—directors make travel accessible to all students and give students a sense of ownership and investment in the experience. Moreover, these shared efforts contribute to developing a communal identity and pride in the ensemble, further reinforcing the community bonds established through the travel experience.

### **Establishing a Group Identity**

Developing a clear group identity is another vital aspect of community building. Directors can cultivate this identity through consistent messaging about the choir’s goals, values, and vision. Regularly communicating these elements can help students feel connected to the larger purpose of the ensemble. It encourages them to take ownership of their roles within the group.

In addition to verbal communication, visual elements can reinforce the choir’s identity. This might include creating choir-specific apparel, such as t-shirts or jackets, that students can wear with pride. Social media presence can also help with this; several media-savvy students are likely willing to run an account. Establishing traditions, such as annual performances or signature repertoire, can also contribute to a sense of continuity and shared experience, even as individual members come and go.

Building a choral community in a 2-year college requires intentional effort and thoughtful strategies that address the unique characteristics of the student population. By focusing on inclusive recruitment, fostering personal connections, utilizing group travel, and developing a strong group identity, choral directors can create an environment that enhances student engagement and ensures the program’s long-term success. The cultivation of such a community is essential for maximizing the educational and artistic potential of the 2-year college choral ensemble.

## Student Activities



Ryan Beeken  
National R&R Co-Chair, Student Activities  
ryan.beeken@wichita.edu



Elizabeth Swanson  
National R&R Co-Chair, Student Activities  
elizabethkswanson@gmail.com

### Student Chapter Development: Conversations with ACDA Student Chapters

by Ryan Beeken and Elizabeth Swanson

We are eager to support student members and faculty advisors of your institution's ACDA student chapter. With a forthcoming manual on how to start a student chapter, we offer this article with compelling ideas for how to build and sustain your chapter based on a Q&A from some of our nation's leading student leaders and faculty advisors. These student chapters fall under the auspices of Crane School of Music, Indiana University, and Ithaca College. Each has won the "ACDA Student Chapter of the Year" award or were the runner-up for this honor. We are grateful for their contributions to this collaborative article. Below are the individual contributors for each student chapter.

- Elizabeth Powell, Music Education, Voice and Special Education Major, at State University of New York (SUNY) Potsdam's Crane School of Music (student of Nils Klykken, Associate Professor of Choral Conducting).
- Chris Albanese (Associate Professor of Choral Conducting at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music).
- Janet Galván (Professor Emerita, Ithaca College) along with three Ithaca College alumni: Juliana Joy Child (Assistant Artistic Director, Pensacola Children's Chorus), Keilah Ussi (Former Secondary Choral Director and Current Graduate Student in Choral Con-

ducting at Michigan State University), and Rebecca Saltzman (Choral Director, Simsbury High School; Eastern ACDA Region Contemporary A Cappella & Vocal Jazz R&R Chair).

### Briefly describe your institution and the makeup of your student ACDA Chapter.

**SUNY Potsdam** is a public liberal arts college with 2,000 undergraduate students, the Crane School of Music making up about 500 of those students. Our ACDA chapter comprises 40+ active members. A majority of our members specialize in voice, with approximately 35 of our members being music education majors on the choral track. Our other members include music business, music history, and music theory majors.

## THE THINGS WE HAVE



Featuring compositions and arrangements by Robert Nelson, contains a wide variety of choral music—from classical contemporary to Neo-Baroque to pop and jazz.

**VOX**  
THE ROB SEIBLE SINGERS

VOX specializes in performing music of all styles, especially new and infrequently performed music from the choral literature.

#### CD includes:

- **The Things We Have** | In Memoriam: September 11, 2001 (a cantata for chorus, organ, flute, timpani, and strings);
- **A Year's Quiet Journey** (a suite of five a cappella songs with lyrics by Lynda Boltz); and
- **Showbiz is my Life** (jazz music in the tradition of the Manhattan Transfer.)

**Now Available!**  
ON ALL STREAMING SERVICES

CD available for purchase at [robertnelsonmusic.com](http://robertnelsonmusic.com)





## Repertoire & Resources

**The Indiana University Jacobs School of Music** is a large school of music housed within the flagship campus of an R1 university. We serve over 1,600 music majors along with offering courses, ensembles, and other programming for non-majors. Our student chapter is composed of approximately twenty students, many of whom are undergraduate choral music education majors. We have a few instrumental and general music students as well.

**Ithaca College** is a comprehensive college of approximately 6,000 students, including a School of Music Theater and Dance with about 450 undergraduate music majors and 50 graduate students. At one time we had a strong master of music in conducting program. The graduate choral students were active in ACDA and

supported the undergraduates as leaders of ACDA.

**Please share chapter recruitment ideas and strategies that have worked well for students at your institution.**

**SUNY Potsdam:** We participate in Potsdam's Welcome Weekend Carnival allowing us to "table," meet new students, and add them to our weekly email chain. Additionally, we are very active on social media (@craneacda) posting our monthly calendar of events, weekly lab choirs, and information on guest speaker events. Keeping our social media up to date helps our members plan and attend our events. Another huge



# Clothed in Love

**PRESBYTERIAN ASSOCIATION OF MUSICIANS  
2025 WORSHIP & MUSIC CONFERENCE**

**JUNE 15-20 & JUNE 22-27  
MONTREAT, NORTH CAROLINA**

**[PRESBYMUSIC.ORG/CONFERENCE](https://presbysmusic.org/conference)**



**Lynda Hasseler**  
Adult Choir Director



**Brandon Waddles**  
Senior High Choir Director



**Amy Kotsonis**  
Middler Choir Director



**Michael Burkhart**  
Children's Choir Director

portion of recruitment for our organization is word of mouth and face-to-face encounters. We encourage our members to talk to first-year students about their own experiences at Crane and within our chapter. Our organization prides itself on being a supportive and uplifting community, and our students are welcoming, kind, and genuine. These warm interactions have been both effective and sustainable for boosting recruitment.

Lastly, we have a mentor/mentee (M&M) program that pairs up first-year students with upperclassmen in order to provide a familiar face in both the club and around campus. We hold specific bonding events and provide opportunities for the M&Ms to attend our events together to foster that feeling of familiarity and belonging. This program helps retain members; upperclassmen actively seek to return to our club to be mentors.

---

**Indiana University:** Anything involving food (ice cream socials, pizza nights, etc.)! Joint events with our NAfME student chapter have also been a success, including faculty workshops and roundtables.

---

**Ithaca College:** Recruiting began during the summer on social media and continued heavily during audition week; signs about the first meeting were posted at the choral audition site. Leadership also helped coordinate collaborative pianists for students. This was a great service to the school and to those who auditioned. Also, ACDA members were present during auditions to answer questions and be supportive of and friendly to new students.

The first meeting was held during the first week of choral rehearsals. There was a scavenger hunt as well as an introduction of ACDA leaders and choral faculty members. The ICACDA recruited not only those in vocal music education but also instrumentalists, composition majors, and performance majors. By joining ACDA, they had instant community with students from all levels (first-year students through graduate students). There were also leadership opportunities even for first-year students. Students also joined to go to the regional and national conferences. The chapter did a great job

of fundraising, making it possible for students to attend for a small amount of money. The leaders also expressed to the new students how many opportunities were provided by ICACDA to learn things that were not necessarily covered in course work. IC alumna Rebecca Saltzman states:

A big part of our recruitment process was about sheer presence in the school. ACDA was everywhere; we helped with high school visits, sold t-shirts, and had a lot of cool, well-attended events like the music read-throughs and workshops with amazing professionals. It was well-known that we had won outstanding national chapter for several years and, even if we hadn't, our reputation was that of choral excellence. When thinking about all the organizations in the SOM (music frats, etc.), ACDA was the most consistent and active. People want to be a part of something that has a great reputation and demonstrates how amazing it is all the time.

---

**What does your chapter programming look like? What kinds of sessions and activities do you offer, and how often do they occur?**

**SUNY Potsdam:** Our chapter has over twenty events each semester that include our weekly lab choirs, bonding, and guest speakers. Our lab choir gives students the opportunity to teach a music lesson to their peers. These can include anything the student wants to improve their teaching skills on, ranging from an elementary general music lesson to a high school choral rehearsal. Sign-ups occur at our general interest meeting at the beginning of every semester. We encourage our first-year members to sign up and offer to pair them with upperclassmen if they are not comfortable with teaching by themselves. In addition to our lab choirs, we have one guest speaker and one bonding event per month. Our guest speakers include alumni, professors, and notable choral musicians. Our bonding events in-



clude bingo, picnics, and board game nights; all are a fun way to build a community.

---

**Indiana University:** We offer a blend of educational and social activities, including three to four faculty presentations and/or panel discussions per semester. We've also invited faculty from other departments and units on campus to offer perspectives on a host of choral-adjacent topics.

---

**Ithaca College:** Generally, the chapter had choral graduate students present a topic of their choice each year. If we had an on-campus guest artist, that person would present. Faculty presented on topics of their expertise. Public school teachers in the area presented sessions on various topics (musicals with middle school, vocal jazz, tenor-bass ensembles, solfège, etc.) There was generally a session after regional or national conferences that allowed the members who went to share information about their favorite sessions and what they learned from the conference. This was fun because they would tell stories of meeting composers or conductors that they had heard about throughout their lives. They also had a Messiah reading in December—open to the community—with student conductors who had been selected through an audition process.

The ACDA chapter assisted with events on campus like our annual Composition Competition Festival Day and Concert and the New York State Area All-State Festival. They served as hosts for attending high schools, oversaw lining up the choir members in the hallway and leading them on stage. These events provided great learning experiences. Conference attendance was a big part of the year's activities. The chapter leaders also promoted community partnerships—many of the students had their first “real-world” choral teaching experience working with a community group called the Dorothy Cotton Jubilee Singers, directed by Baruch Whitehead. ICACDA also worked hand in hand with the Ithaca Children's Choir, now known as ICYC. Many students served as assistant conductors through an internship program or as staff pianists. In the words of a former student (Juliana Joy Child):

ACDA grants access to valuable resources through conferences, publications, and networking opportunities, but I imagine it could be hard for an undergraduate student to fully comprehend the value of those resources if they had no real-world applications for them. My peers and I got to attend conferences every year, mostly paid for by our student chapter. We'd come back feeling rejuvenated and get to jump right in and teach a new canon we'd learned in an interest session to young people at ICYC. We understood firsthand the importance of making personal connections with other choral professionals because we witnessed that good communication, effective collaboration, and a shared passion were crucial for successful choral endeavors. We appreciated things like the *Choral Journal* because we had exposure to so many different music-making settings, and we were figuring out what we were most passionate about.

### How did you keep students engaged with your chapter throughout the academic year?

**SUNY Potsdam:** To ensure our club's success with student engagement, our E-board meets weekly to discuss programming. These meetings are efficient and organized with accurate records reflecting the direction of Crane ACDA. The information discussed is included in our weekly email chain for all members. We rely heavily on our E-board to recruit and excite our members about upcoming events. Seeing peers who provide valuable experiences to one another is vital to our organization's success. Our members stay involved year-round with weekly lab choirs, knowing there is always an ACDA event each week. We plan other events such as guest speakers and club bonding at least a month ahead of time and coordinate them with the school events calendar to ensure our members can attend.

The leadership in our organization is also very receptive to feedback and generally understands the



wants and needs of the Crane student body. One of our strengths lies in connecting students to resources that our curriculum may not supply or does not delve into as far as student interest goes. This puts Crane ACDA at the forefront of the student interest throughout the academic year.

---

**Indiana University:** Having events to look forward to (especially ACDA conferences) helps stimulate interest along with engaging students in fundraising efforts. Ten of our students traveled to Louisville for the 2024 Southern ACDA Region Conference. Their enthusiasm upon returning was palpable! This year, the Singing Hoosiers have been invited to perform at ACDA National in Dallas, so I anticipate many of our students attending.

---

**Ithaca College:** Emails were sent to remind people of deadlines and information needed for conference attendance. Signs were posted throughout the building about meetings and presentations. The officers met regularly. The president stayed in close contact with the faculty adviser. The calendar was shared with members at the beginning of the year. We used the Remind101 text system to remind people of meetings. Food was also a huge incentive. If people came to events, they got snacks! We used Facebook and Instagram to reach our community. Instagram takeovers were a great form of engagement. Not only did it appeal to all students (members and non-members), but it provided an informative and practical look into the lives of current students as well as alumni. Following a day in the life of current students attending choral rehearsals/classes at IC, witnessing student teachers in their first full-on teaching experiences, and alumni directing their own choral programs across the country provided an interesting and informative way to see what ICACDA students were doing with all of the tools they'd gathered at Ithaca College.

---

**Describe your process for gaining funding to support chapter activities.**

**SUNY Potsdam:** Our main source of funding comes from our Student Government. Every year we submit a budget request that allows us to pay for conference dues, guest speakers, supplies, and a mixer at the beginning of each semester. We also hold fundraisers throughout the year to support travel expenses for conferences. Popular fundraisers include bake sales, pretzel sales, and tape-a-professor jar wars. Fundraisers help us reach beyond our club through campus tabling and social media promotion, engaging friends, family, and alumni. Our chapter works to supply students with funding to attend the ACDA conferences each year. We strive to spark student interest and advocate for the incredible opportunities attendance at a large conference can provide. This allows us to gain significant traction with dedicated students. Being an active club with consistent and well-attended events shows our student government that we bring value to the SUNY Potsdam campus and deserve the budget that we receive.

---

**Indiana University:** As a registered student organization, we receive annual funding from the campus to offset operational costs. Funding for special projects and trips is provided on an as needed basis by the dean's office. We also fundraise.

---

**Ithaca College:** One of our most significant projects was to put together a warm-up book, which was sold nationally for \$5. Students reached out to conductors throughout the country to ask for contributions. The students learned a lot and made money to support the chapter. Each year the students also printed and ordered t-shirts to sell to the high schools who attended the choral composition contest. They communicated with the high school teachers who had been invited, sent forms, and collected the money. The students worked closely with the Student Activities Center and applied for funding for activities and for travel each



## Repertoire & Resources

year. They had to present a budget early in the year. From Rebecca Saltzman: “One of the most successful things we did was a silent auction with things that students would want to bid on such as ‘Dr. Galvan’s rum cake’ or ‘Lunch with Dr. White’ or ‘A crocheted sweater from Dr. J.’”

Please include any other information you would like to share about your student chapter and its success.


**SUNY Potsdam:** Our chapter has spent a lot of time reaching out to the choral community for support. Never be afraid to ask a musician or educator to join a zoom call and talk about their work for your chapter. Some of the most valuable lessons we have learned started with a simple ask. Crane ACDA is often the start of our members’ professional journey. Students are given the tools to succeed in academia, build their resume, and create lasting bonds with other future music educators. Our organization is one that uses its influence for unity, acceptance, and kindness. From initiatives that stand against bullying and harassment on campus to small acts of kindness each day, Crane ACDA is where students know they are always safe, valued, and respected.

**Indiana University:** Our students are instrumental in the chapter’s success! Their hard work and dedication is inspiring!

**Ithaca College:** The true secret of our success is the fact that the students ran things—they were the leaders. Being part of their professional organization is a behavior and practice they learn in part through their participation in the ICACDA chapter. They create a vision and look at holes in their education and try to find ways to get more information. What could ACDA provide that was not being done? In what areas do they need more information? What service can be provided?

Keila Ussi says:

While Ithaca College’s music education program was always strong in its curriculum, the opportunities for application of content knowledge provided by our chapter of ACDA was extremely helpful as an undergraduate... As an instrumentalist in my undergraduate degree, ACDA was also a huge way for me to step my foot into the choral world, further preparing me for choral as well as instrumental teaching upon graduation. Being a member of IC’s ACDA Executive Board was invaluable to my development. Organizing large-scale events, considering a variety of student wants/needs, coordinating endless moving parts, networking, problem solving with peers, and documenting the process along the way were all skills that have been directly applicable to my life as a choral educator and are the direct result of the experiences I had. Being provided the space to step up as leaders was beneficial, and also allowed us to provide the tools and resources most relevant to our peers.

Visit <https://acda.org/resources-for-student-members> to see a list of current ACDA Student Chapters or connect with someone at the ACDA National Office to learn more about starting a chapter at your institution. 



## **ACDA Student Chapters: Engage, Grow, Thrive!**

Are you ready to take your student chapter to the next level? The American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) is here to support your growth as musicians and leaders throughout this academic year. Whether you are new or returning, explore the opportunities and resources available to help you thrive!

### **Key Resources for ACDA Student Chapters**

#### **Student Activities Webpage**

Your central hub for everything ACDA student chapters: masterclasses, resources, events, and more! Visit the page to stay updated and ensure your chapter is listed. Explore here: <https://acda.org/resources-for-student-members>

#### **Access to the *Choral Journal***

All student chapter members can enjoy exclusive access to the latest edition of the *Choral Journal*. Log in online and dive into articles, insights, and resources that can inspire your choral journey. Need help logging in? Email us at [membership@acda.org](mailto:membership@acda.org)

#### **Coming Soon: ACDA Student Chapter Manual**

Get ready! A new, comprehensive Student Chapter Manual is on the way. This guide will provide essential resources to help your chapter grow and succeed.

#### **National Conference Tools for Students**

A curated itinerary of interest sessions, concerts, and events specifically for students will be released soon. Make the most of your experience at the next ACDA National Conference! We also will need student volunteers at the National Conference. Check the conference website for information and how to sign up!

#### **Stay Connected. Stay Inspired.**

We're excited to partner with you in building a vibrant student chapter community. For any questions or assistance, don't hesitate to reach out. We're here to help you thrive!

**Questions or need support? Email Dennis Carpenter at [dcarpenter@acda.org](mailto:dcarpenter@acda.org)**





# LIFT EVERY VOICE

## Call for Submissions

Lift Every Voice is a column concerning issues of access, diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and restorative practice (ADEIBR) in choral music. We hope that this column can provide a space to incubate ideas about inclusive practices and provide mentorship for choral practitioners.

### Logistics:

- 1,000-word minimum; 3,500-word maximum
  - Shorter pieces on similar topics may be combined into one column
- The author need not be an ACDA member to submit
- Send submissions to [abumgarner@acda.org](mailto:abumgarner@acda.org)
  - Please submit a bio along with your article
- Use *Choral Journal* style guide, available online at [acda.org/choraljournal](http://acda.org/choraljournal)
- Use *Choral Journal* end notes guide, available online at [acda.org/choraljournal](http://acda.org/choraljournal)

### Review process:

- Submit the article to the ACDA publications editor at the email listed above.
- If the article goes out for review, the identity of the author will be known to the two reviewers.
- Authors will receive constructive comments from the two reviewers.
- No submission will be guaranteed publication until after review by two content area experts.
- We echo the editorial process of the *New Directions in Music Education* journal: "Reviewers should approach the editorial process as a collegial exchange, not as a critical investigation. (...) The approach to the editorial review process described above should represent an empowering, invigorating experience for all concerned."

### We accept:

- Editorials and opinion pieces will be accepted with strong preference given to those representing authentic, lived experiences
- Interviews centering the voices of historically marginalized groups within the choral community
- Articles exploring inclusive, equitable choral pedagogy
- Research articles on ADEIBR topics in choral settings
- Reflections on personal experiences: writing grounded in lived experience

# LIFT EVERY VOICE



## **“On the Road Again”: Traveling with Transgender, Non-Binary, and Gender Expansive Singers in Your Ensemble**

By Melanie E. Stapleton

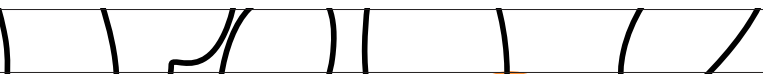
I still remember the palpable excitement I felt in middle school when my future high school choir director came to talk to us about what we could look forward to if we enrolled in high school choir. Admittedly, I was already biased from my upbringing. My dad’s side of the family cherished music in all its forms, particularly singing, so much so that my aunt had studied vocal performance at the Manhattan School of Music, and our traditional family singing of the blessing, “God is Great” before dinnertime often ended in a variety of four-part harmonies. But what really helped to solidify my enrollment decision was the director’s discussion of choir trips.

Every year the ensemble got to go on a trip, annually alternating between “big trips” and “small trips” to ensure they wouldn’t become too cost prohibitive. While these trips naturally included choral performances, I was more excited about the prospect of riding rides at Disney World while my friends were stuck in geometry class.

It’s impossible for me to separate the experience of being in a choral ensemble from the thrill of a new geographical adventure. As I transitioned from high

school choir student to an undergraduate music education student and finally became a choir director in my own right, choir trips were a foundational part of the process. These trips were not only fun, but instrumental to my musical, professional, and personal growth. In the trips I took with my high school choir, I experienced live mariachi music for the first time in San Antonio, Texas, and discovered the myriad styles of music performances present in Branson, Missouri. Professional skills like being punctual to call times and being reliable were repeatedly instilled in me. Travelling with other adolescent humans taught me how to be more courteous and empathetic toward my peers. There were unintended life lessons along the way as well, such as finally learning how to whistle whilst on the bus, or discovering that one errant chili dog can wreak inadvertent chaos. I would not be the same person I am today without those trips.

However, as the only out transgender person in all of my choral ensembles over the years, I repeatedly had to navigate hurdles that my cisgender colleagues did not. Trans issues were not readily visible or distinguishable from the larger LGBTQ+ issues in the mainstream,



particularly while I was a high school or undergraduate college student. My cisgender directors, like many others, did not understand or anticipate these hurdles because they never really had to address them before. This led to multiple instances where I was implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, discouraged by directors from participating in these incredible trips, such as being told in college that people would find me “disgusting” simply because I existed as a transgender woman. These experiences fortunately did not prevent me from going on these trips that I enjoyed so much, but rather furthered my desire to effect change in the choral and music education worlds so that other cis directors would stop attempting to discourage their transgender, non-binary, and gender expansive singers (TGE) from going on trips.

Over the past few years, I have created resources<sup>1</sup> and presented lectures on working with TGE music students across the United States in locales ranging from major cities and universities to rural school districts and community ensembles. One of the most common questions I still receive from many choir directors centers around the “right way” to include a TGE singer, particularly one who is a minor, on choir tours and overnight trips. Unfortunately, there simply isn’t just one “right way.” My motto when it comes to working with TGE singers and musicians is “Every situation is different and contextual.” What works for one TGE singer might not work for another. This is especially true considering the recent rapid rise of anti-trans legislation. In 2023, 589 pieces of legislation targeting TGE people were introduced in the United States. At the time of this article’s writing, eighty-five of those laws have passed, with approximately half of the bills still undecided.<sup>2</sup> This means that many directors are operating under a variety of legal circumstances and have to navigate their own specific contexts to find what works best for them and their singers. Even in the TGE community, discourse around this subject is ever evolving, with TGE directors favoring different options based on their own paradigms and beliefs. It would be imprudent to declare one option as the “best” or “right” option. What follows is an examination of the pros and cons of different potential options for a director to consider as well as some universal guiding

principles about trips with TGE singers to keep in mind so that directors can make the best decision possible for their singers.

## Terminology to Know

While it is beyond the scope of this article to explore the entirety of LGBTQ+ and TGE related vocabulary,<sup>3</sup> I believe it’s necessary to distinguish a few terms that are often conflated when discussing TGE people, specifically the difference between someone’s Assigned Sex at Birth (ASAB) and their gender identity. ASAB is simply the sex you were assigned by medical professionals when you were born; genitalia is typically the main distinguisher informing whether “Male” or “Female” is written on a birth certificate. Though sex is often reduced to this male/female binary, there are a multitude of physical, hormonal, and chromosomal variations found in humans (especially when considering the existence of those who are intersex), suggesting that sex, like gender, is less of a binary and more of a spectrum.<sup>4</sup>

Gender identity is someone’s internal sense of who they are, separate from one’s external features or their ASAB. Most individuals’ ASAB and gender identity line up. These people fall under the label of “cisgender” and represent a majority of the population. The term “transgender” is used as an umbrella term for those whose ASAB and gender identity do not line up in some way. There are many different identities that can fall under the transgender umbrella, and while some are comfortable identifying with the “transgender” or “trans” designator, some opt to use other terms that best match their own identity. I utilize the abbreviation TGE throughout this article as an attempt to universally include both those who identify as transgender, as well as those who use other terms for their identities.

Many people conflate gender identity with sexual orientation, which refers to who someone is attracted to. This has led to a common misconception that if somebody is TGE it instantly means they are also gay, lesbian, bisexual, or pansexual. Research suggests that this is not the case, that gender identity and sexual orientation are “weakly correlated constructs” at best.<sup>5</sup> Or, to put it in layman’s terms, who you *are* in terms of



your gender more than likely has little to no impact on who you *like*.

### Guiding Principles of Travel with TGE Singers

Before we examine the positives and negatives of various rooming options, it is best to operate under a few guiding principles that will assist you in planning your trips. These are not a fully comprehensive list, but I believe they are some of the most important considerations to consider.

*Every decision about a TGE singer should be made with the singer, not for them.*

TGE singers, regardless of age, will have the best understanding of what makes them comfortable or uncomfortable. Any decisions or issues that the conductor-teacher encounters should be shared openly and honestly with the singer, so that they have a comprehensive understanding of the limitations the director is operating under. There may be times when the director is unable to be fully transparent due to policy constraints, but often there are ways to still give a sense of the general barriers being faced. Outside of a very few specific outlying scenarios, it is never okay to make a decision about the TGE singer's rooming without their input, even for seemingly innocuous or small matters. Including parents or guardians in these discussions may be a requirement for TGE minors, but it is not okay to "out" a TGE singer to their family without consent. This action not only takes away the singer's autonomy



**VanderCook**  
COLLEGE OF MUSIC

AMERICAN  
CHORAL  
DIRECTORS  
ASSOCIATION

# Earn Graduate Credit

by Attending the  
**2025 ACDA National Conference**  
March 18-22 Dallas, TX

For more information please contact Dr. Robert Sinclair  
email: [rsinclair@vandercook.edu](mailto:rsinclair@vandercook.edu)  
direct: 312-788-1144

Chicago, IL | 312-225-6288 | [www.vandercook.edu](http://www.vandercook.edu)

CELEBRATING THE CHORAL ART  
PAST - PRESENT - FUTURE

**ACDA NATIONAL 2025**  
March 18-22 Dallas, TX

f i v y

but could also put them at risk for experiencing negative outcomes such as the creation of a hostile living environment, rejection from the family unit, or even homelessness.

*Familiarize yourself with the current legislation in your own area as well as the area(s) to which you are traveling*

As choir directors, we already have a large number of plates that we have to keep spinning. It is not realistic for you to know every single city, state, and federal policy when it comes to topics that involve LGBTQ+ and TGE people (including school district/school-level policies). However, when planning a trip, it is essential for you to understand what laws are currently active, particularly with the current rise of anti-trans legisla-

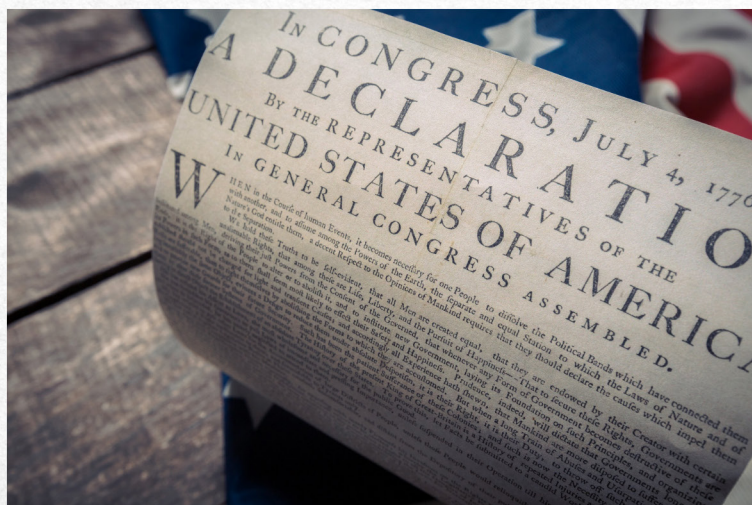
tion. It's important to make a concerted effort to know what bathrooms TGE singers are legally allowed to use, whether there may be a risk to singers who have gender-affirming medication such as hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or pubertal blockers (some states have banned or have attempted to ban gender-affirming care for TGE youth), or if a TGE singer could face repercussions for living authentically while in public. For example, early in 2023, Tennessee passed an anti-drag performance bill that was worded so generally that some could interpret it as restricting TGE people from existing in public while being their authentic self. This bill was struck down by a federal judge as unconstitutional, but the Tennessee Attorney General released a statement saying the state would eventually attempt to appeal the ruling.<sup>6</sup>

Given the myriad safety concerns, it is your responsi-

## America's 250th Birthday is Coming!

### YOU and your choir are invited!


### Join us in 2026!



**SING  
DEMOCRACY  
250**

**Learn more:**

**[SingDemocracy250.org](https://SingDemocracy250.org)**



bility to identify where you will be traveling and to take the initiative to find out what laws are currently on the books. While as directors, we never anticipate there to be legal issues on trips for our singers, particularly for such benign matters as medications or rest stops, it is always best to be prepared.

---

*Have a plan for bathroom and dressing rooms for every planned stop—and do your best to prepare for the unplanned ones as well.*

Pre-planning bathroom and dressing room logistics is especially important when traveling in states that have, or will soon have, active laws that prohibit TGE people from using the bathroom that match their gender identity instead of their ASAB. For any stop in your itinerary, you should make sure that your TGE singers will have a place to take care of bathroom or clothes-changing needs. This may entail specifically choosing venues, restaurants, or gas stations that have gender-neutral, single-stall, or family bathrooms. Or perhaps it means having somebody ensure that a gendered public bathroom or changing space is empty before the TGE singer goes in—though this is a notably unsubtle and potentially embarrassing option. Sometimes, no action is needed at all, as sometimes TGE people can exist without others in public realizing their identity. As the first guiding principle states, try to make sure you privately create a plan with your TGE singer ahead of time for various stops. This will allow the TGE singer to navigate these stops with discretion and dignity.

---

*Be aware of any pertinent emergency information as needed.*

No director wants to have an emergency situation occur while on a trip. Life doesn't always adhere to this plan, and sometimes emergencies happen. For TGE people, emergencies, particularly the medical ones, can be fraught with potential challenges. Often, the name or pronouns that a TGE person uses do not match the name or gender listed on their legal documentation or health insurance. Make sure to prepare yourself by knowing what name/gender is listed on these documents and be ready to discretely educate first respond-

ers or medical professionals about the correct way to refer to your singer. You may need to step in as their advocate until their emergency contact arrives or can be reached.

There are also multiple states that have passed legislation that allow religiously affiliated hospitals or doctors to deny care based on religious beliefs.<sup>7</sup> It may seem hypothetical or hyperbolic, but being denied medical treatment because of gender identity is a very real possibility for TGE people. While this situation is one that will most likely be dealt with by the singer's emergency contact, there is a chance you may encounter this, especially if the contact is temporarily unreachable. Try to consider how you would handle this event if it were to occur.

### **Examining the Pros and Cons of TGE Rooming Options**

There are multiple options available when it comes to the rooming assignments for TGE singers. Each of the following options have their own pros and potential cons attached to them, many of which are dependent on your specific context. The following list of rooming options is not exhaustive, but I believe it accounts for the majority of contexts and offers a realistic and pragmatic lens to rooming for our TGE singers. It is imperative that you weigh these options with your singer to determine the best solution. Typically, I work with the TGE singer to determine their rooming placement/assignment first before I open rooming selections for other students. This allows them to be with friends or peers they will feel safe with and minimizes the risk of being in a private room where they could be harmed emotionally or physically.

I should also preemptively note here that many parents, guardians, or administrators still view rooming through an antiquated heteronormative lens, in which “impropriety” typically only occurs when sexes are mixed in a room. This means that some believe, regardless of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, if somebody was Assigned Male at Birth (AMAB) and they are in a room where the others were Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB), there is inherently something wrong or improper about this because “men” or “boys”



can't be trusted to be alone with "women" or "girls" in private without something romantic or sexual in nature occurring. While this can be true for cisgender, straight people, it does not take into account the existence of those who are LGBTQ+ (including TGE people). Be prepared to have a greater probability of receiving complaints of "impropriety" when those with differing ASABs are placed in the same room by these parents or guardians, despite the reality that "improper" behavior is not bound by ASAB.

**Rooming Option #1: The TGE singer rooms with friends based on gender identity instead of ASAB. (Ex: A trans girl rooms with other girls)**

*Pros:* This is typically a preferred option for TGE singers. Their gender is affirmed, they are treated similarly to their peers, they still get to have the social experience of rooming with others, and they're not excluded.

*Potential Cons:* Some students or parents may express discomfort or levy accusations of impropriety, and there may be legislation or policies—particularly for choral educators—that prohibit this option. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, FERPA (for those to whom it applies to) may forbid you from disclosing aspects of a choral student's transgender status, including their medical history, birth name, or ASAB.

**Rooming Option #2: The TGE singer rooms with friends based on ASAB instead of gender identity. (Ex: A trans girl rooms with cis boys)**

*Pros:* This can circumvent any additional steps of disclosure, or for educators, having to contact administration since the ASABs in the room will "match up." The singer still experiences the social elements of being with other members of the ensemble and the director will more than likely not have to navigate parental anger since this is the cisnormative and heteronormative "standard."

*Potential Cons:* The singer's gender is not affirmed, they may feel extremely uncomfortable or out of place being

with others of a different gender identity (it is more of a quasi-social inclusion instead of full inclusion), and others in the room may feel uncomfortable. There still may be claims of impropriety (particularly from those who conflate sexual orientation and gender identity) and this option may violate the law/policy in more liberal areas that have protections in place for TGE people.


**Rooming Option #3: The TGE singer has their own room for the trip (with the financial difference paid by the choral program not by the singer/singer's family).**

*Pros:* The singer gets to have their own private room, there is no worry of potential bullying, discomfort, or accusations of impropriety, and the director does not have to have any conversations with other parents (choral educators do not have to get administrators involved).

*Potential Cons:* The singer may feel isolated, alienated, or excluded, other students or parents may say that it's "unfair" when they find out, the director has to navigate the financials of making up the cost difference for the solo room (it is not ethical to charge a student extra because of their gender identity), and the singer misses out on a social element of the trip.

**Rooming Option #4: The TGE singer rooms with a family member in the choir or with their parent or guardian, who helps chaperone the trip.**

*Pros:* The TGE singer isn't alone in their room, there will be no accusations of impropriety, and it will minimize the chance of others saying it's "unfair," since rooming with family—especially parents—isn't always considered fun. The director does not have to have any conversations with other parents (choral educators do not have to get administrators involved), and there's a built-in chaperone for the trip.



*Potential Cons:* The TGE singer may feel isolated or excluded from their friends and peers, rooming with siblings or family can create its own unique challenges that do not arise with non-family members, and the singer may feel embarrassed about the situation. The director may also have to navigate the cost difference for this option as well.


**Rooming Option #5: The TGE singer rooms with others who are TGE or LGBTQ+ identifying.**

*Pros:* The TGE singer still gets to experience all the social benefits and elements of the trip, they will be with other people like them, the room will more than likely feel safe and welcoming, there might be no cost difference to worry about, and parental conversations may be easier because of the similarities in situations.

*Potential Cons:* Students may feel alienated or “othered” from the rest of the choir; there could be accusations of impropriety; parents, guardians, or administrators could express discomfort at having a room just for LGBTQ+ students; and the director may encounter law/policies that prohibit this option. The director may also have to navigate a cost difference depending on the number of people in the room.

**Conclusion**

You may have noticed that nowhere in the rooming options provided is an option for the TGE singer to not go on the trip. I do not believe it is ethical to discourage, dissuade, or forbid a singer to have the same experience as the rest of the ensemble simply due to their gender identity. Most TGE singers already have to deal with discrimination and marginalization in their lives. As their choir directors, it is our responsibility to take the initiative and put in the extra work that is needed. Educating yourself and working with your TGE singers to develop a plan that meets their specific contextual needs will ensure that your trips are successful adventures for *all* of your singers and not just *some*. TGE singers deserve to have the chance to sing in new places

with their friends, learn new skills, and make treasured memories. It’s up to you to help make that happen. 

---

**Melanie E. Stapleton** (she/her) is a doctoral student at Northwestern University, pursuing a PhD in music studies with a specialization in music education and holds an interdisciplinary certificate in gender and sexuality studies. She is the founder of Blurring the Binary ([www.blurringthebinary.com](http://www.blurringthebinary.com)).

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Melanie E. Stapleton, “Teaching Transgender Students in the Music Classroom,” accessed December 27th, 2023, [www.blurringthebinary.com](http://www.blurringthebinary.com)
- <sup>2</sup> Trans Legislation Tracker, “2023 Anti-Trans Bills Tracker,” accessed December 27, 2023, <https://translegislation.com>
- <sup>3</sup> PFLAG, “PFLAG National Glossary,” <https://pflag.org/glossary/>
- <sup>4</sup> Dillon E. King, “The Inclusion of Sex and Gender Beyond the Binary in Toxicology,” *Frontiers of Toxicology*, no. 4 (2022), doi: 10.3389/ftox.2022.929219
- <sup>5</sup> Roi Jacobson and Daphna Joel, “An Exploration of the Relations Between Self-Reported Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation in an Online Sample of Cisgender Individuals,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 47, no. 8 (2018): 2407, doi: 10.1007/s10508-018-1239-y
- <sup>6</sup> Caroline Anders, “Tennessee Drag Ban is Unconstitutional, Federal Judge Rules,” *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2023, accessed December 27, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/06/03/tennessee-drag-law-unconstitutional/>
- <sup>7</sup> Jo Yurcaba, “More than 1 in 8 LGBTQ People Live in States Where Doctors Can Refuse to Treat Them,” *NBC News*, July 28, 2022, accessed December 27, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-health-and-wellness/1-8-lgbtq-people-live-states-doctors-can-refuse-treat-rcna39161>



# ocp Choral

BRING THE BEST OUT OF YOUR CHOIR

Introducing your new go-to  
sheet music website,  
offering expertly curated titles  
for any choir size,  
skill level and occasion.



[choral.ocp.org](https://choral.ocp.org)







# Rehearsal Break

Jennifer Rodgers, editor <rodgersj@iastate.edu>

## The Conductor Sets Time; Musicians Keep Time

by Stuart Hunt

Keeping good time is a non-negotiable, but in the best choirs, that responsibility is shared between conductor and singers. The conductor sets the time and attends to keeping it when necessary. Their primary focus, however, is the guiding and shaping of each phrase, the conveying of the work as a whole, and interpreting the intent of the composer. Just beating a pattern can fatigue conductors, performers, and actually distract an audience from the beauty, flow, and involvement of the art. Rehearsal time is precious. Giving your musicians the tools for heuristic learning will save time not just for a day but scaffolds future learning. It is how above-average and great musicians are created, and, as a conductor, you are the architect.

### Awareness

Time and tempo hold ensembles together. When the ensemble is aware of and keeps great time, it frees the conductor to focus on artistry. And it's important to realize that trying to keep time and developing awareness of time are notably different. My variation on Master Yoda's adjuration: "Do or do not...there is no try," is this: trying may fail; but awareness cures. Rhythmic

awareness and mindfulness practice can include:

- Training and drilling eyes to recognize patterns
- Training eyes to look ahead, reducing mistakes
- Counting everything in your head, including rests
- Recognizing where and with whom time-keeping resides

When you hear and observe a string quartet play a concert, where is the conductor? There isn't one present because everyone is investing in keeping time. Example 1 on the next page appeared in a 2014 article in *Science News* by Ashley Yeager.<sup>1</sup> She derived the graphic from a study reported in the *Journal of the Royal Society Interface*.<sup>2</sup> "Some ensembles are more autocratic—following one leader—while other musical groups are more democratic, making corrections equally, to stay together while playing (singing) a piece."

Do these models apply to conductor-less vocal ensembles? String quartet models involve only four players, but this symbiotic communication is what choral

conductors assume and hope is happening in their ensembles. Does it work with 65-100 performers? Could we learn and apply observing and “cooperative performing” with conducted choirs? The answers may be a little more complex because they rely on our singers possessing and mastering foundational skills, including:

- Counting and subdivisions
- Interval accuracy
- Basic or advanced intonation skills
- Listening and balance between sections

These skills are often best addressed in the magic month of “September.” Settling and building individual competence in the first six to eight weeks prevents having to revisit and waste rehearsal time in February or March. Building and affirming skill mastery early is key to ensemble cohesion going forward, allowing conducting of other artistic considerations. Going further, the conductor might consider these larger questions:

- Are we conducting singers or the music?
- Is the ensemble responding to our gesture and guidance?
- How do we acknowledge their progress and achievement and help with this skill transfer?

## Strategies for Heuristic Learning

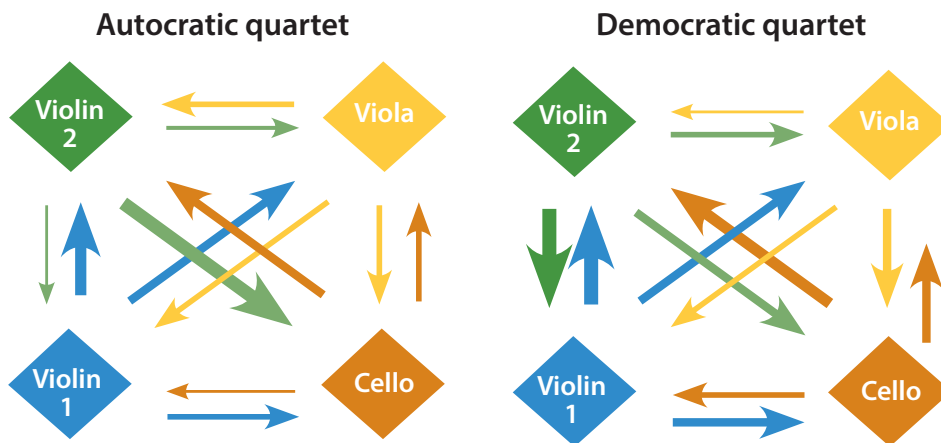
The rest of this article is devoted to seven strategies/exercises for helping your choir develop internal time-keeping skills.

### Doing Things “Wrong”

When I work with choirs regarding centering pitch, I ask them to do the following:

- 1) Sing the first complete phrase of “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” *in tune* (that is usually the norm).
- 2) Sing the phrase a little *flat*. I usually use simple block chords to accompany them, so they are aware of

## Example 1. How String Quartets Stay Together



In a more autocratic quartet (left), violin 1 tended to influence the timing of other players more than she was influenced herself. Arrows show the influence that one player (arrow tail) has over another (arrow head).

A.M. WING ET AL, ADAPTED BY M. ATAROD

where “in tune” should reside. Often, I get to say: “I’m sorry, you are singing in tune. I’m asking you to sing a little flat!” We all get a giggle. Not everyone can do it, but there’s usually a volunteer from the ensemble who can.

- 3) Sing a little *sharp*. It is harder than they imagine. Again, the singers default to being in tune. On balance, this is exactly where you want them, but it helps to combine being spot on with humor.

#### *Using a Regular or Smart Metronome*

Using a metronome, ask the choir to subdivide the beats (vary 4/4, 2/4, 6/8, etc.) One of the advantages of using a smartphone metronome is the visual component, as no audible clicks can deepen each singer’s perception of solid time vs. rushing or dragging. Then combine this with the “doing things wrong” strategy from above.

- 1) With the metronome, have the choir demonstrate keeping steady time. Remember, conductor sets time; choir keeps time. Let them do it on their own!
- 2) Ask them to drag a little behind and still stay coordinated.
- 3) Ask them to rush a little.
- 4) Ask: “What do you notice?” (You might be surprised by the responses.)

Again, this may be harder than they might think and good for a giggle while achieving the skill. These exercises take patience, but what is the alternative? Allowing even a few singers to rush or drag can lead to catastrophic results.

#### *Subdividing Rhythm*

As a conductor, have you trained *yourself* to accurately set and keep time at a variety of tempos (60, 72, 84, 92, 100, 108, 116, 120 bpm, etc.?) How did you do that? Very likely, by mastering subdivision and practicing how tempos are related. For example, set a tempo of 120. Get in your groove and subdivide if necessary.

Reset the tempo to 30 (but keep the 120 in your head) and practice hitting beat #1.

This part of your professional preparation could be directly passed along to your singers. Have fun adapting and demonstrating it in your choir rehearsal. Again, it is best to do this as early in the year as possible. Subdivision is the best way to keep the ensemble together and is particularly helpful for slower tempi. Note that when practicing time, we should avoid “click fatigue,” as it will drive you and your singers nuts. Incremental practice of *exactly* what is needed will foster awareness. If it becomes annoying or goes too long, change the focus. Your score study can reveal particular points in a piece where this exercise can be useful.

#### *Count-Singing*

Robert Shaw used and advocated for a method called Count-singing that is worth examining. He explained it as follows to the audience at a conducting seminar in Cleveland, Ohio, in November 1958:

Count-singing is a procedure that teaches pitches and rhythms simultaneously and trains the singers to share a common pulse. The premise is that all beats and subdivisions are chanted on proper pitches, changing pitches

**BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY** | DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

## Master of Music in Choral Conducting

William Culverhouse, Director of Choral Activities

- Extensive Podium Time
- Internationally known faculty
- Competitive Assistantships

**Application Deadline:**  
February 1, 2025

 [wculverh@binghamton.edu](mailto:wculverh@binghamton.edu)





as the rhythm dictates. Numbers are used as follows, “one-and-two-and-tee-and-four-and,” substituting tee for three because the consonant group in the latter takes too long to articulate.

Figure 1 illustrates the notated music on the top staff and what is actually sung on the lower staff.<sup>3</sup> You can see Dr. Shaw using this technique in a live rehearsal.<sup>4</sup> Notice that he is expressively conducting other concepts within a time-felt framework. He is just conducting a figure 8 but encouraging each singer to keep internal time for group unity. Shaw then includes dynamics in the counting, which led to consistent, coherent expression freeing him to conduct phrases, anticipate entrances, and blend choir and accompaniment. He cautions that “Getting louder does not mean getting faster,” and the reverse, “Getting quieter does not

mean getting slower.”

Yes, he is conducting time, but notice the plethora of expressive dimensions solved by internal timekeeping. By his focus, we can tell he is aware of many factors, not the least of which is having to compete with a stronger singer who has their own sense of time or interpretation. How does Shaw’s method and demonstration address metric cohesion? And, more to the point of this article, do *you* have distinct strategies for addressing metric cohesion?

### *Combining Solfège and Tempo*

In my experience, the popular warm-up in Figure 2 is especially helpful for visual and kinesthetic learners. Practice it daily until the ensemble masters it and keeps internal time.

**Figure 1.** Count-singing example

**Figure 2.** Solfège time-keeping exercise

Method:

- 1) Choose an appropriate key for your ensemble to comfortably sing an octave.
- 2) Remember: You set time; they keep time. Give them 4 prep beats at the tempo they can keep accurately and sing on solfège. For example, at 88 bpm, have the choir sing: “do / do re do /do re mi re do...” This exercise also works well as a two- or three-part canon.
- 3) Then start at the top of the scale and reverse it: “do / do ti do /do ti la ti do...”
- 4) Now ask them to sing only the scale notes while keeping the other notes going in their head at the set tempo: **DO** / (do) **RE** (do) / (do re) **MI** (re do) / (do re mi) **FA** (mi re do) / (do re mi fa) **SOL** (fa mi re do) etc. (Hint: The downbeats and upbeats alternate. If you tap quarter notes on your knee with one hand and hold the other above it so that you are then tapping eighth notes in a down/up pattern, your first Do is a downbeat; the Re is an upbeat: Mi is a down, Fa is an up, etc.)
- 5) Finally, do not tap or give any external cues. The choir will have to internalize time to be accurate.

Once the choir is fluent, set different tempos and have fun with it! It might be interesting to demonstrate to parents or an audience the ensemble’s acquisition of such a challenge. Do it as a warmup in front of an audience. It’s magic!

*Building Groove Using Rhythmic Canons*

Keeping great time is primary. Percussionist Mac Santiago says: “A poorly played note well placed [sung] is better than a well-played [sung] note placed poorly.” The following exercise uses a sense of groove to develop metric cohesion.

- 1) Choose a one-measure pattern and write it on the board. See Figure 3 for some examples.
- 2) Have the choir groove it in time, singing on a syllable or clapping or tapping.
- 3) Split the choir in half and start one group one measure later.
- 4) Next, start one group two beats later, then three beats later.
- 5) Divide the choir into three parts and repeat the pattern of starting the groups at different points.
- 6) Add dynamics.
- 7) *Build on the exercise by choosing multi-measure patterns and repeat the process.*

*Make It Fun*

Turning work into fun is a win-win. Turning fun into work is a lose-lose. As you observe your ensemble in rehearsal—mentally assessing progress, correction, cohesion, and skill transfer—don’t forget to include FUN in your checklist.

Labster, a company that helps science educators use immersive learning, online simulations, and virtual labs, cites research that shows students learn more



Figure 3. Four single-measure groove examples

when they have fun.<sup>5</sup> Sustaining students' memory, motivation, and attention is challenging, but having fun can make all the difference.

- Memory—Dopamine, a feel-good neurotransmitter, is released when having fun. Did you know that dopamine release leads to memory stimulation?
- Motivation—Games can motivate students to take risks. Students who have fun are more motivated to engage with teachings.
- Attention—It's easier to pay attention when students are having fun! Give them a reason to be present.<sup>6</sup>

The trick is to be inventive and to make educational work fun during rehearsal. If you are a little short of creativity one day, ask the choir to come up with an idea. It's likely they will create something interesting and see it as a "game"!

### Conclusion

Imagine solving the time challenge. How would training the ensemble's internal timekeeping change your conducting? What would it feel like to experience the freedom of expressively conducting as you have imagined? How would it change your ensemble's performance?

Keeping good time is a non-negotiable, but let's make it a cooperative effort: the conductor sets time; the ensemble keeps time. This approach frees you to artistically and expressively interpret great art. It empowers your choirs to embody that art. Your audiences will recognize and applaud the outcome.

Excellence is never an accident. It is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, and intelligent execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives—choice, not chance, determines your destiny.

—Aristotle 

**Stuart Hunt** is in his fifty-fourth year conducting choirs K-University in Washington State. His company, [www.toolsforconductors.com](http://www.toolsforconductors.com), writes sight-reading and counting books K-University, and online assessments for choir (vocal), band, and elementary. [Stuart@northernsoundpress.com](mailto:Stuart@northernsoundpress.com)

### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Ashley Yeager, "How String Quartets Stay Together," *Science News*, March 17, 2014, <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/how-string-quartets-stay-together>.
- <sup>2</sup> Alan M. Wing, Satoshi Endo, Adrian Bradbury, Dirk Vorberg, "Optimal feedback correction in string quartet synchronization," *Journal of The Royal Society Interface*, April 6, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2013.1125>.
- <sup>3</sup> Pamela Elrod Huffman, "Essential Building Blocks: The Rehearsal Techniques of Robert Shaw," *Southwestern Musician*, February 2013. Accessed through [robertshaw.website/preparation-rehearsal](http://robertshaw.website/preparation-rehearsal)
- <sup>4</sup> Carnegie Hall, "Robert Shaw: Preparing a Masterpiece, Volume 1—Part 1: Brahms 'A German Requiem,'" YouTube video, 1:54:44, April 25, 2016, [youtube.com/watch?v=42diMGHG\\_Z0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42diMGHG_Z0)
- <sup>5</sup> Jan L. Plass, Bruce D. Homes, Charles K. Kinzer, "Foundations of Game-Based Learning," *Educational Psychologist* 50, no. 4 (2015): 258-283.
- <sup>6</sup> For suggestions related to engagement activities, see: "Ask a Conductor Question 1," *ChorTeach* Vol 14 no. 2 (Winter 2022): 8-10.





## Call for Rehearsal Break Column Submissions

The *Choral Journal's* Rehearsal Break column is an opportunity to share your choral practice and philosophy in a unique setting. Article topics often come from our personal experiences and observations as musicians – teaching and leading, building a new aspect of practice, taking part in a special project or collaboration, forming a musical community or culture. The Rehearsal Break column invites topics from all these aspects of the choral community. Topics of interest include:

- Multiple intelligences in the choral rehearsal
- Internal student leadership structures
- Rehearsal methods and systems (Fibonacci, regular structures and rotations)
- Pros/cons and best practices for memorization
- Collaborative programming - sourcing stories/repertoire from within
- Choral community and culture building

To submit an article or learn more, contact the Rehearsal Break column editor:  
Dr. Jennifer Rodgers, [rodgersj@iastate.edu](mailto:rodgersj@iastate.edu).

## QUARTERLY ENDORSEMENTS



### **JULIAN DAVID BRYSON**

#### ***The Lover's Crown***

- SATB; a cappella; English (Oscar Wilde)
- 4' 00". Written 14 years before his trial and imprisonment for loving 'the wrong kind of person,' Oscar Wilde made this poignant poetic declaration of love. The writing is independently linear and largely imitative; decidedly tonal (e-flat minor), yet ends with the dissonance expressive of the poet's life experience. Requires a skilled choir. ([ProjectEncore.org/julian-david-bryson](http://ProjectEncore.org/julian-david-bryson))



### **MICHAEL BUSSEWITZ-QUARM**

#### ***Lux Aeterna***

- SSSSAAAATB; a cappella; Latin (Requiem Mass)
- 4' 41". Highly evocative setting of this well-known, traditional text. Treble voices used at the beginning to suggest a sense of vast, peaceful eternity; specific directions for diction affects. Text beyond "Lux" entering with TB voices 2/3 of the way through. Tone poem with many uses. Requires skilled choir with serious control. Worth the work! ([ProjectEncore.org/michael-bussewitz-quarm](http://ProjectEncore.org/michael-bussewitz-quarm))



### **NELL SHAW COHEN**

#### ***One Walks the Flesh Transparent***

- SSATBB; a cappella; English (Nan Shepherd)
- 4' 00". One movement from a concert-length cantata on the theme of walking. In the case of this movement, the traveler has "walked out of the body," becoming a "manifestation of ... total life." The four key changes suggest a continuing transformation of Life. Largely chordal but independent movement as well. Stunning, for a solid choir! ([ProjectEncore.org/nell-shaw-cohen](http://ProjectEncore.org/nell-shaw-cohen))



### **JOAN JOHNSON DREWES** *(new to PROJECT : ENCORE)*

#### ***Distant Murmurings***

- SSAA divisi; a cappella; English (Todd Boss)
- 7' 45". A Todd Boss text for sure! This piece is a soulful exposé of the life and love and emptiness and searching and knowing that is the life of a woman. Beautifully crafted, and intensely meaningful. Worth the exploration for skilled SSAA choirs! ([ProjectEncore.org/joan-johnson-drewes](http://ProjectEncore.org/joan-johnson-drewes))

**PROJECT : ENCORE™ is an online catalog of post-premiere, new choral music, reviewed and endorsed by an international panel of prominent conductors.**



**Four times each year, P:E adds newly-accepted scores into its catalog. Score submission deadlines are the 15th of January, April, July and October.**

## **CAROLINE MALLONEE**

### ***Da Pacem Domine***

- SATB; a cappella; Latin (7th century sacred)
- 5' 30". A plea for peace, clearly of timely value throughout the ages. Outer sections move in an undulating, softly-keening chordal style. Inner portions variously chant a plea, lift petitions (in rising lines), and quietly suggest confidence. A fresh, meaningful presentation of this timeless text. Skilled HS choir and above.  
(ProjectEncore.org/caroline-mallonee)



## **JOHN MUEHLEISEN**

### ***A solis ortus cardine***

- SATB, divisi; ST soli; a cappella; optional hand percussion; Latin (Sedulius, 5th century)
- 9' 30". Nine variations on the Gregorian chant for the 5th-century Christmas hymn. Overall movement from "darkness to light" reflected in progression from unadorned chant melody to lush harmony; from minor chords to major; etc, culminating in a dance-like final set of variations and coda. Substantial centerpiece for a concert!  
(ProjectEncore.org/john-muehleisen)



## **JOHN ROMMEREIM**

### ***Kyrie***

- SSAATTBB; a cappella; Greek (Ordinary of the Mass)
- 4' 01". Harmonically inspired by Frank Martin's *Mass for Double Choir*. Rhythmically flexible throughout in the spirit of chant. Consistently A-centric, with chromatically woven harmonies around it. The middle "Christe" section opens up considerably, both in movement and in range. Lovely setting. Requires clear intonation.  
(ProjectEncore.org/john-rommereim)



## **MICHAEL ROBERT SMITH**

### ***Dormi Jesu***

- SATB; a cappella; Latin (Sibylline Leaves, Samuel Taylor Coleridge)
- 4' 00". A gentle, compelling lullaby to the baby Jesus, entreating him to sleep sweetly. The tranquil compound meter provides a warm, comforting character; composer requests subdued dynamics throughout. Very tonal with expressive use of dissonance. Mix of imitation and chordal writing. Lovely addition to Christmas repertoire.  
(ProjectEncore.org/michael-robert-smith)







# Community, Cooperation, and Collaboration through Orff Schulwerk in Middle School Ensembles

by Ellie Johnson

“After almost half a century of involvement with the practice of Orff Schulwerk, I am convinced that the emotional growth that Orff sought as an effect of his approach results from participating in group efforts that are creative at their core.”

—Author and Orff Schulwerk proponent Jane Frazee<sup>1</sup>

Community, collaboration, and cooperation are fundamental to adolescent needs and can be integrated into instructional design. Middle school students are kids who desire to talk with one another (constantly), and play, create, and revise as collaborative groups. Music psychology identifies student peers as influential persons—for better or for worse—in adolescent development.<sup>2</sup> Our middle school ensemble members are existing in a liminal space somewhere between childhood and adulthood, and they often look to their peers for approval as they traverse this space. They exhibit a desire for more autonomy, more responsibility, and move toward specialization as their brains and bodies shift to accommodate and fine-tune increasingly specific skills.<sup>3</sup> Music educators can offer a balancing hand as these students navigate adolescence together.

Embracing flexible, Orff Schulwerk-guided music

activity within the ensemble classroom is one way that middle school directors can infuse their rehearsals with opportunities to observe, guide, and appreciate adolescent musical creativity and voice while still providing quality ensemble training. This article will discuss two characteristics of the Orff Schulwerk approach that are suited to middle school ensembles; offer rationale for including cooperation, collaboration, and Schulwerk-inspired play in the ensemble; and share some application ideas to try in your rehearsals.

## The Orff Schulwerk Approach

Orff Schulwerk is not a method—it’s a “pedagogical philosophy” that places student creativity as top priority.<sup>4</sup> It is a whole-body musical experience designed for all learners.<sup>5</sup> Secondary practitioners, however, can be quick to pass up resources, workshops, and materials labeled “Orff,” as these resources likely feel ready-made for our friends and colleagues in the elementary general music world. Those who have served in middle-level positions that only offer ensemble-based classes sometimes overlook the magic that Orff Schulwerk provides, particularly as it comes to group music-making practices that can help teachers reach large ensembles in unique ways.

Many middle-level ensemble rehearsals already include a great deal of variation, scaffolding, flexibility, movement, and creative enterprise. For some, however, it can be easy to unintentionally develop the expectation that our middle school ensemble members leap straight from elementary general scenarios into formal ensemble rehearsal by offering little variation in rigid rehearsal routines. Orff Schulwerk offers two core ideas toward developing a creative community by relinquishing teacher control and putting musical autonomy and problem-solving into the hands and minds of our very capable students. First: the elemental breakdown of larger works, and second, student-led creation.

### **Finding Elemental Chunks through Score Study**

One of the components at Orff Schulwerk's core is the breakdown of complex musical thoughts and skills into basic elemental structures for sequenced scaffolding and student-led exploration. An Orff Schulwerk lesson must include student input and creativity.<sup>6</sup> The Schulwerk instructor leads students in the reproduction of these elemental structures *and* in their repurposing and reapplication in student-generated musical activity such as improvising, arranging, and composing. Our ensemble rehearsal planning can mimic this approach. For students to take musical knowledge and skills away from ensemble participation, they need time to experience transferring the knowledge and skills they develop in rehearsal in unique contexts without conducting hands to guide them.<sup>7</sup> Just as an elementary Orff Schulwerk teacher might break down and sequentially transfer a piece from *Music for Children*<sup>8</sup> from body percussion to barred instrument, so too can the middle school ensemble director break down repertoire into what I will refer to in this article as “elemental chunks” and facilitate transfer to novel scenarios through creative play.

Dr. Carol Krueger offers an approach to score study that asks directors to break ensemble repertoire down into Orff Schulwerk-esque elemental chunks to better facilitate authentic learning and exploration of the literature.<sup>9</sup> When many Orff Schulwerk educators open their volumes of *Music for Children*, they are likely looking at the examples for relevant component parts that fit together to construct the greater work. Orff Schul-

werk teachers use score study to break each piece in the volumes down into the most elemental structures necessary for their students to be able to either reproduce a piece successfully—which is what we traditionally do in ensemble spaces—or to generate something new by using the component parts of the piece as constructive materials. In fact, the purpose of the volumes is to serve as a catalyst for creative student work. Krueger asks ensemble instructors to view concert repertoire in much the same way.<sup>10</sup> Seek out repertoire made of materials appropriate for your students' current goals and carefully dissect the repertoire, extracting elemental chunks for use as both training and creative material.<sup>11</sup>

When studying ensemble repertoire through an Orff Schulwerk lens, it can be easy to feel overwhelmed. Don't despair. Like with any good lesson plan, start with your goals and forget the rest. Don't worry about covering every single component skill and elemental chunk identifiable within a given piece. Address the component skills necessary for students to understand and be immersed in the repertoire just as you usually would—but this time, maintain a special focus on a small set of elemental chunks derived from the score that students can use to generate their own creative material. Allow yourself time to think and plan creatively, and watch how quickly the options for student applications can multiply.

In this style of score study, I might focus on the melody and extract the different three- or four-note combinations the composer or arranger used to build the line.<sup>12</sup> Present these combinations as isolated, meter-less pitch combinations on flashcards and invite students to work in groups to rearrange them (like a magnet poem) to create longer lines. Sing or play one of the patterns and invite students to answer it by improvising a similar pattern back, practicing a loose question-and-answer format in a group jumble that offers safety for students to experiment. Later, invite students to work in pairs to develop a question/answer phrase entirely their own with time to edit and refine.

When viewing repertoire as truly a *composition*—comprising myriad elemental chunks—we identify a wealth of constructive materials with which our students can play, collaborate, and create while still being fully immersed in ensemble preparation. By engaging in collaborative work in this way, students are prepar-

ing themselves to reproduce repertoire in performance, using repertoire-derived materials to generate something new.

## Using Elemental Chunks for Student-led Creation

In her cornerstone text, *Elementaria*, Orff Schulwerk matriarch Gunild Keetman offers countless examples of how to carefully shepherd students in the creation of original works.<sup>13</sup> Keetman insists that a ground-up, incremental approach to music education is essential regardless of student age<sup>14</sup> and asserts that, “It is especially the work in an elemental style that opens the way to *all* kinds of style.”<sup>15</sup> Take a short rhythm or pitch pattern identified from the repertoire and engage in whole-group echo play (an approach Keetman insists is appropriate for any stage of musical learning).<sup>16</sup> Use this small, elemental chunk to work with students to create something new.

Find or have students create simple texts that are free to use and contain meaning. Lead student groups to engage with the text and the short rhythm in speech play to develop independent lines—simple, text-based ostinatos to start. Later, where Keetman might encourage composing specific parts for different Orff instruments,<sup>17</sup> instead have students use material developed in speech and echo play to create vocal lines. To provide even more structure to help students develop logical voice-leading and harmony, start with these basic guidelines for teacher arrangers learned through Orff Schulwerk Teacher Education Level Courses:

- 1) Allow text to guide rhythmic creation. Prosody will help student-created pieces have a natural feel for performers and listeners alike.
- 2) Start with octaves and fifths for accompaniments and bi-tonal/tri-tonal, short-range melodies. Slowly build to pentatonic scale melodies. As students progress and want more challenge, add in “fa” and “ti,” primarily in the melodic voice as a passing or neighbor tone.
- 3) Initially avoid parallel rhythmic and melodic motion—ostinato and polyphony are our friends. Add

paraphony as a first form of homophonic motion later.<sup>18</sup>

- 4) Notating student-created works is not always necessary. Develop and preserve pieces through shorthand or use of audio/video recording as student skill grows.

Bite-sized, repetitive phrases can be developed slowly to have a great impact when combined and formed into a greater work through collaboration with other student musicians. Over time, smaller student inventions can come together in a larger form to create an ensemble appropriate piece that was created by and for your students—much in the same way pieces from *Music for Children* or *Elementaria* are structured. In this way, you can incrementally lead your students in exercises that strengthen their ability to reproduce music as an ensemble while simultaneously leading students in the composition, refinement, and performance of their own music, all while building community through Orff Schulwerk-based cooperation and collaboration.

## Building Community through Cooperation and Collaboration

*Cooperation* can be thought of as group work where the teacher appoints tasks or a problem, and each group member works on different portions of the task or problem to arrive at a collective solution.<sup>19</sup> Think of the teacher as head chef designing a menu, and the students as station chefs working together to execute the head chef’s vision.

*Collaboration* puts more power into student hands.<sup>20</sup> The collaborative “meal” is one where students may still be working on distinct tasks, but they’ve conceived of the “menu” and developed materials in collaboration with their team to present something cohesive and unique to their group. There may still be prompts and guidance; some classes may need pseudo cooperative/collaborative activities, or perhaps use cooperative activities to build toward collaboration. Orff Schulwerk provides a proven approach and decades of material that allow for flexible, cooperative, and collaborative lesson design.

As you prepare to initiate a cooperative or collabora-



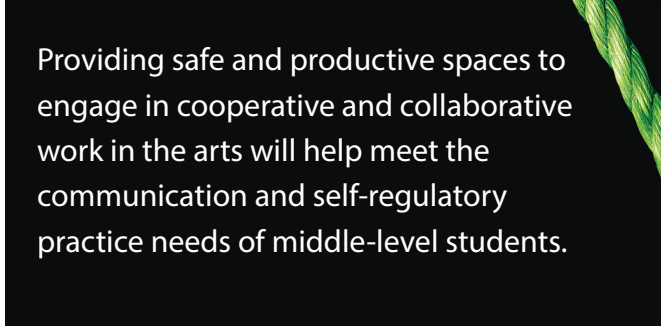
tive lesson in the ensemble space, consider ways to embed the process into the rehearsal routine as a regular occurrence. With thoughtful, proactive planning, the addition of regular student collaboration could help build a classroom culture that not only includes the hard work of repertoire preparation but also the development of original student works through creative play.

Community development is never more vital or tricky than at the adolescent stage. The school environment facilitates near constant comparison to peers.<sup>21</sup> Drastic physical and mental changes and a transition from constant support in elementary schooling to a more independent middle school approach can leave many students feeling a loss of personal control.<sup>22</sup> Despite having a reputation as social creatures, adolescent students often need guidance navigating this complex and shifting social landscape. As cognitive and physical changes lead students toward specialization,<sup>23</sup> students develop distinct preferences and world views. Students often struggle to appropriately express their emotions<sup>24</sup> and need guidance learning how to communicate effectively and appropriately.

Parents and teachers of adolescents have long lamented feeling confused or surprised by the choices or reactions students sometimes make while trying to communicate a need, an emotion, or an opinion. Our middle school students are in desperate need for chances to practice expressing themselves to their peers and communities in safe and effective ways. Increasingly, the role of schools is to prepare students to educate *themselves* and to practice the self-regulatory habits necessary to adapt and keep up with new information after traditional schooling ends.<sup>25</sup> Providing safe and productive spaces to engage in cooperative and collaborative work in the arts will help meet the communication and self-regulatory practice needs of middle-level students. Orff Schulwerk music making is a group endeavor that can build powerful and meaningful community among students.

In *Adolescents on Music*, Elizabeth Cassidy Parker calls for us to “consciously use a descriptive rather than prescriptive mindset” when working with adolescent students.<sup>26</sup> Rather than working to reform adolescents to fit the musical molds we set for them, we must relinquish a little control and remain open and curious

about the many ways adolescents are already interacting with and valuing music in their daily lives. Embracing flexible, Orff Schulwerk-guided, cooperative, and collaborative music activity within the ensemble classroom is one way that middle school directors can infuse their rehearsals with opportunities to observe, guide, and appreciate adolescent musical creativity and voice while still providing quality ensemble training.



Providing safe and productive spaces to engage in cooperative and collaborative work in the arts will help meet the communication and self-regulatory practice needs of middle-level students.

Parker again: “Through musicking, adolescents seek to explore and affirm relationships between themselves and peers to draw greater connection to the world they share.”<sup>27</sup> Unsurprisingly to all who have known and loved an adolescent student—or simply vividly remember being one themselves—interactions, feedback, and relationships play key roles in the development of musical identity.<sup>28</sup> Embracing group work in more ways than the full ensemble with the director at the helm will allow choral directors to create safe environments for middle school students to further foster their musical identities and allow peers and educators to benefit from student experiences and creative works.

### Planning for Success

As with everything in middle school land, classroom management will be a consideration. It will be crucial to establish routines and take care in the scaffolding of group approaches, adjusting to your learners as needed, not only for the cohesion and safety of the classroom environment, but for student success and growth. For students to have the opportunity to truly collaborate, teachers need to set collaborative activities up in such a way that they may *get out of the students’ way!* Musical collaboration can help our ensemble students to devel-

op respectful social norms such as ensuring full group inclusion and valuing compromise<sup>29</sup> without pausing musical activity to make time for a non-musical team builder.

Sharing critical feedback in neutral and receptive ways will be key in establishing group work norms. A solid approach comes from Frazee, who asks that students and educators target the *material* and not the *student* when verbalizing constructive comments.<sup>30</sup> By helping students learn to address the content of a performance, composition, idea, etc., we reinforce two key analytical and reflective skills in addition to keeping things civil in the classroom:

1) Students learn to listen/watch *content* rather than *person*.

In a social media-driven world, the word “content” has, in many ways, come to mean watching, judging, and assessing a “content creator” rather than assessing their creation. The challenge will be clear and overcoming it will be vital. Work immediately to help your students practice watching and listening to the musical and creative items contained within the *activity* being addressed and word feedback appropriately, rather than ascribing value words to the *person*. Even as you establish positive and productive routines where students learn to consistently target critiques at content rather than creator, students will need to be reassured that it is *not* personal, and that they are all vital contributors to the collaborative process.

2) Students can then be directed to think more neutrally and productively about their own work utilizing the same approach: focus critiques on the *content*, not the *creator*.

Performance anxiety’s grip on adolescent musicians extends far beyond the wings of the stage. Sharing with important others (such as peers) can create a sense of importance around performative sharing that may increase anxiety levels.<sup>31</sup> Working early and diligently to establish productive feedback routines will help with these anxieties. We are often our own worst critic. Help students learn to reflect and revise their personal work

much in the same way that they would address their peers—neutrally and thoughtfully, focusing on the value of the *content* and not the *creator*.<sup>32</sup>

### More Ideas for Application

As you wade into the world of embracing collaboration and student-led creative work in the ensemble, tune your own internal critic to focus on the value of the *content* delivered and lessons learned rather than expecting yourself to be a perfect collaborative lesson *creator* right away. Give yourself the time and grace to experiment, edit, and grow in the application of these ideas, just as you will for your students.

Allow for messiness and growth on the part of you and your students; grow comfortable with the uncertainty of creativity by working with these activities in small ways on a regular basis. These activities need not always generate longform compositions to carry great creative meaning. We can use Krueger’s approach to careful score study and Orff Schulwerk-inspired play to embed simple and attainable creative student collaboration into the rehearsal space.

1) *Sing*: Enlist student groups to develop and refine pentatonic scale canons to add into the warmup routine. Repeat the activity as student skill develops over the course of the year to add fresh, student developed material and keep warmups engaging and purposeful.

2) *Say*: Enlist student groups to develop and refine word-based rhythmic ostinatos that thematically and musically relate to concert repertoire.

3) *Dance/Move*: Enlist student groups to develop and refine physical gesture that they believe best represents desired musicality in a segment of the repertoire. Identify the most effective gestures with the help of the ensemble and utilize them in your conducting gesture for the piece from then on.

4) *Play*: Transfer the ostinatos from the “say” activity to percussion or instrumentation and add to your performance of the piece as accompaniment or present alongside the piece as a programmatic pairing.

### Conclusion

If we are working to uphold teaching philosophies that express a desire to develop the whole child, embrace individuality and creativity, and foster lifelong musicianship, consider the inclusion of Orff Schulwerk-spirited play and collaboration. Especially in ensemble spaces, we tend to always be looking forward to the next *thing*—maybe a performance, competition, auditions, high school, and beyond. Parker reminds us, “One moment of musicking is not solely preparation for another; it is also a legitimate interaction in itself, filled with experiences, individuals, and memories.”<sup>33</sup>

Avoid the constant push to the performance by committing to making space for creative exploration of structures in the repertoire. Encourage your teacher-brain to settle into middle school pace by working to observe and participate in the present moment. Facilitate the positive peer interaction that middle-level students so desperately crave and enjoy having more opportunities for musical play as a part of the day-to-day rehearsal flow. **CT**

**Author’s Acknowledgements:** Thank you to Dr. Glenn Nierman, Dr. Bob Woody, and Karen Benson, who provided invaluable recommendations in the creation of this article.

### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Jane Frazee, *Orff Schulwerk Today* (Schott, 2006), 22.
- <sup>2</sup> Robert H. Woody, *Psychology for Musicians* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022), 55.
- <sup>3</sup> Bridget Sweet, *Growing Musicians: Teaching Music in Middle School and Beyond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 8.
- <sup>4</sup> Wolfgang Hartmann, *Looking at the Roots a Guide to Understanding Orff Schulwerk* (San Francisco, CA: Pentatonic Press, 2021), 3.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.
- <sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Hartmann, *Looking at the Roots*, 42.
- <sup>7</sup> Robert A. Duke, *Intelligent Music Teaching* (Austin, Texas: Learning and Behavior Resources, 2011), 141.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Music for Children* volumes are literature materials developed by Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman and translated across language and culture for use in the Orff

Schulwerk approach.

- <sup>9</sup> Carol Krueger, “Conversations with Carol: Music Literacy—Tonal” (Virtual Workshop, Dudley Foundation for the Arts, May 22, 2020).
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> Gunild Keetman, *Elementaria*, trans. Margaret Murray (London: Schott & Co. Ltd., 1974).
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.
- <sup>18</sup> This suggested progression was learned through Orff Schulwerk Teacher Education Courses and can generally be seen throughout Orff Schulwerk materials and publications.
- <sup>19</sup> Colleen M. Conway, *Teaching Music in Higher Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 175.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Albert Bandura, *Self-Efficacy* (New York, NY: Freeman, 1997), 174.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.
- <sup>23</sup> Bridget Sweet, *Growing Musicians*, 8.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.
- <sup>25</sup> Albert Bandura, *Self-Efficacy*, 213.
- <sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Cassidy Parker, *Adolescents on Music: Why Music Matters to Young People in Our Lives* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 2.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.
- <sup>29</sup> Jane Frazee, *Orff Schulwerk Today*, 23.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> Andreas C. Lehmann, John A. Sloboda, and Robert H. Woody, *Psychology for Musicians* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), 156.
- <sup>32</sup> For additional suggestions for addressing performance anxiety, see Mikayla Feldman, “Performance Anxiety: 5 Strategies that Worked for Choir Students,” *ChorTeach* 14 no 2 (Winter 2022): 19-23.
- <sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Cassidy Parker, *Adolescents on Music*, 12.



## CHORAL JOURNAL CONTACT INFORMATION

|                        |                  |                          |
|------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Book Reviews           | Gregory Pysh     | gregory.m.pysh@gmail.com |
| Choral Reviews         | Amanda Bumgarner | abumgarner@acda.org      |
| Lift Every Voice       | Amanda Bumgarner | abumgarner@acda.org      |
| On the Voice           | Matthew Hoch     | mrh0032@auburn.edu       |
| Recorded Sound Reviews | Laura Wiebe      | laurawiebe@gmail.com     |
| Rehearsal Breaks       | Jennifer Rodgers | rodgersj@iastate.edu     |
| Research Report        | Bryan Nichols    | bnichols@psu.edu         |
| Student Times          | Micah Bland      | mbland1613@gmail.com     |

For feature article submissions, contact the editor, Amanda Bumgarner, at <abumgarner@acda.org>. View full submission guidelines at [acda.org](http://acda.org)

Book and music publishers should send books, octavos, and discs for review to:  
Choral Journal, Attn: Amanda Bumgarner, P.O. Box 1705, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73101-1705

For advertising rates and exhibit information, contact Sindy Hail,  
National Advertising & Exhibits Manager, at <shail@acda.org>

## OTHER ACDA PUBLICATIONS CONTACT INFORMATION

|   |                  |                    |
|---|------------------|--------------------|
| ChorTeach (online)                                  | Amanda Bumgarner | chorteach@acda.org |
| International Journal of Research in Choral Singing | Patrick K. Freer | pfreer@gsu.edu     |

## ADVERTISERS' INDEX

|                                |         |                                       |    |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------|----|
| Berkshire Choral International | 15      | Oregon Catholic Press                 | 60 |
| Binghamton University          | 63      | Presbyterian Association of Musicians | 46 |
| Jacksonville University        | 35      | Robert Nelson Music                   | 45 |
| Johns Hopkins University       | 25      | Sing Democracy 250                    | 56 |
| KI Concerts                    | BC      | University of Cincinnati              | 41 |
| MidAmerica Productions         | 26, IBC | University of Southern California     | 32 |
| Musicfolder.com                | 36      | Vandercook College of Music           | 55 |
| National Concerts              | IFC     |                                       |    |

# *Remembering Peter Tiboris*

(October 31, 1947 - September 17, 2024)

MidAmerica Productions is deeply saddened to announce the passing of our Founder and General Music Director, Peter Tiboris. For over four decades, maestro Peter Tiboris dedicated his life to transforming MidAmerica Productions into a world-renowned institution, bringing music to life on global stages, including the prestigious Carnegie Hall. His remarkable vision and passion shaped the organization and touched the lives of countless musicians and audiences alike.

Peter Tiboris leaves behind an unparalleled legacy of excellence, creativity, and dedication to the performing arts. As we collectively mourn this loss, we are committed to ensuring his life's work continues flourishing.

**MAP**  
MIDAMERICA  
PRODUCTIONS

## **2025 Carnegie Hall Concert Dates:**

- March 14, 2025 • March 15, 2025 • March 22, 2025 • April 6, 2025 •
- April 20, 2025 • May 11, 2025 • May 24, 2025 • May 26, 2025 •
- June 1, 2025 • June 7, 2025 • June 15, 2025 •
- June 22, 2025 • June 29, 2025 •

[www.midamerica-music.com/in-memoriam](http://www.midamerica-music.com/in-memoriam)



American Choral Directors Association  
P.O. Box 1705  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73101-1705  
<www.acda.org>

# Best wishes this holiday season

from the KI Concerts family



**KI** CONCERTS

May the spirit of the season  
and the power of music come together  
on your next international tour.

[KICONCERTS.COM/ACDA](http://KICONCERTS.COM/ACDA)