

CHORAL JOURNAL

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025



Especially Do I Believe:
A Conductor's Guide to
Margaret Bonds's

Credo



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ADVOCACY STATEMENT

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

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

From the Executive Director



Robyn Hilger

New Digital Tools Empower Music Educators to Advocate Like Never Before

Across the country, music education is facing pressures that threaten its foundational place in our schools. Whether it's districts lowering arts graduation requirements, workforce plans focusing narrowly on STEM, or budgetary headwinds, defending our role as a core subject requires vigilance—and innovation in the ways we advocate for our choral programs.

Fortunately, we're not alone in this work. The recent launch of a new advocacy resources clearinghouse on musiciseducation.org puts a transformative array of new tools at your fingertips. These are not just web pages; they are a living, evolving toolkit designed to help us respond to challenges. ACDA is proud to do this work with a coalition of partners. Check out the "about" tab to see all the organizations that are collaborating to support you in your advocacy efforts.

What's new on musiciseducation.org?

1. Step-by-Step Advocacy Guides:

The website now offers actionable advocacy pathways. These guides are grounded in proven strategies—like clarifying your local landscape, uniting allies, and turning data into compelling stories.

2. Data & Messaging Resources:

You'll find up-to-date statistics that demonstrate music's power to boost attendance, increase graduation rates, and drive workforce readiness. These facts are ready to power professional presentations, parent newsletters, or testimony before decision-makers.

3. The Karl B Chatbot—Your On-Demand Advocacy Partner:

The true game-changer is the new Karl B AI assistant, available right on the site. Karl B can draft personalized letters, talking points, elevator pitches or policy memos drawn from decades of research, expert best practices, and the latest national data. Simply type your audience and goal, and Karl B does the rest. Check out the user guide before you start. Use the power of AI for the good of your program!

Music educators shouldn't have to go it alone. With these tools, you have resources and expertise on call, whether you're preparing for a board meeting, engaging skeptical administrators, or helping policymakers see the value of what you do. The legislative season is just around the corner. Use these new resources to make your advocacy stronger than ever!

From the ————— □ President



Edith Copley

Last July at the Choral Conductor's Workshop in Seaside, Oregon, I asked attendees, "When did you decide to become a choral conductor?" I made my decision while singing in the Iowa all-state choir my sophomore year in high school. Hearing three hundred tenors and basses singing Howard Hanson's *Song of Democracy* gave me major goosebumps, and I thought: "Wouldn't it be great to have a career where

I could experience spine-tingling moments like this!" The visceral power of music is like no other art form. Take a moment and think back: when did you decide to wave your arms for a living and stand in front of that expressive and welcoming community called "choir"?

Very early in my teaching career, I drove from Iowa to Colorado in a van with James Fritschel, Bob Davis, and Carol Stewart to attend a summer choral conference. There were several headliners, including Bev Henson, Edwin Fissinger, and this "new guy" from England, John Rutter. The most memorable presentation for me was given by Paul Salamunovich, who talked about the "Five Stages of the Choral Conductor."

Stage 1: You've just started your career. You have some "tools" but not very many. You're trying to hear all the parts, but when you stop, you're not sure what to say.

Stage 2: This is a few years later, and it's the exact opposite. You've gained more "tools," but now when you stop the choir, you can't stop talking!

Stage 3: "A Time of Adolescence" when you're very eager to talk about YOU and what you've accomplished: "My" choir and "My" choral program—you know, the one that "I" built.

Stage 4: "A Time of Discouragement" when you've been in the profession for a number of years but wish you had a more supportive administrator. Your spring calendar has work-related activities almost every weekend, and it's overwhelming. You start comparing your ensemble to other choirs and questioning your teaching ability. "How does that conductor get that sound?" Unfortunately, this stage is when many people decide to leave the profession.

Stage 5: "A Time of Enlightenment" when we realize that it's all about the music and what the music is doing for us and our singers.

Regardless of which stage you're experiencing, may you share quality time with family and friends during the holidays, find quiet time to recharge, and give thanks for the wonderful gift of music as we begin the New Year.

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Amanda Bumgarner

This November/December 2025 issue of *Choral Journal* is the final one for editorial board member William Southerland. 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. I am grateful for William's service to ACDA and the wider choral profession. In January 2026, we welcome

two new board members to our team: Caron Daley and Brandon Williams. Caron is director of choral activities, associate professor of music, and ensembles area coordinator at the Mary Papper School of Music at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is also the editor-in-chief of *Anacrusis*, the journal of Choral Canada. Brandon Williams is director of choral activities and choral music education at Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University.

The current issue of *Choral Journal* features part one of a special focus section curated by guest editor Elizabeth Schauer. Parts two and three will appear in the February and March/April 2026 issues, respectively. Don't miss the focus section's introduction from Dr. Schauer on page 56.

Our cover this month highlights the work of American composer Margaret Bonds (1913–1972), and specifically *Credo*, “the work most consider her masterpiece.” Hear from Clinton Hardy Ferrie and Philip Brown, ACDA's national R&R chairs for middle and high school choirs, in the Repertoire & Resources column, where they discuss topics such as repertoire programming and preparing for auditions and offer encouragement for those in the trenches. Chris Maunu's article on the introverted choral conductor is a unique perspective on different leadership styles. Finally, this month's *ChorTeach* section focuses on elementary singers and “lifting up the littles” in our youngest choirs.

As we look ahead to 2026 content, consider what topic you haven't seen in *Choral Journal* recently that you might want to write about or encourage a colleague to write about. Our membership is vast, covering a range of interests, expertise, and experience, and everyone has knowledge to share. For those interested in contributing to the Research Report column, editors Elizabeth Hearn and Elizabeth Cassidy Parker share topics of interest on pages 49-50. You might also be interested in writing for the Rehearsal Break column, and a call for submissions is on page 51.

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 2026 issue will feature a full preview of the interest sessions and performances available at the six regional conferences. Reach out to me at abumgarner@acda.org with feedback, questions, or a submission. Cheers to another year of *Choral Journal*!

2026 Region Conferences



2026 ACDA Eastern Region Conference
February 25-28, 2026 • Providence, Rhode Island



2026 ACDA Midwestern Region Conference
February 25-28, 2026 • Milwaukee, Wisconsin



SING
for a Change

MARCH 4-7, 2026
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March 4-7, 2026 • Tacoma, Washington



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March 4-7, 2026 • Memphis, Tennessee



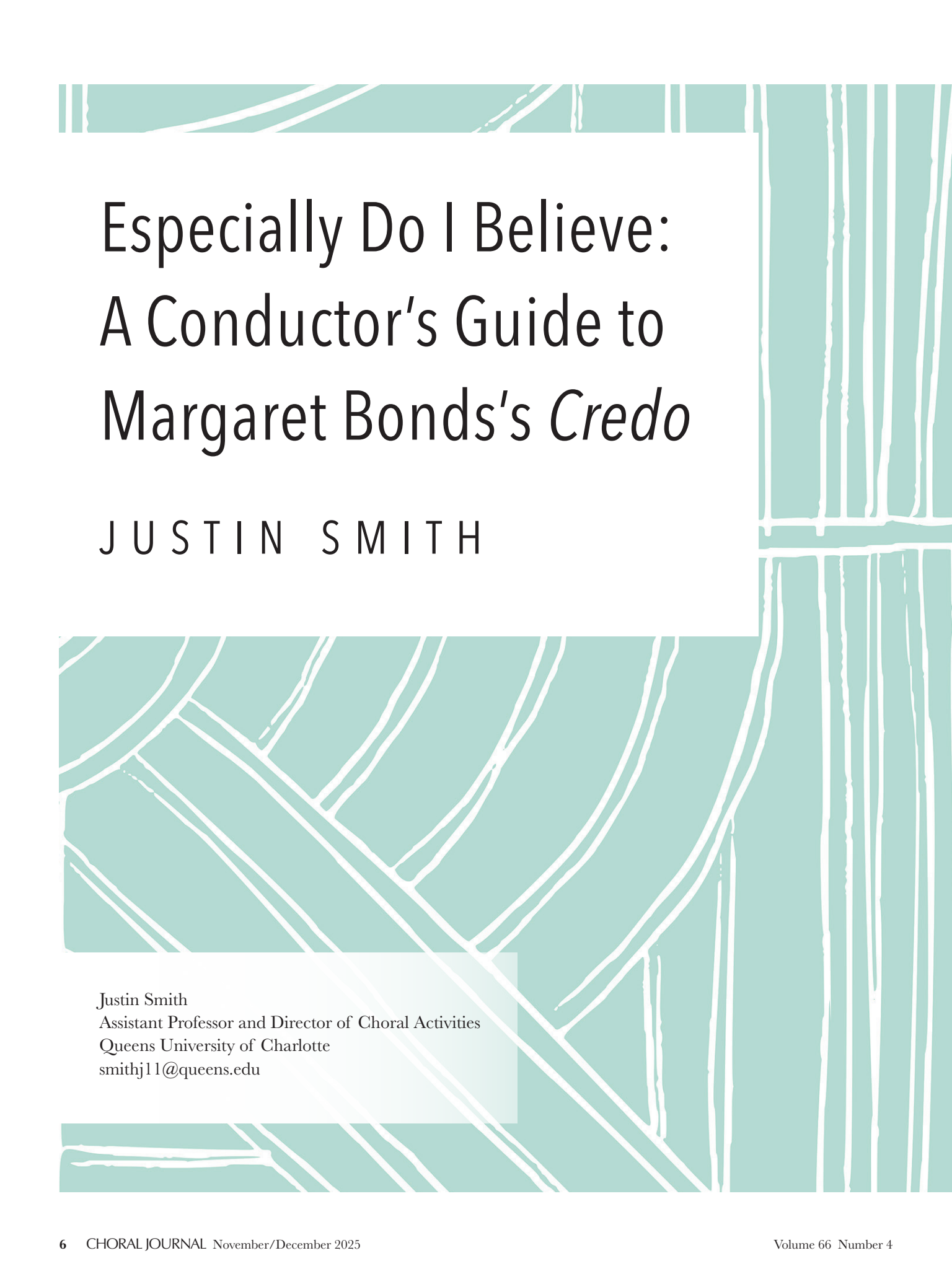
2026 ACDA Southwestern Region Conference
March 4-7, 2026 • Albuquerque, New Mexico

A TAPESTRY OF VOICES



2026 ACDA Western Region Conference
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Especially Do I Believe: A Conductor's Guide to Margaret Bonds's *Credo*

J U S T I N S M I T H

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As conductors expand their repertoire to include works from diverse, underrepresented communities, the work of Margaret Bonds (1913–1972)—American composer, virtuoso pianist, and crusader for social justice—is finally receiving the attention it deserves. This article examines *Credo*, the work most considered her masterpiece, which lay dormant for nearly sixty years after its premiere.¹

Margaret Bonds's music is deeply expressive and thoughtfully constructed, but unfortunately, likely because of her race and gender, her music was never widely performed and was quickly forgotten after her death.² Her collected manuscripts, having failed to sell at a book fair after her passing, were set to be tossed in a nearby dumpster before being rescued at the last minute by a music dealer, who “searching the fair’s leftovers after hours, found them and retrieved them.”³ Thankfully, after decades of neglect, this work and others by Bonds are increasingly present on concert programs with each passing season.⁴

The music of Margaret Bonds is accessible without being simplistic; she was equally fluent in both European and African American traditions and was aware of, yet not dependent upon, European conventions. Bonds argued powerfully for a world free of discrimination and racism, and the teaching possibilities surrounding her body of work are immense. *Credo*’s focus on social justice and equality—and the pathway it outlines to achieve them—makes it a powerful and important work. On the eve of what one hopes is a Bonds renaissance, a choral conductor’s guide to this magnificent composition is offered here.

Genesis of the Work

W.E.B. DuBois's prose poem "Credo" (1904) was one of the first public calls for racial equality by a Black American and a powerful read to this day. With extraordinarily radical and uncompromising language, DuBois condemns war and imperialism, argues for the importance of education in overcoming racism, and posits that racial equality is desirable because God himself divinely mandates it. "Credo" was so important to DuBois that it became the preface to his 1920 autobiography, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*.⁵ (The full "Credo" text is published on the next page.)

Bonds set the text to music between 1964 and 1966, first scoring it for soprano and baritone solo, mixed chorus, and piano, and later orchestrating that setting. (In this author's opinion, the original piano version is more successful, as many overtly pianistic figurations in the accompaniment translate somewhat unconvincingly to orchestral instruments.) Bonds accompanied its first performance at the piano in 1967 and was probably in attendance at the premiere of the version with orchestra in San Francisco under the baton of Dr. Albert McNeil later that same year.⁶ In July 1972, not long after Bonds's death, Zubin Mehta conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic with the McNeil Jubilee Singers in a partial performance of the orchestral version. The poet's widow, Shirley Graham DuBois, attended a performance of the entire work with orchestra, writing that it was one of the most moving moments of her life. She labeled Bonds's setting as a "work of art that is eternal—that will live as long as people love each other and really believe in brotherhood."⁷ Sadly, the work vanished from the repertoire after 1973, remaining unpublished until 2020. Both the piano and orchestral versions were published by Hildegard Publishing in 2020, edited by Bonds scholar John Michael Cooper.

Bonds was a virtuoso pianist who trained at Northwestern University in Chicago. The piano part for *Credo* is challenging, featuring virtuosic passagework, densely stacked chords, and rhythmic complexity. The soprano and baritone solo parts, too, are designed with professional singers in mind, especially in terms of their occasionally extreme ranges. The soprano, for example, is asked to float a mezzo piano C[#]6 above a hushed chorus at the end of the second movement, and the baritone to sustain an E[#]4 in the sixth movement. Both

solos also require the ability to phrase exceedingly long lines and demand a strong sensitivity to text inflection and meaning.

The choral parts are less demanding and can be mastered by a strong high school, collegiate, church, or community choral ensemble. This is not to say they are easy; the third movement, for example, is almost entirely a chain of diminished seventh chords planing up and down, making for great dramatic effect but providing significant intonation challenges.

An Overview of *Credo*

Credo is structured in seven movements and lasts about twenty-three minutes. The first movement, "I Believe in God," is a dramatic statement of faith and belief in the eventual triumph of justice—a central concern of DuBois and Bonds alike. The second movement—the lyrical, gentle "Especially Do I Believe in the Negro Race"—changes mood dramatically. The soprano soloist trades a beautiful, spiritual-like melody with the chorus in one of Bonds's loveliest, most lyrical creations. The movement's closing phrase, where the soloist soars to a high C[#] over a wordless chorus, is particularly striking. Sam Fox Music, uncomfortable with the use of the phrase "Especially do I believe in the Negro race," asked that the text here be changed to "Especially do I believe in the *Human* race" (emphasis added). Bonds and the poet's widow both refused, realizing that to make such a change "cuts the heart out of the *Credo*."⁸ As a result, the work was never published in her lifetime, yet this episode in Bonds's life is an essential and inspirational story about sticking to one's artistic convictions that should be taught in any rehearsal of this movement.

The third movement, "I Believe in Pride of Race," is for tenors and basses plus piano. A small number of lower-ranged singers may make this movement the most challenging for a choir. The wonderfully dramatic fourth movement, "I Believe in the Devil and His Angels," stands in the middle of the work, with chains of diminished seventh chords over a menacing piano drumbeat pattern evoking the evils of racism. The fifth movement, "I Believe in the Prince of Peace," conjures a gospel-style trio in the opening and closing for treble voices in one of the work's most luscious passages. The

text is about anxiously awaiting the coming of Christ, drawing a parallel between that event and the arrival of a world free of racial discrimination. The gospel trio is violently interrupted in the movement's middle section, which sets DuBois's angry condemnation of war as a vehicle of White oppression to appropriately dra-

matic music.

The penultimate movement ("I Believe in Liberty") introduces the baritone soloist, accompanied by chugging piano music evoking the railroad in DuBois's text: a metaphor for the progress of social justice. Bonds's music here is inexorable and inevitable in pursuing that

"Credo" by W. E. B. DuBois

Preface to: *Darkwater, Voices from within the Veil*

Originally published by Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York (1920)

Available for reprint via eBook under Project Gutenberg (2005)

I believe in God, who made of one blood all nations that on earth do dwell. I believe that all men, black and brown and white, are brothers, varying through time and opportunity, in form and gift and feature, but differing in no essential particular, and alike in soul and the possibility of infinite development.

Especially do I believe in the Negro Race: in the beauty of its genius, the sweetness of its soul, and its strength in that meekness which shall yet inherit this turbulent earth.

I believe in Pride of race and lineage and self: in pride of self so deep as to scorn injustice to other selves; in pride of lineage so great as to despise no man's father; in pride of race so chivalrous as neither to offer bastardy to the weak nor beg wedlock of the strong, knowing that men may be brothers in Christ, even though they be not brothers-in-law.

I believe in Service—humble, reverent service, from the blackening of boots to the whitening of souls; for Work is Heaven, Idleness Hell, and Wage is the "Well done!" of the Master, who summoned all them that labor and are heavy laden, making no distinction between the black, sweating cotton hands of Georgia and the first families of Virginia, since all distinction not based on deed is devilish and not divine.

I believe in the Devil and his angels, who wantonly work to narrow the opportunity of struggling human beings, especially if they be black; who spit in the faces of the fallen, strike them that cannot strike again, believe the worst and work to prove it, hating the image which their Maker stamped on a brother's soul.

I believe in the Prince of Peace. I believe that War is Murder. I believe that armies and navies are at bottom the tinsel and braggadocio of oppression and wrong, and I believe that the wicked conquest of weaker and darker nations by nations whiter and stronger but foreshadows the death of that strength.

I believe in Liberty for all men: the space to stretch their arms and their souls, the right to breathe and the right to vote, the freedom to choose their friends, enjoy the sunshine, and ride on the railroads, uncursed by color; thinking, dreaming, working as they will in a kingdom of beauty and love.

I believe in the Training of Children, black even as white; the leading out of little souls into the green pastures and beside the still waters, not for pelf or peace, but for life lit by some large vision of beauty and goodness and truth; lest we forget, and the sons of the fathers, like Esau, for mere meat barter their birthright in a mighty nation.

Finally, I believe in Patience—patience with the weakness of the Weak and the strength of the Strong, the prejudice of the Ignorant and the ignorance of the Blind; patience with the tardy triumph of Joy and the mad chastening of Sorrow.

goal. This movement's close is the entire work's emotional climax. DuBois's and Bonds's dream of a future "uncursed by color" is finally achieved with soaring, wordless angel choruses.

The final movement ("I Believe in Patience") brings back thematic material from the opening movement. Yet the unfettered joy of the previous movement is somewhat tempered. DuBois's text counsels patience as we await the coming of a more just world. Bonds's angsty, urgent setting—with the return of Beethovian poundings from the opening movement, urgent Handelian hammerstrokes on the final pronouncement of "Patience," and stark open fifths on the opening and closing choral sonorities—confirms that we are not quite there yet. Bonds sends us out into the world with a vision of what could be but reminds us there is significant work yet to be done.

Structure

Like many sacred works in the European tradition, the structure of *Credo* is elegantly symmetrical, and any performance ought to keep this in mind to maximize its expressive potential. Bonds arranges DuBois's poem into seven movements in a way that echos the chiasmic structures of Bach and Brahms. (It is unknown whether Bonds had in mind the "Credo" movement of J. S. Bach's B Minor Mass, which has the same structure, but the comparison is fascinating.) In other words, the first and last movements share similar musical and thematic content, as do the second and sixth and the third and fifth. At the heart of the work, the middle fourth movement stands alone (see Table 1).

The musical connection between the first and seventh movements is easily heard: each starts with the same syncopated open-fifth figure in the piano, fol-

Table 1. Chiasmic Structure in Margaret Bonds's *Credo*

Movement	Key	Forces	Theme(s)
1. I Believe in God	A minor	SATB, Piano	Call for racial unity
2. Especially Do I Believe in the Negro Race	A major	Soprano solo, SATB, Piano	Beauty of the African American race
3. I Believe in Pride of Race	D minor	TTBB, Piano	Legal obstacles to racial harmony
4. I Believe in the Devil and His Angels	D minor	SATB, Piano	Evil of the devil as a metaphor for evils of racism
5. I Believe in the Prince of Peace	F major	SSAA, Piano	Condemnation of war as evil, barrier to racial harmony
6. I Believe in Liberty	D major	Baritone solo, SATB, Piano	The beauty of a future free of racism
7. I Believe in Patience	A minor	SATB Piano	Call for racial unity, counseling patience

lowed by the choir taking up the idea. More subtle, however, is how the urgent desire for racial equality expressed in the first movement is mirrored by the text in the seventh movement, which counsels patience as the world works toward that goal. Tonally, they are linked; both are in A minor. As John Michael Cooper has pointed out, these are also the only two movements that mention the word “God.”⁹

The second and sixth movements each introduce one of the work’s soloists; tonally, they are in closely related major keys: A and D, respectively. Textually, both movements are warm and celebratory—the second in celebrating the beauty of African American culture, the sixth in its vision of a world free of racism.

The third and fifth movements pair upper and lower voices, featuring tenors and basses in the former and sopranos and altos in the latter. They are linked tonally via the relationship of the relative major and minor (D minor and F major). Finally, they are textually connected, as both deal with barriers to racial equality—the law forbidding interracial marriage in movement three and the horrors of imperialist war in movement five.

The darkness of these two movements fittingly surrounds the fourth movement, the bleakest of the entire work, and at its exact center. Fittingly, the text also sits at the center of DuBois’s “Credo.” Here Bonds’s characteristic Romantic piano flourishes are gone, replaced by a bare-bones unison D in the left hand, with snare-drum rolls in the right. The choral writing, so often tonal and lush, is reduced to diminished seventh chords in parallel motion. The text is uncompromisingly angry and threatening, lacking the sense of optimism and hope that permeates much of the work.

Bonds’s Music

DuBois’s rhetorical strategy in his “Credo” is worth considering because Bonds seeks a similar approach in her musical setting. By starting each section of his poem with “I believe,” thereby casting his argument in the form of the Christian creed, it seems as though DuBois believed that he could convince skeptical religious White people by couching his language in a comfortable, familiar format. Structuring such a radical document in a format they would recognize from text they recited each Sunday morning would make it more

palatable.

In *Credo*, Bonds adopts a similar strategy, blending elements of the classical tradition with Black vernacular musical traditions. Sometimes they are starkly juxtaposed, while at other times they are more blended. Just as DuBois framed his radical, forceful, occasionally angry argument in a language familiar to White readers, Bonds also found ways to combine, juxtapose, and synthesize White and Black musical traditions. In doing so, she presented the work’s uncompromising demands for racial equality in a musical language with which Whites could understand and empathize.

Conductors interpreting this work should constantly be aware of this dialogue, whether juxtaposed or synthesized, as it is a crucial part of its expressive fabric. Indeed, a significant part of the joy of rehearsing and performing *Credo* lies in identifying the Western European and African American musical traditions in the score and discovering how they interact. Bonds finds a satisfying balance between the Western classical techniques she studied at Northwestern and the African American vernacular musical traditions she grew up hearing.

First Movement

The opening movement begins symphonically, with a timpani-like gesture in the left hand and a grand gesture in the chorus on the words “I believe in God.” The gesture’s brusque, syncopated outbursts recall Beethoven, a composer symbolic of the grand Western European tradition. However, the lowered seventh scale degree (the G^b), the parallel fifths, and the unexpected syncopations in measure nine, with the emphasis on the unstressed word “made of *one* blood” (emphasis added) subtly reference vernacular, African American musics (Figure 1 on the next page).

The work’s opening gesture thus recalls both elements of the Western European canon and the Black vernacular tradition, synthesized into one passage, setting out the work’s artistic strategy at the outset.

The next passage moves from the vernacular to the learned style, with a fugato on the words “I believe that all men” (mm. 14–23), before a charmingly bluesy setting of “black and brown and white are brothers” (mm. 29–30). Here, rather than synthesized styles, we again

Especially Do I Believe: A Conductor's Guide to Margaret Bonds's *Credo*

find a juxtaposition between Western European writing and African American vernacular styles.

The first movement segues directly into the second movement, the only one in the work to do so. The inconclusive nature of the first movement's close—a gradual decrescendo over a pedal tone A that segues directly into the next movement—seems to suggest that the vision of a world free of racism has not yet been achieved. As we will see, this inconclusive segue is designed to resolve itself in the work's final movement.

Second Movement

"Especially Do I Believe" is entirely different, in keeping with Bonds's concern for significant contrast between the movements. As is the case with the sixth movement, this movement showcases the composer's expertise in writing expressively for the solo voice.

The solo soprano's melody is lyrical in the best Schubertian style, accompanied by a piano part that supports it in the tradition of art song. Yet the movement also employs the call-and-response style of the African American church and its tradition of gospel sa-

Moderato

Soprano
Alto

Tenor
Bass

Piano

pp cresc. poco a

f

f

I be-lieve in

I be-lieve in

Moderato

6

S
A

God, I be-lieve in God, who made of one— blood

T
B

God, I be-lieve in God, who made of one— blood

Figure 1. Margaret Bonds, *Credo I*, mm. 1–9.

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cred song, swinging the melodic material back and forth between the soloist and the choir. The piano accompaniment also employs the gently rocking syncopations of African American spirituals; in a charming touch, the piano often responds with “improvised” countermelodies after each phrase, as in the gospel tradition (Figure 2). Given this, requesting the collaborative pianist to play these interludes with an improvisatory, gospel sense of rubato is entirely appropriate.

In the movement’s closing passage, the choir hums under the soprano solo, evoking textures often found in spiritual arrangements. The movement concludes with a touch of nineteenth-century Romantic virtuosity, featuring an exultant high C# in the solo soprano that soars over a hushed chorus, extolling the beauty and majesty of blackness in a truly soul-stirring moment, as illustrated in Figure 3 on the next page. It is hard not to think of the final passages of the “Libera me” in the

Verdi *Requiem* at this moment. Both works are similarly scored and have to do with liberation from earthly bondage. Of all the movements in *Credo*, this is perhaps the most approachable.

Third Movement

Like the related fifth movement, the third movement features clefed voices of the chorus—in this case, tenors and basses in four parts. The gentle lyricism of the second movement gives way to stern declamatory writing, appropriate for the text’s attack on contemporary laws forbidding interracial marriage. Its focus on the strict laws of the time is represented through the unbending, stern harmony throughout. The movement provides a significant challenge for choruses lacking strong tenor and bass sections; both its tessitura and four-part harmonic structure require large, experienced sections.

Figure 2. Margaret Bonds, *Credo II*, mm. 55–60.

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Fourth Movement

"I Believe in the Devil and His Angels" is in the middle of the work's seven-movement structure. This movement is shockingly different from the rest of an essentially optimistic and hopeful work. Gone is Bonds's richly layered, virtuosic piano part found in all the other movements. In its place are precisely two simple, stripped-down gestures: thumping unison Ds in the left hand and menacing drum rolls in the right.

The chorus does the heavy lifting here, with diminished seventh chords in parallel motion (Figure 4 on the next page). This is the only movement with no trace of the African American vernacular musical tradition, which makes sense given the text's focus on the Devil as a metaphor for the evils of White racism. This is also the most challenging movement for the full chorus; locking in the choral parts both horizontally and vertically is very difficult. Locating and pairing off the parts that move in parallel octaves, then adding the thirds, fifths, and finally sevenths, is an effective rehearsal strategy.

Fifth Movement

After the terrors of the fourth movement, Bonds provides a balm for our ears—but as we shall see, it does not last. In the introduction to the fifth movement, "I Believe in the Prince of Peace," the piano clearly quotes "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," but with added chromatic jazz harmonies (Figure 5 on page 16). Furthermore, whereas "Hark" falls back on itself after the opening two bars, Bonds sends it soaring in the best gospel style.

Whereas much of the interplay between Western European and African American music so far in *Credo* involved juxtaposing them against one another, here they are synthesized into one musical phrase. As with DuBois, Bonds appears to be saying, by quoting Mendelssohn's carol, "Here is something my White brothers and sisters can understand. Now, let the lesson begin."

When the choir comes in, it is a three-part homophonic treble chorus in first inversion—a gesture strongly reminiscent of gospel choir textures, which tend to be

97 a tempo

Sop. Solo

mp [transparent]

I be - lieve

S A T B

pp [transparent]

I be - lieve I be - lieve I be - lieve

I be - lieve

pp [transparent]

I be - lieve

I be - lieve

a tempo

shimmering

Figure 3. Margaret Bonds, *Credo II*, mm. 97–101.

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organized to keep the harmonized melody in the uppermost voice. The text speaks of the coming of the Prince of Peace, set with consonant, triadic harmonies that portray a sense of stability and peacefulness.

This peace, however, is not to last. In the movement's middle section, DuBois's angry condemnation of war as a vehicle for White oppression changes the music without warning. With a sudden turn to D minor—the key of the previous movement—Bonds shifts into perhaps the work's most dramatic passage, spurred by the entrance of the tenors in a stark descending major third on the words, “I believe that war is murder.” The music builds in drama, dynamics, and tempo, climaxing with the last word of the phrase: “the wicked conquest of weaker and darker nations by nations whiter and stronger but foreshadows the death of (their) strength.” This is a moment to really let the choir soar in terms

of drama, strength, and volume (Figure 6 on page 17).

This climactic moment is undercut by a marvelous bit of dramatic irony. The “strength” mentioned in the text is, of course, not actual strength, but the false, hollow strength of rich White nations, who are for DuBois inevitably doomed to failure as the world moves inexorably toward racial and social justice. Bonds then crafts the choral harmony on the word “strength” with emphases on root and fifth; only the tenors sing the third, undercut by the second sopranos and piano sounding the second against it. This creates an open, eerily hollow sound—powerful but ultimately empty—perfectly representing the hollow, false strength in the text. It is a triumph, but it is a false one, and directors will want to keep this in mind as they execute this passage, as it has implications for the balance and color of the chord. The following piano passage, Debussyan in its parallel-

188

S *f* I be-lieve in the Dev-il and his an-gels, who

A *f* I be-lieve in the Dev-il and his an-gels, who

T *f* I be-lieve in the Dev-il and his an-gels, who

Bar. *f* I be-lieve in the Dev-il and his an-gels, who

B *f* I be-lieve in the Dev-il and his an-gels, who

(8^{vb})

Figure 4. Margaret Bonds, *Credo IV*, mm. 188–190.

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isms, is likewise full of open fourths and fifths, an instrumental commentary on the text's false victory.

Sixth Movement

Like the second movement, the sixth movement, "I Believe in Liberty," begins as an art song, with a lyrical Baritone line above syncopated piano patterns. In the best Western European tradition of text-painting, these patterns are clearly meant to evoke the chugging of the train mentioned in DuBois's wish, that Black folk be able to ride on segregated train cars "uncursed by color." Though outside the scope of this paper, Bonds's output of art songs is her most stunning body of work in many ways. Here, her skill and sensitivity at writing for solo voice and piano are on full display (Figure 7 on the next page).

Later in his poem, DuBois takes that train imagery further, openly and wistfully dreaming of a future that entails a "kingdom of beauty and light," a post-racial, post-discriminatory future. DuBois's solution to achieve this kingdom, which will create an equitable world, is the "training of little children," the equal and proper education of all races.

Finally, as the movement approaches its climax, the baritone invokes Esau, the biblical figure who betrayed his people, as a warning to those who would betray the glorious kingdom yet to come. Immediately after, the chorus enters in the African American call-and-response style heard in the second movement. Soon, in the work's most glorious and moving passage, the chorus invokes a wordless passage in layered chorus over churning piano triplets. This passage seems to signify we have reached

the promised land, a world free of racism and discrimination, and brings the movement to a stirring end. The optimism of Bond's work here, given all the discrimination and racism that constantly stunted her career throughout her life, is astonishing and inspiring.

Seventh Movement

The final movement ("I Believe in Patience") shares thematic material with the work's opening, bringing it to a cyclical close, yet as mentioned previously, DuBois's text counsels patience as we await the coming of a more just world. Bonds returns to the Beethovenian poundings from the opening movement but excises that movement's opening drum roll in the piano's left hand, creating a sense of anxious urgency. There is a clever movement where the first movement's fugato passage returns, set to "the prejudice of the ignorant and the ignorance of the blind" (Figure 8 on page 18).

Here, Bonds resorts to fugue structure, one of the great achievements of the Western European musical tradition, to conjure the prejudice and ignorance of our White-dominated past. The stark open fifths on the opening and closing choral sonorities are redolent of the great false climax on the word "strength" in movement five and confirm that we are not quite there yet (Figure 9 on page 19).

Bonds thus sends us out into the world with a vision of what could be but reminds us there is work yet to be done. The ideas launched at the composition's beginning are completed, at least partially, by the final bars. As John Michael Cooper writes:

To interpret *Credo* as a grand cycle whose conclusion completes the ideas launched at the outset is to impart to the music an even greater and more dramatic sweep than that of the text.¹⁰

Conductors performing this final movement need to be aware that it is not entirely a triumphant close.



Figure 5. Margaret Bonds, *Credo V*, mm. 215-217.

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248 *a tempo*

S shad - ows the death of that strength.

A shad - ows the death of that strength.

T shad - ows the death of that strength.

B shad - ows the death of that strength.

f

Figure 6. Margaret Bonds, *Credo V*, mm. 248–250.

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293 *mf*

Bar. Solo I be - lieve in Lib - er - ty for all men; _____ the

mf

297 *cresc.* *f*

Bar. Solo space to stretch their arms and their souls; _____ the

cresc. *f*

Figure 7. Margaret Bonds, *Credo VI*, mm. 293–300.

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Conclusion

In a 1965 letter to Shirley DuBois, the poet's widow, Bonds looked forward to a time "when *Credo* will move all over the world."¹¹ Although it sat in obscuri-

ty for nearly two generations, it appears that Bonds's wish is slowly coming true. *Credo*, along with the rest of her considerable body of choral works and art songs, stand as an astonishing achievement of one of the past

423

S

A

T

B

prej - u - dice of the ig - no-rant and the

the prej - u - dice of the ig - no-rant and the

prej - u - dice of the ig - no-rant and the ig - no-rance of the blind;

427

S

A

T

B

I be-lieve in

prej - u - dice of the ig - no-rant and the ig - no-rance of the

ig - no-rance of the blind; I be-lieve in

Pa - tience, Pa - tience, I be-lieve in

Figure 8. Margaret Bonds, *Credo VII*, mm. 423–429.

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century's great American composers. Not only is the music worthwhile, but, more importantly, the process of rehearsing and performing *Credo* creates an important educational opportunity to grapple with the evils of racism, the civil rights struggle, and the hope for a better future. Let us all hope that this sense of optimism—a belief in past wrongs being eventually righted, in silenced voices being heard once more—continues to inspire performance of Bonds's magnificent body of work for many years to come. ■

Acknowledgment: The editor would like to thank John Michael Cooper for his assistance clarifying biographical details.

NOTES

¹ The premiere of the version with piano occurred in March 1967; that of the version with orchestra occurred sometime in 1967. The work was published in 2020 (fifty-three years from those two premieres), and the two versions received their first complete posthumous

performances in 2022 (fifty-five years from the first performances).

² Margaret Bonds died unexpectedly of a heart attack in April 1972.

³ John Michael Cooper, *Margaret Bonds* (Oxford University Press, 2025), xiii.

⁴ In addition, in March 2025, Oxford University Press added to its “Composers Across Cultures” series with a 368-page publication on the life and works of Margaret Bonds, authored by John Michael Cooper, Professor of Music at Southwestern University.

⁵ This is the version of the text Bonds knew and set to music.

⁶ John Michael Cooper, *Margaret Bonds: The Montgomery Variations and Du Bois Credo* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 137.

⁷ Cooper, *Margaret Bonds*.

⁸ Cooper, *Margaret Bonds*, 135.

⁹ Cooper, *Margaret Bonds*.

¹⁰ Cooper, *Margaret Bonds*, 113.

¹¹ Cooper, *Margaret Bonds*, 134.

The image shows a musical score for Margaret Bonds' *Credo VII*, measures 453-456. The score is for a four-part vocal ensemble (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano. The vocal parts are in G major and 4/4 time, with the text "God." repeated. The piano accompaniment is in G major and 4/4 time, featuring a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex bass line in the left hand. The tempo is marked "a tempo".

Figure 9. Margaret Bonds, *Credo VII*, mm. 453–456.

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It's All About the Singers:

An Interview with Clinton Hardy Ferrie and Philip Brown

by Gretchen Harrison



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Both of you teach in traditional K-12 school situations. What trends are you seeing that support choral music education and performance? Conversely, what trends do you see that could create a barrier for successful choral music education and performance?

Ferrie: I believe that what truly sustains music education in my community are the students, parents,

and community members who value and support it. Across the country, I've witnessed programs face significant cuts, yet whenever the possibility of cuts has been raised in my own district, parents have consistently been among the first to advocate for the continuation of our programs.

I also see the work we do inside our classrooms as essential to this support. By building strong relationships with students and fostering a genuine love for singing, we empower them to share their enthusiasm at home. When parents see the joy and growth their children experience, they are more willing to invest in music education. Ultimately, by creating a safe and welcoming environment and exposing students to a diverse range of music, we help them experience music as it truly is: a universal language that connects and inspires us all.

Brown: I think the trends in choral music education in K-12 schools varies from community to community. Where programs are doing well and thriving, there seem to be several themes happening in those areas. First, positive and supportive relationships between the teacher(s), students, and community are key. Establishing an environment where students feel safe, welcomed, challenged, and know they'll grow as musicians and people. Next, music advocacy is not only the choir teacher's job; music in schools needs to be promoted



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by the administration, school board, and surrounding community. The third biggest factor for the choir teacher is selecting repertoire. Teaching goes beyond just notes and rhythms; selections should be timely, age appropriate, and challenging yet accessible.

Conversely, there are a few concerning trends that are impacting choral music programs. First, we are in the era of MORE—more class options, more electives, more graduation requirements... just more. That limits the opportunities for students to take arts classes. Second, school budgets being given to music programs have not caught up with the inflation of music costs the past ten to fifteen years. Many districts are taking away resources and lowering budgets, making it more challenging to update/modernize the choral music classroom.

When looking for repertoire, how do you differentiate between “singer focused” and “teacher focused” repertoire? Is there a difference?

Ferrie: Absolutely. As a mentor for multiple teachers in my state, I cannot count the number of times I have heard someone say they chose a piece simply because they loved it or because they sang it during their own school years. While personal connection to the music is valuable, our own preferences should not dictate repertoire choices for our choirs.

Selecting music that is too difficult can set students up for frustration and a performance that falls short of its potential. On the other hand, programming something overly simple may become tedious for the ensemble and result in disengagement. The key lies in balance. Effective repertoire selection should be rooted in the needs, abilities, and potential of the choir currently in front of us, not just in what we as directors might enjoy.

For adjudicated contests or evaluations, there may be times when the most appropriate piece is not the ensemble’s favorite. In those cases, directors can create excitement by adding elements of fun. Provide historical or cultural background to spark interest or use playful strategies such as having students sing the piece in an exaggerated tone to highlight what not to do. These lighthearted moments bring laughter, relieve tension,

and allow students to reengage with focus.

To keep the joy of singing alive, directors can also balance challenging repertoire with music students love—incorporating a popular song into warm-ups or transitions, for example. This reinforces that while discipline and growth are essential, singing should also remain an enjoyable and life-giving experience.

Brown: I remember in my first year of teaching, I attended a local area high school choir concert, looking to learn and be inspired by the singers and music of the concert. Before the chamber choir performed, the conductor spent several minutes sharing with the audience how proud he was of the singers because they were tackling such difficult music. As he continued, it felt like more of a disclaimer than program notes. Sure enough, the choir demonstrated just how hard the music was and struggled through the performance. While the teacher hyped them up prior to the performance, it was evident in the choir’s facial expressions and demeanor that they were not having a successful performance.

As choral music educators, we have teaching goals in mind for each singer of each choir. One of those goals should be to meet them where they are as they enter the choir room to start the year while looking to where they hope to grow by the end of that year. The repertoire sung in a choir is an important part of facilitating and nurturing that growth, musically and hopefully personally.

Directors have their “go to” songs or even a “bucket list” of music they want to teach, and I do not think there is anything necessarily bad about that. Where it can be problematic is when these teacher-driven lists are put ahead of the important question: *what is the best music for the singers in the choir?* If those two thoughts are aligned, that’s great. But if they are not and music is chosen by the teacher with the biggest justification being “I’ve always wanted to teach/conduct this song,” a moment for reflection may be in order.

Both of you have had choirs perform at ACDA national conferences. How did you prepare yourself and your singers to deliver the most successful performances for such a high-stakes event?

Ferrie: Preparing a choir to perform at a national conference is both a tremendous honor and a significant undertaking. The process can be emotional, stressful, and demanding, but it can also become one of the most rewarding experiences of your career if you embrace the journey, stay organized, and seek support along the way.

I approach this preparation with a backward-planning mindset. From the beginning, I provide students with a clear timeline that outlines what needs to be accomplished and when. For example, by a certain week we may aim to have a set number of pieces learned or specific selections memorized. I regularly update students on our progress, which helps keep everyone accountable and motivated. At the same time, I make a point to include moments of joy and variety. While it is easy to become consumed by conference repertoire, it is important to balance the rigor with opportunities to sing something lighthearted—such as a holiday carol or a pop song—so students don't feel overwhelmed by the same music for months at a time.

Equally important is taking care of yourself as the director. When my choir was preparing to perform in March at the 2025 National ACDA Conference, I came down with the flu in January. My instinct was to push through and keep working so we would not fall behind, but I realized that doing so would not only harm my health but also diminish the quality of instruction I could give my students. I chose instead to rest, and that decision ultimately benefitted both me and my ensemble.

For anyone preparing a choir for such a prestigious stage, my advice is to give yourself grace, protect your well-being, and focus on the journey you share with your students. At the end of the day, the growth, memories, and community built throughout the process matter far more than external perceptions of the final performance.

Brown: There is such joy and exhilaration when the

email comes in that the choir has been accepted to perform at a national convention. Shortly after that comes the wave of nervous energy thinking about logistics, repertoire, and on and on that demand lots of time and energy. I consider myself blessed to have had two different choirs perform at national conventions—a treble choir and a mixed choir—and both were extremely rewarding for the choirs. The amount of support, kindness, and appreciation shown by the choral community toward the singers in the choir at any convention is such a gift.

Being focused on the long-term planning goals of the choir's repertoire preparation was the biggest musical concern each time we performed for national convention. Communicating clear learning goals, next steps, memorization dates, and many more details become important for each singer to demonstrate their knowledge consistently. Choosing repertoire with the singers in mind first was for me more important than the national convention attendees. The singers are the ones who truly live with the music, learn it, create art with it, and must be motivated and inspired by it. That, in turn, gives the choir the opportunity to share those musical blessings through the repertoire to anyone who is listening.

Any time I program repertoire for a convention, I seek out feedback and opinions early on about the possible program from colleagues. Their wealth of knowledge sheds light on perspectives I may or may not have recognized. If it is a thematic program, I try to craft that performance flow of repertoire as if telling a story, taking the choir and those listening on a musical journey. At the 2025 National ACDA Conference, we honored the theme of that conference: “past, present, and future.”

My advice on preparing an audition for a national conference is go for it. You will never know if you don't try, so while the audition process is lengthy, it is worth the time and energy. If you get selected, stay in the moment with the singers, and don't change anything about what it is you and your choir already do, because that's what got you selected to perform. Be true to you and your singers, allowing the convention attendees to see a thirty-minute glimpse of the special world your choir has created so skillfully.

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Repertoire & Resources

What advice can you offer those who are preparing students to audition for honor choirs?

Ferrie: From the very beginning, I set clear expectations with both students and their parents regarding audition preparation and recording. I make it known that I will not record a student who arrives unprepared. If a singer shows up without adequate preparation, I will send them home and allow only one additional opportunity to attempt their audition.

To ensure the process reflects the authenticity of a live audition, I limit each student to two takes, selecting the stronger one. No audition is perfect, and I believe it is important that the recording resembles what adjudicators would hear in person. While I support students by providing rehearsal tracks, offering group sectionals, and helping them learn the music, I emphasize that it is ultimately their responsibility to put in the time and effort to be prepared.

Recordings are made in my choir room using my iPhone—without specialized equipment or digital alterations. Having served on multiple honor choir listening committees, I know how evident it becomes when recordings have been edited or when directors provide prompts during the process. As sponsors, it is our responsibility to be fully familiar with the rules to ensure students are not unintentionally disqualified. While most students record with me present, I do allow those I trust to record independently, even in a practice room without a director. In fact, I have had students successfully earn placement in honor choirs through this approach. Ultimately, what matters most is that students come fully prepared, sing with a forward tone, and demonstrate musicality in their audition.

Brown: Timelines and learning goals, that's it for me. If the audition is due by a given date, find out who is interested in auditioning early on. Then communicate with them where they need to be in their demonstrated learning by giving dates leading up to the audition. If it is a live audition, help the student know what the physical environment of the audition will feel like, how to slow things down before they sing or start the audition, and how to stay present in the moment and let things go as the audition unfolds.

If it is a recorded audition, I make sure students read

and follow the guidelines for the audition. As a director, clearly communicate with those auditioning how many times they will get to record each component of the audition. I usually will not record any component more than three times. I record in a room that is neutral as far as acoustic—not a dead space, but not a lively one either. I usually record with an iPhone voice memo or video recording, depending on the instructions given. I suggest avoiding DAWs such as GarageBand if you forget to check the settings, as it is pretty easy to hear when an audition has been digitally enhanced or altered.

Finally, I share with those auditioning what criteria their audition will be graded on. While they usually never see their scores from these auditions, I find it is informative for them to know how many points the audition is worth, what categories there are for scoring, as this can guide them to grow musically and record the best audition they can. After the audition is recorded, I remind each student that if they did the best they could on that day and time when they recorded, whether they make the honor choir or not, they have grown as a musician through the process and that itself is worthwhile.

What advice do you have for creating a strong interest session proposal for state, regional, or national conference consideration?

Ferrie: One of the most important pieces of advice I can offer is this: make sure your submission is applicable to the division you are submitting to. As the national R&R chair for middle school/junior high, part of my role is to help adjudicate submissions for the national conference. During the last conference cycle, unfortunately, more than 95 percent of the submissions we received for the MS/JH division had little or nothing to do with our age group.

If you are a middle school or junior high choir director, you do have something to contribute. Too often, we hold ourselves back because we believe we are not qualified, that our work is not significant, or that no one would be interested in what we have to share. That is simply not true. You may not be selected the first time, or even the second, but persistence is key.

I remember in 2014, a now close friend of mine

who was serving on our state board called me and said, “You’re going to be presenting at our conference next summer.” I immediately protested, saying I had nothing to offer. She laughed and reminded me that she had seen the work I shared online and knew I had valuable insight for our community. Her encouragement pushed me forward, and that single act of kindness set me on the path to becoming the servant leader I am today.

Have I attended multiple sessions on topics like teaching sight-reading? Absolutely. But I still walk away with new insights each time. Our profession is constantly changing, and new generations of teachers are always joining the field. What may seem routine to you might be exactly what someone in another state needs to hear. So, my advice is simple: share your knowledge, submit your ideas, and don’t be afraid to try. You never know the impact your voice might have on others in our profession.

Brown: There are hundreds of interest session proposals from across the country for conferences like ACDA national. There are several questions for someone wanting to share an interest session that need to be clear right away:

- Who is the primary audience for your session? Age level? Specialty ensemble?
- Is your session a timely extension of a topic that applies to a specific age level or type of choir?
- Would you attend your interest session if someone else was presenting it?
- Will your proposal catch and keep a conductor’s interest?

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If your interest session proposal gets accepted for the conference, celebrate! So many proposals do not get accepted, so it is an honor and clearly a topic/session that the conference committee feels the membership needs. If your proposal is not accepted, it might just not be the right time yet for that session at a conference. Maybe at the next conference that topic will be needed, and your expertise will serve the membership really well then. Also consider that some proposals are not the right fit for a presentation but might work very well as an article in written format that could be published in one of ACDA's publications.

When getting ready to share an interest session or workshop, I usually ask colleagues and peers for feedback in as many ways as they feel they can give that to me. From the content to the visual presentation to any handouts, the feedback I get prior to giving the session helps me focus on what is most important. If you are

using any technology for your session, bring any cords or devices you need with you and test them out in the room you are presenting beforehand. While this seems like a no-brainer, you never know what may happen, and no one wants technology issues to take away or diminish the session.

If you are passionate about your interest session and strongly believe there is value to it, you should absolutely submit it for consideration. When we are attending conferences, we want to hear from people who are driven, passionate, knowledgeable, and skilled. If your session is coming from a place of that intention, we will all be better for it.

— — — — —
Both of you serve a diverse membership. How do you decide what resources to provide?



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Ferrie: I gather information through a variety of sources. My first step is to look at social media, where I see daily posts from colleagues seeking advice. About two years ago, I launched a national MS/JH Facebook group that has grown rapidly into a vibrant community where directors can seek advice, exchange ideas, and share solutions. While the needs across the country vary widely, common themes often emerge. Identifying those shared challenges provides a strong foundation for addressing issues that resonate broadly.

I also draw inspiration from the teachers I mentor. Their questions and concerns reflect the needs of many, and working with them reminds me of my own early years in the profession—when I had little experience and was still learning what it meant to be an effective teacher. Reflecting on those moments helps me ask myself: *what would I have needed at that stage in my career?*

In addition, I regularly reach out to middle school and junior high choir directors across the country to hear what they are experiencing in their own regions. These conversations reinforce the truth that professional support is not just for new teachers. Mid-career and veteran educators also benefit from meaningful professional development opportunities. Ultimately, I want the profession of choral music education to thrive nationwide. Being intentional, listening to others, and actively seeking advice are essential parts of my role in ensuring that we continue to support teachers at every stage of their careers.

I've developed content through my own channels. Under the name *Choir With Clint*, you can find materials on Instagram and Teachers Pay Teachers—resources I began creating several years ago to expand the availability of middle school choir tools and ideas. I am also the co-host of *The Choir Chronicles* podcast. With two full seasons already released, the podcast offers a wide range of conversations, insights, and practical resources designed to inspire and equip choir directors at all levels. I encourage you to give it a listen; you may discover just the spark or idea you've been looking for.

Finally, one of our responsibilities as R&R leaders is to curate a list of recommended literature from ACDA members, which is published on the ACDA website after each national conference. I strongly encourage you to explore that resource.

Brown: It seems like in today's social media/digital footprint world, that resources are all around us. I will usually look online and see what questions seem to be coming up most often, or topics that have several comments echoing a need for content in a specific area. Informal conversations and dialogues with peers/colleagues can also identify shared interests for topics and areas of interest for growth in the professional community.

Some of the diversity in the membership that makes it challenging is the multitude of places where people are in their professional teaching journey. Topics, questions, and resources that a teacher in the first five years of their career may be different from a veteran teacher. On the flip side, many new teachers have a wide array of educational skills that veteran teachers may not have, so the possibilities for choral educators to learn from each other truly are endless.

One of the professional conferences I attended many times is the ACDA-MN Summer Dialogue. While the sessions were informative, the director's chorus experience was always fun, the opportunity to observe all-state choir rehearsals formative, it was the informal chances to dialogue with others that made some of the most profound impressions. Through conferences like this, friendships are made, mentors and mentees evolve, and the collaborative spirit reminds me that none of us are in this profession alone.

I do understand that it is not always possible to get to an ACDA conference for a variety of reasons. While some information shared at these conferences is specific to the conference and those in attendance, there are other resources that are available to the entire membership. The Facebook group page "ACDA Senior High School Repertoire and Resources" can be a good way to find resources, see some repertoire suggestions, comment, and dialogue to learn from one another. There is another Facebook group titled "I Teach High School Choir" that offers up lots of the same things and is a great resource. Additionally, the ACDA website has repertoire suggestions and lists that can be informative and helpful.

— — — — —



Repertoire & Resources

What opportunities offered through ACDA are important to you in your professional life?

Ferrie: As a Texan, I grew up hearing, “This is the Texas way, and it is amazing.” And while there is indeed so much to celebrate about the traditions and strengths of Texas, ACDA has broadened my perspective in invaluable ways. Through this organization, I have discovered diverse approaches to teaching, encountered new ideas, and experienced an incredible spirit of kindness from colleagues across the country.

I still remember attending my first national ACDA conference. It was intimidating and, honestly, even a little lonely. I found myself in a city I had never visited, surrounded by people I didn’t yet know. For someone as naturally introverted as I am, it was a challenge. But that experience pushed me to connect with others, and in doing so, I began to realize the true value of being

part of this national community. If you can find a way to attend, I strongly encourage you to consider the next national conference. The event has grown and transformed significantly over the years, and if it has been some time since you last attended, it may feel like a brand-new experience. In my own role, I’ve worked to expand the MS/JH division and to help directors feel welcomed, supported, and valued in a way that extends far beyond the conference itself.

Brown: ACDA has been a constant in my professional life. From going to state, regional, and national conferences, to submitting and sending students to honor choir opportunities, ACDA is a fount of knowledge, resources, encouragement, and most importantly, inspiration. My first national conference was back in Chicago, and many concerts and sessions left me speechless and in deep reflection about how/why/what goes into

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A greater way I found to really learn more about what ACDA has to offer was to get involved by volunteering. If there is an opportunity to volunteer, I highly recommend it. For example, if you want to know more about an honor choir, volunteer to help with a part of it.

Utilize the variety of resources ACDA offers online through their website. Contact the R&R chairs if you have a question or comment. Read the articles provided in *Choral Journal* and *ChorTeach* that you may find timely and helpful. See what potential professional growth opportunities may be out there and attend or apply when you can. If you are looking for a mentor, or feel you'd be a good mentor, many state chapters of ACDA have these programs as well.

Let's end with some final words of encouragement or advice.

Ferrie: I want to remind you of this: *you are worthy*. In our profession, it's easy to get weighed down by the many challenges and distractions that come with teaching—the parts that pull us away from what we truly love. It's also natural to look at others and think they have it easier or that they “have it all together.” The truth is, every educator faces struggles, and no school or situation is without its challenges. At the heart of our work is the joy of teaching students and changing lives. When we keep our focus there, the impact we can make is truly limitless.

Brown:

- Reflect often.
- Celebrate singer-demonstrated accomplishments (great or small) when you can.
- Be a lifelong learner and embrace what comes with that.
- Observe at least three different conductors each year, and pay as much attention to singer engagement as to what the conductor is doing or saying.

- Be sure to sing in a choir at least a few times a year and not just always be leading them.
- Dialogue with a mentor or peer monthly.
- What you offer and bring to your singers is unique and fantastic.
- Take care of yourself. There is only one you, and you are needed by more than just your singers. Your family, friends, children, spouse, partner, and community want to enjoy you as well. 

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Lifting Up the Littles:

Highlighting Your Youngest Singers

Through Commissioned Works, Effective Rehearsal, Performance Opportunities, and Student Composition

by Jess Edelbrock

Editor's note: This article was originally printed in ChorTeach Vol 15, no. 1 (2022). It is reprinted with an updated section from the author: "Student Composition for Young Choirs."

Our youngest singers can do amazing things. They are keenly connected to their inner sense of musicality, they want to be challenged and uplifted, and they deserve opportunities to shine just as much as choirs that sing the most complex repertoire. These are some of the sentiments I hoped to communicate when the Tucson Girls Chorus Bumblebee Singers performed at the ACDA National Children's & Community Youth Choir Conductors' Retreat in January 2022.

The "Bees" are TGC's K/1 choir, and the centerpiece of their set was "Now We Have Rivers," commissioned specifically for the Bumblebee Singers. The whole retreat concert was intended to showcase singers from all ages—from the Bees to the Cadet Choir from Phoenix Boys' Chorus (grades 2-3), to the middle school groups from Chandler Children's Chorus and Tucson Boys Chorus, up through the high school singers from the TGC and Phoenix Children's Chorus. It was an honor to be a part of a concert that was so intentionally crafted to accurately demonstrate the work so many of

us do every day. All of the conductors involved in this concert were so proud to showcase the depth of artistry that all ages are capable of, and we hope this multi-age approach can serve as a model for national conferences and other high-profile performances to come.

In this article we will explore ideas and practical applications for highlighting your youngest singers, setting them up for success, and showcasing their immense capabilities throughout your community.

First, a confession. I was incredibly nervous about bringing the Bees to the retreat and how they would be received. I was worried that the audience (other conductors, in this case!) would see the performance as introductory or cutesy, simply due to the age of the choir and the developmentally appropriate repertoire and tone. The concept of "choral excellence" and its apparent definition throughout the profession was looming in my mind every rehearsal. However, I was also so confident in the importance of showcasing the work of the Bees, and each week they reminded me how eager and capable they were to dig into hard work and artistry.

After the performance, several conductors shared that they felt validated in what they do, which was the absolute best compliment I could have imagined. It is

so easy to feel less important when you conduct the littles. I am here to tell you that your work is just as difficult, just as artistic, just as valuable as those who conduct the most prestigious groups in our field.

Part One: Collaborative Commissioning

Commissioned works are usually reserved for the “top” groups, but what if our kindergartners have this opportunity? What if they get to feel the same excitement and sense of ownership that comes with performing something that was created for and with them?

In 2018, I was preparing for my master’s recital. At the time, I conducted the Tucson Girls Chorus Bumblebee Singers (grades K-1) and Mariposa Singers (grades 6-8). For the Mariposas, I had a hard time narrowing down repertoire since there is so much age-appropriate, high-quality, engaging music available for middle school treble choirs. I encountered the opposite problem for the Bumblebees. While there are many accessible pieces out there for our youngest singers, I personally found too many of them to be either formulaic, intentionally silly, or in need of much adaptation to actually work for the group. There is nothing wrong with programming silly songs or pieces with similar forms (and I do program these things!). For this situation, however, I was looking for something that would engage the Bees on a different level.

Depending on your situation, you may need to advocate for a commission. In my case, the TGC Director (Dr. Marcela Molina) was fully open to the idea from the start. If your administration or director needs some convincing, you can emphasize the huge potential and unique skills that younger singers possess—their imagination, energy, openness, big hearts, and much more. These qualities will certainly shine through a musical project and highlight the organization or school as a whole. Additionally, younger singers are the future older singers, and experiencing the sense of ownership and validation that comes with a collaborative commission project helps retain singers and parents. A commission for elementary singers also provides an opportunity for growth and impact beyond the particular ensemble; you are adding a much-needed piece to the repertoire

that children’s choir conductors around the world can proudly program.

One of my colleagues in my master’s program, Matt Carlson, happened to be a great composer who was interested in writing exactly what I was looking for: accessible music for less available voicings that was still just as crafted as the most complex SATB divisi piece. Matt’s skills and aesthetic were just as much an impetus for this project as the need for a great Bumblebee piece. If you don’t already have a colleague in mind as a composer for your commissioning project, reach out to other children’s choirs, your state ACDA board, or a local college or university. (You could also reach out to Matt!) Chances are, somebody knows somebody who would be a good fit. Be sure to listen to some of the composer’s previous works to get a feel for their style.

For “Now We Have Rivers,” Matt and I were both open to each other’s input throughout the process. He was the expert in composition; I was the expert in exactly what my choir needed to be successful. We also agreed that this piece must be well crafted and provide a vehicle for the Bees to tap into their fullest potential. Most importantly, we agreed that the project would be a collaboration between each other and the singers. Including your young singers in the composition process can be daunting, but if we position ourselves as facilitators and allow our students to have a voice, truly beautiful things can emerge.

The first step was settling on a topic. Start with what you know! For the Bees, we decided to write about something unique to our home in Southern Arizona: the monsoon. Each summer, it is scorching hot for a couple months and then this glorious series of storms rolls in and gives us rain, cooler weather, and familiar scents of the earth.

Singers writing or contributing to the text is an accessible and powerful way to involve them in the process. After spending some time talking about the monsoon and some of the ways it looks, sounds, smells, and feels, we asked the singers to write a haiku about the monsoon with the help of their parents. We opened this portion up to all K-8 TGC singers. This was for both the practical reason of gathering many options from students of various language skills, and for the social/emotional aspect of collaborating across choirs.

Matt and I worked together to combine the haikus into what would become the song lyrics. Instead of using full haikus from one singer, we pieced lines together into 3 sections: before, during, and after the storm. Once the lyrics were finalized, Matt began composing the music.

I

<i>streets baked like clay pots</i>	Elsa, Ladybug (2nd grade)
<i>thunder is like distant drums</i>	Amelia, Bumblebee (1st grade)
<i>clouds build humid hot</i>	Waimea, Bumblebee (1st grade)

II

dark skies, whipping wind Chloe, Ladybug (3rd grade)
lightning flash, crackling thunder
slashing monsoon rains

III

<i>watching through windows</i>	Elsa, Ladybug (2nd grade)
<i>as it rains on thirsty soil</i>	Amelia, Mariposa (7th grade)
<i>now we have rivers</i>	Elsa, Ladybug (2nd grade)

In the spirit of collaboration, I'm thrilled to include Matt's insight on his compositional process:

Writing for the Bees was such a joy! I felt honored to write music that created a sophisticated choral performance opportunity for our youngest singers. The text that TGC created for this piece was full of vivid, tactile imagery that lent itself beautifully to being set to music. I chose to take each of these haikus and turn them into “mini-movements” of about one minute each. Short sections with quick transitions and lots of variety keeps these young singers engaged in the piece, especially when these sections combine into a continuous narrative. They can be storytellers in addition to performers, which is a lot of fun for the choir.

I put much consideration into writing the vocal parts. I wanted the sound of this piece to be something that was more elevated than typical songs for five- and six-year-old singers. At the same time, however, I wanted to be sure that they could feel successful while performing, and avoid asking them to do things that were not developmentally appropriate. I placed the vocal lines in

a limited range that provided many opportunities to access their head voice. Melodies make frequent use of descending minor thirds, borrowing from the most common interval used in children's songs. The rhythmic writing is kept mostly to quarter and eighth notes, which was designed to be both age appropriate and provide opportunities to introduce these rhythmic elements to the singers.

Within these guidelines, there is still plenty of high-level music making to be had! This piece is full of dynamic contrast, varied articulations, tempo changes, and unvoiced sound effects to sound like the monsoon winds and rains. As opposed to simple block chords that one might expect from music for beginning choirs, the piano and percussion accompaniment adds layers of complexity that does not take away from the vocal line. It complements and challenges the singers while painting the imagery of the text.

It was also important to me to use this piece as an introduction to part singing. Kids can sing in parts at this early age, and they were excited to use these techniques to further paint images from the text; the clouds building on the horizon, lightning flashing in the distance, the flurry of monsoon rains coming at the audience from all angles. These moments of part singing are always first introduced as a unison motive, which is then repeated in two parts shortly afterwards. Starting with unison and immediately building to parts is an excellent way to introduce more advanced choral skills to our youngest singers. See Figure 1 on the next page for an example of a unison motive developing into a two-part texture. Figure 2 on page 35 is an example of a simple echo that creates a three-part harmony (the Bumblebees omitted the G-sharp; the open fifth was enough of a challenge for this group).

So now you are ready to commission a piece for your elementary group! As you work with the composer, you can specify or have conversations about the following:

- Vocal range
- Voicing strategies for successful two- or three-part singing

The musical score is written for a vocal ensemble and piano accompaniment. It consists of three systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano line. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 3/4.

System 1 (Measures 35-36): The vocal line begins with a *p* (piano) dynamic. The lyrics are "slash - ing mon - soon rains slash - ing mon - soon rains". The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a similar pattern in the left hand.

System 2 (Measures 37-38): The vocal line continues with the same lyrics. The piano accompaniment includes a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic marking and a *mf* (mezzo-forte) dynamic marking. The piano part features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a similar pattern in the left hand.

System 3 (Measures 39-40): The vocal line concludes with the lyrics "rains slash-ing mon-soon rains slash-ing mon-soon". The piano accompaniment includes a *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic marking and a *f* (forte) dynamic marking. The piano part features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a similar pattern in the left hand. The system ends with a fermata and the instruction "(hold fermata as long as it takes for the decay to decrescendo)".

Figure 1.

- Special musical elements (e.g., adding body percussion, highlighting an instrumentalist from one of your groups)

- Musical concepts to focus on

- Accompaniment style

- Flexibility: what options are there to simplify the piece further if needed?

Here are some ideas for involving your singers in the process:

- Writing lyrics through individual submissions or as a group project

- Choosing what the piece is about

- Choosing specific musical elements, like which percussion instruments to include

- Composing the first line of the melody for the composer to draw from

- Choosing the overall form of the piece

Part Two:

Intentional and Effective Movement

Many of us utilize movement in the rehearsal to attain and reinforce musical concepts, to increase student engagement, and to help unlock healthy sounds through connection with the body. These movements are often dropped for the performance or turned into “choralography” that has less to do with the desired musical effect. However, creating movement that both aids the singer and works for the stage is essential for nearly every piece the Bees rehearse and perform. This approach serves many purposes: harnessing the group’s energy, increasing focus, allowing space for singer input and creativity, and providing consistency between rehearsal and performance spaces.

Specific movements within “Now We Have Rivers” were developed to encourage specific tone, articulation, rhythm, and dynamics. They are not written into the score; rather, they emerged organically throughout the score study and rehearsal process.

The first step to creating intentional movement as a conductor is to know the score well. Sing through every part multiple times and notice the many layers within each phrase (dynamics, rhythm, cut-offs, text, vocal technique challenges, etc). Choose a phrase and focus on one musical detail (perhaps dynamics first), loosen up and let yourself move in a way that helps you physically emphasize that concept. Sing through again, focusing on a dif-



The image displays a musical score for the piece "Now We Have Rivers". It features three staves: two vocal staves (Soprano and Alto) and one piano accompaniment staff. The tempo is marked "Flowing" with a quarter note equal to 80 beats per minute. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics "Now we have riv - ers" are written under the vocal staves. The piano part includes a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, both marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score is numbered 46 at the beginning.

Figure 2.

ferent musical detail and a different movement. Now, is there a way to combine those movements to help your singers with both goals through kinesthetic connection?

For example: in mm 11-15 of “Now We Have Rivers” (Figure 3), the singers begin by crouching down slightly as they sing “clouds build,” stand and raise their arms along with the crescendo. They also pulse their hands open on the beat to internalize the length

of the note and to achieve an accurate release.

You can repeat this process to try and work in as many musical concepts as possible. Prioritize which portions of the movement to keep or remove if it starts feeling too awkward or becomes counterproductive for your singers. In the same excerpt (“clouds build”), we began rehearsing starting with a complete crouch to the ground and a clap above the head on the release.

The musical score for Figure 3 consists of four systems of staves. The first system (measures 11-13) includes Part I, Part II, Percussion, and Piano. Part I and Part II have lyrics 'Clouds' and 'build' with dynamic markings *p*, *mf*, and *f*. The Percussion part features triplets and a 'loco' section. The Piano part features a 'loco' section and triplets. The second system (measures 14-15) includes Part I, Part II, Percussion, and Piano. Part I and Part II have lyrics 'Clouds' and 'build' with dynamic markings *mf*, *p*, and *f*. The Percussion part features triplets. The Piano part features triplets.

Figure 3.

This turned out to be too exaggerated for some of the Bees. Many would use the crouch as an opportunity to fully sit on the floor, and the clap encouraged some of them to yell the final consonant. We attempted to fix the issue by *explaining* that they should crouch instead of sit, and sing the consonant instead of yell, but a simple adjustment in the movement (standing from a slight bend and pulsing hands on the beat) proved to be much more effective.

Another way to hone in on effective movement is to involve the singers in the process. Young singers naturally move in ways that make sense to them, but they will need guidance to refine their ideas into something that will achieve the desired effect for the whole ensemble. Begin by playing or singing a large portion of the piece—singers can move either in their own space or around the whole room. Ask them to match the music using their whole body, then only their feet, only their arms, only their fingers, only their face, etc. Each time you repeat the exercise, prompt students to focus their attention on one of the musical concepts you would like to emphasize within a phrase or section (or ask them what they would like to listen for!). When you notice a motion that could help the group, ask the singer to demonstrate and have the whole group give it a try while singing the short phrase. You can then follow the same process as above to refine the movement into something that will help the singers best express and achieve the musical goal.

Your singers can be beautifully expressive, and they can also be very silly! Allowing moments of silliness through movement can help establish a culture of fun, trust, and validation. Young students are often told to calm down or focus (which is sometimes necessary), but providing a space for them to be themselves and explore the possibilities of musicmaking can both help them feel affirmed as a goofy young person and aid in their focus in the long run. Including movement in the rehearsal in both structured and less-structured ways harnesses our little's energy to help them achieve great things in a positive and naturally motivating way.

Transferring the wonderful work you do in rehearsal also becomes easier when you keep movements consistent between practice and performance. Singers will feel more comfortable with the familiarity and internal-

ized concepts, and are more likely to produce the same sounds they worked so hard to perfect if the associated movement is kept for the performance.

Part Three: Lifting Them Up

All of our singers deserve exciting and meaningful performance opportunities. When a prestigious or highly visible opportunity comes up, organizations and school programs often send their top or oldest group. There is nothing wrong with giving top ensembles wonderful opportunities, but our youngest and least-experienced singers should also be considered. In doing this it is essential to set our young singers up for success through appropriate repertoire, effective and engaging rehearsal, and high expectations enforced with kindness and encouragement.

As conductors of our young ones, we have the opportunity to educate not only singers but audiences. When you think of a typical outstanding choral performance, what comes to mind? Polished, uniform execution, professional stage presence, impeccable transitions? While these things have their place, it may be time to redefine success on the stage in order to be truly representative of the work we do as educators, singers, and human beings.



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To do this, you must be brave. You must be proud of your non-conducting, because your singers may not need a beautiful legato 3/4 pattern; they may need you to do the movements with them. You must not apologize for the singer who is going to wave to their mom between pieces or literally sit down in the middle of a song (both of these things happened on stage at the National Retreat!). You must embrace mistakes while urging improvement. You must be proud of performing a set of just two or three pieces because they are high quality, challenging, and well done. You must name the fact that what the kids are doing is also art. You must spell that out and then you must let your singers show them what you mean.

Our singers know when we believe in them and when we are truly proud to show them off to the world. They will rise to the occasion, they will give you their whole hearts, and they will surprise you in the most meaningful ways. We simply need to give them the space to do it. Your work as conductors of the littles is so important. You are building the foundation for their musicality, their openness to new experiences, their sense of self-worth and teamwork, and their idea of what choir can be and who it's for. You already know that they can do amazing things; let's show the world!



Scan the QR code to see the full movements for "Now We Have Rivers." <http://www.mattcarlson.co/now-we-have-rivers.html#/>

Student Composition for Young Choirs

Since this article was published in 2022, the TGC Bees have composed and premiered three original works, and the process has been immensely rewarding. In addition to commissioning works for our younger singers, I invite you to consider embarking on a group composition journey with your littles. This can be a daunting task when first starting. Many of us have little to no training on how to teach composition. It's even more rare to see examples of student-led compositions performed in the same set as established composers. In my experience, however, this process is less about for-

mal compositional techniques and more about what we do best as choir teachers: facilitating a culture of trust, guiding students to know when to lead and when to follow, and encouraging our singers to share their voices without fear.

The methods outlined below include suggestions based on the trial and error that we have already gone through at TGC, and are our current best practices:

1) **Source the Text.** For early elementary students, consider partnering with older students to create lyrics. Our littlest singers have complex ideas, but their language does not always reflect the depth of what they are thinking. Collaborations with older students can empower both littles and bigs! Some ideas for text creation:

- a. After selecting a theme, send prompts home and invite siblings/parents to help their young singer to put their big ideas into words
- b. Adapt a book (it doesn't have to rhyme!)
- c. Create a set of haikus by combining various students' ideas

2) **Choose the Form.** Working within a preset structure can be very helpful!

- a. Classic song form is a great place to start. We love a good V1-C-V2-C-B-C-C tag (or any shortened version of that). Students can then see that once they write the chorus they are halfway done with the song!
- b. For a less rigid structure that works well when using a book as a text source, first identify a central idea or single lyric to use as your "chorus." Then, select other lines/pages of text to place in between "choruses." Don't be afraid to move things around or cut parts of the book. (Do be sure to credit the author appropriately.) Complete this with as much student input as you'd like. The Bumblebees select the chorus and some of their favorite lines, and I put them into an order that

makes sense for our group.

3) **Melodic content.** Let them flow.

a. In the Bumblebees, I serve as the translator; we speak a short phrase until it's in our heads, then I play a D or E major chord to give us our tonic and choose a few students to sing me whatever is in their heads for that phrase. Then I repeat (with real-time "autotune") so the whole class can sing it back. *We always draw the melodic contour in the air while we sing.* We do this with several ideas and then choose which one. Sometimes I truly let the girls choose, and sometimes I select one idea or another to emphasize certain concepts.

b. It is common for one singer to suggest a melody and then all subsequent suggestions are exactly the same because that's what is in their ears. To break this up, I ask a lot of questions:

- What is this sentence/phrase about? What is the feeling for this phrase?
- What would music sound like that is sad, happy, bouncy, silly, etc.
- What if our highest pitch is on this word or that word?
- What should the longest word be? The shortest?

4) **Notating their Creation.** At TGC we are fortunate to have accompanists who can sketch out much of the basic notation of the singers' ideas in real time. They also can harmonize it quickly. However, you can sketch the notation in small chunks (use solfège, a staff, whatever works best for you) and harmonize it later using your choice of instrument.

a. Super quick harmonization 101: Pick the note in the melody you want to harmonize, play it as the root of a triad, the third, then as the fifth. Students pick what they think sounds best!

A few additional considerations as you embark on this creative journey with your students:

- Plan more time than you think you will need. Encourage every idea at first.
- Scaffold well with small, structured steps.
- Embrace unexpected detours. The Bumblebees unknowingly composed secondary dominants, and most recently, a mixolydian melody!
- Incorporate musical concepts all the time, not just at the end. Every step is an opportunity to explore articulation, dynamics, tone, etc.
- Adding movement is a high-impact way to enhance any piece, including an original composition! This is another great avenue to include student input!



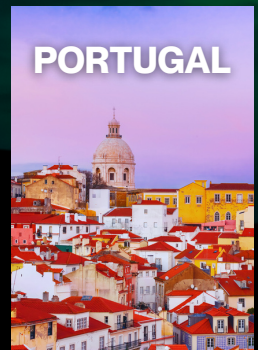
View "Be a Tree" performed by the Tucson Chorus Bumblebee Singers.
<https://youtu.be/8YTieLqU1BE>

As the Bees like to say, "you never know until you try." Consider this article permission, encouragement, a call to action to incorporate student-led practices—including composition—in your youngest choirs. 

Jess Edelbrock is the director of operations and associate conductor of the Tucson Girls Chorus. jedelbrock@tucsongirlschorus.org



8 INTERNATIONAL RESIDENCIES 3 INAUGURAL TOURS



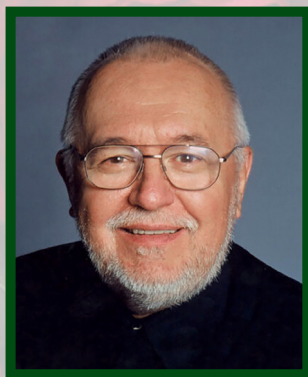
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In Memoriam

Joe Huszti (1936–2024)



Joseph Béla Huszti, internationally renowned choral conductor and beloved father, teacher, and friend, died peacefully at his home in Irvine, California, on June 7, 2024, after a brief illness. Born to a family of Hungarian origin in Ohio on September 27, 1936, Joe distinguished himself as a gifted musician from an early age. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in music from Northwestern University. He married Melinda Murray in 1959 and that fall began his tenure at Bakersfield Junior College in central California; their daughter, Heather, was born in 1960. In 1965, his Bakersfield College Choir became the first American ensemble to win first prize in the International Musical Eisteddfod in Llangollen, Wales—an achievement that earned them nationwide headlines and audiences with President Lyndon Johnson and Pope Paul VI. A documentary film, *One Heart, One Voice*, about the choir and its international adventures was produced in 2017.

He held positions at the University of Delaware, Boston University, and the Tanglewood Summer Institute before moving to the University of California–Irvine in 1977; he remained there until his retirement in 2016. He made thirty international choir tours with the UCI choirs and won dozens of major prizes at competitions

around the world, and received the UCI Distinguished University Service Award and multiple teaching awards. In 1979, Joe and Melinda joined forces to begin the annual Madrigal Dinner tradition at UCI.

In 1997, Joe formed Men in Blaque, a select male-voice ensemble composed of UCI alums and other talented singers. Men in Blaque made multiple international tours and brought home prizes from such events as the World Choir Games (China, 2006), the Yeosu International Choral Competition (South Korea, 2013), and the International Musical Eisteddfod (Wales, 2017). Joe continued to conduct Men in Blaque until months before his passing. The California Choral Directors' Association awarded Joe its highest honor, the Howard Swan Award, in July 2020. In March of 2024, the Western ACDA Region named him as the honoree of its biannual conference.

Joe's prizes and laurels, however, meant less to him than his six decades of students—their professional successes (in and out of the choral world), their personal integrity, and the multi-generational extended family they formed by virtue of having sung, sometime and somewhere, in one of his choirs.

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The Superpower of the Introverted Choral Conductor

BY CHRIS MAUNU

When people think of a conductor, they often picture someone electric, charismatic, and full of flair. The stereotype leans toward the extrovert: someone who can rally a room with infectious energy and effortless charm. Yet every personality type brings its own unique strengths and its own set of challenges. One of the hurdles introverts face in creative fields is visibility. In musical spaces—especially at conferences or professional gatherings—it’s often the extroverted personalities who shine. They speak up more quickly, network faster, and seem to step into the spotlight with ease. There is nothing inherently wrong with that. But when that becomes the default image of leadership on the podium, we risk overlooking the other types of brilliance in our space. As an introverted conductor, I’ve learned that what some might see as limitations are actually my greatest tools. This article is for others like me—to affirm that your quiet strength is more than enough.

A Quiet Journey to Authentic Leadership

For a long time, I believed that the key to success on the podium was to adopt the outward energy of others. As a young music educator attending conferences and workshops, I was drawn to presenters who could light

up a room with sheer presence. Their charisma was magnetic—bold, dynamic, and seemingly effortless. I would return home trying to emulate their gestures, humor, and charged delivery, convinced this was the way to lead. But every time, it felt off, like I was putting on a coat that didn’t quite fit. I could sense it in my students: “Why is Mr. Maunu acting like that?”

I repeated this cycle for years, thinking that if I could only mimic someone else’s style, I would be more effective. It wasn’t until I began to lean into something deeper and more personal that things started to change. Slowly, I found myself becoming more comfortable in my own skin. I felt more relaxed, more grounded. I was beginning to embrace my authentic self. That’s when the dynamic in my rehearsals shifted. The singers in front of me seemed to trust more, listen more, and take more ownership. Artistry began to deepen in ways that felt meaningful and natural. Over time, I realized that the key was not in trying to adopt someone else’s persona, but in discovering my own leadership style and trusting it for the first time.

Looking back, my journey didn’t follow a typical path. I grew up in a small town in South Dakota, population 267. There were just twelve students in my graduating class. Most of my time was spent surrounded by the simple rhythms of small-town life. As a quiet kid, I didn’t see anyone in the performing arts who acted like

The Superpower of the Introverted Choral Conductor

me. I had no idea that someone like me could belong, especially in a leadership role.

In high school, I threw myself into sports, trying to find my place socially. Music was always there, a steady hum in the background, but I definitely didn't see it as a potential career. It took the encouragement of a few great teachers, a little nudge from the universe, and a lot of courage to shift direction. I switched my college major from business to music education, and the journey was on. Still, after years of teaching and conducting, I was trying to lead with borrowed energy, believing that more outward energy equaled better leadership. It took time to understand that my quieter, more introspective nature was a strength, not a limitation.

This journey of self-discovery has shaped how I approach leadership as a conductor, particularly as an introvert. To fully understand the value of introversion in this role, it's important to first define what introversion looks like in the context of a choral conductor.

Defining Introversion in a Conductor Context

When I use the word *introvert*, I'm working from a fairly standard definition: someone who tends to recharge through solitude, is more inwardly focused, and may find large social settings draining over time. A common misunderstanding is that it's about shyness or a lack of people skills. Many introverts, myself included, *thrive* in public leadership roles; we just tend to lead more introspectively. Weston Noble, Alice Parker, and Robert Shaw come to mind as choral conductors who led strongly yet quietly.

Their careers offer compelling evidence of introverted leadership in action. Weston Noble, for example, was known for his humble, grounded, and gentle presence on the podium. His leadership was rooted in deep listening and service to the ensemble rather than command or charisma.¹ Alice Parker often spoke about the inward, contemplative nature of her creative process, stating, "I always find my truest musical self alone ... music is born in silence."² Robert Shaw was intensely introspective. His writings reveal a conductor more concerned with the intellectual approach of the artist than with outward showmanship: "Conducting is not

about charisma; it is about preparation."³ These three luminaries demonstrate that introverted-leaning personalities are not a limitation in the choral field. They can, in fact, be a profound source of strength.

There is not much formal research on introversion in the choral conducting world (which says something in itself), but studies suggest that as many as half of the general population identify as such. Whether that ratio holds true for conductors is unclear, even though the public-facing nature of the role seems to be a natural draw to the extrovert archetype. In any case, I suspect there are many more than we realize; we just show up differently. Looking back, I can see how my quieter tendencies shaped my path—not as a detour, but as a different entry point into leadership.

How Introversion Shines: A Culture of Safety and Trust

In rehearsal, introverted leadership often creates a culture of listening. I don't fill every space with commentary. I let silence do some of the work. That space signals to singers that their presence matters. Their voices, both musical and personal, are respected. I've found that singers rise to greater heights when they're trusted. They don't need to be micromanaged. They need to be heard. One strength of a conductor is to notice when energy dips or when something deeper is at play in a rehearsal. The sensitivity of an introverted conductor to the singers' energy can help shape a rehearsal space that feels safe, open, and honest. It's a slow burn kind of leadership, but the impact runs deep.

There is research to support the idea that introverted leaders outperform their extroverted counterparts at times. Introverts tend to listen more and encourage others to take initiative, and as a result, people under their leadership often feel more empowered and invested in the process.⁴ I remember a student from a recent honor choir standing quietly off to the side, visibly reserved and unsure. I didn't rush toward her with high energy or try to coax them into a forced conversation. I simply met her eyes and offered a small, grounding nod. Later that day, she approached me and said, "Being noticed meant so much. I love singing, but I am incredibly shy. Thank you for seeing me." It was a powerful reminder

that sometimes the quietest moments of connection are the ones that matter most.

In the Classroom:

Deep Listening and Authentic Connection

In the classroom, an influence-through-presence model allows me to truly see my students. I notice the subtle things—the singer who avoids eye contact or the one whose silence says more than their words. I check in, not with flashiness, but with genuine presence. Now, as an artistic director of the Pacific Youth Choir, I continue to stretch and grow, stepping into bigger rooms, higher stakes, and more complex challenges. But the principles haven't changed. I still lead from grounded awareness and reflective conviction. I still trust silence. I believe that authenticity builds the deepest kind of artistry. Of course, I bring passion and energy when needed, but I'm careful to channel it through a place of authenticity.

That said, introverted conductors do face the paradox of needing to engage with others in ways that can be draining. The “stage presence” we cultivate in performances or rehearsals is not always a reflection of our natural inclinations. For many introverted conductors, the experience of standing in front of a choir or speaking to an audience feels different than socializing in everyday life. The energy demands of these situations can be significant, even if we enjoy them.

To navigate this, I've learned the importance of carving out time to recharge. For me, that often involves retreating into solitude after a performance or intense rehearsal. I reenergize with a walk, a good podcast, or simply being in a space where I'm not expected to perform or engage with others. It's these moments of stillness that allow me to replenish and find balance. Recharging is crucial for maintaining my authenticity. Without it, I could easily slip back into the habit of trying to mimic someone else's energy or persona.

Interestingly, because I love leading choirs so much, those energy-draining moments feel so much more manageable. The purpose and fulfillment I gain from working with choirs has changed my life for the better. Wherever you land on this spectrum, the key is allowing for moments of recharge after stepping into the extroverted aspects of our role.

Performance: Grounding the Ensemble

On stage, I'm there to anchor the music, hold space for the artists, and be a conduit so the performance can fully inspire an audience. I'm not there to put on a show for the singers in front of me. It's about steadiness. A grounding presence helps calm nerves, focus energy, and keep the ensemble centered in the music and the moment.

I've seen how a composed demeanor can settle a group right before they walk on stage. It reminds them that we're not here to impress. We're here to inspire

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through meaningful sharing. It's about guiding with humanity and depth, letting the artistry do the talking. And for many ensembles, especially youth choirs, that kind of leadership becomes an important stabilizing force.

Thriving as an Introverted Conductor

If you are looking for a few ways to authentically show up, connect, and grow your visibility without pretending to be someone you're not, consider the following:

- **Lead with depth in conversation.** You don't need to work the whole room at a conference. One or two meaningful conversations can be far more impactful than a dozen surface-level interactions.

- **Follow up in writing.** Thoughtful emails or messages can leave a lasting impression after a workshop, performance, or meeting.

- **Share your process publicly.** Whether through blog posts, short-form videos, or social media reflections, letting others peek into your thoughtful approach to rehearsal and artistry will build connection and credibility.

- **Find one-on-one mentorships.** Sometimes it's hard to speak up in big spaces, but private connections can be powerful. Seek out mentors or colleagues for coffee chats or a Zoom call.

- **Let your work speak.** Submit recordings, apply for presentations, and share your students' growth. When authentic and strong, your work will eventually open



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doors, even if you're not the loudest voice.

- **Attend selectively and engage intentionally.** You don't need to go to everything. Choose events and spaces where you feel safe to be fully yourself show up with presence and purpose.

To those who do not identify as introverts, your role is vital too. Perhaps you've never questioned whether your personality "fits" the podium. Maybe bold expression, quick connection, or being energized by the spotlight feels second nature to you. Those are gifts worth honoring.

Championing Diverse Leadership Styles

How many deeply gifted musicians, teachers, and conductors are passed over simply because they aren't "loud" enough? How many young people never consider conducting or teaching because they don't see leaders who reflect their perceived type of energy?

If we want our field to be inclusive—truly inclusive—we need to recognize and elevate all types of leadership. Not just the loudest ones. If you're in a position of influence, one of the most impactful things you can do is recognize and affirm the quieter voices around you. Not everyone is going to jump into the spotlight, and they shouldn't have to in order to be seen. Consider who might need a little more time to process before responding in a rehearsal or meeting. Notice who listens deeply, leads with calm, or asks thoughtful questions one-on-one. These are leadership strengths, too, just expressed differently.

You can support your introverted colleagues by creating space where both loud and quiet energy is valued. Model curiosity over assumption. Make room for silence. Invite collaboration in ways that allow different processing styles to shine. When we intentionally build professional cultures that honor a range of personalities and leadership approaches, we include more people and we grow deeper as a field.

To the Quiet Leaders

If you're stepping into the role of conductor or edu-

cator, you have everything you need. Your presence can be powerful, even if it's not loud. The ability to listen deeply, reflect intentionally, and empathize genuinely are not traits reserved for introverts. They are human tools, available to all of us. But for many introverts, these qualities often come naturally and are central to how we lead. That's worth recognizing and celebrating. Whether you recharge in stillness or in connection, whether you process internally or out loud, the core truth remains: great leadership takes many forms. Extroverts and introverts alike bring essential gifts to our musical spaces.

To the young conductor who wonders if they're "too quiet" for the podium, I see you. I was you. And I'm here to tell you: your version of presence, your way of connecting, your authenticity... That is your power.

The podium doesn't need more noise. It needs more truth. And sometimes, the truest voices arrive gently and inspire authentically. 

Chris Maunu is the artistic director of the Pacific Youth Choir, affiliate faculty at Portland State University, and was conductor of the 2025 ACDA National 11–12 Honor Choir. He is a four-time Grammy Music Educator of the Year finalist.

NOTES

¹ William K. Eide, *Weston Noble: A Man of Principle, a Legacy of Faith* (Luther College Press, 2004).

² Alice Parker, "The Immediacy of Song: An Interview with Alice Parker," *Choral Journal* 46, no. 9 (April 2006): 13.

³ Robert Shaw, quoted in Robert Blocker, ed., *The Robert Shaw Reader* (Yale University Press, 2004), 288.

⁴ Adam M. Grant, Francesca Gino, and David A. Hofmann, "Reversing the Extroverted Leadership Advantage: The Role of Employee Proactivity," *Academy of Management Journal* 54, no. 3 (2011): 528–50.

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Research Report

Elizabeth Hearn and
Elizabeth Cassidy Parker, editors

Overview and Editorial Transition

by Elizabeth Hearn and Elizabeth Cassidy Parker

We are honored to serve as editors of the *Choral Journal* Research Report column. In addition to this role, Parker has recently assumed the position of chair of the ACDA Research & Publications Standing Committee, and together we look forward to continuing this column's mission of connecting choral scholarship with practice. We extend sincere thanks to Bryan Nichols for his dedicated service as the previous editor of this column. His leadership and guidance have been invaluable during this transition.

Purpose and Scope

The Research Report column exists to advance the visibility of choral music research by presenting scholarship in ways that inform, challenge, and enrich the work of practitioners across diverse contexts. Whether directing a community ensemble, preparing future music educators, or leading singers in rehearsal, readers should find research here that sparks reflection and offers meaningful application. We seek to amplify the voices of scholars who investigate and interpret choral topics grounded in peer-reviewed scholarship.

Submissions may take a variety of forms, including, but not limited to:

- A focused discussion of a single study or a small group of studies.
- A synthesis of a broader body of peer-reviewed literature.
- A topical review that links research findings to current issues in the choral field.

Regardless of format, submissions should move beyond summary and provide clear implications for practice that include actions or considerations that conductors and educators may apply directly in their professional work. Our goal is to connect scholarship with the lived realities of the rehearsal room.

Call for Submissions

The journal welcomes submissions year-round from scholars, practitioners, and graduate students who wish to share their work with the *Choral Journal* readership. Authors conducting studies, reviewing literature, or reflecting on the relationship between research and practice are encouraged to contribute. Interested authors should direct their manuscripts and inquiries to Libby Hearn—chearn@olemiss.edu.

Research Report

Poster Session Highlights from the 2025 ACDA National Conference

To celebrate the breadth of choral scholarship, we wish to highlight some of the research featured in the 2025 ACDA National Conference Poster Session. These projects exemplify the type of innovative, relevant work with practical applications that we hope to feature in this column:

- Choir Teacher Agency & Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Kaitlyn Schramm)
- Cognitive Load Management in the High School Choral Rehearsal: A Case Study (Sean Foster)
- Continuous Transitions and Audience Enjoyment of Choral Music: A Pilot Study (Annika Stucky)
- Growth Mindset of Music Ability Predicts Music Self-Concept Among Middle School Students (Diego Daflon Pinto)
- High School Chorus Students' Perspectives of a Practitioner-Designed Cultural Context Curriculum (Jason Bowers & Julia Edwards)
- Implicit Theory of Singing Ability & Singing Self-Concept in the Collegiate Choral Hierarchy (Kari Adams & Jessica Nápoles)
- Informal Learning Practices & Processes in Three High School Choral Programs: A Multiple Case Study (Aimee Pearsall)
- Perceptions of Teacher Preparation for Secondary Choral Music Literacy Instruction in Kentucky: A Pilot Study (Sarina Olson-Gustely)
- Perfectionism and Social Comparison Among Choir Directors (Jessica Nápoles & Thomas Rinn)
- Rethinking Assessment in the Choral Classroom: A Content Analysis (Skyler Bluemel)
- The Effect of Ensemble Race on Listener Perception (Ethan Murphy)

- Thinking About Singing: Metacognition in the Choral Ensemble (Kyle Gray)
- “There’s Room for Me Here”: An Ethnographic Study on Autonomy, Motivation, and Psychological Safety in the Choral Rehearsal (Ramon Cardenas)
- “What Are They Singing About?": Choral Performance Audience Preferences of Text/Translation Delivery (Kelli Baker & Melissa Grady)
- When Did You Stop Singing? Elementary Boys' Attitudes and Self-Efficacy Toward the Act of Singing (Eric Wyler)
- Why Do We Gather? Functions of the Church Choir (Jon Snyder)

Visit <https://tinyurl.com/ACDAPosters25> for a full listing of the 2025 poster session abstracts.

Looking Ahead: Call for Proposals

As we look to the year ahead, we encourage readers to make plans to submit poster session proposals for the upcoming 2026 ACDA Regional Conferences. Additionally, the call for proposals to present at the 2026 Symposium for Research in Choral Singing, held April 30–May 1 in Chicago, is open.

The submission deadline is Friday, November 14. See acda.org/conferences/symposium-for-research-in-choral-singing for more information.

As we begin this editorial role, we look forward to curating this space and presenting scholarship that generates new conversations, raises relevant questions, and encourages fresh practices in choral music. 

Elizabeth Hearn is associate professor of choral music education at the University of Mississippi. ehearn@olemiss.edu.

Elizabeth Cassidy Parker is professor of music education at Temple University. elizabeth.parker@temple.edu



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 – how to reach visual/kinesthetic learners as well as aural
- Internal leadership structures – exploring benefits and types of singer/student leadership in choirs
- What would Fibonacci say? Rehearsal methods and systems
- Conversations around memorization – pros and cons and best practices

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

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Requiem: In Remembrance of Former Students

- SATB; optional string quartet or piano; English (Christopher Rust)
- 18' 30". In five movements, honoring both the living and the dead; celebrating memory, presence, and connection. Largely chordal and paired-part texture. Melodic interest shared among the parts. Uplifting through acceptance, peace, and keeping every legacy alive. "Lux aeterna" ends full! Unusual and compelling! HS accessible. (ProjectEncore.org/christopher-rust)



SAM WU *(new to PROJECT : ENCORE)*

The Painter on Silk

- SSAA; piano; English (Amy Lowell)
- 7' 14". A devoted artist spends his life painting roses, detached from the world's chaos. As he dies amid conquest, he longs for his silent roses to burst into living sound. A tone poem from inside a beautiful mind. Etherial, fully independent stylistic element for piano. Requires mature control/skill: even lines, calm with rhythmic shifts. Exquisite! (ProjectEncore.org/sam-wu)



ALEX VAN SANT *(new to PROJECT : ENCORE)*

Psalm 58

- SSAATTBB; a cappella; English (Psalm 58; Fanny J. Crosby)
- 4' 29". Theatrical outcry against corrupt rulers. Seeks to leverage the liberatory potential of the biblical text as relates to oppression at the hands of the state; pleads for divine just to destroy evil. Strong rhythmic diction necessary; theatrical vocal flexibility. Creative, innovative, even playful at times. A must-do for those who can! Pro ensemble. (ProjectEncore.org/alex-van-sant)



JOAN JOHNSON DREWES

The Star

- SSAA divisi; piano; English (Sara Teasdale)
- 2' 30". Playful piece: The Star admires her reflection in pool, but the pig reveals her folly, prompting laughter from water and mud as the Star retreats in embarrassment. Fun character piece, musically portraying the star, water/mud, and pig. Fair amount of unison writing, but some real challenge, as well. Indep, unique piano part. Solid treble. (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.



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BERNARD OVINK *(new to PROJECT : ENCORE)*

Tota Pulchra Es

- SSATBB; a cappella; Latin (Song of Songs 4; Psalm 42)
- 3' 36". A lover's tender call, celebrating flawless beauty and deep longing; image of pure desire and union in sound. Evocative use of voice pairings moving into unison. Some vocal ornamentation suggests best performed by small ensemble. Requires both flexibility and precision. Unusual, stunning portrayal of love. Pro ensemble level. (ProjectEncore.org/barnard-ovink)



ARI MESSENGER *(new to PROJECT : ENCORE)*

Arpège

- SATB, divisi; S,Ct,T soli; piano; French (Albert Samain)
- 5' 15". Pan's heartbreak over losing Syrinx, who became the reeds of his flute. Through various, Pan relives love's illusions and urges others not to waste their chance at love. Choral texture is that of a whistful tone poem, over which the three solo characters interact. Charming! Stunning piano writing. Requires flexibility, mature skill. (ProjectEncore.org/ari-messenger)



JOSHUA CARTER MAYNARD *(new to PROJECT : ENCORE)*

where to count the stars

- SSAATTBB; piano; English (Joshua Carter Maynard)
- 4' 37". Search for guidance to a lost, star-filled place of belonging, peace. Small, yearning voice longing for wonder, light, a way home. Stunning, use of resources, beginning minimally (painting stars in piano), individual-voice entrances; opening to lush, full chords. Scoring brings out warmth. Not to be missed! Good HS and above. (ProjectEncore.org/joshua-carter-maynard)



JOSHUA FISHBEIN

Magnify the Light

- SSAATB; piano; English (A.D.Gordon, Emma Lazarus, Walt Whitman, Psalm 18)
- 4' 50". The central message, "We must magnify the light, not fight the darkness," is set to a lively ostinato in 8/8 meter, with which the piece both opens and concludes. Texture is often that of paired voices; independent, but supportive piano writing, and some a cappella passages. Very reasonable ranges even for young voices. Fun! (ProjectEncore.org/joshua-fishbein)



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Chicago, IL

Call for Proposals

The American Choral Directors Association is pleased to announce the fifth International Symposium on Research in Choral Singing from 8AM Thursday, April 30, to 6PM Friday, May 1, 2026. A forum for the dissemination of research and scholarly activity, the 2026 hybrid symposium will be held in person or remotely for ACDA members from North America and for international participants, no membership is required. We will combine diverse presentational formats and break-out sessions with opportunities for in-depth conversation, inquiry, and consideration of future research directions of all types. Penn State University will host the conference in Chicago, in conjunction with Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain) and De Montfort University (England).

The intent of the Symposium is aligned with the purpose of the *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing*: to advance knowledge and practice with respect to choral singing, choir sound, choral pedagogy, and related areas such as equity and inclusion in choral singing, school community partnerships, adolescent development, vocal development, and singing and well-being.

Sessions will be presented in person or synchronously via Zoom; time allotments will be determined by the program committee and communicated to presenters in acceptance letters. Unique to our symposium format: All attendees are expected to attend the entire duration of the symposium, and requests for specific time slots cannot be considered.

Typical duration for spoken presentations will be 10–15 minutes plus 5 minutes for questions/answers; poster presenters will describe their work in a lightning talk. We anticipate a schedule of morning/afternoon in the Americas, afternoon/evening Europe and late night/early morning in Asia/Australia. **Proposals must comply with the following guidelines:**

- Previously published research should not be submitted; however, unpublished findings from a published project may be submitted.
- Research previously presented at a Symposium should not be submitted.
- In-progress research is permissible for submission so long as preliminary data and findings can be discussed in the proposal and the author plans to have completed the project by the symposium. Prospective research projects are not suitable for this Symposium.
- Proposal submission implies intent to register for and present at the Symposium if accepted. The Symposium registration fee will be approx. \$125 USD, and this year a special graduate student rate will be offered for \$50 (in-person only).

Submit 400-word abstracts for presentations or the poster session online at
<https://acda.org/conferences/symposium-for-research-in-choral-singing>



The IJRCS Editorial Board will serve as the Program Committee and will rate each proposal according to relevance, originality, clarity, and validity. The Program Committee reserves the right to designate accepted proposals for either paper or poster presentation.

Proposal Deadline: Friday, November 14, 2025, at 5:00 PM CST (Chicago time)

- All submissions will be blinded for review by the program committee.
- Applicants will be notified on or before January 15. Presenters will be asked to register by March 1.

A Bigger Table (Part 1 of 3)

One of the many wonderful things about working at The University of Arizona is living in Tucson, a UNESCO World City of Gastronomy with a rich culinary heritage that spans 5,000 years. On any given day, I can opt to enjoy not only the traditional Mexican and Native food and drink of this region, but also an abundance of food from around the world, proudly and lovingly prepared and shared, including Bosnian, Danish, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Jamaican, Korean, Persian, Peruvian, Polish, Puerto Rican, Salvadorian, Syrian, Turkish and Vietnamese, as well as regional American foods, and many more and perhaps more familiar cuisines. What a joy it is to savor this food, and to learn about these traditions and cultures from those who know it, live it, and love it.

Likewise, this section of the *Choral Journal* is a rich banquet of information about music spanning countries, regions, traditions and ethnicities, and representing a variety of populations. Each section in this three-part series includes two feature articles that provide in-depth information on lesser-known composers and/or works, generously researched and shared by exceptional scholars. Each issue also will contain a curated review section highlighting three choral reviews and one sound review of beautiful music that is likely new to many. In the third and final installment of this section (March/April 2026), Erik Peregrine will offer a menu of valuable resources to support and facilitate personal exploration of a wide range of musics. What a gift and a delight to be able to experience and learn about all of the powerful and moving music shared in this focus section, proudly and lovingly shared with our community by this joyful company of scholars. I invite you to pull a chair up to the table and try something new from the abundance before you.

Elizabeth Schauer (she/her)
Director of Choral Activities
University of Arizona School of Music

*Original watercolor copyright
Tammy Bummell*



Felicitas Kukuck

Composing Against All Odds

SHEKELA WANYAMA

Felicitas Kukuck (1914–2001) was a prolific German music educator and composer who lived through both world wars in Germany. The socio-economic and political upheaval of the time had a tremendous impact on her life and output. She wrote over one thousand works, including for chamber ensembles, piano, flute, and solo voice, though the bulk of her output is choral. Her choral music suits singers of varying levels of experience, often allows for adaptation as needed, and is neatly crafted with both musicians and listeners in mind. Her works display approaches to structure and melody that recall Johannes Brahms and Hugo Distler, and harmonic language that reflects her study with Paul Hindemith. All of her vocal works are in German. Due to the post-World War II recovery period that overlapped with Kukuck's most prolific years, as well as challenges she faced during her lifetime as a woman of Jewish descent in Germany, only a small percentage of her compositions are easily accessible to conductors today. However, taking some extra time to investigate her works will yield rewards for the dedicated conductor. This article provides a start.

Shekela Wanyama, DMA
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Biography

Felicitas Kukuck was born Felicitas Cohnheim on November 2, 1914, in Hamburg, Germany. Her father was a physiologist and her mother was a trained classical singer, and both were supportive of their four children's musical aptitude. Felicitas sang songs with her mother from an early age, beginning piano lessons at the age of ten and improvising songs on piano with her younger brother, Fritz. Her childhood was not without challenges: World War I broke out just four months before she was born. In 1916 her parents changed their family name from the Jewish-origin Cohnheim to Germanic-origin Kestner out of concern for the family's safety. At the end of World War I, Felicitas and her sister had the good fortune to travel to the Netherlands for six weeks as part of a wartime recovery program for children. This early experience may have contributed to her later dedication to children's health, well-being, and education.

She eventually returned to Hamburg and went on to attend the city's renowned Lichtwarkschule, a school that emphasized critical thinking, creativity, and the arts. When the Nazis came to power and took over the school in 1933, she transferred to the Schule am Meer on the island of Juist—a residential school that emphasized the performing arts. While her time there was short, this was perhaps a formative time for Kukuck, as pianist and composer Eduard Zuckmayer conducted the school's choir and orchestra. Zuckmayer was also



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well acquainted with Paul Hindemith, who would later become Felicitas's primary composition teacher. Unfortunately, the Schule am Meer closed just one year after Kukuck enrolled, as many students from Jewish families were forced to emigrate due to the extreme anti-Semitic sentiment in Germany. Kukuck finished her studies at the progressive Odenwaldschule in 1935.

The year 1933 was pivotal for the Kukuck family. Despite changing the family's name to Kestner two decades earlier, and although the family had long been members of the German Evangelical Church, the family's Jewish ancestry came to light, and Felicitas's father lost his position at the university in Hamburg. He had served, with honors, in the German military during World War I, but that did not save him from the Nazi government. Their house was raided in 1933, and their lives were made increasingly difficult as World War II drew near. Kukuck wrote in her autobiography:

This was how German Jews were treated at the time by German Nazis. Even now this makes me so furious that I feel absolutely miserable. But I know I must not let go of it. Everyone should know about this. All the details, so that something so cruel and inhumane will never happen again.¹

Her parents and younger brother reluctantly emigrated to England in 1939. Life in England wasn't easy but was somewhat safer at that time.

In 1935, Kukuck wished to pursue post-secondary studies in music education in Berlin but was told she wouldn't be allowed to teach in schools due to her Jewish ancestry. She then enrolled at the Musikhochschule Berlin, where she studied flute and piano and passed the required exams to teach private lessons. At the same time she learned she had passed these exams, she received official notice that she was forbidden also from teaching privately. Kukuck continued her studies, playing in the orchestra and singing in two choirs, in addition to studying piano. She then had what she considered a life-changing stroke of good fortune: she joined the composition class taught by Paul Hindemith.²

Studying composition with Hindemith was a joy for Kukuck. She and her classmates met with him three

times a week from 9:00 am until 1:00 pm. Each student brought their pieces with them, and Hindemith offered feedback on each piece with all students watching and learning. Sometimes they collaborated on writing three-part pieces at the chalkboard, each student taking a part and working it into the other two parts. For Kukuck, the most exciting aspect of learning from Hindemith was his approach to melody. The melody "wasn't supposed to be a song, or a sonata theme, or a fugue theme, but rather a melody in itself."³ She would later tell her daughter, Margret Johannsen, that Hindemith saw melody like a jewel in a ring: the band of the ring exists to decorate the jewel and bring out its beauty. Similarly, Kukuck's writing begins with melody, and the rest of the music exists to help the melody shine.⁴

Hindemith also influenced Kukuck's perspective on composition as a practice. He encouraged his students to consider the text, the performers, the audience, even the performance space, when writing music. His lessons stayed with her:

Composing is my life. I am happy that I can compose, and that I can always learn more about it. At the same time, it also means that I am in contact with and among people. New compositions aren't for the drawer, not for me. They should be sung and played. They are for other people.⁵

Hindemith left Germany in 1938, and Kukuck continued to work toward her final exam in piano performance, which occurred in 1939. Her exam selections showed her dedication to Hindemith, who at the time was designated as a "degenerate" composer by the Nazi Music Chamber. Kukuck included a piece by Hindemith on her exam to honor him and his impact on her development as a musician and composer. She did this against the advice of her piano teacher, who was a member of the Nazi party (perhaps reluctantly) and wore a swastika on his lapel. He was concerned his colleagues might not pass Kukuck due to her choice of repertoire but, in the end, he allowed her to play the piece and likely shared her sense of relief when the committee gave her passing marks.⁶

Three days after passing her exam, Felicitas married Dietrich Kukuck, a friend from school who also played in the Hochschule orchestra. Dietrich may have helped save her life: before their marriage, he secretly found a sympathetic clerk to change Felicitas's documents to reflect Kestner as her official birthname rather than Cohnheim, which still remained on the original document. This hid her Jewish ancestry on government paperwork. Their marriage was a happy one, with their first son born in 1940 in Berlin. Shortly after, Dietrich was called up to serve in the German military, and Felicitas was left to care for herself and their young son during the horrors of World War II. In addition, she supported a young Jewish woman who needed shelter and food. Kukuck remained in Germany while so many members of her family and her friends chose to leave. She explained in a 1980 interview: "The music—German music, the land of Johann Sebastian Bach—held me tightly. I was rooted here. I wanted to live here. I would never have left."⁷

After the war, Felicitas and Dietrich were fortunate to find each other again in Hamburg and remained in the area. She gave birth to three more children and continued her disciplined composition practice. Collaborations with choir directors, school teachers, and church musicians brought numerous commissions and occasions to write music for many different instruments and musicians at varying levels of experience. Kukuck wrote canons and simple part-songs for school music books, pieces for beginning piano and guitar students, and arranged folk songs for amateur choirs. A collegial working relationship with Gottfried Wolters, conductor of the Norddeutschen Singkreis, led to a number of commissions for motets, oratorios, and other significant choral works. In 1969 she founded Kammerchor Blan-



Source: *Archiv Frau und Musik, Signatur NL-FK-1*
Heirs of Felicitas Kukuck. Open access.
All rights reserved.

kenese, a choir that often premiered and performed her music and which, in a different configuration, still exists today. From 1971 to 1981 she taught music at the Lola Rogge Dance School in Hamburg, where she composed pieces for performances and her students' final exams.

The 1980s saw a burgeoning peace movement that spread across Europe, with fierce commitment from people in Germany. Kukuck joined this movement, and soon after, began to address themes of war and peace in her music. Many of her larger works are from this era, including the church opera *Der Mann*

Mose [The Man Moses], the cantata *De Profundis*, and many smaller chamber music pieces. One of her largest works, a requiem titled *Und es war: Hiroshima. Eine Collage über Anfang und Ende der Schöpfung* [And It Was: Hiroshima. A collage about the beginning and end of creation] premiered in 1995 during World Peace Week in the ruins of Hamburg's historic Saint Nicholas church. The same year saw the premiere of the cantata *Wer war Nikolaus von Myra? Wie ein Bischof seine Stadt aus der Hungersnot rettete und vor Krieg bewahrte* [Who was Nicholas of Myra? How a Bishop Saved his City from Famine and Protected it from War], as well as three motets and one more cantata.

Kukuck composed daily until her death in 2001. She wrote over one thousand works—primarily vocal and choral pieces—for musicians at all levels. It is rare for a composer to be effective at writing for such a wide range of abilities and to take pride in all of it. Margaret recalls her mother saying that it was easier to write complex music and harder to write simple music. Felicitas wanted "only the best"⁸ for children who were studying music and, with four children at home and

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supportive colleagues, she had a good sense of what worked.

Felicitas Kukuck's music is mostly performed in Germany by community and church choirs, and is rarely heard outside the country. In 2014, over thirty concerts across Germany marked the centenary of her death, and her name remains among the prominent German composers of the twentieth century. Most of the information about her life and work is in German, although relatively well documented thanks to the efforts of her daughter and organizations such as the Archiv Frau & Musik, which now holds the rights to Kukuck's estate. The quality, adaptability, and content of her body of work will be of particular interest to musicians working in Christian churches, although the collections of canons and folk songs—if one can track them down—will provide rich material for those working with young and developing musicians.

Selected Works of Felicitas Kukuck

Es führt über den Main [It Crosses the Main] (1952)
Available in numerous arrangements

Of the more than one thousand pieces Kukuck wrote, it is her arrangement of this medieval *Totentanz* folk song for which she is best known. *Totentanz* songs are part of the medieval fascination with death and dance (also known as *danse macabre*) that appears in visual art, literature, and music of this era. The text of *Es führt über den Main*, authorship unknown, tells of how people dance when they cross a bridge over the Main River. Everyone—from a shoeless fellow, a young woman, and even a king—must dance as they cross the bridge, a metaphor for death. In the context of German Protestantism, the idea of dancing to one's death could be understood as finding joy in anticipation of one's own personal resurrection. It could also be a reminder to live one's life well, since death comes for everyone in the end, often without warning.

Whatever its original meaning, this folk song has been passed down for generations as part of Germany's extensive folk song tradition. In 1952, Felicitas Kukuck wrote an arrangement of the song for school

and community music publications and added two additional stanzas. Kukuck's stanzas continue the tale of the bridge: it gets destroyed by all the people in the land, who dance as they swing their axes. In Kukuck's version, the song ends with people coming together and holding hands as they dance "ohne Ende," or without end. It could be that she wanted a stronger ending for a song children would sing in school, or to contribute to a sense of unity among children after so many years of war in Germany.

Whatever the case, the additional stanzas have become the definitive version of this old folk song. The singable melody is built like a bridge, with gentle ascending stepwise notes, lingering a moment an octave above where it began, and descending gracefully on the text "fa la la la." It moves from minor to major and back to minor again. When Kukuck sings it in an old recording, her vocal tone and tempo vary to reflect the parts of the story.⁹

— — — — —
Storm-Lieder [Storm Songs] (1952, 1985)
Möseler Verlag

There are two volumes of these delightful part songs that set the texts of nineteenth-century German poet Theodor Storm. Unaccompanied and set for mixed choir, the texts are largely secular and make frequent reference to the natural world. Homophony prioritizes clarity of the text, mixed meters indicate word stress, and occasional, often unprepared, chromaticism illuminates deeper meaning contained within Storm's poetry. These pieces may be more suitable for experienced choirs.

— — — — —
Das kommende Reich [The Kingdom to Come]
(1953)
Carus Verlag

Written for mixed choir, orchestra, baritone and organ, this seventy-minute setting of the Beatitudes is an example of Kukuck's belief that music for less-experienced musicians must also be of high quality. The choral parts in this score are sometimes for two parts only or written

in unison or octaves, and are frequently supported by orchestration. People comfortable with German can sing the parts written specifically for the “Gemeinde,” or congregation. Otherwise, these parts can be done by the full choir or even a smaller subset of singers. The baritone solo is accompanied by two flutes who are sometimes in octaves with the soloist, and at other times filling in harmonies in modest ways, perhaps recalling the “halo effect” used by Johann Sebastian Bach centuries prior.

Die Weihnachtsgeschichte in Liedern
[The Christmas Story in Songs] (1973)
Möseler Verlag

This collection of seven pieces for mixed choir (and soloists, when available) was printed in 1973. Each piece recounts part of the Christmas Story. In Kukuck’s time, it was common to have Christmas celebrations in public schools as well as church, and these pieces would suit both occasions. They vary in mood and tempo, providing opportunities for creating dramatic interest. Three different places in the score indicate that the congregation could sing a hymn or carol that pairs with the part of the story outlined in the song. The writing is accessible and can be adapted for different voicings and instrumentation as needed.

Ecce Homo: Die letzten Tage des Jesus aus Galiläa [Behold the Man: The Last Days of Jesus of Galilee] (1990)
Möseler Verlag

This ambitious work was written in 1990 for mixed choir, vocal soloists, and an ensemble consisting of flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, alto and tenor recorders, percussion, saxophones, trombone, string quartet and organ (or synthesizer). The structure recalls the Passions of J. S. Bach, with soloist roles for Narrator (similar to Bach’s Evangelist), Jesus, Judas, Petrus, Kaiphas, and Pilate; a choir singing the role of the People (like Bach’s turba choruses) and reflective chorales; and groupings of notes signifying crosses throughout the piece. Margaret Johannsen compiled Bible verses and added her

own writing to create the libretto. While not strictly atonal or twelve tone, this oratorio is full of chromaticism. The singers are often, but not always, doubled by one or more instruments. Recitative-like material is notated and metered yet retains a speech-like feel.

The oratorio almost ends with Jesus on the cross and the earth rumbling. At that point, an unexpected epilogue opens on a train station in Danzig, Poland, in August of 1942. The brief scene is based on the real story of Janusz Korczak, a Polish children’s book author, child advocate, and director of an orphanage. When given the opportunity to escape, Korczak refused to leave the nearly two hundred children in his care and boarded the train to Treblinka concentration camp with them. The soloist who sang Jesus in the first part of the oratorio now sings the part of Korczak. The final words of the oratorio are “I am not guilty,” sung by the soloist who previously sang the role of Pilate and now assumes the role of the soldier who offered to help Korczak escape.

Und es ward: Hiroshima. Eine Collage über Anfang und Ende der Schöpfung [And it Was: Hiroshima. A Collage About the Beginning and End of Creation] (1995)
Möseler Verlag

This oratorio was written for mixed choir, organ and/or woodwinds, percussion, and soprano and tenor soloists. Despite living through so much war, Kukuck didn’t address it as a theme in her music until sometime in the 1980s when she joined Germany’s burgeoning anti-war movement. This difficult and powerful piece explores the tragedy of the bombing of Hiroshima through texts from the Bible, poetry written by Hiroshima survivor Mitsue Furuta, and additional texts by Kukuck’s daughter. The forty-five-minute-long work features unaccompanied chorus with arias and recitatives accompanied by the organ and/or woodwind instruments, and percussion. Many of the choruses will be accessible for church or community ensembles; there are, however, moments of rhythmic and harmonic complexity that merit careful attention and may be better suited for more experienced ensembles.

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Conclusion

It is difficult to suggest only a few pieces from Kukuck's rich catalogue of choral music, particularly as so much of her work would be useful for a wide range of ensembles. Her style is emblematic of most twentieth-century German vocal music: expansive and singable melodies are mixed with unusual intervals and chromaticism. Her overall harmonic language can be considered tonal, although there are deviations from tonality in her more complex and later works. The architecture of each piece is clear, and the text—always in German—guides the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and metric setting. Some of her scores are easily accessible, while others will require correspondence with the publisher to obtain. A full list of published works and publishers is on the website www.felicitaskukuck.de.

The oft-heralded composer Paul Hindemith certainly had a profound impact on Kukuck's development as a composer. Yet even cursory study of her work cements her place in the lineage of fine German composers in her own right. Her dedication to music education and writing thoughtfully crafted music to suit a range of abilities distinguishes her music from that of many of her contemporaries. Whether selecting from the more complex pieces, her church motets and cantatas, her part songs, or even folk song settings, the work of Felicitas Kukuck provides an illuminating window into music in the German classical tradition during some of the country's most turbulent and transformational years. 

Additional Resources

Bick, Martina. "Felicitas Kukuck,"
Digitales Deutsches Frauenarchiv.
Accessed March 3, 2025. <https://www.digitales-deutsches-frauenarchiv.de/akteurinnen/felicitas-kukuck>

Johannsen, Margret. "Felicitas Kukuck,"
Musik und Gender im Internet.
Accessed March 2, 2025. https://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/receive/mugi_person_00000459?lang=de

Kukuck, Felicitas. *Ecce Homo: Die letzten Tage des Jesus aus Galiläa*.

Wolfenbüttel: Möseler Verlag, 1991.

Kukuck, Felicitas. *Storm-Lieder*.

Wolfenbüttel: Möseler Verlag, 1951.

Kukuck, Felicitas. *Storm-Lieder II*.

Wolfenbüttel: Möseler Verlag, 1985.

Music and the Holocaust.

"Reichskulturkammer and Reichsmusikkammer."
Accessed March 3, 2025. <https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/de/politics-and-propaganda/third-reich/reichskulturkammer/>

NOTES

¹ Felicitas Kukuck, "Autobiographie in Form eines Tagebuchs ab 17. April 1989," 7, https://felicitaskukuck.de/Autobiographie_FKukuck.pdf

² Felicitas Kukuck, "Autobiographie in Form."

³ Felicitas Kukuck, "Autobiographie in Form," 10.

⁴ Margret Johannsen, interview by Beatrix Borchard, Hamburger Musikhochschule, July 5, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcu6RUXy608>

⁵ Cordula Sprenger, *Felicitas Kukuck als Komponistin von Solo- und Chorliedern* (Tectum Wissenschaftsverlag, 2008), 17.

⁶ Margret Johannsen, interview by Beatrix Borchard.

⁷ Eicke Funck, "Eicke Funck im Gespräch mit Felicitas Kukuck," *Intervalle I*, Arbeitskreis Musik in der Jugend (Wolfenbüttel, 1980), 13.

⁸ Margret Johannsen, interview by Beatrix Borchard.

⁹ "Musik zum Reinhören," https://felicitaskukuck.de/musik_hoeren.htm.

A Bigger Table Music Reviews

Choral Reviews

‘Akahi Ho‘i

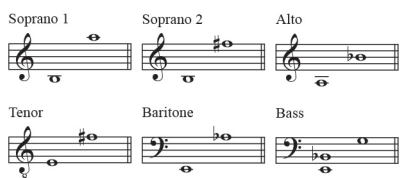
Music by King David Kalākaua

arr. Megann Sala (b. 1991)

Text adapted from Nina Keali‘iwahamana (b. 1936)

SSATBB (2:30)

Pavane Publishing



This arrangement for choir from Megann Sala harkens back to a beautiful version of the song for solo voice and orchestra by Jack de Mello, which was recorded by Nina Keali‘iwahamana and Emma Veary. The original work was composed by King David Kalākaua (1836–1891), the last reigning king of Hawai‘i. He was educated in music performance and composition along with his three siblings. The four siblings became known as Nā Lani ‘Ehā (the royal/heavenly four). Often called the Merrie Monarch, King David Kalākaua was a proponent of reintegrating hula into the public eye.

This arrangement is a wonderful introduction to the music of Nā Lani ‘Ehā and Hawaiian choral music for ensembles in high school, collegiate, or community set-

tings. The melody and text are broken up into portions of homophony and section soli, making pronunciation easy to monitor during rehearsal. Pavane offers a diction guide on their website, and the link is included in the score. “Loo” and “doom” are used as accompaniment in voice parts without text. There is limited division for basses and sopranos, and it only occurs when these voices are acting as accompaniment. The lowest basses go below the staff and highest sopranos go above the staff in only one measure each. This arrangement is representative of other unaccompanied Hawaiian choral works, and more information can be found in Sala’s forthcoming DMA document on arrangements by Dorothy Kahananui Gillett. More textual information for this and many other Hawaiian works can be found on the online resource, Huapala.org.

Keenan Elijah Dolan, DMA
University of Arizona

Maria Magdalena et altera Maria

(from *Motetti Spirituali*, 1619)

Sulpitia Lodovica Cesis

ed. Xinke Shen

SA (2:30)

Voces Feminae VF-006



This short, graceful work was composed by the Italian composer, lute player, and nun Sulpitia Lodovica

Cesis (1577–after 1619). As a nun composer, Cesis found creative ways to evade strict church rules, even using instruments like the cornett and trombone in her music. In 1619 she published *Motetti Spirituali*, a collection of motets for two to twelve voices. “Maria Magdalena et altera Maria” is a small-scale, unaccompanied duet from this publication and is one of the shortest pieces in the collection. The piece celebrates Easter, and the text is in Latin from Matthew 28:1, 6–7.

Translation:

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary
went to the place of the sepulcher.

“Jesus, whom you seek, is not here:

He is risen, as he said.

He goes before you into Galilee:
there shall ye see him.”

The piece is set in three sections in ABB form. The first section focuses on the story’s female characters: Mary Magdalene and the “other” Mary, and also sets the scene at the empty tomb. The second section quotes the words of the angel. The last section repeats the second section, including the same music and the text. The piece concludes with a brief coda in which the final notes are prolonged, creating a strong sense of closure and rest. The two voices alternate between imitation and homophony. The text-setting is mostly syllabic, with a few melismatic moments in the soprano. This elegant duet requires sopranos with flexibility for the melismas and is a good choice for treble choirs (including college, adult, high school and advanced middle school), especially for those with a small number of singers. Doubling of the vocal parts by instruments—such as flutes or recorders, or adding chordal support with an organ—would be appropriate and can help support the singers. The work was originally composed for cantus and bassus. For this edition, the pitch has been transposed up the interval of a minor third to accommodate two treble voices.

Xinke Shen

MM student

University of Arizona

Thus Spake the Mother

Melissa Dunphy

Text by Sri Ananda

Mormolyke Press, 2024

SSA unaccompanied (3:30)



Melissa Dunphy sets the powerful words of Indian poet, mystic, and philosopher Sri Ananda in *Thus Spake the Mother*. Ananda’s text comes from his 1919 collection *Snow-Birds*, written during his first few years in Norway, where he lived for the latter part of his life. Ananda is credited with being one of the first to bring Indian philosophy and teachings to Europe. Dunphy’s setting is accessible in its part-writing and singable melodic lines but provides a challenge in the weaving of textures and modal harmonies, making it appropriate for collegiate, community or advanced high school treble ensembles.

“Thus Spake the Mother” is set in three sections that transition through tonal centers to highlight the meaning of the text. The first section, set in C mixolydian, begins with a fanfare-like motive of “Forward!” and forward motion is achieved through alternating antiphonal and homophonic passages. In the second section, the text changes from declamatory for “cross the ditches, break the hedges, and march” to a more nebulous setting of “seize the secret of the lightless sea, scan and control what mighty powers lie hidden in the soul’s unfathomed depths.” In this section, Dunphy keeps the motives from the first section but uses modal and tonal shifts to depict the ambiguity of the text. While these shifting centers can be complex, Dunphy’s voice leading makes the transitions seamless through predominantly half-step motion.

The moral of the story is set in the third section, in which the “Mother” reveals the purpose of her demands. She states, “Nature will bring her long-saved

treasures to serve and nurture you, but you shall lead Humanity by the hand with gentle, ceaseless, sweet, unmasking love.” Dunphy forgoes modal mixture in this section, setting it as a musical embrace in B^b major, and with a tempo that gradually slows to the piece’s conclusion. The alternating textures now take on the character of a rocking, comforting lullaby. The three voices arrive at the final fermata at different times on the text “by the hand,” as if they are grasping each other’s hands.

“Thus Spake the Mother” is a brilliant embodiment of the many aspects of Mother: powerful, commanding, mysterious, and nurturing. This piece is as accessible as it is expressive and has layers of meaning that can engage treble singers in rehearsal and performance.

Angelica Dunsavage, DMA
Artistic Director
Phoenix Girls Chorus



Tomás de Torrejón y Velasco

Musique à la Cité des Rois/Music in the City of Kings
Musica per le monache di San Vito/Music for the
Nuns of San Vito

Coro de Niños Cantores de Córdoba
Ensemble Elyma
Gabriel Garrido, director
Phaia Music K617035 (1993; 46:29)

Ensemble Elyma captures the essence of Baroque composer Tomás de Torrejón y Velasco (1644–1728) in this outstanding recording. Torrejón y Velasco emigrated to Peru and was the maestro at Lima Cathedral for much of his life. He composed the first opera written in

the Americas (*La púrpura de la rosa*) in 1701. His works on this recording fall into two categories. The first five pieces are villancicos (with Spanish text) for two to four voice parts and basso continuo. The final four are in Latin, and include Psalm settings (“Nisi Dominus” and “Dixit Dominus”), a Lamentation, and a mass for six voices. These pieces feature larger vocal forces: three to ten voices.

One of the hallmarks of Torrejón y Velasco’s style is his jaunty, dancelike rhythms, which permeate his villancicos and the Latin sacred works. Repeated rhythmic motifs give cohesion and momentum. Typically, the villancicos alternate between *estribillo* (refrain) and *coplas* (verses), which usually contrast in voicing and character. In all the works, textures alternate frequently between polyphony and declamatory homophony and harken back to the styles of early Baroque Italian composers such as Monteverdi.

Ensemble Elyma is a mixed ensemble founded in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1981 by Argentinian conductor Gabriel Garrido. The focus of the group is the music of Monteverdi and Baroque composers of the Americas, and their ensemble typically features four to sixteen singers and seven instrumentalists. Performance practice dictates that the music can be augmented with a variety of instruments, and Ensemble Elyma makes imaginative choices in this regard, utilizing guitars, organ, flutes, and brass instruments to support the vocal parts. The recording also features Coro de Niños de Córdoba, a now-defunct children’s ensemble based in Argentina. This group joins Ensemble Elyma on six of the nine pieces. The performances are riveting and contribute to a thoroughly enjoyable listening experience.

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Damien Geter's *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*

JORDAN M. SHOMPER

Damien Geter's *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow* is a contemporary social justice work that charts an emotional journey from fear to hope in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Structured in five powerful movements, the cantata leads listeners from anxiety and uncertainty in "Fear," through the inward reflection of "The Prayer" and "Breathe," to the renewed optimism of "The Resolve" and "Hope." Geter recontextualizes elements from historical works and combines them with contemporary secular poetry to create a piece that connects time periods and communities. Scored for SATB choir with *divisi*, chamber singers (SATB quartet), cello, and vocal soloist,¹ *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow* is a technically compelling work and a powerful expression of resilience and transformation that merits further study and performance.

Biography

Damien Geter is a multi-faceted artist. A successful opera singer, music director, conductor, artistic advisor, actor, author, teacher, and composer, he also owns his own publishing company. He has served on the music faculty at The Catlin Gabel School in Portland, Oregon, and co-authored the book *Music in Historical Context: An Examination of Western European Music Through a Socio-political Lens* with Merrin Guice.² Currently he works as music

director of Portland Opera. Geter's works have been performed by renowned orchestras, choirs, and other musical organizations throughout the United States. To date, his oeuvre includes over two dozen works in the following genres: chamber, large-scale instrumental, small-scale vocal, operatic, and choral.

Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow

The cantata was commissioned by Eugene Rogers and The Washington Chorus in 2020, in part to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the chorus and Rogers's first concert as director. The Chorus opened its 2020 fall season virtually by streaming a twenty-three-minute short film created by Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Bob Berg, which featured *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*, The Washington Chorus, soprano Aundi Marie Moore, and cellist Seth Parker Woods.³ Since its premiere, the cantata has been programmed by many notable organizations and university choirs.

Geter's work focuses on COVID-19, specifically the pandemic's disproportionate impact on Black Americans. The composer summarized his approach, saying, "It is a fact that the pandemic has touched the Black community in a much more aggressive manner than other communities. To highlight this atrocity, I chose to

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pay homage to the ancestors and Black Americans by incorporating spirituals in this cantata.”⁴ The text captures the emotional and psychological landscape of this historic moment while also providing a message of hope for the future.

Geter uses form, texture, harmony, and text-painting to portray the emotional character of each movement. Additionally, he recontextualizes historical elements—including Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*, BWV 12; the spirituals “I Want Jesus to Walk With Me” and “There is a Balm in Gilead”; and the Charles Albert Tindley hymn “We’ll Understand It Better By and By,” and combines them with poetry of Megan Levad, Aminata Sei, and Walt Whitman to bridge past and present struggles. Megan Levad is a poet, librettist, professor, and author of the books *Why We Live in the Dark Ages*⁵ and *What Have I to Say to You*.⁶ Aminata Sei is a writer and social justice advocate whose work explores themes of resilience, equity, and cultural identity. Walt Whitman was an American poet, essayist, and journalist, celebrated for creating a style of free verse that included “oratorical rhythms and chanted lists of American places, names, and objects.”⁷

The title of each movement represents a state of being or an action that occurs during times of difficulty. Fear is a natural response to hardship and is often manifested physically as well as emotionally. Prayer is a practice embraced across religions and is a way to seek comfort and guidance in the face of adversity. Breathing is an important component of many meditation practices and can mitigate anxiety by calming the body and mind. Resolve refers to a firm determination to act. Hope is the belief that despite difficulties, a positive outcome is possible. It can lead to a sense of peace and optimism. The journey from fear to hope is amplified in numerous ways throughout the work, specifically through harmony, tempo, and the organization of texts (Table 1).

I. Fear

The first movement is set in a large, two-part form with an introduction and a coda and features the sacred poetry of Salomo Franck and the secular poetry of Megan Levad (Table 2 on the next page).

Geter sets the first three of four lines in Franck’s text, drawing from the second movement of BWV 12. Levad’s text comprises eight stanzas in free verse. In the

Table 1. Overview of *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*

	I. Fear	II. The Prayer	III. Breathe	IV. The Resolve	V. Hope
Text Sources	Salomo Franck and Megan Levad	Traditional spiritual, “I Want Jesus to Walk With Me”	Aminata Sei	Traditional spiritual, “There is a Balm in Gilead,” and hymn, “By and By”	Walt Whitman
Key areas	Fm	Fm	D Dorian → C	Eb	Ab
Tempo Range	60 bpm	56-65 bpm	55-70 bpm	55-72 bpm	70-100 bpm
Overall message	Fear and Struggle	Yearning for Comfort	Perseverance	Healing	Transformation

first stanza, Levad references humanity's attempts to tame forces of nature: "the fire, the flood, the mountain, and its bear." She includes a directive to "look everywhere" for these potential threats, emphasizing the constant awareness required to navigate life's challenges. Levad suggests that instead of looking outward for dangers, people should look inward for calm and strength. Persistence is another central theme of her poem, and it is underscored by the lines "we are born to trouble, we are built for trouble." This suggests that although challenges are intrinsic to the human experience, people can overcome them. The theme of persistence emerges again in the lines "we seek, we seek, we seek and reach" from the third stanza. The repetition of the word "seek" suggests the necessity of continued action to navigate difficulties.

In the introduction, Geter employs parody technique, borrowing the texture of the second movement of BWV 12 from the beginning through m. 44. There are three differences between Bach's setting and the parody. First, the second viola part is omitted. Second, Bach's continuo line is set for solo cello. Third, the chamber singer parts are arrangements of Bach's other instrumental

parts, excluding the second viola (soprano – violin 1, alto – violin 2, tenor – viola 1, and bass – bassoon). The SATB choral parts are the same in both works. Geter also sets Franck's text in the chamber singer parts, even though they are derived from instrumental parts. The text of the chamber singer parts corresponds to the text in the choir in any given section throughout the introduction. The syllables of each word are separated with a rest, which creates a feeling of breathlessness (Figure 1 on the next page).

Bach's setting features a four-bar *lamento basso* pattern that appears twelve times. Geter sets the figure eleven times in the introduction, cadencing after the eleventh iteration. The *lamento basso* is featured in each of the five movements of the cantata, creating thematic unity, although it is often transformed (transposed, inverted, in retrograde, etc.).

The A section opens with a two-measure passage for solo cello, while the voices whisper "fear," a textual addition, corresponding with the title of the movement. There are a variety of textures in the A section, including contrapuntally enlivened homophony, paired

Table 2. Musical overview of "Fear"

	Intro	A	B	A'	B'	Coda
Measures	1-45	46-62	63-73	74-85	86-94	95-97
Stanzas	Franck text	Levad 1-2, "Fear"	Levad 3-4	Levad 5-6	Levad 7-8 (lines 1-2)	Levad 8 (lines 3-4)
Forces	SATB choir, chamber singers, cello	SATB choir (<i>divisi</i>), cello				
Meter	3/2	2/2	2/2, 3/4	2/2, 4/4, 6/4	2/2, 4/4	4/4
Tempo	Lento, H=60			Sostenuto, Q=60, H=60		Q=60

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voicings, and canonic writing. The frequent change of texture contributes to a sense of anxiety throughout the movement.

Text-painting is another important compositional approach that is employed to great effect in this movement. Where the text references floods and mountains, the bass is juxtaposed in its low range and the soprano in its upper range, painting the images referenced in the text. The words “we seek and reach” are set in sequential, cascading long notes, representing the persistence necessary to reach the desired outcome. Consecutive quarter-note triplets convey the dragging nature of the

“long day.”

Geter draws particular attention to two lines of text. At “the closest breath,” the composer indicates a *ritardando*, giving special attention to its reference to the transmission of COVID-19. In the last few measures of the movement, he highlights the text “and try and dream,” set in the altos alone, and ends the movement with a C major chord, foreshadowing the hope later in the work.

II. The Prayer

“The Prayer” is scored for SSAATTBB choir, soloist, and cello and is set in theme and variations form with

Lento ♩ = 60

The musical score is for Movement 1, "Fear," measures 1-5. It is in 3/4 time, marked Lento (♩ = 60). The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The score is divided into two main sections: Chamber Singers and Chorus. The Chamber Singers section includes Soprano Solo, Alto Solo, Tenor Solo, and Bass Solo. The Chorus section includes Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. A Cello part (Vlc.) is also present. The lyrics are in German: "Wei - nen, Kla - gen, Sor - gen, Za - gen,". The dynamics are marked *mp* (mezzo-piano) for the Chamber Singers and *mf* (mezzo-forte) for the Chorus and Cello. The tempo is Lento, 60 beats per minute.

Figure 1. Damien Geter, *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*, Movement 1, “Fear,” mm. 1–5.

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four sections (Table 3).

The second movement of *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow* features the tune and the text of the spiritual “I Want Jesus to Walk With Me.” In the text, the speaker expresses a desire for Jesus’s presence throughout their life, which they describe as a “pilgrim journey.” The speaker asks for Jesus during moments of profound hardship, when their emotional burden becomes overwhelming, with the words, “In my trials, Lord, walk with me.” In the context of the cantata, the inclusion of this spiritual represents the profound struggles people faced during 2020, particularly early in the pandemic when death tolls and hospitalizations were rapidly rising and governmental lockdowns were occurring. Geter explains: “This spiritual was on my heart at the time.... I kept singing it...before I had even been asked to write the piece.”⁸

Section A begins with the soloist (Geter calls this “the voice of hope”⁹) singing the melody with embellishments. The choral parts have short, improvisatory phrases with fragmented or reordered text. By setting the music in this way, Geter emulates the church music of his youth while also intensifying the feeling of yearning.¹⁰

In Section C, the tenors and basses sing an ostinato pattern, repeating the phrase, “Walk with me.” The tenor and bass 1 parts interject “Please walk with me”; the bass 2 part remains consistent throughout. The melodic line moves to the soprano 1 part, while the so-

prano 2 and alto parts harmonize homophonically. The melodic phrases are separated with rests, evoking a feeling of breathlessness reminiscent of the first movement.

The movement features varied textures, including non-imitative polyphony, duets, and trios in Sections A and B, homophonic and contrapuntal textures in Section C, and quarter-note ostinatos that are contrasted with sustained whole notes in Section D. Unlike the first movement, in which frequent textural shifts evoke anxiety, the changes in this movement express a deep yearning and desire for comfort and represent numerous prayers happening simultaneously, reflecting the central theme of “The Prayer.”

III. Breathe

“Breathe” is scored for SSAATTBB choir and cello, and the movement is set in modified rondo form with four main sections (Table 4 on the next page).

It features the text of Aminata Sei’s poem of the same name. The poem comprises four stanzas and is set in free verse. Although some stanzas have slant rhymes (words that have similar—but not identical—sounds), Sei shares, “I can’t really say [I] took into account rhyme or any conventional use of literary devices. I just wrote then what sounded good to me.”¹¹ The final line in each stanza concludes with the word “breathe,” creating a sense of thematic unity and structural symmetry.

The text begins with a feeling of simplicity for the text “no complex expectations.” Here, the directive is

Table 3. Musical overview of “The Prayer”

	A (Theme)	B (Variation 1)	C (Variation 2)	D (Variation 3)
Measures	1-15	16-32	33-52	53-63
Stanza	1	2	1	1 fragmented
Meter	4/4	4/4, 2/4	3/4	4/4, 3/4
Tempo	Q=65		Pesante, Q=56	

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"Just breathe." The tone changes in the second stanza as "disruptions" make even the natural act of breathing difficult: "Now we don't know how to breathe." The third stanza reflects a loss of confidence and hope with the words, "shaken" and "stirred"; however, Sei encourages the reader: "We must continue to breathe." The final stanza urges the reader to turn inward to regain a sense of peace. The final line recalls the end of the first stanza, "Learn again to just breathe." Sei uses "breathe" in a literal way but also as a metaphor for finding balance and strength during difficult times.

Musically, Geter begins this movement with a four-measure passage for solo cello followed by staggered vocal entrances, with multiple repetitions of "Just breathe." The repeated figures evoke calming self-talk. The melody enters but is obscured by the simultaneous polyphony. At the climax of the B section, Geter repeats the text, "don't know how to breathe," setting it homophonically as duplets in compound meter, and culminates the phrase with a cluster chord, underscoring the anxiety expressed in the text (Figure 2 on the next page).

Geter uses various compositional techniques throughout the movement to illustrate the text. In the A sections, he employs two extended techniques in the cello part: *tonlos* and harmonics, *sul D*. *Tonlos*, described

by Geter in the score, is playing, "On the bridge, creating a breathy, non-pitched effect," representing the struggle for breath one might experience when stricken with COVID-19. Harmonics, set in a steady, repeated pattern, evoke the sound of a hospital monitor.

Most of the movement is set in the Dorian mode, and Geter frequently employs dissonance as well as high vocal registers to create a feeling of anxiety. The vocal lines in various combinations clash at the interval of a second (sometimes displaced by an octave). The soprano 1 part remains in a high register, often around D5–F5. Geter further illustrates the text with moments of word painting, such as "shaken" and "stirred," which he sets with rapid sixteenth-note triplets.

In Section D, the key changes to C major, reflecting the more hopeful text of the final stanza. Here, Geter uses more traditional triadic harmonies and employs a more conventional chord progression, suggesting stability. The concluding A' section features long, melismatic soprano lines that oscillate between C and D and create a feeling of suspension. Although this final section is in the key of C, the movement ends with a sustained G pitch in the altos and the cello, again employing *tonlos*. By ending the movement this way, the composer captures both glimpses of hope and the lingering uncertainty that characterize this middle movement.

Table 4. Musical overview of "Breathe"

	A	B	A'	C	D	A''
Measures	1-23	24-35	36-43	44-60	61-77	78-94
Stanza	1	2	1 (line 4)	3 & 2 (line 4)	4	1 (line 4)
Key	D Dorian				C major	
Meter	2/4	6/8	2/4	2/4, 4/4, 4/8, 2/8	4/4, 2/4	3/4, 4/4
Tempo	Q=55	DQ=70	Q=55	Q=70	Q=62	

IV. The Resolve

Like the second movement, “The Resolve” is scored for SATB choir with *divisi*, chamber singers, soloist, and cello. The movement features an introduction and a coda, with the majority of the movement made up of the melodies from “There is a Balm in Gilead.” The spiritual is set in the traditional verse-refrain form, beginning with the refrain, with a repeat of the refrain after the second verse. Geter sets the refrain of “By and By” in the transitional section before the coda (Table 5 on the next page).

The text of “There is a Balm in Gilead” has numerous references to healing. This healing is not just for

physical wounds but also for deeper emotional and spiritual pain. The overall message is that, despite struggle and hardship, healing can be found in the holy spirit and the support of others. Geter notes, “I can’t think of any other spiritual that...talks about the trajectory of going from fear and despair to hope.... There’s something that’s going to help soothe your soul.”¹²

Tindley’s hymn text includes four verses, each with the same refrain. Only the refrain text and tune are used in this work. Geter changes Tindley’s second line from “All the saints of God are gathered home” to “All of us are here together as one,” which allows the message in the hymn to be universal. In “By and By,” the

The musical score for Movement 3, "Breathe," mm. 31-35, is written for SATB choir with *divisi*, chamber singers, soloist, and cello. The score is in 8/4 time and features the refrain "Don't know how to breathe." repeated in various parts. The lyrics are: "cer - tain - ty e - merge we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe. don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe. Now we don't know how to breathe. We don't know how to breathe. tain - ty Now we don't know how to breathe. We don't know how to breathe. merge... we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe. cer - tain - ty, we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe. Now we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe. merge Now we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe. Vlc. merge Now we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe."

Figure 2. Damien Geter, *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*, Movement 3, “Breathe,” mm. 31–35.

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speaker looks forward to a future time of unity and clarity. In the context of this work, the line “when the morning comes” symbolizes optimism and new beginnings. Geter comments that the text in “By and By” does not shy away from “the fact that we went through [the events of 2020], but also...[recognizes] that we did get through this and understand the reasons why this happened later.”¹³

In this movement, Geter allows the spiritual and hymn to speak for themselves, presenting each separately before returning to the peace of “There is a Balm in Gilead” in the coda. While he incorporates modern harmonic language, the composer remains faithful to the mode, melody, phrase lengths, rhythm, and texts of the source materials. One exception to the authentic treatment is his inclusion of cello in a traditionally unaccompanied genre. The cello plays continuously throughout the refrains and verses, often with

legato eighth-note passages, providing harmonic support. The cello writing in this movement is notably the most lyrical in the cantata so far, marking a significant shift toward a more hopeful tone.

In the first refrain, the altos sing the melody, while the other choral parts harmonize with the full text or text fragments in contrapuntally enlivened homophony. For the second refrain, the soloist joins the altos on the melody and has a sixteenth-note embellishment on the word “balm.”¹⁴ The third refrain is closely related to the first two but has more variation. The fourth refrain is different from the first three in several ways: the melody returns to the soloist while the chamber singers replace the choir and harmonize polyphonically at a *mezzo piano*; the harmonization is more dissonant for the chamber singers, with reverse pedal tones in the soprano line. In addition, the *lamento basso* returns in the tenor line. Geter also acknowledges the structure

Table 5. Musical overview of “The Resolve”

	Intro	A	B	A'	B'	A''	A'''	C	C'	Coda
Source Materials		There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain	There is a Balm in Gilead Verse 1	There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain	There is a Balm in Gilead Verse 2	There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain	There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain	By and By Refrain		There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain fragment
Measures	1-4	5-12	13-20	5-12 repeat	13-20 repeat	21-28	29-35	36-51	36-55	56-62
Forces	SATB choir, cello		SATB choir, solo, cello				Chamber singers, cello	SATB choir, cello	SATB choir, CS, cello	SATB choir, CS (SA), cello
Meter	3/4	4/4						2/2	2/2, 4/4	4/4
Tempo	Q=72						Q=65	Joyously, with light swing; No swing (same tempo)		Q=55

of the traditional spiritual in the verses by setting two lines of text over four measures, while incorporating a respectful treatment of the melody with only one embellishment on the word, “Spirit” (“knowledge” in the repeat). The choir sings on “Oo” and then finishes with the latter portion of text for each line, often the final word, amplifying the main part of the message. In the final lines of the first two verses, all vocal parts have the full text in a predominantly homophonic texture, suggesting unity.

“By and By” is marked “Joyously, with light swing.” Geter sets the tone for this section with syncopated eighth-note figures in the cello. He assigns the melody to the soprano and bass choral voices and indicates that the soloist should improvise while the altos and tenors sing accompaniment material, often repeating fragments of the text (Figure 3).

At the first ending, the chamber singers interject, “And by and by, oh,” Geter’s addition to the text. In the repeat of this section, the chamber singers have high, *forte* interjections, evoking excitement. The chamber singers are often offset from the choral parts in an improvisatory style. Geter notes that he consciously

included the spontaneous-sounding figures: “This is a song that we sang at church as a kid.... I remember all the inflections that people used to throw in there and everything, [and] some of them are in the piece.”¹⁵

The movement ends peacefully. The soloist sings the first half of the first phrase of “There is a Balm in Gilead,” sustaining the final note for three measures. The phrase fragments further in the soprano and alto chamber voices, repeating the text and motive, “There is a balm.” The sustained notes and gentle repetition suggest that the balm remains within reach but is not yet fully realized. This conclusion reinforces the cantata’s broader themes of resilience and the journey toward hope.

V. Hope

After four movements of tension and reflection, *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow* comes to its final moments in the aptly titled movement, “Hope.” Like movements two and four, “Hope” is scored for SATB choir with *divisi*, soloist, and cello. It has an ABA’ form with an introduction and coda (Table 6 on the next page).

The musical score for Figure 3 shows measures 36-38 of Movement 4, "The Resolve," from *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*. The score is for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Bass (B), and Cello (Vlc.). The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo/mood marking is *mf* (2nd time *f*). The lyrics are: "By and by, oh, when the morn-ing comes." The Soprano and Bass parts have a melody, while the Alto and Tenor parts have accompaniment. The Cello part has a syncopated eighth-note figure.

Figure 3. Damien Geter, *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*, Movement 4, “The Resolve,” mm. 36–38.

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This movement features the poem "Continuities" by Walt Whitman.¹⁶ Whitman uses natural imagery, including aging bodies, dimming light, the sun's rise and fall, and the return of spring. This imagery helps to convey the theme of renewal and transformation that permeates this movement.

In this poem, the speaker reflects on the enduring nature of life, emphasizing that "nothing is ever really lost, or can be lost." This assertion highlights the belief in continual existence, even when appearances change or circumstances shift. Whitman describes time, space, and "the fields of Nature" as "ample," meaning that each is vast and offers the possibility of transformation and regeneration. The references to the aging body, "sluggish, aged, cold," and the dimming "light in the eye" speak about the natural progression of life, including Whitman's belief that these life forms will "duly flame again." This cyclical view of life is further affirmed in the imagery of the rising sun and the return of spring, bringing "grass and flowers and summer fruits and corn." In the context of this work, the poem suggests that although COVID-19 caused significant loss, renewal will follow and transformation is inevitable.

The first two lines of the poem are presented in the introduction, sung by the sopranos and altos in homophony. Here, the cello line evokes a dream-like quality, oscillating between an A^b and B^b in a continuous

sixteenth-note figure. The tenors are introduced high in their range in measure three, creating a light texture with the three upper voices for the hopeful text. The basses enter in the A section.

As the tempo quickens to 100 bpm in Section A, Geter revisits the opening lines of the poem, reinforcing the main message that "nothing is ever really lost." The melody is in the solo voice and the choral parts accompany it in lively, syncopated rhythms, often in eighth-note figures. The compositional approach is similar to that in the other movements. Text fragments are set in the lower choral voices, which later join the soloist to amplify the main message of the text. In this movement, the cello is treated as one of the choral voices, setting it largely in the same rhythm, which contributes to a feeling of unity. The harmonic language in this section predominantly features major chords, which sound particularly hopeful in contrast to the dissonant and extended chords used throughout much of the rest of the work.

In Section B, Geter musically highlights the stark imagery in lines six through eight of the poem. He uses a melodic major seventh interval in the soprano line, harmonized with dissonant chords to paint the harsh reality of the aging body and the dimming of life's light. Beneath this, the cello part stirs uneasily with tumultuous sixteenth notes, in stark contrast to its earlier dream-like oscillations. The composer recalls the

Table 6. Musical overview of "Hope"

	Intro	A	B	A'	Coda
Measures	1-6	7-26	27-47	48-56	57-61
Lines of Text	1-2	1-5	6-8	1, 9-10, "Hope"	1
Meter	4/4		4/4, 3/4	4/4	
Tempo	Tranquillo Q=75	Hopeful Q=100	Slightly slower Q=75, Q=100, Q=75	Q=75	Q=70

lamento basso in the bass part on the lines, “the embers left from earlier fires.” The final phrase of Section B builds to *fortissimo* at the word “rises” on a powerful tonic chord that spans four octaves, which affirms an optimistic future. The ascending melodic line and the repeated word, “continual,” create a sense of inevitability, and strongly communicate hope and renewal.

In Section A', Geter reprises the opening melodic figure, now with the text, “To frozen clods ever the spring's invisible law returns,” brilliantly creating a musical picture of the textual idea of renewal. This metaphor suggests that just as the barren earth of winter inevitably gives way to fertile soil in spring, so life's moments of strife transform into times of renewal. This theme is further emphasized by bringing back the soloist to deliver the cantata's central message: “Nothing is ever really lost.”

The coda brings the movement to a climactic moment, punctuated by the addition of the title word, “Hope!” on a strong tonic chord. Following this, the final phrase features the choir humming a tonic chord while the soloist gently reiterates for the last time, “Nothing is ever really lost.” The score indicates *diminuendo al niente* in all parts, combined with the instruction for the cello to “Continue as if moving further into the distance.” This creates a fading effect that lingers beyond the choir's release. The optional extension of the cello's ostinato contributes to the effect, with each repetition growing quieter. The cello's ostinato symbolizes the perpetual flow of life, time, and hope. These final measures encapsulate Geter's masterful portrayal of continuity and transformation. As the music gradually fades, it conveys that although individuals experience physical death, the cycle of life endures beyond what is immediately visible or perceptible.

Conclusion

Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow is a powerful musical response to the COVID-19 pandemic that charts a journey from fear to hope. The first movement, “Fear,” portrays the physical and emotional manifestations of anxiety. “The Prayer” and “Breathe,” the second and third movements, focus on meditative practices intended to calm the body and mind, while the fourth movement, “The Resolve,” and the final movement, “Hope,”

emphasize resilience and the belief in a brighter future despite present struggles. The work's contrasting textures, text-painting, and harmonic choices amplify these themes. It is a composition with universal relevance that merits attention not only for its artistic and technical excellence but also for the profound message it conveys. 

Editor's note: Composer headshot on page 68 by Rachel Hadiashar

NOTES

- ¹ The voice part of the soloist is not specified in the score; however, the range is well suited for a soprano or tenor.
- ² Merrin Guice and Damien Geter, *Music in Historical Context: An Examination of Western European Music Through a Sociopolitical Lens* (Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2014).
- ³ The film was produced by The Washington Chorus with executive producers Eugene Rodgers and Stephen Beaudoin. “Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow,” The Washington Chorus, <https://thewashingtonchorus.org/cantata-for-a-more-hopeful-tomorrow>.
- ⁴ “A Note from Composer Damien Geter,” <https://thewashingtonchorus.org/cantata-for-a-more-hopeful-tomorrow>.
- ⁵ Megan Leivad, *Why We Live in the Dark Ages* (Tavern Books, 2014).
- ⁶ Megan Leivad, *What Have I to Say to You* (Tavern Books, 2018).
- ⁷ Gay Wilson Allen and Alexander Norman Joffares, “Walt Whitman,” Encyclopedia Britannica Online, Last updated March 2024, www.britannica.com/biography/Walt-Whitman.
- ⁸ Damien Geter, Zoom interview with author, April 2024.
- ⁹ Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹⁰ Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹¹ Aminata Sei, e-mail correspondence with author, 2024.
- ¹² Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹³ Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹⁴ The score does not specifically indicate that the soloist should join the alto line (which has the melody). However, the soloist in the premiere recording did so, and in correspondence with the author, Geter shared that this decision is up to the conductor.
- ¹⁵ Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹⁶ Walt Whitman, “Continuities,” *New York Herald* (March 20, 1888).

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