

Book Reviews

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Choral Conducting: A Life of Building
Dale Warland with Brian Newhouse
E. C. Schirmer, 2026

Dale Warland has held a well-deserved place of honor and respect in the choral profession for decades. As a highly esteemed conductor and composer, he set exemplary standards of music making with the Dale Warland Singers, commissioning 270 works; since disbanding the group in 2004, he has continued to share his expertise in a variety of ways. Now in his nineties, he remains articulate and passionate about choral music.

Choral Conducting: A Life of Building compiles Warland's most important ideas into a succinct volume that is filled with practical information for conductors at all levels. It gives insights into the thinking and practice of this remarkable musician by focusing on three areas: the conductor, the choir, and the repertoire. No matter what age or experience level of musician we work with, those areas are basic to our field. As conductors, we must be musical leaders, in command of musicianship, of conducting technique, of pedagogy, and interpretation.

Choirs of all ages and stages share similarities. In part two of the book, Warland speaks about the leadership team, auditions, and influences on tone. Again, regardless of age or stage, all choirs' tone is affected by things like space, unified pronunciation, dynamics, vitality, and balance. In addition, each of us must choose appropriate repertoire to suit the ensembles we lead. Many of the ideas about programming can be translated into non-professional choir contexts. This section includes quotations from noted contemporary conductors, as well as a series of statements drawn from Carole Glenn's publication, *In Quest of Answers* (Hinshaw, 1991). The need to account for conductors' and singers' interests as well as audiences' is a theme throughout.

The section on auditions deserves special mention. Warland's process is tailored to a professional choir, and parts of it could certainly be used for advanced groups. While it might not translate exactly to everyone's situation, the lesson learned here is the attention to detail. It was Warland's ears and meticulous listening that resulted in the remarkable sound consistently produced by his professional ensemble. Warland's championing of commissions as outlined in chapter ten remains one of his most outstanding contributions to the field. His recommendations on this topic are practical and helpful.

Two things especially stand out: Warland's insistence on the importance of hearing as the foundational

skill for conductors, and the centrality of score study as a basis for rehearsal. He mentions that fine gestures never substitute for good ears; it is effective hearing that enables the conductor to build the choral instrument. Writing bluntly, he says, "Know your stuff." That applies to the music as well as the other responsibilities we have. His process for score marking is detailed and revealing. In addition to musical issues, the book also addresses things like gesture, rehearsal, and interpretation.

Choral Conducting is written in a conversational style. With the help of Brian Newhouse, a former member of the Dale Warland Singers, Warland has produced a readable volume that is a wealth of information, insights, and wisdom. Many of us have memories of workshops and masterclasses with Dr. Warland and appreciated his clear direction, kindness to people, and encouraging manner. Those same characteristics come through in the publication. Even the "Epilogue" (Special Topics) with its relatively short observations on a variety of things is profoundly wise. I am deeply thankful that Dale Warland and Brian Newhouse chose to collaborate on this project.

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Choral Concepts: Conducting Technique and Choral Methods (2nd ed.)
Donald Neuen, ed. Rebecca Lord
GIA Publications, 2025
300 pages

Donald Neuen is among the most influential American choral conductors of the past several decades and is known for his years leading the choral programs at the Eastman School of Music, at UCLA, and through the widely televised "Hour of Power" broadcasts. His legacy has been sustained by conductors he mentored, singers who sang under him, and the numerous honor choirs, festivals, and workshops he has led. His reach was broadened with the 2002 publication of his book, *Choral Concepts*.

In 2025, GIA published a second edition with an expanded title: *Choral Concepts: Conducting Technique and Choral Methods*. While much of the text, including the chapter numbers and chapter titles, remains unchanged from 2002, wording has been updated and ideas expanded throughout. The most notable additions can be found in chapters ten and eleven. Chapter ten, which in the first edition was a primer on conducting Handel's *Messiah*, is now doubled in length, covering conducting major choral-orchestral works in general. Chapter eleven, "Artistic Musical Conducting," has also been expanded, starting with the basics of posture and baton technique followed by conducting in different styles, mixed meter, and recitative conducting, among other topics.

In chapter one, "Artistic Excellence," Neuen presents his philosophy, which is centered on an uncompromising pursuit of excellence. He urges conductors to "[d]edicate yourself 100 percent to your current job… Remember, the day we stop getting better is the day we start getting worse" (pp. 3–4). Chapter two introduces pedagogical techniques to help achieve excellent singing, including a five-week plan for teaching breath support followed by a four-step method for applying breath support to singing tone.

In chapter three, "Developing a Great Singing Sound," Neuen addresses varying degrees of vibrato for different styles with the goal of a "natural" choral sound. He states that conductors must generate energy from their singers. Neuen refers to energy in the broadest sense. Instead of mere energy of the singing voice, he emphasizes that the entire physical presence (voice, facial expression, posture, and movement) of each singer must exude energy, and it is the conductor's job to elicit this energy from singers without inhibition. Energy must also be coupled with an absolute insistence on beauty of sound. "When we hear an unacceptable sound," he writes, "we must stop *immediately* and correct it… If you are capable of accepting a negative sound, even for an instant, you will eventually come to hear it as the norm" (p. 35). As with the previous chapter, philosophical viewpoints are followed up with pedagogical applications. Neuen devotes several pages to techniques for developing resonance and establishing head tone placement.



More technical issues are addressed in chapter four, with a focus on individual voice parts, including balance between sections. The next chapter, which is devoted to warm-ups, includes numerous examples of vocalises to achieve specific results. Neuen again emphasizes energy that projects beyond the voice into the entire presence of the singer. Several of the warm-ups contain arrows marked over weak subdivisions of the beat, illustrating what Neuen calls "forward motion phrasing," which is described in the next chapter.

Echoing the approach of Robert Shaw, Neuen writes in chapter six, "We use rhythmic interest, forward motion, and phrasing to create interest in music… rhythmic interest means a *slight* emphasis on offbeats, or those beats that are normally de-emphasized" (pp. 87–88). Neuen argues that the energy between the beats is the impetus that moves the music forward. Similar to the markings he introduced in the previous chapter on warm-ups, he details his own brand of score marking (applied here to excerpts from repertoire) using hooked arrows above and below groups of notes, usually beginning on weak beats, to show how a phrase or semi-phrase should propel forward. Neuen argues that "without rhythmic interest, forward motion, and phrasing, there is no *music*, only the *mechanical mathematics* of accurate pitches and rhythms" (p. 96). In chapter seven, "English Diction," the principles of the previous chapter are adapted to text and syllabic stress. He writes, "No consecutive notes, syllables, or words should receive equal emphasis!" (p. 150)

Chapter eight, "Score Preparation and Analysis," incorporates the approach of Julius Herford, with whom Neuen had a long association. "Awake the Harp" from Haydn's *Creation* serves as a model. He presents a schematic of the work and a system of score marking that includes an annotated score of the entire movement. Chapter nine covers rehearsal technique, seating arrangements, long-range planning, and rehearsing large works with orchestra and soloists. He includes both a sample six-week rehearsal schedule as well as a sample schedule of a single full orchestra, choir, and soloist rehearsal of *Creation*, both scheduled down to the minute. Like the schematic and score marking examples in chapter eight, these rehearsal plans serve as excellent models that conductors can adapt to nearly any situation. Chapter twelve presents a final summation of the "Role of the Conductor."

The book includes supplementary videos, which can be purchased separately. While the videos reinforce the concepts Neuen presents in the book and are particularly helpful in demonstrating the conducting techniques in chapter eleven, they are especially valuable for those who have not had the opportunity to witness Neuen's work. His charisma and vitality on the podium come through in the videos. As excellent as the book is, the videos best capture Neuen's insistence on "energy" and the relentless pursuit of excellence.

Donald Neuen represents a lineage of choral luminaries from the recent past. *Choral Concepts* can be seen as a text representing an entire school of choral conducting in which the ideas of Shaw, Herford, Alfred Mann, and others come through in Neuen's distinctive voice. As Allen Hightower of the University of North Texas writes on the back cover, "In the field of choral conducting and pedagogy, there is no other book to rival the depth and breadth of Donald Neuen's *Choral Concepts*."

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Becoming a Choral Music Teacher: A Field Experience Workbook (2nd ed.)
Patrice Madura Ward-Steinman
Routledge, 2018

Becoming a Choral Music Teacher: A Field Experience Workbook is a comprehensive manual for pre-service choral conductors to be successful as secondary choral educators. The main objectives are to provide practical and actionable tasks to use in choral methods courses as well as to serve as a resource that can be used during the first years of in-service teaching. Dr. Ward-Steinman starts with theoretical and philosophical implications of teaching vocal music. The book then includes advice for new teachers, warm-up plans, rehearsal outlines, and repertoire lists. There are also "brainteaser" activities to help put the theory into practice. These in-

clude creating a ten-minute warm-up plan, auditioning middle school singers, creating a rubric for an assessment, and attending a vocal jazz ensemble.

This is the second edition of the original workbook from 2009 and includes updated NAfME standards and licensing guidelines along with updated research and tools for including and empowering special education learners and LGBTQ+ members. This text further introduces new ideas for classroom management as well as insights for incorporating kinesthetic and aural learning domains.

The updated workbook is particularly relevant since there is an emphasis on including traditional choral composers as well as underrepresented composers of varying styles. One section of note is "Directing Vocal Jazz and Other Non-Traditional Choral Ensembles," which includes basic jazz theory exercises, examples of well-respected jazz ensembles and composers, and performance practice. Another section discusses the updated National Core Arts standards and provides ways to assess student achievement in middle and high school choral settings. Additional benefits include information on passing music education certification exams and tools for setting the new director up for success.

While it is impossible for one book to cover everything a pre-service choral director needs to know to be successful, this textbook provides a foundation for continued learning after graduation. Additionally, undergraduates tend to enjoy constructivist tasks of learning by doing instead of spending a lot of time on theory and pedagogy. This workbook offers a balance of the practical with the theoretical and is a useful resource to encourage and foster the next generation of choral directors.

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Being a Singer: The Art, Craft, and Science
Linda Balliro
Chicago Review Press, 2020
208 pages

It is more difficult to learn the art and processes of singing from a book than from vocal study, yet that is often what must be the case for certain people. I can think of the person in the small rural high school with a single K–12 music teacher who barely has enough time for all their preps or who may have little vocal training. Or take that band teacher who is asked to teach a choir because the district has been reduced to having one music teacher for the coming year. While there is no substitute for studying with a voice professional, this book could help fill that void.

Linda Balliro, educated in voice at the New England Conservatory and teaching at the Berklee College of Music, provides a pragmatic yet resourceful tool for self-study and reference in *Being a Singer*. Balliro has classical training yet also works with students and singers in CCM (contemporary commercial music) and musical theatre realms. The book demystifies singing terminology and comes from that philosophy first.

The book is divided into two main sections ("How Your Singing Functions" and "How to Develop Mastery"), each with five chapters. Section one contains the following chapters: "Mobilize Your Voice, Mind, and Body"; "Discover What Needs Training"; "Connect the Lower and Upper Ranges"; "Extend the Connection"; and "What About Breathing?" The chapters in section two are: "Refine Resonance"; "What About Power?"; "Broaden Perspective"; "Expression and Interpretation"; and "Expand Flexibility." The structure of the book follows a natural progression, and exercises are plentiful within each chapter. There are reflections and/or conversations with artists and teachers at the end of each chapter that offer useful insight; for example, there is a conversation with Dr. Ingo Titze, internationally recognized voice pedagogue, that is accessible and not bogged down with lofty terminology. These conversations provide useful guidance and motivation throughout the process.

The voice approach is from the neutral vowel uh [^], more common in commercial styles, rather than



the classical ee, oo, or ah [i, u, a], also in line with what may be more comfortable for the novice singer. The wide range of styles also helps beginners to have a neutral vocabulary. Some of the exercises may seem challenging at times, but all are presented with a logical progression in mind.

Being a Singer is also suitable for the classical pedagogue or choral conductor who wants more guidance in pop and musical theatre styles and their terminology. Students may also appreciate the author's recalling of experiences from her own life. In short, this book is well worth the small investment, and I have already mapped out several ideas and exercises to use in the studio and with ensembles during the coming season.

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Teaching Music Each Day Inspired
Advice, Ideas, Encouragement, and Motivation for Music Teachers
Peter Boonshaft
GIA Publications 2026
Softcover, 220 pages

As conductors and music educators, we occasionally need a dose of motivation, sage advice, and opportunities for reflection. *Teaching Music Each Day Inspired* is a collection of short reflections from Dr. Peter Boonshaft that provides inspiration, advice, and a wealth of helpful, practical classroom strategies based on decades of experience in the field of music education. In the forward, Dr. Anthony Maiello writes that Boonshaft's book "is full of great inspirational and informative lessons. It is a treasure chest representing his many years of outstanding teaching experience, knowledge, and lessons well learned."

I personally found each of the short reflections to be doses of motivation and a musical "Vitamin C," offering wisdom phrases and poetry that related to the life of a musician/educator. One entry titled "A Marvelous Feast" (pg. 185) highlighted our need to explain what we teach, why what we teach is important, and how we should promote the benefits and rewards to all who are connected to our teaching, be it students, parents, administrators, or members of our community. My daily encouragement included the entry, "Winnie-the-Pooh Knew!" (pp. 167–168): "Winnie-the-Pooh state[d] so profoundly, 'How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.'" It reminded me how fortunate I was to be able to spend my career doing something so wonderful as making music with children. It also reminded me of why it is so difficult saying goodbye to a senior class, a group of fifth graders who move on to middle school, or when we decide it is time to retire.

Teaching Music Each Day Inspired offered numerous opportunities for personal reflection. For example, I appreciated Boonshaft's "mantra" in the entry titled "Beauty" (pp. 107–108): "I believe that every day, every child needs to hear something beautiful." We can expand on that thought to include visual art and say, "I believe that every day, every child needs to hear and/or see something beautiful." The entry "Biography" (pp. 118–119) contained a short entry with a profound quote: "For us as teachers, our biography, in great measure, will be written by those we teach." As choral educators, we have invested our minds, hearts, and souls into an artistic endeavor that ignites the lives of many of our students. It is our passion and what drives excellence for our students and ourselves. *Keep Teaching Music Each Day Inspired* close—by your choir room desk, music office, or nightstand for a quick dose encouragement and motivation to continue each day inspired.

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