



Research Report

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2026 ACDA International Symposium on Research in Choral Singing: Conference Report

by Saleel Adarkar Menon

The Fifth ACDA International Symposium on Research in Choral Singing was held April 30–May 1, 2026, at the Big Ten Conference Center in Rosemont, Illinois. The symposium was hosted by The Pennsylvania State University (USA) in conjunction with De Montfort University (England) and Complutense University of Madrid (Spain). Participants gathered in person and remotely to present and discuss research related to choral singing, choral music education, conducting, vocal pedagogy, community engagement, and singer well-being. As in previous symposia, the primary goals were to share current scholarship, encourage dialogue among researchers and practitioners, and identify questions and directions for future inquiry within the field of choral singing research.

The symposium opened with welcoming remarks from conference leadership and the ACDA Research and Publications Committee, followed by a presentation from James Higgs, recipient of the 2024 Julius Herford Dissertation Prize. In his presentation, “Terza Messa by Marianna Martines: Significance, Style, and Critical Edition” (also the name of his dissertation¹), Higgs examined the historical significance and musical

characteristics of Martines’s sacred choral work while discussing the process of preparing a critical edition for contemporary scholarship and performance. Additionally, Loneka Wilkinson Battiste, from the University of Houston, delivered the symposium keynote address on Black Music Aesthetics. Her presentation examined how African-derived musical values and practices inform approaches to music teaching, learning, and performance. The keynote provided one of several starting points for discussions of repertoire, culture, and pedagogy that continued across the symposium program.

The symposium featured qualitative, quantitative, historical, philosophical, ethnographic, and mixed-methods research addressing educational, community, professional, religious, and health-related contexts. Notably, the symposium continued to offer a hybrid format, which allowed participants to attend either in person or remotely. Remote attendees were able to engage with presentations and discussions in real time through videoconferencing and chat-based interaction, expanding access to scholars who may not have otherwise been able to participate.

Symposium Events and Presentations

The two-day symposium featured a combination of twelve long-paper sessions, twenty-one short-paper sessions, twenty poster presentations, and structured opportunities for formal and informal discussion. Session topics ranged from community engagement and identity formation to vocal pedagogy, assessment, repertoire, conducting, health, technology, and teacher preparation. Several sessions were organized around related topics, creating opportunities for presenters and attendees to engage in sustained conversations about shared areas of interest.

Poster presentations expanded these conversations while introducing additional perspectives and contexts. For a complete list of presentations and poster sessions with titles and full abstracts, see the link in the notes.² The symposium also included a performance by the Progressive Baptist Church Choir of Chicago under the direction of Walter Owens Jr. This performance served to connect a specific choral community's practice of gospel music—a tradition represented in the conference program—with spoken presentations. Beyond formal sessions, attendees engaged in shared meals, social gatherings, and informal discussions, creating opportunities for networking and collaboration among established scholars, graduate students, and early-career researchers. Because the symposium employed a single-track format, participants shared a common set of presentations and discussions throughout the event.

Although the presentations addressed a wide range of topics, several recurring areas of inquiry emerged across sessions, posters, and discussion periods. Rather than summarizing individual presentations in sequence, the following sections highlight representative studies that illustrate common questions and concerns explored by symposium participants.

Community, Belonging, and Choral Participation

Many presenters brought forward questions of community, belonging, and participation across a variety of populations and musical settings. Researchers examined how singers experience connection within choral

spaces, and how choirs function as sites for social engagement and personal meaning-making.

These conversations emerged immediately in the symposium's opening session on LGBTQ+ choral communities. Stephanie Gregoire examined community formation within a newly established ensemble. Thomas Standish-Rinn investigated singers' perceptions of *matter*ing—as distinct from *belong*ing—within a chorus. Although these presenters approached the topic through different methodological lenses, each focused on singers' experiences as they navigate membership within a musical community.

Several additional presentations extended these conversations to other populations and settings. Jessica Gallagher-Steuver examined the role of choral participation in the lives of older LGBTQ+ adults, while Evan Powers documented the experiences of singers participating in a choir serving individuals experiencing homelessness. In a poster presentation, Joaquín Fuentes described a school-based choral initiative in Spain that sought to strengthen engagement among students, families, and community members. These studies directed attention toward the capacity of choirs to create opportunities for connection among individuals whose life experiences and circumstances differ considerably.

Researchers also considered how singers understand themselves within choral environments. Ann Wright, Graham Welch, and Hazel Baxter investigated how young children describe their singing identities, while Lynne Cuneo proposed a framework for understanding the social and organizational dimensions of secondary choral ensembles. Questions of identity, belonging, and legitimacy likewise appeared in Ramon Cardenas's autoethnographic examination of graduate study and in Arreon Harley-Emerson, Vinroy Brown Jr., and Daniel Jackson's exploration of expertise among Black conductor-educators.

In addition to musical outcomes, many presenters focused on the lived experiences of singers and conductors. Whether examining community choirs, school ensembles, graduate education, or professional practice, these scholars directed their attention toward the ways individuals locate themselves within choral spaces and the relationships that emerge through participation in collective music making.

Health, Well-Being, and Embodied Experience

Health and well-being appeared throughout the symposium in ways that extended beyond traditional discussions of vocal technique and performance. Presenters considered singing in relation to emotional wellness, physical function, community health, and clinical intervention, illustrating the many contexts in which choral singing intersects with broader questions of human flourishing.

One strand of inquiry centered on quality of life and personal well-being. Andrea Asztalos examined Hungarian community singers' perceptions of the psychological, social, physical, and spiritual dimensions of choral participation. Similarly, Rebecca Erickson presented on the potential of collective singing to strengthen social connections and address community needs, while Jessica Nápoles documented a collaborative creative project that explored how her participants experience self-compassion through composition, rehearsal, and performance. These presentations prompted discussions about what singing contributes to people's lives beyond musical achievement.

A second strand focused on the physical realities of music making. Michaela Bartoskova investigated relationships among yoga, movement, bodily awareness, and vocal function. Rebecca Atkins examined physiological responses associated with different attentional approaches during singing, and Caron Daley and Ryan Sullivan addressed occupational health concerns among conductors. These studies directed attention toward the body as both an instrument of performance and a site of inquiry.

A third strand featured work situated within health-care and interdisciplinary contexts. Sarah Bartolome and colleagues described the Fontan Choir, a project designed to support young people living with complex cardiac conditions through singing and breathwork. Such initiatives demonstrate how choral singing continues to intersect with medical, therapeutic, and community-based initiatives.

These presentations reflected a growing body of scholarship examining how singing might intersect with physical, emotional, and social dimensions of human experience. Researchers approached these topics

from a variety of methodological and disciplinary perspectives, illustrating the breadth of inquiry currently occurring at the intersection of choral singing, health, and well-being.

Repertoire, Culture, and Musical Perspectives

In this year's symposium, researchers used repertoire as a lens through which to examine cultural identity, musical traditions, historical narratives, and pedagogical practice. Some presentations considered how singers and conductors engage repertoire across cultural boundaries, while others explored the traditions, histories, and educational contexts that shape musical understanding. These studies illustrated the many ways repertoire can serve as both a musical artifact and a vehicle for broader scholarly inquiry.

Several researchers explored how conductors and singers engage musical traditions beyond their own lived experiences. Elisa Dekaney and Wendy Moy discussed the educational and musical outcomes associated with preparing repertoire from a culture different from that of many ensemble members. Alexander Nguyen examined the experiences of diasporic composers navigating relationships among cultural identity, artistic expression, and professional expectations. Although these studies focused on different populations, both addressed questions about the relationship between cultural knowledge and musical practice.

Other researchers focused their presentations on specific national, linguistic, and stylistic traditions. Supitcha Kansirisin introduced participants to Thai choral repertoire and its historical development, while Chia-An Tung described pedagogical approaches used to prepare Mandarin-speaking singers to perform Southern gospel repertoire. Relatedly, Emorja Roberson explored the artistic and pedagogical practices of the influential gospel musician, Donald Lawrence, highlighting the relationships among performance, oral tradition, and musical transmission. Additionally, Eles Kravets examined culturally specific understandings of choral tone and vocal production, illustrating how aesthetic preferences can vary across musical traditions.

Historical inquiry provided another avenue through

which researchers engaged repertoire. Christopher Clark introduced attendees to a body of repertoire by Ethel Smyth that has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years. Stephen Paparo and Barbara Tagg examined the influence of American composer Gregg Smith, giving particular attention to how his work inspired collaboration and community engagement alongside performance. Similarly, Alfonso Elorriaga documented the pedagogical contributions of Manuel Borge, a Spanish educator and composer.

Many researchers also connected repertoire scholarship directly to rehearsal and classroom practice. Annika Stucky provided practical resources for conductors interested in contemporary Finnish repertoire, while Debbie Seitter examined four choral works by Abbie Betinis, connecting score analysis with conductor preparation and rehearsal practice. Centering representation, teacher agency, and physicality, Melissa Young presented a descriptive analysis of repertoire selection for beginning treble choirs in Texas, and Rachel Segman investigated relationships among movement, leadership, and performance practice in seventeenth-century repertoire.

Other presenters expanded traditional understandings of choral repertoire and music making to various contexts. Dongryul Lee and Kirsten Hedegaard described a large-scale compositional and pedagogical project centered on environmental and social concerns. Justin Caithaml and Monica Poston evaluated the curriculum of a university ensemble devoted exclusively to musical theatre repertoire, finding increased levels of engagement and connection to life experiences. Similarly, Nick Pierle explored approaches to helping singers navigate multiple vocal styles while maintaining vocal health and stylistic integrity.

Throughout the symposium, presenters represented a wide range of musical traditions, repertoires, and cultural perspectives within contemporary choral scholarship. Researchers investigated historical sources, emerging repertoire, culturally situated pedagogies, performance practices, and intercultural musical experiences, illustrating many ways that repertoire can serve as an artistic and scholarly point of inquiry.

Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

Teaching and learning remained a prominent area of inquiry throughout the symposium. Presenters considered how educators engage topics such as classroom practice, rehearsal pedagogy, teacher preparation, assessment, musicianship development, and student learning.

Several presentations focused on instructional approaches designed to support musical and social development within ensembles. Kelli Baker and Melissa Grady reported on the use of structured activities to strengthen ensemble cohesion, while Nicholas McBride and Cara Bernard described a pedagogical framework centered on empathy and inclusion by highlighting the national “This Is Me” festival for LGBTQ+ Youth. Using participatory action research, Christopher Wasko investigated songwriting as a vehicle for student engagement and collaborative learning. Filmmaker Leanne Pooley similarly explored ways of fostering participation and musical growth through accessible and interactive choir game experiences. Although these presentations differed considerably in design, each emphasized active engagement as a central component of learning.

Alongside the social dimension of singing, some researchers approached questions about the cognitive dimensions of student learning and musicianship. Kyle Gray examined how singers develop strategies for self-regulating their own learning processes. Additionally, Pat Antinone investigated the role of audiation in sight-singing performance, contributing to ongoing conversations regarding music literacy and musicianship instruction. These studies reflected continuing interest in the cognitive processes that support successful musical learning.

Researchers highlighted assessment practices as another recurring topic. The conference organizers devoted a short-paper session to assessment, including work by Skyler Bluemel, Saleel Menon, Emma Daniels, Kerri Thompson, and Christopher Hansen. Although each presentation approached assessment from a different perspective, the session addressed questions concerning evaluation, evidence of learning, and the role of adjudication and portfolio assessment within choral education. Likewise, Annika Stucky presented a

pilot study that examined listener perceptions and evaluative judgments within performance settings.

The symposium also featured several presentations that considered the preparation and professional learning of choral educators. Patricia Terceros Montano reviewed scholarship related to the preparation of future choral educators. Through analyzing the content of regional publications, Patrick Freer and Amber Daniel-Robinson considered the current topics occupying practitioners and professional organizations across the United States.

These presentations addressed different stages of the educational process: designing instruction, facilitating learning, assessing growth, and preparing teachers. Their collective presence within the symposium prompted dialogues concerning the pedagogical dimensions of choral music education and the many factors that shape teaching and learning in choral settings.

Emerging Topics and Future Directions

In addition to the recurring themes discussed above, several presentations engaged questions evolving rapidly within the profession. These studies addressed topics that have received comparatively limited attention within choral research while also raising questions that may shape future scholarly and professional conversations.

Artificial intelligence and technology represented one such area of inquiry. Hyesoo Yoo examined how educators understand and engage emerging technologies in teaching and learning contexts, focusing on both AI literacy and teachers' perceptions of artificial intelligence. Similarly, technology appeared in discussions about professional learning and information sharing. Rita Gentile and Kelly Bylica examined how educators engage informal digital spaces such as TikTok as sources of instructional ideas and professional development, highlighting the growing influence of online platforms on teaching practice. These studies considered how technological change may influence the work of choral educators and teacher preparation programs.

Other presentations addressed broader questions concerning the profession itself. Jessica Nápoles, Danika Locey, and Jennifer Barnett provided a contempo-

rary snapshot of the 2026–2027 academic job market, while Melanie Stapleton critiqued essentialist vocal pedagogy and encouraged consideration of constructivist perspectives on voice, identity, and teaching. Although these presentations addressed different topics, each invited participants to consider how changing technologies, evolving pedagogical frameworks, and professional structures may influence the future of choral music education. Compared with the larger thematic areas represented at the symposium, these topics occupied a smaller portion of the program. Their inclusion nevertheless reflected an ongoing willingness among researchers to engage emerging issues alongside more established areas of inquiry.

Reflections and Conclusion

The breadth of topics represented at the 2026 ACDA International Symposium on Research in Choral Singing reflected the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary choral scholarship. Across long-paper sessions, short-paper sessions, and poster presentations, researchers employed qualitative, quantitative, historical, philosophical, and mixed-methods approaches to investigate questions related to singing, teaching, learning, health, culture, community, and professional practice.

Rather than centering a single topic or methodological approach, the symposium brought together scholars working across diverse populations, settings, and research traditions. Community choirs, school ensembles, higher education, healthcare contexts, historical archives, and professional organizations all served as sites of inquiry. This diversity of perspectives contributed to a program that reflected the many contexts in which choral singing occurs and the many questions researchers continue to ask about those contexts.

The organization of the symposium contributed meaningfully to scholarly exchange. Sessions were frequently grouped around related topics, allowing conversations to develop across multiple presentations rather than within isolated studies. For example, presentations addressing LGBTQ+ choral communities, assessment practices, and intercultural musical experiences were positioned in ways that encouraged dia-

logue among presenters and attendees. This structure allowed participants to consider points of convergence and divergence among studies while identifying questions for future investigation.

The symposium's hybrid format further supported participation and discussion. Remote attendees were able to engage with presenters and participants in real time through videoconferencing and chat-based interaction, while in-person attendees benefited from opportunities for informal conversation during meals, breaks, and social gatherings. The combination of in-person and remote participation expanded access to the symposium while maintaining opportunities for meaningful engagement among attendees.

The 2026 gathering provided a forum for sharing current research while fostering dialogue about future directions in choral scholarship. As research in choral singing continues to expand across disciplinary, methodological, and professional boundaries, gatherings such as the International Symposium on Research in Choral Singing remain important spaces for scholarly dialogue and collaboration.

Symposium Leadership and Acknowledgments

The success of the 2026 ACDA International Symposium on Research in Choral Singing depended upon the contributions of many individuals and organizations, most especially Bryan Nichols (conference chair) and Motje Wolf (program chair). The Symposium Steering Committee included Matthew Garrett, Jeremy Manternach, Wendy Moy, Diego Pinto, Thomas Standish-Rinn, Bridget Sweet, and Justin West. Their collective work guided the planning and implementation of the symposium and has supported the continued development of the International Symposium on Research in Choral Singing as a venue for scholarly exchange.

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NOTES

- ¹ James Higgs, "Terza Messa by Marianna Martines: Significance, Style, and Critical Edition," The University of Arizona ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (2023), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2971499327>; see also James Higgs, "Terza Messa by Marianna Martines: Examining Historical Sources of a Forgotten Masterwork" *Choral Journal* 66, no. 7 (March/April 2026): 60–72.
- ² Symposium presentations and poster sessions with titles and full abstracts: <https://acda-publications.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/IJRCS/ProceedingsSRCS2026.pdf>.