

Excellence in Choral Music: A Chronology of the American Choral Directors Association

by Marvin E. Latimer Jr.

The American Choral Directors Association, the most storied professional choral organization in the world, will celebrate its Sixtieth Anniversary Jubilee, February 27 through March 2, 2019, in the place of its birth, Kansas City, Missouri. In the months leading up to the event, *Choral Journal* will publish several articles focused on ACDA's rich history and traditions. The present article, the first in the series, offers a chronology of some of the many high points in ACDA's history. The material was taken from *Excellence in Choral Music: A History of the American Choral Directors Association*, which is the first in ACDA's Archives Series (to eventually include a rollover of some of ACDA's current monographs). Scheduled for release in early 2019, the publication is an outgrowth of the work of the Research and Publications Organization History Subcommittee.

Acquiring an Identity

1945–1955: Developing university choral programs graduated choral conductors who were more specialized than in previous years, prepared through coursework in theory, musicology, choral literature, and performance practices. This new generation of choral conductors,

who changed the landscape of choral music performance in the United States, were ready for an organization that could serve their growing needs for professional development and networking.



Harold Decker and Julius Herford were co-authors of Choral Conducting: A Symposium, a groundbreaking text that was emblematic of a new era of choral scholarship. Property of ACDA International Archives for Choral Music, Harold A. Decker Collection.

1955–57: Archie Jones, Robert Landers, and Harry Robert Wilson, while serving as choral clinicians in Oklahoma and Texas, began discussions about a national professional organization of choral conductors that would be similar to the American Bandmasters Association. Landers proposed that the new American Choirmasters Association would limit membership to one hundred seventy-five and that it would be honorary.

December 1957: After circulating a letter to prospective members, Robert Landers formed a steering committee consisting of James Aliferis, Charles Hirt, Wayne Hugoboom, Warner Imig, Archie Jones, Elwood “Woody” Keister, Maynard Klein, Robert Landers, John Raymond, Roger Wagner, Earl Willhoite, and Harry Robert Wilson.

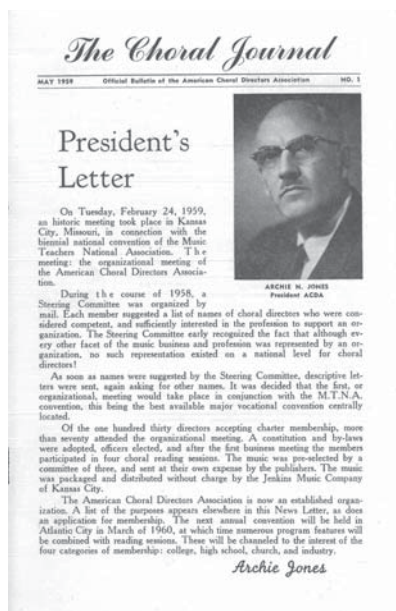
February 1959: At the first organizational meeting held in the Kansas City Municipal Auditorium, thirty-five choral directors selected the name American Choral Directors Association and adopted a constitution and bylaws. Though similar to the ABA governing documents, the ACDA constitution was purposely inclusive.



A photograph of an early National Conference reading session shows that ACDA's inclusivity led to early growth, though men outnumbered women by a considerable margin (Philadelphia, PA, 1964). Property of ACDA International Archives for Choral Music, National Collection.

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May 1959: The first *Choral Journal*, prepared by Harry Wilson, was printed and distributed by Wayne Hugoboom, who had learned the printing business while working for the family-owned newspaper, the *Dorchester Clarion*. Hugoboom's sister and brother-in-law, who owned Makovec Printing in Tampa, continued to publish *Choral Journal* for the next two decades.



Copy of the first page of the first issue of *Choral Journal*, May 1959.

January – April 1961: In ACDA's second year, division conferences were held across the country. State conferences soon followed. The division/state structure, codified in a 1964 constitution revision, served as a means of communication and member recruitment. With the exception of the 1979 restructuring that created the Central Division, it has remained unchanged to the present.

March 1964: In an effort to better address membership growth and the need for better communication, the ACDA Board of Directors created an executive secretary position for Wayne Hugoboom, who had become ACDA's chief architect and administrator. The Board also appointed six standing committees: Activities, Choral Repertoire and Standards, Conference and Program, Executive, and Membership. Precursors to today's Standing Committees, they directly reflected ACDA's identity as an inclusive, member oriented, conference focused organization.



Wayne Hugoboom served as Assistant Professor of Choral Music at Indiana University (January 11, 1947). Property of Indiana University Office of University Archives.

Becoming a National and International Presence

August 1964: The decision to merge with TCDA, whose charter predated ACDA, and later other state choral associations, defined a key part of ACDA's identity. It also led

to a somewhat unclear relationship where affiliate states could exert more autonomy than charter states. A number of national leaders over the years considered that circumstance to be less than desirable.



Theron Kirk, Clark Rhodes, and Cloys Webb negotiated the precedent setting merger between TCDA and ACDA that opened the door for other important state affiliations. Property of ACDA International Archives for Choral Music, National Collection.

August 1967: When ACDA operations outgrew Wayne Hugoboom's kitchen, ACDA officials purchased a house in Tampa at 7514 North Hubert for \$9,250.00. Russell Mathis described it as a tiny tract house, built on a badly cracked slab near a drainage canal, with water not safe to drink, that Wayne Hugoboom single-handedly repurposed as the first ACDA national office.

May 1969: After nearly a decade of collaboration, ACDA announced it would no longer hold conferences with MENC due to policy changes that required associated organizations to be included within the body of MENC conference programs. The dissolution of ACDA's confer-

ence relationship with MENC was transformational. From that time forward, ACDA focused on conference schemes that were more consistent with its performance-first identity.

August – September 1969: ACDA was actively involved in organizing the first Vienna Symposium, held in Krems, Austria. Though considered to be a successful experiment in international collaboration, by the summer of 1974, interest in the annual event had fallen so sharply that only one American choir attended. ACDA discontinued its affiliation in 1977.



Pictured at the 1969 Vienna Symposium from left to right are Everett Hendricks, James McKelvy, Morris Beachy, Russell Mathis, and Harold Decker. Property of ACDA International Archives for Choral Music, Harold A. Decker Collection.

March 1971: After three years of planning, the first independent national conference was held in Kansas City, MO. Nearly sixteen hundred attended, almost half of the total ACDA membership. The program favored concerts and reading sessions over scholarly presentations,

a structure that facilitated camaraderie, exposure to new choral music, and artistic excellence.

June 1972: The Repertoire and Standards Committee, which had existed earlier in other forms, was approved in 1972 by the Executive Committee. The subcommittees were College and University, Junior and Community College, High School, Middle and Junior High School, Youth Choirs, Elementary, Choral Music in the Church, and Choral Music in the Community.

March 1973: International choirs appeared for the first time on a conference program at the 1973 Kansas City National Conference. Largely through Gene Brooks's tireless recruiting efforts, international choirs from across the globe became a regular feature on conference programs. Between 1973 and 2017, national conference programs featured ninety-four international choirs.



The Estonian Men's Chorus, who presented the concluding performance at the 1989 Louisville conference, affirmed the power of choral music to form bonds between nations. Property of ACDA International Archives for Choral Music, National Collection.

Summer 1974: The first People to People International ACDA delegation toured Western Europe and Russia. PTPI tours, which occurred annually for several years, represented an important precursor to ACDA's leadership in the International Federation of Choral Music.

Adapting to Growth and Change

March 1975: The Morgan State College Choir became the first Historically Black College and University (HBCU) choir to perform on a national conference program. Though ACDA officials spoke often of their desire to reach out to African American choirs and their conductors, the need for greater ethnic diversity in national conference programming remains today.



With Jester Hairston presiding, the Morgan State College Choir, under the direction of Nathan Carter, was the first Historically Black College to perform at a national conference. Property of ACDA International Archives for Choral Music, National Collection.

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October 1977: Gene Brooks was appointed executive secretary following Wayne Hugoboom's unexpected retirement. During his three decades of service, Brooks became the common denominator as ACDA grew from seventy-five hundred to over twenty thousand active members, with net assets that increased from \$54,733.00 to \$2,654,060.00.



Leslie Gene Brooks (1936–2007) was ACDA's longest serving executive director. Property of ACDA International Archives for Choral Music, National Collection.

September 1978: Colleen Kirk announced the formation of a reconfigured national R&S Committee that included sub-committees for boys' and children's choir, choral editing standards, choral music in the church, choral music in the community, college and university, high school, junior high school, vocal jazz and show choir junior, community college, and youth and student activities. Kirk also devised a method of communication between sub-committee chairs and ACDA member-

ship through *Choral Journal* columns. Sub-committees were modified and added in future years, but the general structure and practice remained the same until 2016.

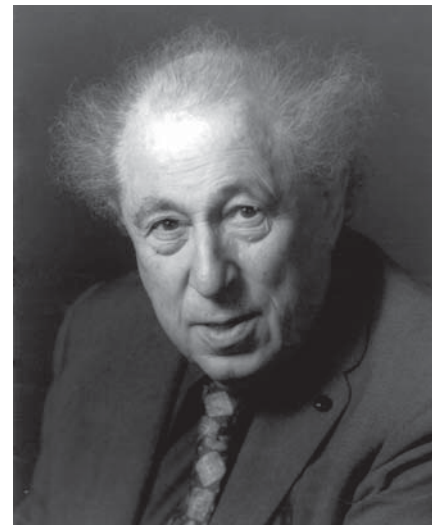
June 1979: A new national office in Lawton, Oklahoma, was dedicated in the summer of 1979. Gene Brooks was from Lawton and had cultivated a long-standing relationship with the McMahon Foundation, Lawton's major benefactors, who financed the project. The site was provided by Cameron University, and Ted Horton, a local architect, designed the building.

Fall 1979: Walter Collins, one of ACDA's foremost scholar conductors, appointed the first ACDA Research and Publications Committee. The purpose of the committee was



Dean of the College of Music at the University of Colorado for many years, Walter Collins was one of ACDA's most devoted choral scholars. Property of ACDA International Archives for Choral Music, Walter Stowe Collins II Collection.

to address the dearth of literature and reference materials that specifically targeted the needs of choral conductors and pedagogues. Its accomplishments over the years included the ACDA Monograph Series, the prestigious Julius Herford Dissertation Award, and most recently, *American Choral Music: 1870–1923*, an innovative collaboration with the Library of Congress.



Teacher of Lukas Foss, Robert Shaw, and Roger Wagner, Julius Herford was the foremost choral music scholar of the twentieth century. Property of ACDA International Archives for Choral Music, National Collection.

March 1981: The first national conference ecumenical service held in the St. Louis Cathedral featured the St. Charles Borromeo Church Choir of North Hollywood and the St. Basil Church Choir from Los Angeles, conducted by Paul Salamunovich. The event, which became a regular feature at conferences, was designed to serve a growing constituency of church choir conductors.

August 1982: ACDA became a founding member of the International Federation of Choral Music (IFCM), a nonprofit organization created to strengthen and promote choral music internationally. During its first decade, ACDA maintained a strong leadership role, but involvement gradually diminished in the mid-nineties as IFCM operations transitioned to Europe. The relationship was reenergized following Tim Sharp's appointment to ACDA. He was elected vice-president of IFCM at the 2017 Barcelona IFCM World Choral Music Symposium.



Tim Sharp is pictured in Nairobi, Kenya, with Thierry Thibaut (immediately to his right), director of IFCM's Conductors without Borders program, and Ken Wakia (immediately to his left), conductor for the 2017 World Youth Choir. Photo courtesy of Tim Sharp.

March 1983: The first honor choir featured at a national conference was organized by Doreen Rao and conducted by Jean Ashworth Bartle of the Toronto Children's Choir. In the coming years, honor choirs became a mainstay at national, division, and often state conferences. Said Rao, "I strategized that if we created this model for the national conference, it might serve as a prototype for the

division, and eventually state levels. And it did."



The organizer of the first national conference honor choir, Doreen Rao was a fierce advocate for the inclusion of children's choirs in ACDA activities and publications. Courtesy of Doreen Rao.

Looking to the Future

July 1985: To add much-needed administrative space, a contract was awarded to Dallas Howard Construction to expand the national office. Ted Horton, the architect for the original building, designed an addition that spanned the entire eighty-foot width of the structure and added forty-three feet of depth. It included two offices, a reception area, a library, a listening room, extra storage space, and a large space for the archives. The project was funded through a generous donation from the McMahon Foundation.

May 1987: The dedication of the ACDA International Archives for Choral Music represented the culmination of years of work that began

in the summer of 1974 when Royce Saltzman proposed the idea for an ACDA archives to Russell Mathis, then newly elected ACDA national president. Through the efforts of Walter Collins and Harold Decker, who often disagreed about the scope of the collection, the archives became an important resource both for ACDA members and for choral researchers in general.

June 1987: Raymond Brock was appointed director of development to establish and direct an endowment for ACDA. But in 1990, Brock was diagnosed with an aggressive form of lung cancer. Following his death on August 12, 1991, the endowment received a number of substantial gifts in Brock's name, and the Raymond W. Brock Memorial Account was created. The account funded both the Brock Memorial Commis-



The Brock Memorial Commission, named for Raymond Brock, ACDA's first director of development, was ACDA's most important contribution to choral composition.

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sion and the Brock Student Choral Composition Contest, which were responsible for creating a significant body of choral music.

June 1987: The Board of Directors, together with the Past-President's Council, visited Lawton to participate in the dedication of the new addition to the national office. That meeting, according to President David Thorsen, provided a unique opportunity to review past practices, examine present needs, and plan for the future. The result was a decision to hire Joseph Wesley Zeigler and Alison Damon Zeigler, a professional arts management team from Montclair, New Jersey, to conduct ACDA's first major strategic planning initiative.

January 1990: The first major ACDA dues increase was a response to a fiscal crisis that had been created by the national organization reimbursing divisions for conference shortfalls and passing several inflated budgets expecting revenue increases that did not materialize. These practices led to an accumulated deficit in excess of one hundred fifty thousand dollars. In March of 1995, Treasurer Elaine McNamara reported that the debt was nearly paid in full.

March 1993: Due to burgeoning conference attendance, the first dual-track schedule was featured at the San Antonio National Conference. In later years, additional tracks were

added, culminating with a six-track program at the 2005 Los Angeles National Conference. Attendees insisted, however, that the 2005 conference was more exhausting than it was restorative, and in following years, conference planners returned to programs with no more than three tracks.

March 1993: The Turtle Creek Chorale, conducted by Timothy Seelig, became the first GALA chorus to perform at an ACDA National Conference. Of the hundreds who attended the performance, few likely were aware of the challenges faced a decade earlier by ACDA leaders who struggled to resolve controversies related to the first GALA choruses—the New York City Gay Men's Chorus and the Los Angeles Gay Men's Chorus—who were selected by blind audition to perform at ACDA division conferences.



The New York City Gay Men's Chorus (NYCGMC), directed by Gary Miller, was selected through blind audition in the spring of 1983 to perform at the Eastern Division conference to be held February 9–11, 1984, in Baltimore.

April 1993: ChoralList was created by Walter Collins and James Feiszli as the first email distribution list dedicated to choral music. In 1999, Feiszli and David Topping incorporated the nonprofit site as ChoralNet. Then in 2009, to further enhance ACDA's online presence, Tim Sharp merged ChoralNet with ACDA operations as a valuable part of ACDA's membership benefits. It offered a blog, a classified section, announcements and forums, and a list of resources, including information about publications, conferences, and mentoring opportunities.

July 2003: With assistance from the McMahon Foundation and support from Oklahoma City Mayor Kirk Humphries, Gene Brooks moved the ACDA national office to Oklahoma City. ACDA had outgrown the Lawton facility, a circumstance that was complicated by the fact that Cameron University officials, who controlled the property around the building, were either unwilling or unable to allow ACDA to expand. Oklahoma City offered a central location—the reason for the move to Oklahoma in the first place—and an accessible airport, both of which would be a necessity as the organization continued to mature.

Coming of Age in the New Millennium

March 2008: Tim Sharp was appointed ACDA's third executive director following Gene Brooks's un-

expected retirement due to health concerns. Sharp had previously served ACDA as *Choral Journal* Editorial Board member, and editor of two important *Choral Journal* columns, *Hallelujah!* and *Research Report*. Jerry Warren wrote, “[Tim Sharp] brings to the organization a unique set of skills that are exactly what we need at this important time in the life of ACDA. In addition to his experience as an administrator, he is an involved, practicing conductor, author, and scholar, and has had important roles as a business owner and manager.”



A photograph of Tim Sharp with a group of Rhodes College seniors, taken after a blues festival on Beale Street in downtown Memphis, where he served as judge. Courtesy of Tim Sharp.

October 2008: ACDA launched a new website that allowed for online conference registration and membership renewal, a priority for ACDA leadership. It improved membership access to archived *Choral Journals* and searchable indexes. The upgraded site was also intended to provide access to conference materials, including recordings, scores, and interest sessions.

Fall 2008: ACDA introduced ChorTeach, an online-only magazine with a quarterly publication cycle, designed to meet the practical needs of choral music educators at all levels in all professional affiliations. There were no advertisements, only article content designed to offer choral directors fresh ideas and techniques for meeting the challenges facing them both in the rehearsal room and on the performance stage.

March 2009: With a program that returned to a two-track structure and walkable distances between the conference center and performance venues, ACDA celebrated its 50th anniversary conference in Oklahoma City. At Tim Sharp’s encouragement, scholarships and other incentives for student members were developed. Mentoring opportunities, resources, and special events were created to foster an inclusive and collaborative environment. A series of master classes were added to provide an opportunity to learn from world-renowned conductors.



Emblematic of Tim Sharp’s vision to create opportunities for every child to sing, the Chevy Chase Elementary School Chorus was featured at the 2009 ACDA National Conference. Property of ACDA International Archives for Choral Music, National Collection.

September 2009: ACDA merged with ACDA Endowment Inc., which effectively shifted administrative control of the endowment to the ACDA Executive Committee. Sharp’s early efforts to reorganize the structure of the endowment and recruit contributions proved to be highly successful. In September of 2012, he wrote, “I am happy to report that as of today, ACDA’s endowment has exceeded 1.1 million [dollars] and it is growing.”

June 2011: Sharp announced that ACDA officials were entering a two-year process that would consist of a review of ACDA’s history, an assessment and administrative audit of the national office, and a self-study of administrative topics such as ACDA’s purposes, governance, facilities, and financial management. He encouraged membership to consider questions related to ACDA’s identity, values, mission, service, strengths, weaknesses, and the organization’s potential.

January 2012: ACDA initiated its first membership drive, Sing Up!, fueled primarily by grassroots efforts at the state level. It consisted of three recruitment tools: student members were allowed to join ACDA for five dollars, the national office distributed one thousand complimentary active memberships to be awarded to first-time ACDA members, and a colleague referral program was instituted that awarded both the referrers and the referees with a gift from the national office. By early 2014, two

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thousand new members were added.

June 2014: ACDA announced the Fund for Tomorrow campaign, designed to provide children opportunities to sing in choirs, encourage the creation of new children's choirs, fund new student ACDA chapters, mentor young choral directors, and financially assist students who were interested in attending a conference but lacked the means to do so.

June 2016: ACDA leadership added new Standing Committees in the areas of International Activities, Ed-

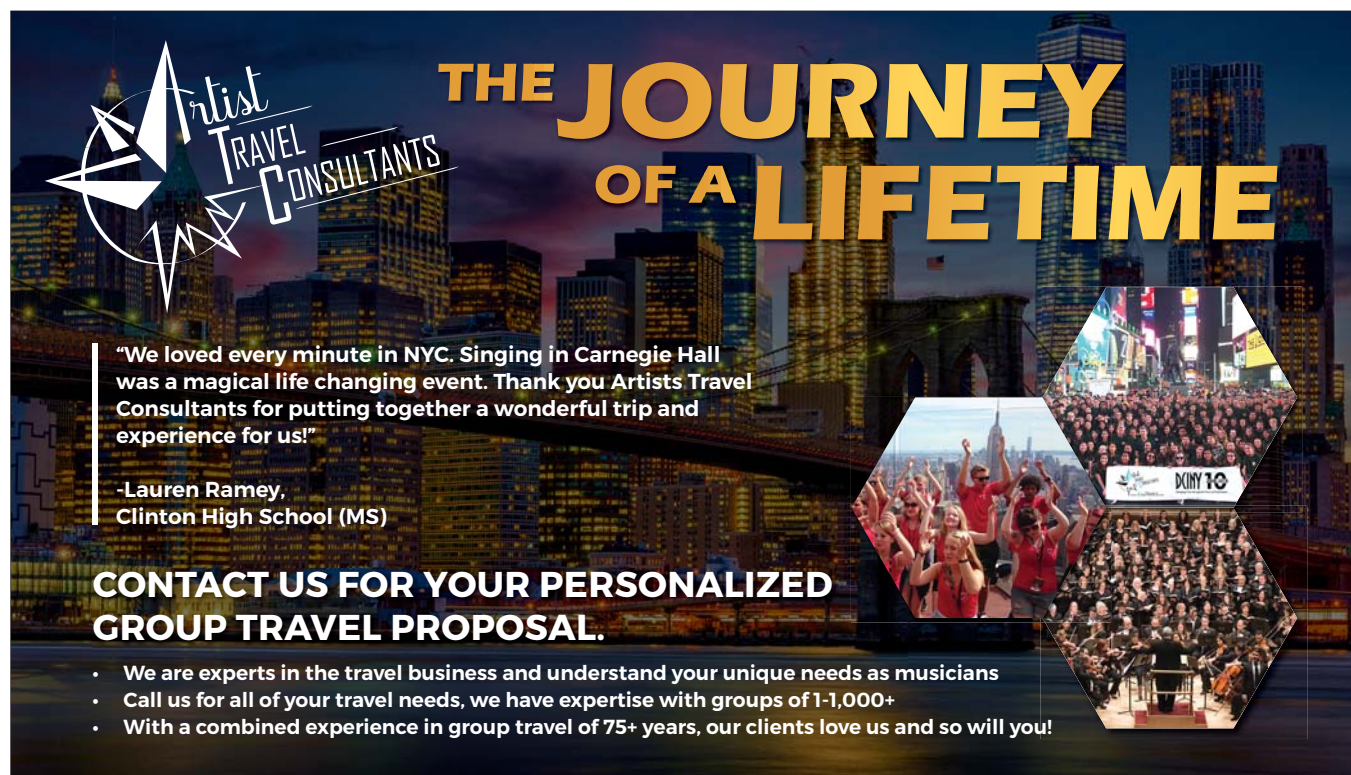
ucation and Communication, Advocacy and Collaboration, Diversity Initiatives, and Composition Initiatives. They also restructured the Research and Publications Committee and Repertoire and Standards Committee. The changes were a response to revisions requested by the membership and the professionalization that had occurred in the national office.

December 2016: ACDA launched two forward thinking initiatives, ChorTransform and NextGeneration. ChorTransform was a program where student members could work

in practicums with university advisors, local schoolteachers, and administrators to initiate choral music experiences in underserved communities. NextGeneration was intended to identify, train, and encourage high school choristers with future leadership potential.

Looking to the Future¹

More than simply an organization of professional musicians, the American Choral Directors Association represents an ongoing effort to bring continuity to an art form that is distinctly human. ACDA and its global



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-Lauren Ramey,
Clinton High School (MS)

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partners can enter the twenty-first century with a sense of pride and accomplishment in what we have done to advance and professionalize the choral art to this point in time. We can look back and find comfort that we enjoy and perpetuate a culture that is truly a choral culture, and that we have created the educational systems and performance mechanisms that offer the very best to those who want to align with our mission and want to remain dedicated to inspiring excellence in the choral art.

But relevancy is a looming challenge to us as we look forward. We must not only look to introducing music education and performance to those awaiting their first experience in the choral art; we now must look ahead to ways we can inspire people to be part of choral music education, performance, composition, and advocacy throughout their life. Furthermore, as we work to perfect our skills and our genre, we should eschew becoming a playground for the elite, both in terms of talent and in terms of resources to experience this treasure. This beautiful experience of choral music we work to refine should accompany the entire journey of life and should be available to everyone.

This is the future for the American Choral Directors Association. We will now build upon the educational systems, the methods, the disciplines, the standards, the ideals, the resources, and the best practices in choral music pedagogy and performance as we offer this experience to people throughout life, and to people desiring to create beauty in community regardless of age, gender, class,

or creed. We will work to innovate our way into new places where the choral art can be experienced for the first time. We will offer training from the beginning to the end of life, and we will work to remove the barriers that prevent this from happening for everyone. To the best of our ability, at this time and juncture in our history, we are poised to make this happen. 

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of Alabama. He is past president of the Alabama Choral Directors Association and chair of the Research and Publications Organization History Subcommittee.

NOTES

¹ This closing section is paraphrased from some of Executive Director Tim Sharp's reflections on the future of ACDA included in his Afterward to *Excellence in Choral Music: A History of the American Choral Directors Association*.



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