

The question of the relationship of administrative and organizational techniques to performance success in high school choral programs provided the impetus for the study. This question surfaces naturally and spontaneously to conscientious choral directors from the beginning of their first teaching assignment. These directors will attend concerts, workshops, and conventions, where they will be exposed to groups which attain advanced levels of excellence, since the selective nature of most clinics, workshops, and conventions restricts the participation of all but the most skillful choral groups. Superior performance ability seen in these groups obviously reflects advanced skills of conductors who are well founded in technical and stylistic components of choral rehearsal and performance. As choral directors gain experience, however, an increasing awareness develops that superior rehearsal techniques and advanced musicianship of the conductor are only a portion of the complex ingredients necessary for the cultivation of excellence in performance.

Perhaps the most basic decision which a successful high school choir director makes is specifically directed to complex considerations of musicality during the rehearsal. Moreover, the conductor's approach to musicality is the underlying basis of the rehearsal and extends to decisions which involve managing many aspects of the program. Such choices are eventually formalized as procedures and policies around which the entire program is based.

Since previous research has generally been inconclusive concerning which approaches to the rehearsal are most effective, the genesis of the present study is traced to the paucity of information available concerning the demographics, values, and administrative techniques associated with directors of successful choral programs. This study therefore examined these aspects of successful choral programs and compared them to those of average choral programs in order to describe the status

# Characteristics of Successful High School Choral Programs<sup>1</sup>

by James Dunaway

of successful and average choral programs in the Western United States during the 1985-86 academic year and to determine if any differences between these two groups were significant.

The definition of success in this study was based on performance success. The selection of successful choral programs to participate in the study was based on precedents in previous research and involved soliciting the recommendations of state ACDA and MENC leaders, and state supervisors of music. The various state leaders were asked to recommend groups which would have received superior ratings at festivals during the previous two years,<sup>2</sup> and which had not experienced a teacher turnover during the same period.

Since the definition of an average choral program had few precedents in previous research, this study based the criteria for the definition of average choral programs around those of successful programs. The state leaders were instructed to recommend programs in this classification which would not have received superior ratings during the previous two years, but which also would not have received lower than Division III ratings. The requirement of no recent teacher turnover was identical to that of successful programs, and an additional element of subjectivity was included: state leaders were instructed to recommend programs whose performance was neither among the best nor among the worst in their geographic areas. Thus the study deliberately attempted to exclude a group of choral programs whose performance might be classified as being between the successful and average programs. Naturally, the identity of participating choral programs and their classification as successful or average has been and will remain confidential.

The first objective was to describe the demographic characteristics of the successful and average samples,

to run statistical tests on the demographic data, and to identify areas where significant differences may exist. The second objective was to examine the values and associated organizational and administrative characteristics of the samples, and to determine if statistically significant differences exist between them. A third objective was to determine which tests that were statistically significant were also field significant in a practical sense and to project inferences from these which might benefit the profession.

The response rate for the lengthy questionnaire which was sent to choral directors in eleven Western states was 71%.

## *Implications for the Choral Director*

A choir director has little control over the population of the city where he works, except perhaps to relocate to a larger or smaller community, but he might consider examining many attitudes and practices of successful choir directors which are independent of the unique settings of various communities or schools.

It is critical that those reading this research report bear in mind that in all cases where there were significant differences between the samples, the distributions of both groups covered a broad range of scores, with outliers at both ends. One might conclude that the outliers at the low ends in the successful sample attained success in spite of their low index in that particular measurement. Another possible conclusion would be that the outliers at the high ends in the average sample may not have been particularly benefited by their high index in that particular item.

It was established that directors of successful choral programs have more education than do those of average programs, but one cannot assume that additional education will enhance an individual's rehearsal

**Dunaway is Chairman of the Fine Arts Department and Director of Choral Activities at Cedar City High School, Cedar City, Utah.**

sal techniques unless it is concomitant with increased musical growth in the individual. Neither can a director assume that extra rehearsals will automatically benefit a choir, since several programs classified as average in this study rehearsed outside of the school schedule regularly. Nor can the extra rehearsal be seen as a compensation for rehearsal time inefficiently spent.

Therefore, the most basic consideration for choral directors examining the significant differences listed in this report must center around the fundamental relationship of the values and organizational characteristics to areas of musicali-

ty. Unless these characteristics are perceived as a direct outgrowth of musical elements, they will be viewed out of context.

### Demographics

In examining demographic descriptions, there were thirty-two total categories, and of these, fourteen demonstrated significant differences between the samples. Of these fourteen only four or five areas surfaced where the differences between the samples could be considered significant in terms of relating to the choral director wishing to upgrade a program. These were areas which demon-

strated statistical significance but are further clarified as being field significant on the basis of being in the control of the director and being practically feasible. These four areas were the level of education of the director, the percentage of the teaching assignment spent in the choral area, the strength of the training programs, and the percentage of boys in the total choral program. The percentage of boys in the select choir, while being also field significant, is not as fundamental an issue as the percentage of boys in the total program.

*Level of education.* The range of both samples varied considerably, but the level of education of the directors from the successful sample was generally higher than that of the average sample. Although no choral director can assume that a higher level of education will automatically produce more musical results, when additional education is carefully selected based on its potential to focus on concrete items of musicality, the chances are much greater that the director's approach to musicality will improve.

*Teaching assignment.* Directors from the successful sample spent a significantly greater amount of their teaching assignment in the choral area than did those from the average sample. The advantages of teaching full-time in the choral field should be obvious. First, the director is in full control of a training choir system which can generate extremely beneficial results to the select choir. In the training choirs a director can emphasize fundamentals of musical literacy, tone production, and intonation, since he may not be obligated to prepare for as many performance deadlines as he would

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in the select groups. Second, the director can structure the groups by experience and choose literature and design learning strategies which promote the musical growth of each student. There are other even more fundamental advantages in teaching full-time in the choral area. The educational background of most directors of both samples included a composite major with no undergraduate minor. Thus, a choral director teaching other subjects would likely be teaching in an area with little expertise and might consequently spend a disproportionate amount of energy and time in compensation for lack of expertise.

**Percentage of boys.** This study demonstrated that directors of successful programs are likely to have a higher percentage of boys participating in the program than are directors of average programs. The percentage of boys in the total program is most likely more important than the percentage of boys in the select choir, since many of the students in the training choirs will eventually enroll in the select choir.

There is no question that the physical, emotional, and social maturity levels of high school boys generally lag behind those of high school girls by a year or two. Boys' rate of physical maturation presents challenging obstacles to the high school choir director, since girls' and boys' vocal mechanisms are often at vastly different levels of maturity. Another difficulty in recruiting boys might be associated with their general penchant toward athletics, although this study made no attempt to assess strength of athletic programs or the amount of involvement in these programs by boys enrolled in the choral program. In spite of these stumbling blocks, the assumption that ideal musical balance of parts approaches numeric balance was borne out in this study, since the percentage of boys in successful programs was significantly higher than that of average programs.

**Training choirs.** A director wishing to upgrade a high school choral program should consider this study's finding that the directors of the successful sample rated the strength of their training programs much higher than did those of the average sample. The implication is very simple and direct: successful directors

generally devote a significant amount of energy to building strong training choirs, and the strength of these choirs eventually contribute to the strength of the select choir.

All the suggestions given in this section involving demographic characteristics examined in this study, except the level of education of the director, relate directly to the quality of training programs in the school. When a director's teaching assignment is not 100% in the choral area, there is a strong possibility that the training programs are not being developed to their fullest potential. The percentage of boys in the total choral program also relates to the potential of the training groups, since training programs without adequate numbers of tenors and basses may have difficulty in creating the climate which will ultimately produce a select group with a workable balance of parts.

#### *Attitudes, Values, and Practices*

The study examined seventy-seven topical categories relating to attitudes, values, and practices.

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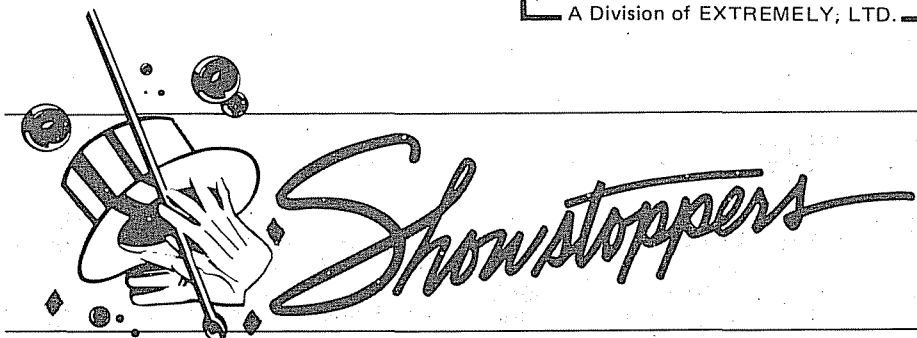
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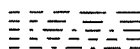
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Twenty-nine of these revealed statistical significance, and of these twenty-nine, as many as eighteen were field significant. When one examines the eighteen areas closely, they are easily combined into nine.

The emphasis and balance of established repertoire. That all values and organizational characteristics of directors of successful choral programs are directly related to considerations of musicality was a fundamental assumption of this study, and no decision of the choir director is more aligned to musicality than that of repertoire selection. Several findings surfaced in this study which

relate to repertoire selection, particularly the inclusion of a balance of styles, the tendency toward "classical" choral literature, and the performance of established composers.

In the topics relating to repertoire, both samples were in close agreement that the choice of repertoire is the sole responsibility of the director and that good programming includes a balance of all musical styles. The two samples disagreed as to the role which jazz and popular styles should play. The mean response of the average sample to the statement, "Jazz and pop styles

should be included on all concerts," indicated a general neutrality, while directors of the successful sample tended to disagree substantially with the statement.

Directors were asked to respond to the statement, "The best program is when the majority of the repertoire is from classical choral literature." The responses of the two samples differed substantially, with directors from successful programs agreeing with the statement more than did those of average programs.

The statement, "Students respond better to pop and modern styles," was also included to assess the preference toward classical or popular styles, since those who concur with this statement would naturally prefer popular styles over classical styles. The directors of the successful sample disagreed with the statement, while those of the average sample were close to ambivalence.

While the language of the statement, "Properly trained, students should perform all styles equally well," specifically deals with performance rather than acceptance of styles, the assumption is that students who perform a particular style well will enjoy and accept that style. The differences in the responses to this statement were significant, and indicate that successful programs are prone to stress a variety of styles more than are average programs.

The choral directors were asked to list actual repertoire performed on a concert during the past year which best represented ideal programming, and several types of information were available for analysis from this list. The previous examination of classical styles indicated that successful programs



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tend to express preference of classical styles over popular styles. This finding was further substantiated by examining the level of involvement in the performance of established composers, since successful programs performed established composers more often than did average programs. The mean level of involvement of the successful group was 60.1%, and that of the average group, 45.9%.

The directors were requested to indicate the percentage of emphasis which they would give to eight musical styles, and the samples ranked their preferences essentially the same. However, a most interesting finding surfaced in examining the interplay of actual styles performed and the number of ideal styles selected. Since the actual styles performed represented only one concert performance, a weighted formula was constructed to compensate for the fact that it would be extremely unrealistic to expect all musical styles to be represented on any given concert. The results of the statistical test indicate that directors of successful programs abide by their philosophy of including a balance of all styles in concert programming much better than do their counterparts of average programs.

*Major evening concerts and new repertoire.* One of the most significant differences which surfaced between the samples was associated with the total number of major evening concerts, and a corollary finding to the above considerations of repertoire was that successful programs tend to perform more repertoire than do average programs. The implication was that a choir which presented four separate major evening concerts will be more likely to perform more literature than a choir whose total number of major evening concerts was three. Although a

few groups indicated that on each major concert 100% of the repertoire was new, there was nothing in this study which suggested that no repertoire should be carried over from one concert to another. The study did establish that the successful sample performed a substantial amount of new repertoire on each major evening concert, and another implication might be that the director who does this has more efficient rehearsal techniques in order to be able to prepare a greater number of new selections for each evening concert.

*New music expenses.* The successful sample spent a substantially larger amount of money on new music than did the average sample. MENC's recommendations for a "quality program" includes a minimum of seventy-five titles in the library for each type of group and suggests that fifteen titles be added each year for each type of group.<sup>3</sup> The successful sample's greater budget for new music may also represent that group's ability to articulate the needs of the choral program to the administration.

*Extra rehearsals and sectionals.* An extra rehearsal would be meaningless unless it was a continuation

of efficient, productive use of time in the regular rehearsal and was a natural outgrowth of the musicality of the regular rehearsal. This study suggested that the amount of time spent in regular rehearsal was beyond the control of the directors from both samples, but the successful sample's greater involvement in sectionals and rehearsals outside of school time suggests that a director can compensate for limitations of the school schedule. The contribution of extra sectionals to the excellence of a choral program should be obvious, since the director can deal with problems of tone production, unity of tone, and can polish difficult passages.

*Time of rehearsal.* Both samples in this study concurred that the ideal time for the rehearsal slot was during the a.m. hours, and the successful sample was more likely to meet during that time than was the average sample. That the students are much more alert during the morning hours is beyond question. A few directors favored the noon slot, since it gave them flexibility in dealing with noon concerts. Others favored the 1:00 p.m. slot, since a noon performance could extend into the rehearsal period.



With Alexander Dashnaw as Artistic Choral Director, the San Francisco Choral Festival offers two options: evaluation against a standard of excellence with clinic and/or massed choir. The massed choir concerts with brass ensembles will be held at the *Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption* and *St. Ignatius Church*. This festival is open to all church, school, university, and community choirs.

#### Massed Choir Program

Fanfare For A Festival ..... Ron Nelson  
 Gloria ..... John Rutter  
 Lord, Thou Has Been Our Refuge ..... Ralph Vaughn Williams  
 edition by Alexander Dashnaw

World premiere performance of a commissioned work  
 by Gregg Smith, conducted by Gregg Smith

#### Evaluators and Clinicians

Alexander Dashnaw  
 Director of Choral Activities,  
 Long Island University,  
 C.W. Post Campus

Walter Klaus  
 Organist, Choir Director,  
 All Souls Unitarian Church  
 Conductor, Musica Viva

Gregg Smith  
 Conductor, Gregg Smith Singers  
 Composer, Grammy Award Winner

James E. Dash, Producer  
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These considerations, however, appear extremely minor when viewed in light of the higher degree of student alertness during the morning hours, particularly when the lowest degree of alertness is recognized as being immediately following the lunch hour.

*Accommodation of the schedule.* Early rehearsal time was considered to be a component of success, but the accommodation of the schedule is more involved than getting an ideal rehearsal slot in the morning; it involves gaining enough support

from the administration to not only make it *possible*, but to make it *convenient* for students to enroll. The successful programs participating in the study generally had schedules which were more accommodating than did the average programs, particularly as they rated how accommodating their schedules were and listed programs which inhibited stronger enrollment. Strong enrollment may be inhibited by singleton classes, particularly the upper level college preparation offerings. Administrators wishing to promote the

strength of the choral program should be acutely aware of the potentially devastating effect of these singletons and should devise the schedule around the musical offerings.

*Travel expenses.* Choirs from the successful sample spent a significantly higher amount of money on travel and traveled more miles than did those of the average group. The value of longer trips in choral education is a highly controversial issue which involves educational travel vs. entertainment travel. However, a choir wishing to attain excellence in performance must travel to perform and to hear other groups perform. Since this study made no attempt to evaluate the benefits of festival competition, it should be mentioned that several alternatives exist for the director who does not wish to perform competitively. Joint concerts or exchange concerts provide excellent opportunities for artistic interchange. Such ventures often involve rehearsing with a new director, and this not only reinforces the concepts of the regular director, but also may invest new ideas and techniques into the group.

*Use of student leaders.* Several topics concerning the use of student leaders demonstrated no significant differences between the samples. These topics—the general level of contribution, the director's influence, the frequency of officer meetings, the frequency of rehearsal time allotted to officers, and the sum of the areas of responsibility—were measured by the directors' either checking along a five-segment Likert scale or by checking areas of responsibility from a list. Directors were instructed not to complete items on the questionnaire which did not apply to their situation, and thus the above items do not reflect the total N of the samples.

However, significant differences occurred in two areas regarding the use of student officers: the total number of officers, and programs with vs. those without officers. These differences were generated by actual numbers, and this was sufficient justification to give these findings precedence over those which only assessed directors' attitudes along a continuum. Another justification for assigning these two areas precedence was that the total

# SMOKY MOUNTAIN MUSIC FESTIVAL

GATLINBURG, TENNESSEE

(3 miles from *Dollywood*)

APRIL 29-30, 1988

MAY 6-7, 1988

MAY 13-14, 1988

MAY 20-21, 1988

COMPETITION IN: CONCERT BAND  
ORCHESTRA, MARCHING BAND, JAZZ BAND,  
STREET PARADE, CONCERT CHOIR,  
SHOW CHOIR, JAZZ CHOIR, GLEE CLUB

*Festival Director*

**Dr. W J Julian**

Director of Bands  
University of Tennessee (Knoxville)

Phones: 615 / 938-0246  
615 / 693-5470

The three day festival includes two nights accommodations in a first class Gatlinburg motel, adjudication by nationally known judges, trophies to winning groups, plaques to all participating groups, guided tour of highlights of Smoky Mountain Park.

**TOTAL COST: \$65 per student (2 night package)  
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Area(s) of Interest:            ( ) Jazz Band            ( ) Second Band  
( ) Concert Band            ( ) Parade Marching            ( ) Marching Band  
( ) Orchestra            ( ) Concert Choir            ( ) Jazz Choir            ( ) Show Choir  
( ) Glee Club            ( ) Senior High School            ( ) Junior High School

Weekend Interested \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: Dr. W J Julian, 601 Westborough Rd., Knoxville, TN 37909



N of the samples were represented. The rationale for using the total number of officers as a general index of reliance on officers was that a director who relies heavily on student leaders would naturally have more officers than one who relies less. The conclusion was that since successful programs are both likely to have student officers and to have more student officers, directors from these programs tend to rely on student leaders more than do directors of average programs.

*The role of the chamber ensemble.* It was established that successful choral programs were more likely to have a chamber, madrigal, or show choir in the curriculum, but that the chamber group was less likely to receive priority over the select large group. The directors from the successful sample were also more apt to require the members of the chamber group to participate in the large choir. These tendencies suggest that there are advantages in having the small select group as the nucleus of the large group. Since the members of the small ensemble are generally more experienced than those in the large group, their presence in the large group contributes to the general strength of the group and also assists in training younger or less experienced students. Their presence in the large group may also serve as a statement as to the importance of the large group in the mind of the director.

#### The What, Why, and How of Excellence

A basic assumption of this study was that the principal force behind a successful choral program was an extremely gifted teacher. A gifted teacher would be one whose natural talent was extraordinary, who had received good training, whose musicianship was at a high level, and who utilized choral music as a means for enriching the lives of students. Although studies which have attempted to define the components of a successful director's rehearsal technique have been inconclusive, an underlying assumption of the present study was that the rehearsal was the principal component of success in performance. Another assumption was that some values and organizational techniques of superior choral directors would differ significantly from those of

average choral directors, and this assumption has been borne out numerous times. The inferences from these statistically significant differences accrue from the subjective assessment of the investigator, considerations of practical significance vs. mathematical significance, and realizing what the director can control and what is beyond the director's control.

Another consideration for those wishing to upgrade the quality of choral programs is that all the values and administrative traits investigated in this study are rooted in the director's considerations of the musical, vocal, social, and emotional growth of the students. As a successful director assesses the choir's needs and potential, decisions are formulated, and policies are enacted, but all formalized organizational machinery retains its focus on the fundamental musical goals of the choir. This symbiotic relationship might be perceived as a *gestalt*, a wholeness of purpose, as musical considerations generate administrative decisions and organizational policies enhance musicality.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Condensed from principal findings of James Dunaway, *Administrative and Organizational Characteristics of Successful High School Choral Programs in the Western United States* (Ph.D. Diss., Univ. of Utah, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> The topic of festival ratings is extremely sensitive among choral directors, since some directors appear to base the entire year's activities upon receiving a superior rating in the festival, while others refuse to compete for ratings. Several directors contacted to participate in the pilot test indicated that their festival performances were "for comments only." Moreover, verification of festival ratings is very difficult. The information is not available to state leaders because it is generally held confidential, and requesting that the choir directors supply their festival ratings might be interpreted as an invasion of privacy. For these reasons, the letter to the state leaders read, "Each group in the study should have received superior ratings (Division I) during the previous two years at music festivals. You do not need to feel obligated to verify this—simply nominate those programs which you feel most likely would have met this requirement."

<sup>3</sup> Warren E. George, Charles H. Hoffer et al, eds., *The School of Music Program: Description and Standards* (Reston, Virginia: MENC, 1986), pp. 49-50.

# Manhattan Choral Festival

April 29 - May 2, 1988 New York City

With Alexander Dashnaw as Artistic Choral Director, the Manhattan Choral Festival offers two options: evaluation against a standard of excellence with clinic and/or massed choir. The massed choir concerts with orchestra will perform at the *Cathedral of St. John The Divine* and the *United Nations Plaza*. This festival is open to all church, school, university, and community choirs.

#### Massed Choir Program

Te Deum . . . . . Franz J. Haydn  
Mass in G . . . . . Franz P. Schubert

World premiere performance of a commissioned work by Robert Washburn, conducted by the composer

#### Evaluators and Clinicians

Alexander Dashnaw  
Director of Choral Activities,  
Long Island University,  
C.W. Post Campus

Gene Brooks  
Executive Secretary,  
American Choral Directors'  
Association

Robert Washburn  
Dean Emeritus,  
Crane School of Music,  
State University of  
New York, Potsdam

Donald Bailey  
Director of Choral Activities  
Texas Tech University  
Lubbock, Texas

James E. Dash, Producer  
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