

# PODIUM

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## **President's Message**

### **Amy Branahl**

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### **Celebrating 50 Years of Illinois ACDA**

As we turn the page into a new season together, it is both an honor and a joy to mark a very special milestone in the life of our organization: the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Illinois ACDA *Podium*. For five decades, this publication has served as a trusted voice and resource for our members—sharing literature, celebrating achievements, and reminding us that we are part of a vibrant community of choral conductors across the state. It is humbling to stand on the shoulders of those who built this tradition, and inspiring to imagine where the next fifty years will take us.

At its heart, Illinois ACDA has always been about connection. The music we continue to make may just be one concert, yet its impact lasts. The same is true of the relationships and collaborations that have been nurtured through our organization.

Whether through the pages of this publication, at conferences, or in our classrooms across Illinois, our mission has remained the same: to support one another, to grow as artists and educators, and to elevate the power of choral music in our communities.

This year promises to be one filled with opportunity and renewal. Our Repertoire & Resources (R&R) Chairs have been hard at work designing events that will support your artistry, expand your toolkit, and connect you with colleagues in meaningful ways. From reading sessions and workshops to festivals and new initiatives, these offerings are designed to serve you—whether you are leading a children's choir, shaping voices in schools, directing in a sacred setting, or building ensembles in the collegiate or community sphere. We ask you to look at our upcoming events to see the value of an ACDA membership. These festivals provide opportunities for your students and chorus members to not only to learn, but also to contribute your own voice to the rich fabric of our choral organization.

- <https://www.il-acda.org/events/>

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As we celebrate this golden anniversary, I encourage each of you to join us at IMEC for our reception at Obed and Isaac's at IMEC and our annual reading session. Also, please mark your calendars for our Summer ReTreat for next year June 24-25, 2026. We are super excited to bring our Director's Chorus concert back to this year's ReTreat. Lastly, I want to take a moment to thank the IL-ACDA for all the work they have and continue to do. May this year remind us of the resilience and beauty of our art, and of the many ways Illinois ACDA continues to be a home for choral musicians across the state.

With gratitude and anticipation,

Amy J. Branahl  
President, Illinois ACDA

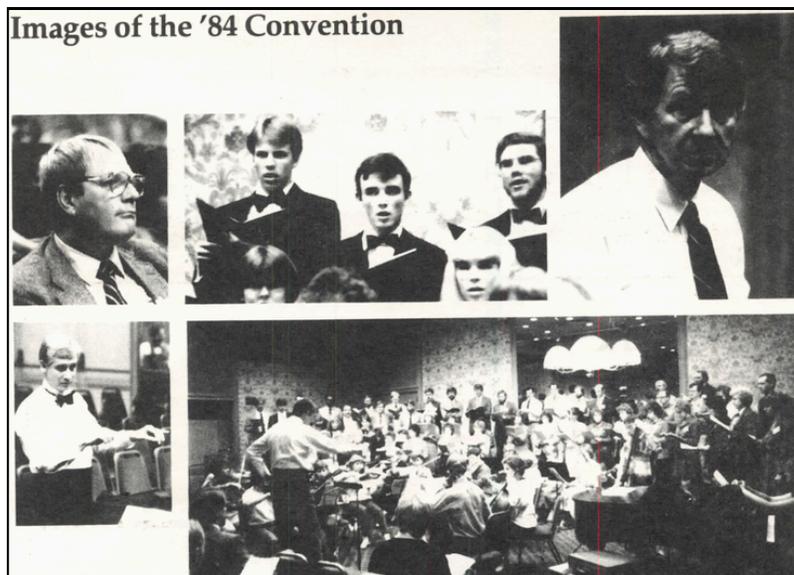
Note from the Editor

**Sean J. M. Newman**

Podium Editor  
Faith Lutheran Church, Lake Forest  
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As we conclude the golden anniversary year of this wonderful publication, we'd like to thank all those who have contributed articles over the past 50 years. The *Podium* is a commitment to the choral directors of the state of Illinois, and we look forward to many more years to come!

I hope you enjoy the following snippets from previous *Podium* issues. These pictures highlight the many special moments from Illinois ACDA Summer ReTreats and Fall Conventions over the years:



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**Note From the Editor continued**



*Western Wind Vocal Ensemble*



*Glen Ellyn Children's Chorus*

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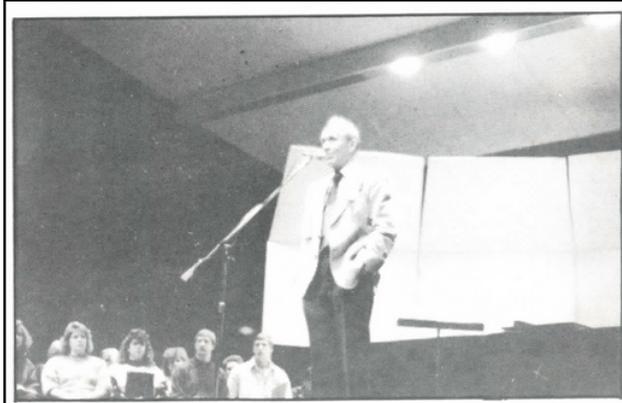
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Please reach out to Amy Branahl if you are interested in any open positions at amyacda@gmail.com

If you have any questions or comments, please reach out at [www.il-acda.org/contact-2](http://www.il-acda.org/contact-2)

Note From the Editor continued



Weston Noble shares ideas for junior college students with convention attendees.



Linda Anderson and her singers from Buffalo Grove show off their high stepping.



Re-Treat clinician Rodney Eichenberger chats with conference participants.

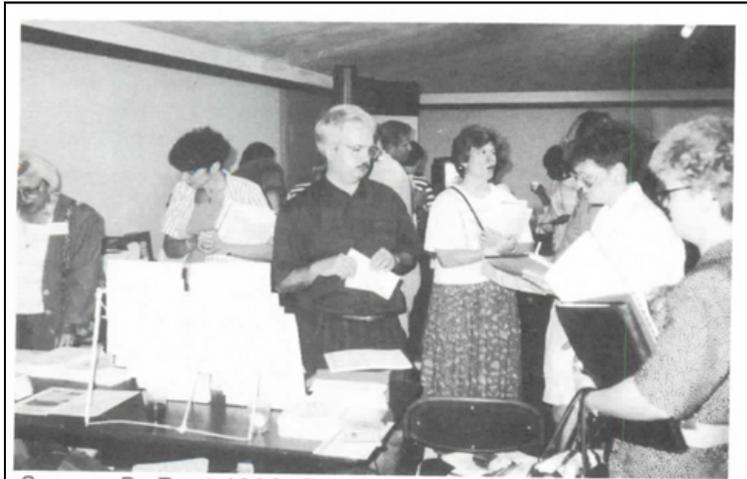


Mary Hopper of Wheaton College leads participants in a reading session for treble and male literature.

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*At Re-Treat '93 Chet Alwes did his Mephistopheles to brighten a cadence in the Palestrina "Missa Brevis."*



*Summer Re-Treat 1992: Participants peruse the displays.*



*Executive Board members enjoy a light moment at Summer Re-Treat registration.*



*Albert McNeil inspired participants for the Robert Ray Gospel Mass performance at Summer Re-Treat '93. McNeil's Jubilee Singers perform in Galesburg on November 2. (See page 7)*



*Re-Treat participants preview the IMEA All State Choir music with James Stegall of Western Illinois University.*



*Ethelyn Sparfield and the St. Louis Children's Chorus demonstrate sight reading dexterity at Summer Re-Treat '93.*



*"Practicing what we preach" at Re-Treat '93.*



*"Winter" choral directors are "summer" students.*



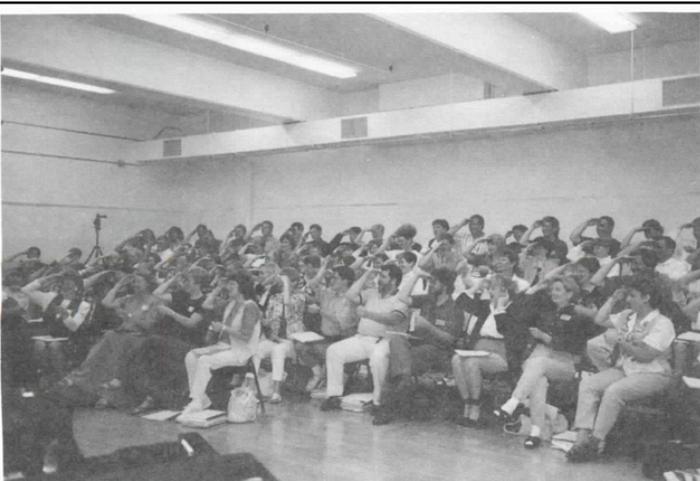
*Brainstorming and evaluation by the Executive Board initiate planning for Re-Treat '95.*



*New ideas abound as Re-Treat participants visit exhibits and talk with colleagues.*



*The directors at Re-Treat '96 enjoy making their own kind of music.*



*Re-Treat '97 participants salute Randy McChesney's expertise with young singers.*



*Joel Ross, winner of the IL-ACDA Composition Competition, sings through a companion piece with Re-Treat participants.*

We look forward to making many more memories at Illinois ACDA events. Please enjoy more history from Janet McCumber in her article! It is a privilege to be the editor for this publication.

Musically yours,  
Sean J. M. Newman

## Vocal Jazz, Where Do I Begin?

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### **Jess Heinrich**

Jazz Choir Chair

*Geneva Community High School*

Welcome to the wonderful world of vocal jazz. Come one, come all! This genre may look daunting, but it is actually more in your blood than you realize. Jazz can be a little bit of everything: pop, bossa nova, bebop, swing, funk, etc. So why do we put it under the label of jazz music? Frankly, the “vocal jazz” category of music is only categorized that way due to the abundance of non-classical, complex chord structures. Therefore, if you have a really cool arrangement of a pop tune that has complex chords—boom! You’re doing jazz. The genre is meant to be far more inclusive than people may realize.

So, if one is already doing jazz but wants to start feeling like a master in the category, what is the best way to get there? One of the best sayings regarding the jazz genre is, “jazz is better caught than taught.” Imagine you go to a salsa-dancing establishment. You have read how to do the steps, but have never listened to the music nor seen people dance to it. Would you expect to fit in right away with the rest of the dancers? Absolutely not. You’d want to go to this salsa establishment and be a fly on the wall for a bit. Observe people dance, listen to the time signature of the music, and get the feel of the music in your body. Singing is exactly the same.

Sometimes we, in the choral profession, look at music and expect to get all the answers from the score, since we have a literal, musical road map. Start listening. If you are a classroom teacher, have your students listen to a vocal jazz musician for a couple of minutes per day. Play the music while they come into class. If you are a music in worship ensemble, community choir, or professional choir, play the music as they arrive to rehearsal. If you are wanting to educate yourself, start listening to jazz once a day in the car or on a walk. You do not need to score study to start getting the feel of this genre in your body. Unknowingly, you will start to naturally feel what should be accented in phrases, you will swing better, you will hear common beat patterns, and you will see what music feels more on beats one and three versus two and four, etc.

“Vocal jazz” music is all around you. The only thing standing in the way of you considering yourself a jazz musician is that you haven’t let yourself catch some jazz.

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## Rehearsal Through a Different Lens: A Chat with Composer, Kevin Jay Isaacs

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### **Cory Boulton**

College/University Choir Chair

*Bradley University*

Dr. Kevin Jay Isaacs, Professor of Music at Western Connecticut State University, has spent more than four decades in a distinctive academic role that often surprises young instructors. While he officially serves as Director of Choral Activities, his primary teaching load includes composition, form, and theory. In our profession, it can be rare to see a state university position that blends these two domains so fully. Because of this unique combination, Dr. Isaacs approaches choral repertoire in ways that often diverge from the standard methods taught to pre-service conductors. In this interview, he responds to one critical question that gets to the heart of his work and its broader implications for studying choral music.

### **The Question:**

*I worked with you for many years, and continue to observe your masterful methods in the rehearsal. I think your approach to looking at music with singers through the lens of form is fascinating, and while this is a much larger conversation, would you be willing to just share with us your perspective on how we should be studying repertoire?*

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### The Response:

Absolutely. There was little to no music instruction at my elementary school. Instead, I took private art lessons from a brilliant painter in town from second to eighth grade. My work with Helen Waddell was foundational to my later ideas of form, structure, purpose, and comprehensibility in artistic expressions. Those weekly lessons enlivened my creative impulses and prepared me for many interpretive methods that would permeate my choral conducting and composition. My musical experiences through high school were typical. I sang in choirs, attended honor festivals, took fun bus tours, and even went to Europe one summer with a choir and orchestra.

In college at TCU, I was a choral music education major, but something didn't feel right. I was most happy when I was looking at scores, learning about musical elements, and *noticing* what was happening to me and others during musical participation and reception. I changed to theory & composition, which allowed me the opportunity to spend my time studying, analyzing, and composing. I was finally where I needed to be, and those years of art lessons were calling to me through the fog of time. The mind takes on the *order* of what it studies. Nothing is wasted.

My education at TCU during my master's degree continued in theory/composition with a minor in music history. My assistantship duties were teaching courses in music literature and guided listening. This experience was a direct way to use all the facets I loved in the discipline: musical engagement, recognition of sonic events, perception of structural elements through time, and the emotional effects derived from each. My lessons with Helen bubbling up yet again?

My doctoral work was in composition with a minor in choral conducting at the University of Arizona. I studied composition with the celebrated composer and pianist, Robert Muczynski. He taught me that each piece is "telling" the audience, the performer, *and* the composer (during its creation) information about itself and, more importantly, its relationship to time. Time is the canvas for all musical expression. As John Dewey wrote in 1934 in *Art as Experience*:

"No distinction can be made between form and substance...; the act itself is exactly what it is because of how it is done...; in the act there is no distinction, but perfect integration of manner and content, form and substance...; ultimately all confusion of values proceeds from the same source: **neglect of the intrinsic significance of the medium.**"

Music, as a discipline and artform, is not just the *making* of music, it is the entire *idea* of music itself. Because its canvas is time, because its transmission is "wiggly air" through time; and because its meaning is abstract, not representational, music has its own philosophy, geometry, and methods of recognition.

Let's call it, "Form through Gestural Function."

Music is the organization of temporal space, so the "time-order" of material is important. Material is *what* it is because of *where* it is in time, even in music with a text. The audience will only recognize material they have already heard, so the movement from and to previously heard gestures provides the audience with aural landmarks for their musical journey. New material is just that: contrasting and fresh. The receiver hears something, perceives something different, then re-hears something familiar. This process is self-flattering and recursive. Tonally, each piece uses pitch-class horizon lines, levels of dissonance, and harmonic expansion/compression to signal structure and movement. Additionally, it is the composer's desire that the audience pay attention to material with varying intensity depending on the function of each gesture or section. Is the piece introducing, presenting, connecting, completing, combining, or transforming a musical event during this segment of time? How do we know when and where they are happening or changing, especially in the mono-timbral context of a *cappella* choral music?

Each piece of repertoire is working at multiple levels to demand attention, shift focus, provide form, and improve comprehensibility. It is required of us as conductors and teachers to reveal this dynamic activity to our singers and students. They will perform with more intent, less fear, and more understanding as they discover and appreciate what the music, not just the text, is suggesting and how it wants to be heard.

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## Beyond Sight-Singing: Expanding Music Literacy for Stronger Student Ownership in the Choral Classroom

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### **Nythia Martinez**

District 1

Diversity Initiatives Committee Chair

*Walter Payton College Preparatory*

*High School*

Like so many of us, I have the privilege of introducing the joy and study of music to a large percentage of my high school class roster. Most of my beginning-level choral students walk into our classroom on the first day of school with serious apprehension, believing failure is inevitable because “I don’t sing.” As their music ambassador, helping them build their identities in music is my first priority, addressed both in the first class through immediate singing, and heavily throughout the school year through experiences that promote confidence. With students often viewing singing as an exclusive, talent-based activity, it is essential that, in addition to singing in choir, we create diverse entry points for engagement with music that help them recognize their capacity for participation in the multi-faceted artistic process.

These circumstances invite us to think about designing our curricula for the strengthening of students’ disciplinary literacy, defined as students “learning to read, write, talk, and reason as a junior member of a discipline’s community” (Petrosky, McConachie, & Mihalakis, 2010, 132). If we equip students to connect with repertoire through a more comprehensive lens of musicianship, it is my assertion that we are likely to cultivate student musical identity and capacity in tandem, proving that in spite of their vocal inexperience, they can be an asset to a choir, since vocal performance is then only one of many skill sets measured to demonstrate growth in music.

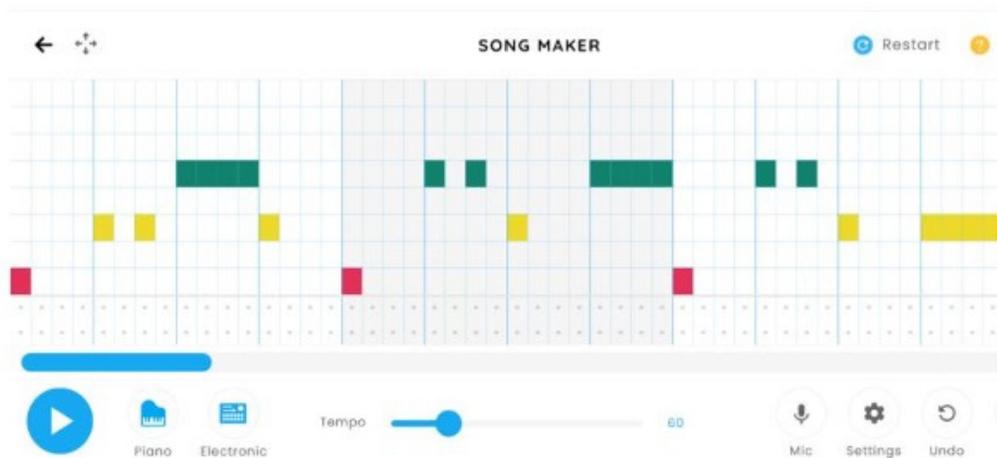
While literacy development in the choral classroom often appears in the form of sight-singing practice, successful and meaningful reading experiences must be preceded by the development of students’ aural capacity. Audiation, trusting the voice to produce what the mind hears, not only ensures more successful future reading, but helps to quickly convince students that music is inside of them.

A few examples of ways in which my students engage with skills and repertoire to increase holistic disciplinary literacy are as follows:

- 1. COMPOSITION/DICTATION:** One online platform that has been extremely useful to my students for developing early aural capacity is the simple, yet effective **Chrome Music Lab**. Soon after our initial exploration of singing, my beginning students’ first graded activity asks them to compose an eight-measure melody using only SOL (green), MI (yellow), and DO (red), and only Ta, Ta-Di, and Takadimi rhythms. They use this grid to compose, hear the playback, and practice singing their melody with Curwen hand signals. The platform helps students to clearly associate sound with sight while the playback function supports the vulnerable experience of recording themselves singing alone. An example of the first three measures of a student’s written work and their accompanying recording are shared below:

*continued on page 11*

[CLICK HERE FOR STUDENT AUDIO](#)



In the latter part of the first quarter, after students are familiar with basic notation and have sight-read stepwise melodies, traditional rhythmic and melodic dictation becomes a central part of our curriculum. Interestingly, I have found that dictation can actually serve both students' audiation development in the beginning of the school year, while also preparing them for future sight-singing. Consider using Chrome Music Lab to provide the grid upon which students can plot their first dictations before they engage with traditional notation. I have seen this approach to improve both capacity and confidence in hesitant singers.

2. **HABITS OF MIND:** A classroom culture open to newness requires teacher intentionality for student buy-

in. As we move through the school year, I further address disciplinary literacy in music with metacognitive work around the "Habits of Mind for Musicians". **The Institute for Habits of Mind** provides this useful chart summarizing the expectations of a successful artistic process. To engage with the material, I first ask students to provide examples of habits they have previously practiced in varied life scenarios with success and others that remain to be a challenge. As our musical work becomes more challenging throughout the year, I ask students to recognize the primary habits the activity requires for their ultimate success. As we know, success in music class might feel different than in other subjects - it is not often linear and has no real finality. Intentionality with the Habits of Mind has primed my students to cultivate a mindset that values reflection and patience over the illusion of perfection:

3. **SCORE MARKING:** While I had often utilized this process with my advanced students, the practice of score marking, especially for the beginning ensembles, has proven to truly deepen their value for musical detail - the more detail they notice, define, and mark, the more ownership they had over the function and dynamic landscape of their repertoire. This kind of analysis may seem dense with detail, but many students are familiar with activities in other subjects that ask for labeling, so the activity is often met with excitement. A chart they use to standardize their marking practices is also provided below:



**Red:** Tempo: Fast and increasing. Dynamics: *mf* and louder, crescendo markings

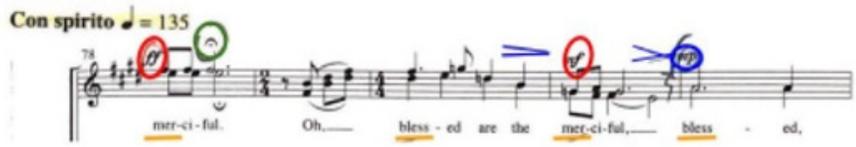
**Orange:** Syllable emphasis - underline strong syllable in slurs/multi-syllable words

**Yellow:** Section descriptions/newly established tempo markings

**Green:** Articulation markings: accents, staccato, fermatas, etc.

**Blue:** Tempo: Slow and decreasing. Dynamics: *mp* and quieter, decrescendo markings

**EXAMPLE:**



Early composition, strengthening habits of mind for musicians, and score marking procedures are examples of activities that have deepened my students' literacy of the multi-layered process necessary for repertoire preparation in the choral discipline. Additionally, and in my opinion, more importantly, incorporating the academic reality of music preparation in your choral classroom for entry-level students can help them shift fixed mindsets around talent and embrace the musician they never believed they could be.



**Be sure to check out Illinois ACDA's Favorite Choral Works on pages 20 and 21!**

## Randy Haldeman

Collegiate/Lifelong Choirs

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*Author's Note: Now in my thirty-fifth year of teaching choral music—most of it at the graduate and undergraduate levels—I find myself continually returning to the simplest and most fundamental truths, both to monitor my own habits and to guide my students. The following is an excerpt from a larger set of presentations entitled Getting Ready to Get Ready: Time and Rehearsal, which I have given at multiple conferences across the country, most recently at MTVA. Please feel free to contact me for additional information, or for the extended bibliography that informed this work.*

### Why Time Matters

Time is the most valuable resource we have. Studies of Academic Learning Time (ALT)—the portion of class when students are actively engaged in meaningful, appropriately challenging tasks—show a consistent correlation with achievement. In choir, ALT translates to the proportion of rehearsal actually spent singing.

In one study of high school choral rehearsals, ensembles averaged just over 50% of time engaged in singing. The rest disappeared into management, warm-ups, transitions, and talking. Yet the choirs that sang more, improved more. The old adage still seems true: *You can't talk your way to a better performance.*

### Start Singing—Right Away

One of the simplest, most reliable ways to improve rehearsal quality is to start the choir singing within one minute of the tardy bell. Studies consistently suggest that the closer to the bell a choir begins rehearsing repertoire, the higher the correlation with assessed performance quality. Yet the average high school choral director begins the first piece after 14 minutes and 19 seconds, and more than 42% start after 15 minutes.

What we do in the initial minute matters. Analyses of high-school choral rehearsals have documented how opening routines—often warm-ups and organizational tasks—shape time use and student behavior, for better or worse. Designing those first minutes for swift, musical engagement improves the “on-task” ratio and consistently improves performance outcomes.

Brendell's 1996 study of high school choral rehearsals—replicating Thurman's 1978 work and confirmed by many since—analyzed both how much time was devoted to different rehearsal activities and how much off-task behavior occurred during each.

**Table 1:**  
**Analysis of opening rehearsal routines**

REHEARSAL ACTIVITY	% OF REHEARSAL TIME	% OFF-TASK BEHAVIOR
SIGHT-READING	22.23%	9.22%
VOCAL WARM-UP	9.63%	15.07%
GETTING READY / TRANSITIONS	6.75%	26.14%
PHYSICAL WARM-UP	3.37%	18.48%
LITERATURE INSTRUCTION	1.84%	16.27%
OTHER ACTIVITY	1.46%	16.53%

The highest percentages of off-task behavior occurred during activities requiring less singing and active participation—especially getting ready and physical warm-ups, both of which often happen at the very start of rehearsal. These opening minutes are prime opportunities to improve efficiency, focus, and student engagement.

### **The One-Minute Standard**

When a choral director has set in place elegant routines that automate the opening minute of rehearsal, the benefits are palpable. A classroom environment of efficiency and focus is established immediately, expectations of student behaviors are set and reinforced, and the reward payoff (the singing!) is arrived at sooner. It is also far easier than fighting for attention to start rehearsal each day. Here is a starter-kit of suggestions I find useful to achieve these goals – remember, students must be systematically taught to do these things:

- Post your rehearsal plan on the board, daily, so that choristers can organize their music.
- Automate attendance taking. I used to use a QR code that they would scan every day, and also have used the self-attendance function in my LMS. text a simple keyword (a shibboleth, if you will) to my choir cell number. If you're old-school, use seating charts.
- Write announcements on the board, or better yet post them to the LMS, and/or email or text them from your choir cell number.
- Don't take questions about the announcements until after class, or, they can email or text you. The same with signing passes and documents, and the like.
- Instead of using a verbal call-to-order, use a I-IV-V chord progression to start the first vocalese.
- Have sections leaders assist those members in their section who are having issues with organizing music, and so on. Whenever possible, empower choristers to establish, monitor, and positively reinforce these micro-behaviors that make for effective rehearsals.
- Establish the one-minute standard and hold to it consistently. Establish a reward structure for following the procedures (e.g., I have achievement rewards for my church choir members for 5 consecutive on-time check-ins).

Time lost at the start of rehearsal is rarely recovered. Elegant procedures, where every second serves the musical goal and strengthens the ensemble, are best employed immediately at the start of every rehearsal. By combining quick startup procedures with student ownership, directors can reduce off-task behavior, maintain momentum, and maximize the minutes that matter most—the ones in which the choir is actually making music. Do you have some elegant procedures that get you through the opening minutes directly to music making? I'd love to hear from you.

## Thoughts on Student Reflection

### **Abigail Risner**

District 8

*Dixon High School*

As we enter a new school year, the act of reflecting is at the forefront of our minds. Thoughts on the previous year inform our decisions as we make revisions to routines, select repertoire, and prepare to make this year the best one yet. There is no doubt that reflecting on our work is a crucial step in helping us continue to learn and grow as educators.

Naturally, reflection is essential for our students' growth as well. How can we support our students in learning and growing through their reflections?

An obvious point of reflection is at the end of a concert cycle. I typically have students watch a video recording of the concert and engage in both written and verbal reflection. To begin, I give the students the floor to share any comments they may have about the concert. Most of the time, students respond with positive feedback that was shared with them by the attendees of the concert.

*continued on page 15*

## Thoughts on Student Reflection continued

I have found that starting with allowing students to share and hear all of the positive reactions to their concert helps more individuals open up and contribute to later discussions.

Next, students receive a reflection form that includes sentence prompts. Students write at least one complete sentence about something they noticed went well, something that they wonder could be improved, and something they wish went better for each piece their ensemble performed. The prompts help students start a thought using a positive tone, encourage observation of both things that went well and points for improvement, and set them up to elaborate on the point they are making. We are our own worst critics, and that can sometimes lead to a lack of depth in explaining a point of improvement and communicating negatively. While noticing and making a plan to improve mistakes is an important skill, it is equally important to take pride in our work and know what went well.

In addition to the writing prompts, students will also self-grade by filling out a rubric. Students reflect and assign a score to a variety of categories pertaining to their performance. These include, but are not limited to, musical effects, ensemble skills, vocal technique, and stage and audience presence. Giving students the rubric that is used to grade a performance helps them understand and apply the vocabulary used in rehearsal. This also identifies the areas of choral performance where individuals may need additional instruction.

The final part of a concert reflection involves setting goals for the next concert. Students are asked to reflect on their personal performance and work ethic leading up to the performance. They also engage in discussions to create a group goal with their section and as a full ensemble. Goal setting is a great way to promote a sense of ownership and helps guide the next steps for future rehearsals.

The ability to reflect is a crucial skill throughout the entire learning process, not just as a result of completing a concert program. An essential skill in becoming a great musician is being able to identify mistakes in rehearsal. We often model this skill to students in the form of feedback but it is also important to take a step back and allow our students to listen and identify areas that need improvement for themselves. In fact, our students will often pick out things that we may have missed earlier in rehearsal!

The act of reflecting is one of the most important skills we can teach our students. There are many ways to incorporate reflection from rehearsal to post-concert. Empowering your students to reflect every step of the way will lead to intuitive musicians and even stronger ensembles.

# The Conductor's Podium

State Newsletter of the Illinois Members of the American Choral Directors Association

### Janet McCumber

Historian

*Eastern Illinois University*

“On Tuesday, February 24, 1959, an historic meeting took place in Kansas City, Missouri, in connection with the biennial national convention of the Music Teachers National Association. The meeting: the organizational meeting of the American Choral Directors Association.”[1]

With that statement in the very first *Choral Journal*, President Archie Jones announced the birth of the American Choral Directors Association. During 1958 a steering committee was formed to generate a list of names of choral directors who were “considered competent, and sufficiently interested in the profession to support an organization.”[2] By 1960, the charter membership list of 94 choral directors was published in the *Journal*, including Dr Harold Decker of the University of Illinois.

In the September 1961 issue of the *Journal* an article appeared titled, “Recommended Listening for Choral Directors,” prepared “under the direction of Harold A. Decker, Director of Choral Activities, University of Illinois” with appreciative credit given to the U of I grad students who apparently did most of the research. [3]The collection of commercial recordings was extensive and included an index of composers and the records on which their music appeared. Also in 1961, 37 state chairmen had been appointed as well as a separate chairman for Chicago. Dr Decker was appointed as the Illinois state chair, with Kent A. Newbury appointed to the Chicago seat.

In the September/October 1963 issue of the *Choral Journal*, it was announced that Illinois would be the first state to organize a state chapter of ACDA, due to “the continual growth of choral activities among ACDA members and other choral directors in Illinois.”[4] State chair Harold Decker reported that there were 140 active members in Illinois at this time, which was the largest state membership in the country. Dr. Decker gave the following statement regarding the genesis of the Illinois chapter:

“Briefly, the purposes of the ACDA are to foster and maintain the highest artistic and spiritual experience that can be provided by choral singing. In order to attain these goals in the state of Illinois, our State Chapter has been organized with the following objectives in mind:

- 1.To promote workshops and clinics which will acquaint conductors with great choral music of all periods and with the appropriate style of each. In addition, these workshops will provide the inspiration of choral leadership in attaining the highest levels of musicianship and artistic performance by observing and studying new techniques and rehearsal procedures.
- 2.Special emphasis will be placed annually on various projects such as Madrigal Festivals, Exchange Concerts, Choral Festivals, and in assisting the Illinois Music Educators Association in the choral areas at district and state meetings.
- 3.The encouragement of ‘neighborhood’ meetings of choral directors whereby there may be a closer understanding and exchange of ideas between choral directors.”[5]

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[1] Jones, Archie, “President’s Letter,” *The Choral Journal*, no. 1, May, 1959.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Decker, Harold A., “Recommended Listening for Choral Directors, *The Choral Journal*, September, 1961.

[4] Author unknown, “Illinois First to Organize State Chapter of ACDA,” *The Choral Journal*, September/October, 1963.

[5] *Ibid.*

Dr. Decker went on to explain that the state would be divided into six districts, corresponding to those implemented by IMEA, each with a district chair. The six districts and their chairs were as follows:

- District 1: Walter Rodby, Homewood-Flossmoor (suburban Chicago) and Kent Newbury (Greater Chicago)
- District 2: Vernon Fay, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb
- District 3: Lewis Whitehart, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington
- District 4: Henry E. Busche, MacMurray College, Jacksonville
- District 5: June Johnson, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston
- District 6: Robert Kingsbury, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale[6]

The article continued by elaborating the events and meetings planned by these chairs. There were multiple mentions of collaboration with the Illinois Music Educators Association, and several articles in previous *Journals* emphasized the need for ACDA to closely work with MENC (Music Educators National Conference). As is the case still today, the relationship between the two organizations was not always smooth, but both groups were dedicated to promoting collegiality between them, recognizing that they were working toward a common goal in promoting musicianship and high musical standards.

In March of 1966, at the biennial national convention, Dr. Harold Decker was elected president of ACDA, serving a two-year term from 1966-1968. Dr. Decker had previously served as the “second vice-president,” a term that appears to correspond to our current president-elect (“first vice-president” corresponds to our past president). Each of these seats, as is the case today, is a two-year term. The May/June 1966 issue of *The Choral Journal* included a page with the nominees for state chairs along with a ballot that members could cut out and mail in with their vote. These nominees were only in states with 20 or more members.[7] Dr. Decker would continue to serve on the national advisory board after his terms as president and first vice-president.

The Illinois chapter, while participating regularly in division and national events, did not have a state convention until the fall of 1976. The first state convention was held on October 22-23, 1976, at the Hyatt Regency O’Hare. There were *five* headliners: Margaret Hillis, Lynne Bradley, David Larson, Doreen Rao, and Phil Mark. As information about this first conference was mailed to the membership, *The Conductors’ Podium* of October 1976 included very little information about the conference, other than to encourage downstaters to “make it a Fall vacation!”[8] These state conventions would be held in October for quite a few years, at various locations around the state, including: Peoria (no specific location given), Eastern Illinois University, Judson College, Joliet, Wheaton, Naperville, College of DuPage, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

In 1979 it was decided to present Harold Decker an award that honored his service to both ACDA and the Illinois chapter of ACDA. He served as president of ACDA at least twice and also served as the Illinois state president. His contributions to the field of choral music were prodigious, and it was decided to give this award to a deserving Illinois choral musician/conductor every year from then on, naming the award after its first recipient. The criteria for the award are as follows:

1. Quality leadership and service to the art of choral music.
2. Minimum of 20 years of leadership in choral music.
3. Minimum of 15 years of choral service in Illinois.
4. A record of active service in IL-ACDA.
5. Must be a member of ACDA.[9]

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[6] Ibid.

[7] “Nominees for State Chairman,” *The Choral Journal*, May/June, 1996, p. 32.

[8] *The Conductors’ Podium*, Fall 1976, “The President’s Letter.”

[9] From the IL-ACDA website.

Since this time, the Harold Decker award has been given each year to the choral leaders of our state who meet the necessary criteria.

The state board made the decision to have several “mini conventions” around the state in 1983, rather than one all-encompassing convention. The conventions were held by individual districts at locations within those districts, as follows:

- District 1: Governors State University, Park Forest South, October 15
- District 2: Illinois Central College, East Peoria, October 22
- Districts 3, 5: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, September 10
- District 6: SIU-Edwardsville, November 17
- District 7: Members encouraged to attend District 1 convention[10]

Obviously, it was a great deal of work to put together these mini-conventions, each with its own headliners, interest sessions, and performing groups. This is the only year that the mini format was used, not surprisingly!

1984 saw the genesis of the Composition Competition for Illinois composers. The initial prompt was posted in the December 1983 issue of *The Conductors' Podium* by David Brunner, composer and chair of the Composition Competition committee. The prize awarded to the winner was \$300, and IL-ACDA reserved the right to give the premiere performance of the work at the Fall 1984 convention. The winner of the first Composition Competition was Michael Kosch, who at the time was the assistant to the director of the Experimental Music Studios at the University of Illinois. The piece was entitled *spring!-may*. [11] While I was able to find several instrumental compositions by Michael Kosch on YouTube, I could not find a performance of *spring!-may*.

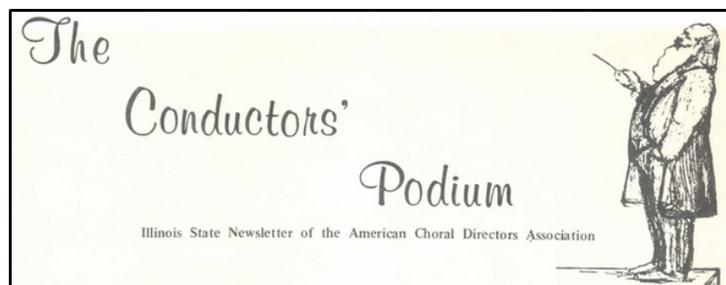
In the fall of 1991, it was decided by the board of IL-ACDA to move the annual conference from the fall to the summer, in the hopes of increasing attendance. The spring issue of *The Conductors' Podium* is where we see the first use of the term “Re-Treat” to describe this new conference format. This first Re-Treat was packed with sessions and talent, including the Western Wind ensemble, which performed a concert as well as leading conference participants in small ensemble singing; Rodney Eichenberger; René Clausen; Arnold Epley; Sandra Prodan and the Glen Ellyn Children’s Chorus; and Eunice Boardman. Additionally, members of IL-ACDA presented reading sessions and workshops on various topics. [12] The 1992 Re-Treat was held on the campus of Millikin University in Decatur, and that would continue to be the location for the next 10 years.

If you have interest in the events of IL-ACDA in the early years, you are welcome and encouraged to look at the *Podium* archives on the IL-ACDA website. Thanks to Randy Halverson, Aaron Mejorada, and myself, the early issues of our newsletter have been organized, digitized, and placed on the website where they are easily accessible under the “publications” tab.

[10] *The Conductors' Podium*, Fall 1983.

[11] *Ibid*, Winter 1983, Fall 1984

[12] *The Conductors' Podium*, Spring 1992; Fall 1992, President’s Letters.



## Moving Forward — Governance, A Call for Decker Award Nominations, and Supporting the IL-ACDA Composition Contest

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### **Paul Laprade**

Past-President

*VanderCook College of Music*

*Oak Park Concert Chorale*

*Tutti Voce Collective*

*New England Congregational*

*Church*

As Immediate Past-President, I've had the privilege of witnessing initiatives from the past two years take root, celebrating the success of our recent summer ReTreat, and watching with joy as our current President, Amy, continues to move the needle forward on several fronts that will benefit our organization. I have full confidence in the direction we are heading.

A quick read through this issue of the *Podium* reveals some of the exciting changes underway. For example, instead of featuring submissions solely from individual R&R chairs, we now showcase contributions from the entire R&R team. Our President-Elect, Ben, has taken on the role of overseeing R&R initiatives—a position that is already yielding organizational benefits. With Sean, our *Podium* Editor, we anticipate a stronger, more consistent presence for vetted repertoire. These efforts will be reflected not only in the expanded R&R articles in the *Podium*, but also in how R&R is represented in our conferences and sessions, such as those at IMEC. This evolution, driven by a subtle shift in governance structure, is poised to have a significant impact.

On my end, I will be balancing Ben's responsibilities by overseeing the work of the District Chairs. Traditionally, the Past President managed award selections—a role that has now grown to include not only the Young Director and Harold Decker Awards, but also the Partnership Award, a meaningful addition introduced by Past-President Laura Coster. By working more closely with District Chairs, the Past President can now initiate the search for deserving nominees with greater intention and a clearer aim to represent all regions of the state. As with any new process, it may take time for our goals to align with outcomes fully, but the foundation is strong.

To close, I offer two invitations. First, please contact me with your nominations for the 2026 Harold Decker Award. Guidelines for the award are posted in the "Awards" tab on the IL-ACDA website. Second, encourage any composers you know to submit entries for the 2026 Composition Contest. We've seen tremendous success with the revised 2025 competition, thanks to the collaborative efforts of past-chair Donald Fraser, our new Composition Contest Chair Chris Windle, and myself. The updated award—which includes a cash prize, a quality performance, a professional recording, and publication through MusicSpoke—is truly a gift to our field, as it directly results in the creation of a new work.

Thank you for your ongoing support of our team and the mission we serve together.

Paul Laprade

Immediate Past-President

**Favorite Choral Works to follow on  
page 20!**

The logo for the Illinois Association of Church and District Associations (IL-ACDA). It features the word "illinois" in a small, blue, lowercase serif font. Below it, the letters "acda" are written in a large, elegant, blue cursive script. A small blue circle is positioned above the letter "a".

## Various Repertoire & Resources Chairs

### Treble Choirs (submitted by Ali Kordelewski):

Almas de Barro  
By Santiago Veros  
SSAA  
Music Spoke

### Junior High/Middle School Choirs (submitted by Carol Munn):

JAM! (Jom-Ayuh-Mari!)  
By Tracy Wong  
SAB Octavo  
11426603  
Supplier ID: TW001.1  
Graphite Publishing

### Community Choirs (submitted by Jennifer Whiting):

Ta lendab mesipuu poole  
By Peep Sarapik  
Text: Juhan Liiv  
SATB and piano  
Noodiriitul (Estonian sheet music company)

“Ta lendab mesipuu poole” is perhaps the most beloved folk song in Estonia. Tens of thousands gathered to sing it in defiance of Russian occupation during “The Singing Revolution” (1987–1991). My community choir sang “Ta lendab” during our concert tour of the Baltic states. We were deeply affected by the people's love for freedom and their profound connection to this song, which still brings tears to their eyes. It challenged us to consider how we must also stand up for freedom in America today. The score is available from Noodiriitul for SATB and piano, or for voices only, or for piano only. This is the standard arrangement by Sarapik, sung by every Estonian citizen:

<https://noodiriitul.ee/en/score/peep-sarapik-juhan-liiv-ta-lendab-mesipuu-poole-like-a-homing-bee-for-mixed-choir/>

Here's an example of 110,000 Estonians singing “Ta lendab” at their national song festival:

[https://youtu.be/QFX5ueueBpg?si=X\\_IckfblGgXCqQ-F](https://youtu.be/QFX5ueueBpg?si=X_IckfblGgXCqQ-F)

I would be happy to share resources for pronunciation (e-mail: [jenniferwhitingmusic@gmail.com](mailto:jenniferwhitingmusic@gmail.com)).

### Jazz Choirs (submitted by Jess Heinrich):

Evergreen  
Arranged by Erin Bentlage  
Originally performed by Yebba  
Adapted by Tehillah Alphonso  
Can be found at <https://sajevoices.com>

### Children's Choirs (submitted by Marianna Kosaya):

So Take This Song of Joy  
By Greg Gilpin  
Traditional Quaker Lullaby  
SSA  
J.W. Pepper Catalog #: 10708342  
Supplier ID: 35031380  
UPC: 888680655686  
Shawnee Press

The Secret  
By Greg Gilpin  
Poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar  
SSA  
J.W. Pepper Catalog #: 10757031  
Supplier ID: CGE177  
UPC: 749193025789  
Choristers Guild

Kusimama (Stand Tall)  
By Jim Papoulis  
Original (Swahili and English)  
SSA  
J.W. Pepper Catalog #: 11202989E  
Supplier ID: 460824  
Boosey & Hawkes

Good Night and Good Morning  
By Robert S. Cohen  
Text by Richard Monckton Milnes  
SSA  
J.W. Pepper Catalog #: 10953818  
Supplier ID: 15/3586H  
UPC: 9780787762056  
Heritage Music Press

The Duel (The Gingham Dog and the Calico Cat)  
By Michael Bussewitz-Quarm  
Poem by Eugene Field  
SA  
J.W. Pepper Catalog #: 10692715  
Supplier ID: MB1018-2PTT-OV  
MBQ Studio / MB Arts

The Moon and the Wind

By Patti Janell Drennan

Poems by Robert Louis Stevenson

SA

J.W. Pepper Catalog #: 10583529

Supplier ID: CM9426

Carl Fischer LLC

Siyahamba

Arranged by Victor C. Johnson

Traditional South African Folk Text

SA

J.W. Pepper Catalog #: 11566095

Supplier ID: 00-49851

UPC: 038081571652

Alfred Music Publishing

The Beauty of Life

By Robert S. Cohen

Text by Ronald W. Cadmus

SSA

J.W. Pepper Catalog #: 10538806

Supplier ID: SBMP1299

UPC: 608938360816

ISBN: 608938360816

Santa Barbara Music Publishing

**Diversity Initiatives (submitted by Nythia Martinez):**

De Tierra Lejana Venimos (2015)

Arranger by Juan M.V. Garcia (b. 1977)

Text source: Puerto Rican traditional Christmas carol (villancico)

Publisher: Carus-Verlag Stuttgart [Germany], 2015; in Christmas Carols of the World (228 p.)

Catalogue #: CV 02.142 (7 p.)

**Two-Year Colleges (submitted by Patrick O'Shea):**

Felices ter (Thrice happy they)

By Randall Thompson

Text source: Horace, Odes, Book 1, 13 (Latin)

Publisher: E.C. Schirmer

Catalogue Number: 2416 (print) or 2416-E (downloadable)

Direct Link:

<https://www.ecspublishing.com/six-odes-of-horace-felices-ter-thrice-happy-they.html>

Recording (American Repertory Singers, Leo Nestor):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBnMDXEsJ08>

An excellent choice for directors wanting to explore a polyphonic setting in Latin of a secular rather than sacred text.

**Senior High School Choirs (submitted by Roland Hatcher):**

Temporal

Diana Sáez/Suzzette Ortiz

Text: Traditional Puerto Rican Plena

Publisher: La Voz

Catalogue #: 11535672



**Be sure to check out Illinois ACDA's upcoming events on page 22!**



## UPCOMING EVENTS

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IL-ACDA leads and sponsors events to support all aspects of the advancement of choral arts in the state of Illinois. Please refer to our website ([www.il-acda.org/events](http://www.il-acda.org/events) and [www.il-acda.org/awards](http://www.il-acda.org/awards)) for more information on the events and award opportunities listed below:

### **All-State Show Choir Festival**

October 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Wheaton-Warrenville South High School

Coordinator: Sean Hoffman, Show Choir Repertoire & Resources Chair

### **IL-ACDA Award Nominations**

Due January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026

Harold Decker and Young Director Award nominations can be sent any time to Amy Branahl at: [amyacda@gmail.com](mailto:amyacda@gmail.com)

### **Sing and Share Treble Festival “Central Illinois”**

February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Washington High School

Coordinators: Lara Reem with Ben Luginbuhl, President-Elect, IL-ACDA

### **Midwestern ACDA Conference 2026: “Reflections of Us”**

February 25<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

*(see page 23 for more information)*

### **Treble Fest “North”**

Spring 2026

Coordinator: Ali Kordelewski, Treble Choir Repertoire and Repertoires Chair

### **Treble-Bass Voices Fest**

Spring 2026

Coordinator: Brian Birch, Tenor-Bass Choirs Repertoire and Repertoires Chair

### **Children’s Choir Festival**

Spring 2026

Coordinator: Marianne Kosaya, Children’s Choir Repertoire and Repertoires Chair

### **Vocal Health and Choral Singing for Mature Voices**

Spring 2026

Coordinators: Lori L. Sonnenberg, Vocal Health Specialist and Paul Laprade, Conductor/IL-ACDA Past-President

### **IL-ACDA Summer ReTreat 2026: “Voices of Leadership: Cultivating Unity and Inspiration in Choral Music”**

Headliners: Dr. Kristina MacMullen and Dan Davison

### **IL-ACDA Music in Worship Festival**

November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Pilgrim Congregational Church, Oak Park

Coordinators: Sean J. M. Newman, *Podium* Editor and Keith Hampton, Music in Worship Chair

*Please look for additional events and opportunities on our website ([www.il-acda.org](http://www.il-acda.org)) and in future editions of the Podium.*



# REFLECTIONS OF US

MILWAUKEE, WI  
FEBRUARY 25-28, 2026

**20.17% INCREASE  
IN HONOR CHOIR  
AUDITIONS!  
SINCE MWACDA 2024**

**THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR TEACHERS, SPONSORS,  
AND HONOR CHOIR CHAIRS FOR ENCOURAGING  
STUDENTS TO AUDITION FOR OUR MIDWESTERN HONOR CHOIRS!**



**Thank you to the many choir directors who worked hard to submit Honor Choir submissions for the Midwestern Regional ACDA Conference.**

**We hope to see everyone at the Illinois ACDA reception in Milwaukee. Details to come!**

