

PODIUM

Spring 2022

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

LAURA COSTER

Can You Really Have it All?

Dear choral colleagues,

I recently revisited a quote that was important to me years ago: *You can have it all. Just not at the same time.* (Oprah Winfrey). How does this quote relate to us in 2022?

Spring has arrived and you finally have in-person rehearsals and live concerts. There are also church services, community choirs, musicals, competitions, trips, family and social gatherings, and everything else you are doing. Things are better now, yet many feel the need to make up for all of the lost concerts and events that have been missed; even more importantly, it's thrilling to make music with one another again. Amidst all of these positive changes, it can be tempting to rebuild, recruit, and jump in with new ideas all at once. Stop. Take a moment to breathe. *You can have it all. Just not all at the same time.*

Many are working harder today than before the pandemic. Directors have fewer singers in their choirs and as a result, their position has been restructured due to lower enrollment. In many cases, the restructuring of the program has increased their responsibilities. We are being asked to do more with less support and sometimes, less resources.

In my early thirties, the choral program at my school had an extra co-curricular ensemble that met during my lunch hour. I agreed to take the class as an overload to

my schedule—in addition to also directing the school musical. Two months later, I was in desperate need of a lunch break and had a serious case of burnout. Although my intentions were noble, I traded good teaching for exhaustion, stress, and impatience with both myself and my students. Doing it all was far from having it all.

Personal goals make us better. Time gives us the opportunity to reach our goals in a deeper way. Give yourself time to reflect, grow, and enjoy the process. It may feel counterintuitive, but slowing down will make you a better educator, collaborator, and musician. Drop the extra committee so that you can catch up with friends. Go to a conference to refresh your outlook and enhance your skills. Make adjustments so you can go to your child's baseball game. You can take the European tour next year. *You can have it all. Just not at the same time.*

It is my honor to serve as your president. Know that the board and I are open to hearing your ideas about how we can serve you better so you can become the best teacher and conductor you can be. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions that I might be able to answer, or just to let me know what you are thinking for the future of IL-ACDA.

Also reach out to a board member and to each other. Sometimes talking and sharing ideas is all we need to gather the energy to move our choral program forward. We are here for you to connect, create, and refresh.

CHORAL REPERTOIRE AND RESOURCES

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Upcoming Events for you and your students, low commitment and high reward:

1. IL-ACDA T/B Festival for HS Singers

**Tuesday, April 26, 10 AM—4 PM
(3 PM Concert)**

Location - Western IL University,
Macomb, IL

Clinician - Dr. Jerry Blackstone

Event Chair - Brian Birch

Site Host - Dr. Jason Hawkins,

Preparation-none! Just bring your singers and we will take care of the rest.

\$10 per student (includes lunch) or
\$100 maximum (10 or more singers)

2. Summer ReTreat 2022:

Together Towards Tomorrow

Wednesday and Thursday, June 22-23

Location: Bradley University, Peoria, IL
Register at il-acda.org

Join us to fellowship together as we sing in a Director's Chorus and develop skills with our [headliners](#):

Arreon Harley-Emerson is Chair of the Diversity Initiatives Committee for National ACDA and the Director of Music and Operations at the Choir School of Delaware. Arreon teaches K-12 choir and he will share quality diverse music repertoire for all age levels. Learn more about style and performance practice which you will be able to apply to your rehearsals.

Arreon will also share from his life experience as a director of color. He will discuss how to create an environment that respects diversity and equality for all of your singers. Learn tried and true and new repertoire to help students find commonalities as they share their culture with one another.

Dr. Jerry Blackstone is a professor emeritus of conducting at University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance. He was the director of choirs at Michigan for thirty years and led the graduate program in choral conducting program.

In February 2006, he received two GRAMMY Awards ("Best Choral Performance" and "Best Classical Album") as chorusmaster for the critically acclaimed Naxos recording of William Bolcom's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. The Naxos recording of Milhaud's monumental *L'Orestie d'Eschyle*, on which Blackstone served as chorusmaster, was nominated for a 2015 GRAMMY Award ("Best Opera Recording"). *Opera Magazine* reviewer Tim Ashley wrote: "the real stars, though, are the University of Michigan's multiple Choirs. Their singing has tremendous authority and beauty. Their diction is good too and it is an extraordinary achievement, and utterly mesmerizing."

His groups have performed for National Collegiate Choral Organization (NCCO) and in 2017, NCCO presented him with its prestigious Lifetime Achievement Membership Award for "significant contributions to choral music." He also received the ACDA-Michigan chapter's Maynard Klein Lifetime Achievement Award.

At the ReTreat, you will experience what it is like to be in Jerry Blackstone's choir. You will be inspired as you learn from a choral master. He will share effective choral techniques and tried and true repertoire that will be accessible for community/church choirs, high school, and college. Sing in a choir again and enjoy the process of making music together!

Registration is open at il-acda.org.

Best wishes for your spring concert season,

Laura Coster
President of IL-ACDA
North Central College
Naperville

CHORAL REPERTOIRE AND RESOURCES

Repertoire Specific Coordinator

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St. Charles East High School

World Musics & Cultures

Darius Polikaitis

Dainava Lithuanian Chorale

Chicago

Tenor/Bass Choirs

Brian Birch

Marmion Academy

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Treble Choirs

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Contact us at il-acda.org/contact-21

Reflections on Choral Music and the Invasion of Ukraine

Darius Polikaitis

World Musics & Cultures

Dainava Lithuanian Chorale

The last few weeks have been difficult ones for the community my choir serves. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has shocked and horrified much of the world and the United States. But this is especially true for people whose roots lie in Eastern Europe, such as the singers in my choir, most of whose heritage is Lithuanian. For some of my older choir members, the scenes of refugees crowding onto trains and walking miles on foot to the border have brought back memories of similar experiences they lived through as children during the Second World War. One of my sopranos told me that the images are exactly as she remembers their flight from Lithuania in 1944, except the horse-drawn wagons have been replaced by cars, and the luggage now has wheels.

Music and singing have provided some level of comfort. At the first rehearsal after the start of the invasion, we returned to a piece we had performed several years ago: Craig Courtney's "Ukrainian Alleluia". Although the work itself is not Ukrainian it is inspired by the composer's extended visit to this country and portrays "a quiet voice of faith, praise, and hope in the midst of suffering and tragedy". "Ukrainian Alleluia" is quite accessible to a capable community choir. You can find a number of excellent performances on Youtube. Have a listen – and consider programming it for an upcoming concert. Or find and program a Ukrainian work. The Leontovich Ukrainian Choir Association has posted a large number (click [here](#) to access). They

encourage choirs worldwide to download free of charge and to film their performances and publicize.

The Chicago area is home to a large Ukrainian community, centered just west of downtown in a neighborhood called Ukrainian Village. Several weeks ago they organized an anti-war protest outside of Saints Volodymyr and Olha Ukrainian Catholic Church. As the protest was coming to a close I stopped into the church. To my surprise, a Ukrainian choir had gathered in the choir loft and began to sing a beautiful Ukrainian hymn. It occurred to me that this was choral singing at its purest – not to perform or impress, but to console and comfort, and to provide a sense of community in a time of suffering.

In 1963, in the wake of President John Kennedy's assassination Leonard Bernstein said, "This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before." How sad that since that day musicians have had cause to echo that sentiment all too often and in too many places throughout the world. Of course, music will not provide concrete assistance to the people of Ukraine. But it can help to remind the world of injustice and human suffering. And it can stir souls to great and heroic deeds. Lithuania and its Baltic neighbors certainly know the power of song – their fight for freedom was called the "Singing Revolution". May we always use this awesome power for good and may every phrase we sing reflect the best and noblest of humanity. Slava Ukraini!

Finding Clarity

Cory Boulton

District 3

Bradley University

Deep within us as humans, there is a desire for ultimate truth: the "answer," the "purpose," the "it" of our lives. And, whether we are conscious of it or not, we spend all of our moments searching for that truth: through our beliefs, our professions, our relationships—

constantly reaching for what that "it" is, being completely aware of what "it" is not. We generally accept that life is ambiguous and constantly in a state of uncomfortable flux, yet we still yearn for control and stability. We are all looking for clarity, but unsure how to navigate the journey.

One of the things that almost 18 months without live-music making has

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gifted all of us, is the realization that creating together, communing together, and expressing together, is how we start that journey. Maybe, if we did that more as a human race, we'd see that there is a stream of wellbeing and clarity that flows to us constantly, and all we have to do is be in a place to receive it. And, over the past 6 months, my students and I decided that we would commit to do just that. Together.

We chose repertoire that eventually became a vulnerable expression of that commitment to not only audiences, but to each other. We worked through texts and harmonies across all time periods and cultures. Much of the repertoire chosen delineated

the evolution of our philosophies on spirituality, love, self-concept, and truth over 24 months. We also made an effort to choose repertoire that was accessible enough that no matter who was in the audience, they could join us in a shared experience of understanding.

Through that shared investment and commitment, we really came to the conclusion that perhaps, in the end, understanding one another in full acceptance and love is really what "it" is. Maybe that's what our purpose is. Maybe that's how we find ultimate truth within ourselves. And maybe, just maybe, that inner knowing is the legacy we leave behind.

Something About Lemons & Lemonade: The Journey to IL ACDA

Laurie Lewis-Fritz

*Assistant Professor of Music and
Private Applied Coordinator*
Lincoln Land Community College

On Saturday, October 16, 2021, the Lincoln Land Community College Choir took the stage at Gannon Hall on the campus of DePaul University to perform at the Illinois ACDA Fall Conference. The only community college with a performing choir that year, the students performed a program focused on rising together through personal and global crisis. It was a meaningful program, not just one that the students enjoyed performing but one that they believed in. They took pride in their performance. The weekend was also a celebration, not just of their accomplishments, but also of live choral music, as the students attended every other choir's performance and enthusiastically applauded for and reflected on the concerts afterward.

How did we get there?

The preceding year had been—to use one of our favorite buzzwords—unprecedented. There was not a chapter in any of my textbooks in graduate school about how to lead a choir during a global pandemic. When the world shut down in March 2020, I thought we would only be in lockdown for a couple of weeks. Then a couple turned into four. Then our performances were canceled. I remember my first foray into video editing that spring. It was a rough clip (under 30 seconds) of one of the songs we had planned on performing. I then did the thing that I quickly learned not to do; I imposed

an expiration date on the pandemic, convinced (rather, hoping) that Fall 2020 would bring normalcy.

Spoiler alert...as I write this in March 2022, "normalcy" hasn't returned.

At LLCC, we are fortunate to have a large space available to us. It was originally an auto garage for our auto students that was converted into a theatre class space, complete with a stage floor and some long, white curtains. This space became the Choir's classroom for

the year. Prior to the pandemic, the Choir met in person for three 50-minute rehearsals every week. With duck-billed singers' masks and 12-foot spacing, the Choir met in this room for two 30-minute rehearsals every week, with our third rehearsal being a 50-minute Zoom meeting.

I made up for the missing instruction time by having students submit videos of themselves singing the repertoire for feedback. These videos became sort of **mini individual voice lessons**, where students could hear me tell them what they were doing well and what I wanted them to work on. Having individual time with each student gave them confidence and helped me help them better. It is also worth noting that when someone sends you a video of themselves from their home, their sacred space, it is important to honor and respect this glimpse of their lives.

I bookended every Zoom rehearsal with a chance for the students to connect with their own humanity and each other. Every Zoom rehearsal began with me asking the

students how they were doing. We ask this question of people all the time, usually without the expectation of an in-depth answer. But, when you show someone you're truly interested in how they're doing by waiting for a response or asking follow-up questions based on their response, you might be surprised at the answers you get. *I didn't worry about the rehearsal time we "lost" because time spent on wellness is never lost.* The students got to know each other in a way that likely wouldn't have happened had "normalcy" returned. We all met dogs, cats, guinea pigs, and even a salamander, but we also celebrated job interviews gone well and commiserated in the complex grief from everything the pandemic took away. I allowed them a glimpse into my personal life, too, as my infant was at my side for these rehearsals, enjoying her bottle while Mommy led class. Sometimes, I would look out at a sea of weary faces in tiny squares and know that what they needed was not learning more music. Once, I asked them how many of them had had something to eat or drink. Very few hands went up. So, I sent them all to get something to eat and drink and bring it back. We spent the rest of the class engaging in score study while students ate and drank. At the end of every Zoom rehearsal, depending on what day it was, it would be time for "Feel Good Friday" or "Warm Wishes Wednesday" where students would send messages of encouragement to one or more other students via chat. It took about five minutes, and it was well worth it to see the smiles and hear the laughter.

So, not only had Choir become an important place of connection (even more than before), but this comfort level allowed students to ask for extra assistance in front of their peers with ease. **When we lead a group, we become a steward of each person's well-being and humanity. Our singers are people first. When we hold space for them, we allow them to release their burdens, even if only temporarily, and to connect with music more freely.**

It became more important to me than ever that the repertoire the Choir spent time with would be meaningful to the students and relevant to current events. In Fall 2020, this meant the Choir students participated in a departmental collaboration video that I coordinated entitled *Together*, where their work was showcased alongside that of our Art, Communication, Film/Digital Media, and World Languages students. In Spring 2021, this programming focus became the basis of *Rising Together*, our Spring 2021 concert video. It is worth noting here that one of the songs, Andrea Ramsey's "The Rising" with poetry by Sara Teasdale, uses a metaphor of barley bending in wind but not breaking to illustrate the singer rising from pain unbroken. I had fair trade bracelets made for every student, both in the Spring 2021 group and the Fall 2021 group. These bracelets had the word "barley" on them so the students would remember they could rise from pain unbroken, and that there was a community of people in the Choir to whom they would always be connected. It is from *Rising Together* that I submitted our audition for Illinois ACDA. Both videos are available on YouTube on our LLCC Music channel. I taught myself how to use Adobe Premiere and did all the editing for *Rising Together*. In this way, I was able to exert control over the final product, which honored not only the work the students had put in but also their relationships with each other.

I will never forget receiving the e-mail on June 14, 2021, that the LLCC Choir had been selected to perform at the Illinois ACDA Fall Conference. We have all been through so much, and to have that year culminating in an invitation to an ACDA stage was, to say the least, remarkable, exciting, and heartwarming. After my husband and family, my department dean was my next call. **He and the College were immediately and wholly supportive at such a level that the students and I could focus on preparing our program.**

I continued with the theme of rising together through personal and global crises. At a community college, many students are only around for two years at most. In acknowledgment of this, some of the program came from the previous year, and some was brand new. Of course, for some students in Fall 2021, all the repertoire was new, so the students from previous semesters were able to take on leadership roles in class and outside sectionals in helping to prepare the program. Other students took the lead in making temporary clothing alterations when our new concert attire arrived. Still, other students got together to ensure posters made their way around campus advertising our performances. **Taking ownership of the program preparation helped them take more pride in this rare honor.**

On the performance side, **preview performances provided the opportunity to find and work out any lingering issues.** We had two. A few weeks into the semester, the Choir performed about half of its program for the LLCC Foundation Board at one of its meetings as a show of gratitude for all its help. The Choir held two full preview concerts nine days prior to its departure for Chicago. This gave us four more rehearsals to finish preparing for Illinois ACDA.

The LLCC Choir gave a polished and enthusiastic performance at the Illinois ACDA Fall Conference. With the music in their hearts and barley bracelets on their wrists, the students rose together from the crises of the past year to beautifully prove the resilience of the human spirit. The success of the performance and the overall experience continues to have a positive ripple effect on each student and the Choir as a whole.

Closing the loop

There is another side to all this that certainly had a positive impact on our journey to Illinois ACDA, and that was the process of closing the loop to the benefit of our AFA-Music degree, our music classes, ensembles, lessons, and, ultimately, our students. The makeup of the LLCC Choir in Fall 2021 featured a higher number of students overall with a higher concentration of music majors than was in the LLCC Choir in Spring 2021. Though not everyone reading this leads a choir at a community college, I hope something about the process will prove useful to you as you build (or rebuild) your groups.

Know who the key stakeholders are in the admissions process. I thought I knew the process for people who want to become students at LLCC. It is more complex than I thought. I learned about the steps for admission by simply asking questions. I then had meetings with people at each point of the process. For instance, I met with our advisors (called student success coaches) to convey the importance of students who express an interest in

majoring in music being put immediately in touch with music faculty. Because music majors are typically behind if they don't begin music courses in their first semester of college, this allowed the student success coaches to help ensure students' timely completion of the degree. I also had a meeting with the person in charge of student transitions. This meeting led to music faculty receiving a notification every time someone applies to LLCC and indicates an interest in majoring in music. This allows contact with students much earlier in the admissions pipeline.

Know who the key stakeholders are in the records/reporting process. I also learned there are a few different channels by which various people on campus could acquire data about our music degree. So, I connected with a few people who have reporting responsibilities, including the associate vice president of enrollment services, the registrar, an admissions specialist, and the director of student success. Now, more people are included in the e-mail to students who have successfully auditioned for the AFA in Music. This means more people have the same information, which helps students in terms of schedule building and timely persistence and completion with the proper program noted on their file.

Get creative with recruitment and retention. All music majors, as well as ensemble members regardless of major, receive a free LLCC Music t-shirt and LLCC Music mechanical pencil with a logo that I worked with our public relations office to design. This branding helps with creating a sense of community within the program and with recruitment on- and off-campus. The Music Major Spotlight on the LLCC Music Facebook page allows music majors to be featured individually and for the community to connect with the program. Area high school teachers receive a

newsletter twice per semester that includes current news in the music program as well as concert dates and registration information. Representatives from public relations and the student newspaper are kept updated on music program news, too, and they are invited to performances to provide publicity. A flyer that gets handed out for recruitment outlines why students would want to pursue music as a major at LLCC, including a 100% successful transfer rate for our music majors heading to four-year schools for the past three years, affordability, small class sizes, accomplished faculty, and, of course, the LLCC Choir's performance at the Illinois ACDA Fall Conference. Best of all, nothing beats personal connections made with students during high school visits and other on- and off-campus recruiting opportunities.

Moving forward

How do you measure, measure a year? It would be easy to say that our performance at the Illinois ACDA Fall Conference was the culmination of much hard work in and outside of the choir rehearsal room. Though not untrue, it was the beginning of much more. Choir helped us all process and respond to personal and global crises, which has gotten us to the present day. Students learned what they were capable of, and that bold confidence has manifested in many positive ways. The number of students pursuing the AFA-Music at LLCC has grown significantly, creating a sense of community where students learn from and push each other to realize their full potential.

What you do with the lemons of the last two years is up to you. I vote for lemonade—and maybe lemon meringue pie.



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IL-ACDA ReTreat, June 22-23, 2022
Bradley University, Peoria

Together ***Towards*** ***Tomorrow***



HEADLINERS



Jerry Blackstone



Arreon Harley-Emerson

Illinois ACDA Presents...



tenor bass festival

2022

APRIL 26, 2022

10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

FINAL CONCERT: 3:00 PM

WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

The Tenor/Bass Festival is geared toward high school tenors and basses. The event requires no prior preparation. Students should arrive ready to sing, learn, and have fun. The primary goal of this event is to encourage young tenors and basses to continue singing beyond high school and to support choral singing.



CLINICIAN:
DR. JERRY BLACKSTONE

Professor Emeritus,
University of Michigan

\$10 registration fee per student (includes the cost of sheet music and lunch)

Maximum \$100 registration fee per school



**TO REGISTER, VISIT THE QR
CODE BELOW:**



****Directors:** Please pay for all of your students in one transaction. Payment can be made via credit card (PayPal) using the link on the Google Form confirmation page --or-- via check.

****Make out to IL-ACDA, put T/B Festival in the memo line, and send to:**
Paul Nielsen
93 Railroad Ave.
Grayslake, IL 60030

QUESTIONS? CONTACT BRIAN BIRCH AT BBIRCH@MARMION.ORG

Brian Birch
Tenor/Bass Choirs
Marmion Academy

Ski jumping, archery, bowling, baseball, boxing. If singing requires athletic breathing then it has much more in common with sports than it gets credit for. While I would not qualify every male singer as being a sports fanatic, I have found my students do need to move. Using some purposefully placed sports analogies helps a lot with focus, tone production, and musicianship.

The warmup is the most effective time to utilize these analogies to emphasize tone production. My students have a favorite breathing exercise where we become archers. We draw the arrow from the quiver to check posture and stance. We knock the arrow to prepare to breathe deeply. We draw the bow from the waist to breathe in long full breaths. We release the arrow on a hiss and crescendo until the arrow strikes the target with “zaaaaa.” We set the targets at greater distances to keep the air moving for the length of the note. We usually conclude the exercise by aiming at a friend, because it’s a fun way to connect with others. We have even more fun with a rocket-powered arrow, releasing the air on a lip trill.

The Space Between: Developing the Intermediate Tenor/Bass Singer

Dr. John McDonald
District 6 Representative

Assistant Professor of Music Education and Director of Choirs,
McKendree University
Conductor, *St. Louis Children’s Choir Young Men’s Chorus*

In addition to my position at McKendree University, I have the pleasure of being in my third season as conductor of the Young Men’s Chorus for the St. Louis Children’s Choir. This ensemble is made up of changed-voice tenor and bass singers ranging from sixth grade through seniors in high school. Many of the members transition into this ensemble from one of the organization’s treble ensembles as their voices change. The wide range of vocal stages, from the still changing to the mostly settled, along with diversity of musical backgrounds has been a wonderful teaching experience for me. I wanted to write down and share some of my observations and advice from my time with this ensemble. Most of this advice is geared towards working with upper middle school or early high school singers, particularly those singers currently undergoing the shift in their voices associated with puberty.

Keep them singing!

You have probably heard this before, but it bears repeating; keep them singing! One practice that is sure to break the confidence of any young singer, of any voice part, is to ask them to not sing or “mouth the words.” This is particularly true for a young developing baritone who already lacks confidence in their singing abilities because of the changes they are going through. Being asked to mouth the words or be silent in rehearsal or performance might drive that student away from singing altogether. Instead, be creative! Focus on what they *can* sing instead of what they can-

We often do football “set huuuuuuut” exercises to improve the singing onset. The students imitate my best Peyton Manning impression, but with a clearer, healthier tone. Eventually, I apply this principle to vocal exercises.

The image of a ski jumper is great at illustrating leaps. He starts low in a squat, then extends his whole body by flexing his legs and core when he leaps. This naturally engages the singer’s muscles, allowing them to approach the note with plenty of air and avoid straining.

In repertoire, these techniques can be just as productive. The running back is a great way to get students to accent syncopated patterns. A gentle push or punch of a punching bag can be the difference between a tenuto and an accent. Students pantomiming bowling or pitching can help effectively shape phrases.

These are just a few examples that are useful in introducing or reinforcing your vocal pedagogy and musicianship. I encourage you to be creative and make your own analogies. Some work well and some don’t. Regardless, it’ll make the lessons learned fun.

not. Rearrange the part to fit their range and ability. Then be positive and uplifting about this process. They get their own part written just for them? How cool! That approach might be the very thing that keeps them involved in singing, even through the difficult times, and grow to experience their full potential later.

Discuss the physical changes to their voice

Frequently throughout the season, I get to hear auditions of singers who discover their voice starting to change while rehearsing with a treble ensemble. Every voice is different so sometimes this transition is steady and incremental, and other times it is sudden and, seemingly, overnight. I always make a point in auditions to discuss with the student what is happening with their voice. I do not go into too much detail with scientific or anatomical terms, as I try to avoid boring them or grossing them out in our first encounter, but I do tell them about what is going on and how it is likely to progress. It is surprising to me how often they tell me I am the first one who has talked to them about the changing voice. And it is amazing to me how their entire demeanor changes after this brief discussion. They may have come into the room with an apologetic posture and performed the vocalizes unsupported, uninspired, and wincing at every little stumble. But now they stand a little taller, sing with more pride and confidence in their voice, and understand the vocal stumbles and trips are all part of the process. I encourage you to try this, if you do not already, with your singers entering the stages of transitioning from treble to baritone. It does not have to be a lengthy discussion, but I suggest discussing it with students individually as that is often a more comfortable setting than with their peers. I will also share my personal voice-change experience with singers auditioning for my ensemble, which both helps them feel understood and connected with me, someone they just met. If that is an option

for you, try speaking to your experience, and if not, consider inviting an older tenor/bass singer to share their experience with your students and answer any questions they may have.

“Build” their voice through warmups and exercises

Take the time at the beginning of each rehearsal to warmup. Be intentional about the warmups you choose and the feedback you give the singers. Warmups should never be passive for our singers. They should be engaged and a part of the process as the director describes and models correct technique. These vocalizes, singing exercises divorced from the added layers of text or anxiety of singing the correct notes or rhythms, give us the opportunity to build the correct approach to singing and reinforce muscle memory in our singers. As we work to improve their tone and technique, we then apply those fundamentals to the repertoire. This step is crucial for developing baritones as their muscle memory is distorted by the sudden change in the muscles themselves. I use the analogy of someone who has practiced and developed over time a solid jump shot in basketball. Now imagine that same person grows one foot overnight, changing their physical positioning and increasing their wingspan. Would you throw that player directly into a game? No – you would have them practice, focus on the fundamentals, and rebuild their form. Singers need opportunity to rebuild or relearn their fundamentals as well.

Perform regular check-ins on their vocal progress

Time is a valuable commodity, of which we never have enough in our profession, so I know setting weekly or biweekly individual appointments with each of your developing baritone singers is a tall order. But the rewards for this activity are worth the time. Not only does this process help you track the progress of a singer's voice change, thereby assisting in a correct placement in your ensemble, but it also demonstrates to that same singer that you are invested in them and that you care about their progress. Incorporating a routine check-in into your schedule, no more than three to five minutes per singer, also individualizes your process and can provide opportunity for more specific feedback than you are able to give in a group setting. It also helps you adjust the singer's voice part placement if necessary. If a student should be moved to a new section because of discomfort in their placement, but they do not speak up or are not evaluated for that change, they may lose interest in singing. The spirit of these check-ins should be to evaluate for range and comfort, making it clear to the singers that you are not judging their tone or auditioning them to keep their spot in your choir. I begin by scheduling individual check-ins with the younger members of my Young Men's Chorus but will frequently have students ask to schedule a check-in sooner than scheduled if they are feeling discomfort in rehearsal. They know it is a non-pressure situation and will be for the benefit of themselves and the ensemble.

Know your singers

Along the same lines as the individual check-in, the adolescent student is keenly aware of whether you are invested in them as an *individual* or only in their contribution to the *group*. Taking the time to find out your students' hobbies or interests will go a long

way in developing a relationship of trust that will let your student be vulnerable with you – a key factor to growing and learning through a tough time in physical and social development. I remember early on in my time with the Young Men's Chorus, I would often use sports analogies in rehearsal – arcing the tone up and over the pitch like a free throw, popping plosive consonants like a hockey puck ricocheting between sticks, grounding the posture like a pitcher on the mound, etc. This came from my own memories from my high school tenor/bass chorus and other rehearsals and conductors I have observed. But I was not getting the musical or vocal response I desired. It was then I had the students fill out an interest sheet telling me their hobbies, favorite items, and interests. Despite a few St. Louis Cardinals fans, sports were barely mentioned. I needed to update my repertoire of rehearsal tricks (and quickly learn a lot about video games). This also changed my interactions with students as they enter or leave rehearsal making them more genuine and personal.

Build community

In addition to developing a trust with the director, the students need to have a community with one another where they feel safe, cared for, and respected. A late middle school, early high school developing baritone is already going through so many changes and pressures we cannot even begin to understand; the last thing they want in their choir rehearsal is to feel judged or invisible. While each singer is different, we want to inspire in them the desire to achieve a common goal with their peers. Creating a positive environment of connectedness is essential for each singer to feel a part of that team progressing toward that goal. Building community takes time but pays dividends through the individual investment of every singer to better themselves and each other. Find ways to incorporate partner or small group activities that allow the students to learn more about each other and find common ground. Creating this social experience, in addition to the inherent musical experience, will make it easier for a student struggling with a voice change, or any other adversity, to persevere through the hard times and achieve their full potential.

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