

PODIUM

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

LAURA COSTER

Greetings IL-ACDA members! I hope you had a chance to rest this summer and feel rejuvenated in this new season of choral singing. Last year at this time, we thought we would be back to "normal." Most say it was far from it. I hope this year brings a new excitement and joy to you and your singers.

We want ACDA to be a place for you to grow along side of your colleagues for encouragement and creative, new ideas. For the first time since June 2019, more than 50 members gathered together for our Summer ReTreat. We made some beautiful music, connected with new and old friends, and learned new, quality literature.

Just to experience *why we do what we do* again was special to me. I'm not even sure if I can explain it fully, but seeing other directors and hearing their stories and experiences made me feel joyful. Making music gives us a chance to feel free and let go of all the hardships we may have experienced over the last few years.

Jerry Blackstone and Arreon Harley-Emerson were both incredible as our headliners. Jerry is a master teacher and musician. He models what he does so we can do it too. He helped us refine our conducting gestures to be clean and expressive as many volunteered to conduct. When we began singing together, it only took Jerry about five minutes to get us thinking about the musical details and phrasing. It was magical.

Arreon is a mover and a shaker, an artist, a researcher, and a builder. He is a bundle of energy with charisma that is contagious. He presented DEI in a way that brought us

hope and a renewed sense of vision. We learned so much new music and considered how to gesture clearly in a way that helps singers understand gospel and other diverse contemporary music.

If you missed the ReTreat, Arreon sent us slides to remind us of what he shared, which will be posted on the IL-ACDA website in the Diversity Tab. You can also see the repertoire list from Arreon and Jerry under the tab-Events/ReTreat.

This year, we are offering quite a few opportunities for you and your singers to grow personally and musically. Consider what is possible this year. Perhaps you can bring your singers to one of our events!

Upcoming IL-ACDA Fall Events

IL-ACDA Middle School Honor Festival

October 13 from 10am-2pm
Bradley University, Peoria

Composer/Conductor Jacob Naverud
Carol Munn—chair
Cory Boulton—host

Register up to 12 students at il-acda.org today! This event is open members and non-members. Encourage non-members to join IL-ACDA for a reduced price.

IL-ACDA HS Honor Show Choir is back!

October 13-15 at Naperville North HS

Contact Nick Janssen at
njanssen@naperville203.org for audition information.

Individual students audition with a prepared singing and dance excerpt. Selected students join together to work with outstanding clinicians and students from choral programs across the state during this three-day event.

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Amy Branahl
Youth Choral Theatre of Chicago

Junior High/Middle School Chair

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McHenry Middle School

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Centralia*

Lifelong Choirs Coordinator

Andy Jensen
Southwestern Illinois College, Belleville

Community Choirs

Andy Jensen
*Southwestern Illinois College
Belleville*

Music in Worship

Christopher Windle
Music in Worship
*Church of the Atonement
Chicago*

Join Voices

High School Honor Choir for Chicago Public School students and teachers,
Date: TBA in the fall

Chairs:

Grace Jeong
Nythia Martinez, District 1 Chair.

More information is coming soon by email and at il-acda.org.

Winter Events

Treble Choir Sing & Share Festival

Five Point Washington
Thursday, Feb 9, 2023

Chairs: Lara Reem & Ben Luginbuhl

Save the date and look for more information about registration in the fall.

TTBB Choir Sing & Share Festival

Winter of 2023. An event in the Chicago area. More info is coming soon!

Freshman and Sophomore Honor Choir-

St. Charles East HS
Saturday, Feb. 11th, 2023, 9:00am-4:30pm
Monica Bertrand, Chair. Save the date!

ACDA National Convention:

A Place of Belonging Feb. 22-25,
Cincinnati, OH
Go to acda.org to register
2023 Summer ReTreat: June 21-22
Bradley University in Peoria.
Save the Date!

Lisa Fredenburgh, Chair
Cory Boulton, Host

Fall Convention 2023

Fri-Sat. October 20-21
University of IL-Urbana
Smith Memorial Hall
Save the Date!

Laura Coster—Chair

Andrea Solya—Host

Information on performance choir auditions and applications to present an Interest Session will be shared in late September.

Stay in touch by reading your Constant Contact e-mail messages from IL-ACDA and information on our website.

Laura Coster
President of IL-ACDA

Encourage and Connect: Let Us Put These Verbs Into Action!

Lynda Marshall

Youth & Student Activities

Kaskaskia College, Centralia

It is time for some self-reflection! When was the last time...

- You thanked a teacher that influenced your life in some way?
- You called a friend or acquaintance instead of texting or posting on social media?
- You did something kind for a colleague?

As a new school year begins, I want to focus on encouragement and connection with others, not only with singers in my ensembles but with peers and colleagues. As we continue to navigate new things thrown at us since COVID first arrived, it is difficult to see a bright light at the end of what seems to be a never-ending tunnel. I see firsthand young, talented teachers leaving the music classroom and pursuing different careers. I see effective veteran music teachers hanging on by a thread to finish their job and retire. I cannot help but think that we all have a stake

in making music important, fulfilling, and inspirational for our peers, colleagues, students, and communities. How can we come together as singers, conductors, and teachers to help and maybe even prevent our colleagues and friends from leaving the field of music?

I advocate for "if you are going to talk the talk, then you should walk the walk!" Therefore, I contacted all of my former students that have gone on to be music educators and texted them a note of encouragement for the new school year. What transpired? Coffee next weekend with Laura, a phone call next week with Michael, and babysitting services and dinner delivery for an expectant mother. Many other students' texted back, and we had a text exchange to catch up with each other. Do you have former or current students, teachers, church, or community musicians to which you could send a note of encouragement? If you answered "YES," STOP READING this article and contact them right now! If you answered "NO," contact me, and I will

CHORAL REPERTOIRE AND RESOURCES

Repertoire Specific Coordinator

Monica Bertrand

St. Charles East High School

World Music

Darius Polikaitis

Dainava Lithuanian Chorale
Chicago

Tenor/Bass Choirs

Brian Birch

Marmion Academy
Aurora

Treble Choirs

Andrea Solya

University of Illinois
At Urbana-Champaign

Vocal Jazz Chair

Jess Palmisano

Geneva Community High School

Show Choirs

Nick Janssen

Naperville North High School

Social Media

Cristian Larios

Plainfield North High School

Composition Contest

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Composer, Conductor & Recording producer

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Jason Hawkins

Western Illinois University
Macomb

Student Representative

Mitchell Barrett

DePaul University
Chicago

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put you in touch with A LOT of musicians that need encouragement! (Moreover, I will have your contact information to encourage you! ☺)

Our school, church, and community choirs offer each of us the opportunity for connection. As I select repertoire every year, I make sure I choose music that I think my singers can connect with personally. All of the pitches, rhythms, dynamics, articulations, and diction can be accurate; however, accuracy does not equal emotion. Choral music allows all participants to feel, whether you're the singer, conductor, or the audience. I am continually amazed at discussions in my rehearsals, where I allow singers to share their thoughts and insight. I have found written reflections to be one of my students' favorite assignments because they are comfortable expressing their opinions, and many have shared

they find it therapeutic to dig deeper into the meanings of songs. Maybe I am a little too "Pollyanna-esque" (I have been accused of that) to think that what we do in choir truly can change people's lives. I have seen the positive effects so many times in my career, which is why I still love what I do as I enter my twenty-fifth year of teaching.

Perhaps I am just a lover of a Utopian choir where everyone comes to rehearsal with smiles, humility, the ability to express themselves appropriately, all of their materials, a fantastic attitude, all of the music memorized, stellar diction, articulation, dynamic contrast, AND so much emotion in performance that NASA could see the energy on satellite images! May this year bring us closer to that "Utopia" as we take steps to encourage and connect regularly.

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- Music Ministry
- Piano Performance
- Music History & Theory
- Music Education

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Looking Beyond the Symptoms:

Diagnosing the Vocal Challenges in the Choral Rehearsal

Brian J. Winnie

College/University Chair

Western Illinois University, Macomb

"Let's try that again with only the sopranos starting on page 4, measure 22. Sing your part on the syllable /du/ and hold the G4 in measure 23, paying close attention to singing it above the pitch because it was a little flat last time. Everyone else, listen to their adjustment."

This example demonstrates clear, directive, and specific instruction and feedback, and the entire choir is engaged in the rehearsal process. The con-

ductor, however, addresses and labels the symptom "flattening of the pitch" and does not provide any skill-building remedies to help raise the pitch. Much like medical doctors, choral conductors should look past the symptoms when diagnosing a vocal challenge. A doctor would hopefully not say, "your heart rate is fast; please take note of that and slow it down next time you visit." Instead, they discuss the underlying conditions surrounding the fast heart rate, or in the conductor's case, the intonation challenge. Diagnosing and teaching the root cause of vocal challenges in the choral rehearsal can help students de-

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velop an awareness of how vocal choices affect their singing.

A common list of symptoms is listed below. These are separated into musical and vocal symptoms the conductor can hear and observe.

When considering these symptoms, conductors often have “quick-fix” prescriptions, but I often find they only mask the underlying condition rather than alleviate it. For example, if a singer is singing with unwanted constriction, conductors could a) ask the singer to sing softer and with more breath flow or b) help the singer develop the awareness of what parts of their vocal anatomy cause con-

striction and how to remove muscle effort from those areas with retraction instead. Choosing option “a” is akin to a doctor prescribing Zithromax (Z-Pack) for all viral and bacterial infections based on the symptoms of a runny nose and cough, even though it only works on bacterial infections. A choral conductor’s Z-Pack tends to be associated with breath or vowels. Take a look at the list of symptoms again and think through some of the root causes for each symptom based on how the voice functions beyond breath and vowel.

This can be tricky if the symptom we notice has more underlying symptoms, and it’s the

Common Musical Symptoms	Common Vocal Symptoms (heard)	Common Vocal Symptoms (observed)
I hear incorrect...	I hear...	I see...
1. notes	1. breathiness	1. boredom
2. rhythms or tempo	2. pressing	2. disengagement
3. dynamics	3. intonation faults	3. misalignment
4. articulation	4. “wah wah” text stress	4. relaxed torso
5. vowels or consonants	5. brassiness	5. relaxed or unnecessarily tense head and neck
6. intonation	6. dullness	6. facial movements causing quality changes in the throat
7. blend	7. brightness	7. _____
8. balance	8. darkness	
9. psyche	9. hooty-ness	
10. phrasing	10. “kermity-ness”	
11. text stress or poetic understanding	11. nasality	
12. style	12. constriction	
13. _____	13. limited range	
	14. weak low notes	
	15. no vibrato	
	16. wide vibrato	
	17. soloists within the group	
	18. lack of expression	
	19. overexpression	
	20. over or under articulation	
	21. choppy singing	
	22. _____	

conductor’s job to find the possible causes. For example, if the symptom is “I hear incorrect notes,” it could be the singer’s ear, or perhaps the singer can’t yet sing pitches in a particular range with the desired vocal quality. This is typically a vocal production challenge if the singer does not have congenital amusia (tone deafness). Upon further analysis, perhaps the conductor notices that the singer is breathy, or the sound is over-adducted (pressed) when trying to sing those pitches.

The following could be underlying causes for these symptoms:

- The student is utilizing thick vocal folds (chest voice) instead of thinner vocal folds (head voice).
- The student is pushing too much breath, causing the vocal folds to open or muscles of the vocal folds to tighten against the breath pressure.

- The student is not tilting the thyroid cartilage enough to help thin the vocal folds for the higher pitches in the range.
- The student is not stabilizing the head and neck, so the smaller muscles are not free to do the work required for those pitches.
- The student is using a very low larynx and tongue position.

Once conductors have reflected on the potential causes, many different skill-building exercises can be created to determine the necessary adjustments.

Some example exercises could include having students:

- Sing the phrase with low effort glottal onsets on each pitch to aid in vocal fold closure or smooth onsets to aid in thinner vocal fold contact.

- Blow out some air before starting and singing again without taking a new breath to aid in singing with less breath pressure.
- Pitch glide or siren (sing on “ng”) throughout the melodic range, focusing on allowing the sound to become less intense as they ascend.
- Cry or whimper while singing the melody on a single vowel to aid in tilting the thyroid cartilage.
- Engage more body energy in the head and neck by lifting the soft palate area maximally as in shivering to help stabilize the larynx.

As students work on these exercises, the conductor can help students understand how the changes in these anatomical structures help increase range or sing higher and lower with less unnecessary effort. They can also increase the transferability of skills between similar repertoires and provide a functional comparison for repertoires with varied vocal qualities. Eventually,

students can collaboratively assess causes of vocal challenges through small groups, journal writing, recordings, think/pair/share, post-it notes on the wall, or silent practice.

Continue adding to the symptoms list and reflect on the vocal production causes. The voice is a fascinating, complex instrument. We owe it to ourselves and our students to continue learning more about how it functions in all voice qualities for healthy and sustainable life-long singing. The Estill Voice Model (EVT) is one resource for understanding vocal anatomy and physiology. EVT teaches how 13 structures of the voice function and provides valuable exercises to maneuver those structures to create various vocal qualities. Other great resources include VoiceScienceWorks and various professional development workshops in voice science, acoustics, and pedagogy.

Why Mindset is Your Most Powerful Teaching Tool

Abigail Risner

District 8 Representative

Meridian CUSD 223, Stillman Valley

One thing that I have taken away from my first year of teaching is how important it is to maintain a balanced mindset in the classroom. I started last year with lofty expectations of myself and the program that I inherited. When things started not to go as expected, I became frustrated with myself and struggled with self-doubt. I dwelled on each mistake and forced myself deeper into a dark hole of negativity.

After a while, I realized how big an impact my thoughts about myself had on me. They were negatively affecting my teaching and mental state. I knew I needed to change the way I was thinking. The biggest help was from an activity my first-year mentorship program encouraged. We were asked to write down our most positive moments from each day for a week. It was so refreshing to force myself to highlight the best part of the day first before I continued reflecting and thinking about the day! Focusing on the positives helped me look at my mistakes more objectively. I began to accept the negative parts of teaching and all of the feelings that go with it without letting

them cloud my view of my entire experience.

This new outlook has also had a positive impact on my students. My students became more confident, were more patient with one another, and had a healthier grasp on how to reflect on their abilities without tearing themselves down. They sang better, and their attitudes were consistently more positive. Seeing this unfold throughout last year illustrated how much students mirror their teachers. It became more obvious to me that I needed to be more conscious of what kind of example I was illustrating to my students every day.

Gaining a more positive mindset has helped me get closer to being the director, leader, and mentor my students need and deserve. I have learned to see the beauty in the process, enjoy the little wins and accept that my mistakes are natural and necessary for growth. Having a balanced mindset that acknowledges the whole learning process is key to setting the tone for student

Start Your Singing Year Refreshed!

Nick Brockamp

District 4 Representative

Glenwood High School, Chatham

It has been a couple of crazy years in the world of choral music! We've all been navigating this new normal and trying to find the best ways to allow our singers to do what they do best - sing! As we venture into another year of singing (no matter what choir you belong to!), it is important to recognize that we all need to be “refreshed.” There are so many ways to do this, not just for your



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singers, but also for yourself. There's only one question: How do you define "refreshed"? My goal is not to tell you how to feel refreshed but to encourage you to find your own path to the refreshment you and your singers seek. We, as choral professionals, have an amazing opportunity to take this fresh start, run with it, and provide a new foundation for our ensembles to build upon. My hope is this inspires you as you begin the next step in your singing journey.

For me, feeling "refreshed" means that I can feel my students' excitement when they walk in to sing. I can feel my excitement in sharing the gift of singing with them. Most importantly, I can feel both my students and I are motivated to continue creating, performing, and responding to music for the entire school year. I'll be the first to admit this past school year was exhausting. Since taking over my current position in the 2019-2020 school year, I have not had the opportunity to experience a "normal year." In fact, this past school year was the first time I could experience working with the choirs in the final quarter of the year after an actual full year of singing! Add to that being a new father, and you've got a recipe for burnout (along with counting down the days to summer). However, as I head into this new school year, I've identified how I can find that sense of refreshment for myself and my singers.

What have your singers accomplished in the past few years? It may seem like so little for some and so much for others, but there's one thing we can all say for certain: our singers have

been incredibly resilient! From virtual performances to social distancing and masking for live performances, they've continued to buy into what was necessary to keep singing alive. Now is the time to reward them for their efforts! What's something you've always wanted to do with your ensemble? What new ideas could you bring to the rehearsal space? What conversations can you foster within your singers to develop them as performers? The time is now to bring your answers to these questions to the table! Give those singers a new challenge, and not only will it reward them for their hard work, but it will also reward you as their leader to see them succeed at beating that challenge.

At the same time, remember that you must allow yourself to recuperate and reinvigorate. You've been with your singers every step of the way, knowing that singing would return on the other side. It hasn't been easy, but you have achieved the impossible. Take the time for yourself to relax and do things you enjoy, knowing that your ensemble will still be there, ready to rock and roll when you return. Remind yourself of the passion that led you to step into the role of a choral professional, and let it lead you back to that excitement you once felt. You will notice the difference it makes in your rehearsals and the relationships you build with your singers.

I hope this provides you with some encouragement as you head into your singing year. The road will always be long, but taking a pit stop to find that refreshment can ensure your journey will be as exciting and successful as you choose to make it.

Book Review—Ponder Anew: Conversations in 21st Century Music

Jessica Nelson, editor

Church Publishing Incorporated, 2022

208 pages

\$19.95 paperback, \$18.99 ebook

Christopher Windle

Music in Worship

Church of the Atonement, Chicago

Ponder Anew is an anthology of essays and sermons for 21st-century church musicians. Jessica Nelson and the other authors offer insights and ideas into some of the most challenging topics church choir directors and organists face. Importantly, these authors do not shy away from COVID and its effects on their ministries but instead address it head-on; and discuss how their work and ministry as church musicians have changed since March 2020. The discussions within are valuable to choir directors and organists across all denominations. This book begins a conversation about how music shapes ministry and vocation within a changing church and a changing profession. I believe it is essential reading as we enter a new program year.

This collection is organized into three sections – Essays, Conversations in Vocation, and Sermons – and includes ten essays by eight authors of diverse backgrounds, seven sermons by six priests, interviews with eight church musicians about their vocational calling, and conversations with seven bi-vocational musicians. It is a mixture of philosophy, practical suggestions, and words of encouragement for the church musician.

Section I begins with an essay by The Rev Jennifer Melnyk Deaton, Rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Indianola, MS. Chapter 1 – "How Can I Keep from Singing? On Music as Pastoral Care" – is a beautiful start to this book. She addresses how music and liturgy can be a source of comfort and how church musicians might be "pastoral caregivers." The essay is organized into a series of short subsections, and perhaps the most poignant is titled "When We Were Kept from Singing," which focuses on what the loss of singing meant for congregations in the first 18 months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The essay that follows – "Tablets and Technology: Liturgy and Music in the Information Age" – confronts a topic with which all churches and musicians must now contend: how the use of technology is changing worship services, music making, and the church at large. Writer David Sinden, Director of Music at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Ladue, MO, begins with an exploration of how technology has changed churches since the installation of the first light bulb and takes the reader through an enlightening discussion of technology's incorporation into worship spaces. One of the most thought-provoking aspects of this discussion centers on what elements of digital music and liturgy we should retain "as the fog of the coronavirus pandemic lifts..." (p. 23).

The next four chapters – "Story of Songs: The Language of Stories in Song;" "You Will See Rare Beasts and Have Unique Adventures: Considering Again the Clergy-Musician Relationship;" "Celebrating One Another's Way of Worship;" and "A Shift in

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Tension: Leveraging Music Programs for Evangelism and Formation” – each address areas of opportunity and conflict faced by choral conductors in churches. “Story of Songs” is an exploration of the importance of text in music; it is followed by “...Rare Beasts...” which is an examination of the tensions that lead to conflict in the clergy-musician relationship. “Celebrating One Another’s Way of Worship” seeks to define ‘contemporary’ and ‘traditional’ music clearly, and encourage specificity when talking about musical style in an effort to open a conversation between these two worship styles. Finally, “A Shift in Tension” challenges conductors to change “... the tension point of our chorister programs and even our adult choirs to discipleship ...” (p. 76) and explores how to move the focus of singers beyond the performance of repertoire.

Chapter 7 – “Reckoning with the Anglican Inheritance: Stories of the Episcopal Chaplaincy at Harvard” – written by The Rev. Rita Teschner Powell (Episcopal Chaplain at Harvard University), was especially interesting to me. Powell presents choir directors of all denominations with interesting insights into how tradition can speak to modern worship. As Powell writes, “The homework is to find ways to study, explore, recover what the liturgical patterns of our Church have been and to treat historical liturgy as though it might have knowledge of ritual and gesture that we have forgotten” (p. 96).

Section I concludes with C. Ellis Reyes Montes’s (Music Director at Grace Episcopal Church in Houston, TX) chapter, “Approaches to Decolonizing Our Church Music.” Montes examines how liturgy, instrumentation, language, and resources all often ignore the voices of underrepresented communities within the Episcopal Church. He also proposes ideas and methods to help “... make our way toward reconciliation” (p. 115).

Appropriation in Choral Music: it’s not all Greek to me

Paul Laprade

Secretary

University of St. Francis, Joliet

This brief contribution to the *Podium* is unusual in that it is a brief summary of participation in a conference that was not centered around activities with ACDA. Nonetheless, my experience as a presenter at this conference only two weeks before the start of our summer conference contributed a great deal to my understanding of music as a part of the wider family of the arts and humanities.

The Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER) is an international organization based in Athens, Greece. Scholarly in nature, with a juried publication for which I have served on its editorial board, its goal is to invite and encourage deep interaction and exchange among researchers from many disciplines and nationalities. (In attendance at my paper were scholars from Macedonia, South Africa, Peru, Turkey, Germany, England, Vietnam, and Brazil, among others.) Unlike conferences or conventions specially devoted to music, a wide range of topics in all of the arts and humanities is discussed at an ATINER conference. I was one of three people chosen from the USA to present papers and was honored to meet colleagues from the choral department at NYU and from the literature department at the Universi-

Section II – “Conversations in Vocation” – consists of two chapters: “Claim the High Callings: Conversations in Vocations” and “Musicians in Bivocational Ministry.” These two chapters result from a series of interviews conducted and recorded by the editor. “Claim the High Calling” consists of eight separate interviews presented in their entirety with commentary by Nelson. Each participant is asked to address the way in which “... Alec Wyton’s understanding of church leaders as pastor-teacher-performer, in that order,” affects their music making and how this may all change in the wake of COVID-19 (p. 120).

The second chapter of this section, “Musicians in Bivocational Ministry,” asks similar questions of seven musicians who do not hold full-time positions at churches. This chapter discusses the ways in which bi-vocational ministry may exist, and it addresses the potential benefits and concerns of these part-time roles.

Section III offers six sermons that honor the role of music in churches and encourage choir directors and organists in their vocation and ministry. These sermons were all preached about or for church musicians and are reprinted here in their entirety without commentary.

As Nelson acknowledges, “... you may not like or agree with everything each contributor has put forward ... some of the perspectives contained within may contradict each other,” but this is precisely why this book is the start of an important dialogue (p. xviii). COVID-19 has shifted the ground under all choral conductors. This anthology thoughtfully and intentionally begins conversations about many of the specific issues that have become central to the reality of leading a church choir or, more broadly, a congregation in 2022. It is essential reading.

ty of Kentucky. Our topics were mirror appropriation in music (my paper), the effects of the virtual choir experience upon growth in learning music in general, and the results of a specific type of directing in eliciting performances in theater.

This forum would be an irresponsible place to summarize a paper which argues that appropriation is inseparable from the very process of music making (composition, performance, and conducting). What is important to offer is the type of experience I was given through the unique approach organized by ATINER. In a conscious attempt to recall the method of Socratic teaching and through an effort to recreate the original Greek colloquia of that time, two methods of interaction between researchers were facilitated. The first was a question and answer ‘roundtable’ held after the presentation of groups of three papers. Questions between individual papers were limited, but extensive discussions between the audiences and presenters regarding trios of papers were often extensive in nature. In fact, the most in-depth discussion I have ever had regarding appropriation was held during this time, with several scholars suggesting that the notion of appropriation is itself problematic in the arts due to the value and timelessness of intertextuality. (Intertextuality is how we ‘rewrite’ works anew, as seen in the path from Pygmalion to Kiss Me Kate and Pretty Woman, among many examples.) The commentary was an honest set of inter-

changes in which scholars from around the world tried to tackle this issue with respect and a broad range of perspectives.

The second and final manner in which papers were discussed was through an evening-time colloquy. During this segment, a host offered a series of broad questions which they believed the day's papers raised. Seated in a round room (after a fine Greek meal), we cited one another's work and tried to deepen our discussions based on earlier conversations and references. I sensed a deep level of respect and little ego at work in these interchanges, for we had faith in our colleagues' mastery of their own disciplines. The discussion of overriding themes and principles was among the most fascinating experiences in my life as a scholar in music. I am honored to have been chosen to participate.

I hope that you might consider joining me in Athens at an ATINER conference sometime in the future. As with any conference, one can attend to listen to or present a paper, yet participation in the wider, vibrant discussion is also part of what is offered as part of the experience. Thankfully for many, the chosen lingua franca is English! As a choral conductor, gaining wider perspectives from such fine scholars was deeply enriching and inspiring. As a tourist, seeing a live performance of Verdi's *Rigoletto* at the Theatre of Dionysius (with projected English and Greek translations illuminated under the Acropolis and Greek wine at intermission) was arguably one of the best \$25 I ever spent.



Spinning My Wheels!: Lamentations, Reflections, and Reset Plans of a Bewildered Choir Director

Nythia Martinez
District 1

Walter Payton College Preparatory High School, Chicago

To close out each year, our school plans a fun field day event with options for both indoor and outdoor activities. After I complete my chaperoning duties for the potato sack races on the softball field and trivia in the gym, I always make my way to the karaoke session in the disco-lit recital hall to cheer on each brave performer...and to...SPY!

"Who is singing?!?!" Fertile ground for recruitment, right?

This June, groups of experienced choir kids put multiple requests in the karaoke song queue. Two young baritones on the same bill thought it would be fun to enter the spotlight and sing the hook to a Kanye West track. I didn't recognize them, so I wasn't sure what to expect from the performance, but once the chorus hit, I heard some solid pitch and harmony moments! My heart smiled - and then quickly sank.

"Why don't I already know them?!?!"

They took their cute bow, and as they left the stage, I CHASED them out of the hall, asking if they had ever considered registering for our school's choral program. What happened next was both illuminating and sad...they shot me looks of dread, a solid "no way!" and exited the conversation with a swift escape down the stairs.

What am I supposed to do with THAT?!?!"

As I watched them run, I was immediately consumed with guilt about what I must be doing wrong to have allowed such a perception of choir to exist at our school. I felt this, knowing that changed graduation requirements in the Chicago Public Schools have had huge impacts on music enrollment numbers throughout the district over the last several years and that parts of this issue are bigger than me. So I've been spinning my wheels, trying to determine which enrollment issues are indeed systemic and which I could possibly solve with some really creative thinking.

So on this last day of school, I found myself on the verge of defeat, as I had spent this entire post-remote-learning year trying my best to resurrect choir, planning new and exciting concerts, competing in multiple regional festivals, planning special collaborations, and sharing the groups' work and accomplishments broadly with the student body, faculty, and families.

So why the horror?!?!"

Interestingly, this karaoke run-in came days after I met a fine instrumentalist who confessed to me that she also loved singing but never joined the class because "choir just wasn't for her." Of course, I interrogated that moment, her reasoning including that she doesn't read music and has never sung "classical" repertoire. If even *this* student, an experienced musician, is misinformed about what choir class is, how can I expect the sweet Kanye West karaoke kids, not to mention students

who have no previous experience in music studies, to register for a class that seems like it's only filled with students who already identify as singers, who are unafraid of performing, and who are all natural sight-reading aficionados?

It's obvious there is a perception issue, and my focus moving into this school year needs to focus on removing choir misinformation. Becca Searns of Haley Marketing (Searns, 2021) describes the disconnect between perception and reality occurs because **"you have a mental impression of something, and it defines how you see that something, regardless of the truth."**

So what is my plan?!?! Create new mental impressions.

Here's my short list of five recruitment experiments I plan to incorporate this upcoming school year. If you find you are dealing with any nuanced versions of what I've described above, I hope these can inspire some food for thought!:

1. Lean hard into social media to rebrand choir

- Design any posts that encourage engagement - both for current students but especially for prospective students
 - Ex. Student introductions with quick bio/backstories that remove the idea of prerequisites to singing
 - Short, with editing inspired by tik tok or insta.
 - Ex. Student polls
 - Ask questions that the student body can answer - no prior knowledge necessary.
 - Maybe vote on a piece to be included in a concert?
 - Student clubs or athletics can compete to get the choirs for their events
 - This would require gaining access to the athletic calendar
- Ex. Performance posts
 - Instead of full-length concerts, post short clips and include how to access the full concert link - maybe linktree?
 - Re-post student comments in your insta stories
 - This celebrates the performers, highlights positive reactions, and shows gratitude for audience engagement.
- Be intentional about your follower-ship
 - Invite the directors of your feeder programs (if any) to follow your page and post messages for their students
 - Congratulate them on recent achievements
 - Invite them to school events
 - Get re-posted and spread your visibility exponentially.

2. Pops Concerts...at the BEGINNING of the year

- Open the gates to the choral program by choosing rep for which your current students will have immediate buy-in
- Publicize your concert program before the event to stir audience interest
- Consider including some traditional-esque choral works that utilize pop/contemporary elements to introduce different choral soundscapes within familiar contexts to new audiences
- Leaving POPS concerts only to the end of the year misses

the recruitment deadline and can reinforce the idea that pops concerts are the reward for the "burden" of working on all of the other "serious" music throughout the year. To strengthen our singers' versatility and spectrum of appreciation, we should legitimize good pop arrangements alongside other beautiful works of varied genres and time periods.

3. Program contemporary repertoire accessible to younger groups

- Well-written, authentic contemporary, especially a cappella rep, is impressive but often too advanced
 - Find rep where each line's simplicity, layered together, results in textural excitement
 - This repertoire can be an inclusive entry point into singing and ensemble work
 - Resource Recommendations: *A Cappella 101* by Rob Dietz and *Teaching Music through Performance in Contemporary A Cappella* by Marc Silverberg, J.D. Frizzell, Deke Sharon

4. Beatboxing competition/clinics

- There HAVE to be vocal percussionists in the building who don't feel they have a home.
 - Recommendation from Rob Dietz/Ben Bram of A Cappella Academy - hold a beatboxing competition and/or clinic as a way to access another cross-section of the student body and welcome them to the program.
 - If you are starting an a cappella group, it could be a great way to build excitement and roster.
 - If not, consider inviting vocal percussionists for special choral cameos - may encourage future enrollment.

5. Creative extracurricular time

- A cappella group
 - Student ambassadors that can engage with the school community
 - One of our groups made beautiful singing telegram videos for Valentine's Day last year that received a lot of attention from the student body
- Karaoke Club
- Choir-club exchanges
 - Football / Dance / Choir - maybe they can lead each other in warm-ups?
- Field trips to performances for rostered and non-rostered students - especially at the beginning of the school year
- Lead a club that is NOT music-related to build relationships with another cross-section of students
- BRING A BUDDY TO CHOIR! If they've never been to the choir room, they may never come to the choir room. Welcome visitors multiple times throughout the year and allow them to feel the joy of ensemble singing, the loving spirit of your classroom, and the comfort of another safe space in the building.

If any of these ideas can help you plan the start of the school year, or if you've tested other strategies that have successfully pulled you closer to your enrollment goals, please share with me at nmriviera1@cps.edu so I can stop spinning my wheels!



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SCAN FOR INFO AND
REGISTRATION

Carol Munn
Youth Choirs Coordinator
McHenry Middle School

Throughout these past few years, I have felt the devastating crash and burn of my middle school choir program as we were forced to turn our choir curriculum into e-learning, hybrid, and eventually masked singing with 6-foot spaced distancing. Middle school students who were already apprehensive to sing had to attend choir rehearsals while muted on a zoom call, learn to project their voices through masks, and finally sing in a choir spaced so far apart that they could not hear each other enough for safety and support. I am grateful for the students who stuck it out with the choir throughout these tough times. I am also grateful for the resources that supported us in learning basic concepts through the pandemic and beyond. Now that we are in a rebuilding phase, I again turn to the tried and true rehearsal strategies that engage my singers and strengthen their musical ability. Listed below are how I continue to use fun, engaging warm-ups and the resources I use to find new music.

Warming Up the Voice: Engaging new singers at the start of rehearsal with simple and fun vocal warm-ups taught by rote easily helps students feel successful right at the beginning. Choral concepts like diction, expanding the vocal range, vocal agility, and focusing on specific vowels can engage young singers and help even the timidest singer start to participate, as can simple songs or rounds like “Alfred the Alligator,” “Bim Bom, and “Haida.” Adding a few movements gets everyone involved while creating an element of laughter and fun. These warm-ups have become essential to rebuilding the middle school choral rehearsal after the pandemic because everyone can easily participate, even with a minimal ability to read music. One of my favorite resources for recorded vocal warm-ups is Rollo Dilworth’s book and CD Choir Builders. Each vocal warm-up in this book is written out and can be projected on a screen or taught by rote. In addition, the warm-ups can be played while students sing along, so the teacher does not need to play piano accompaniment and can freely walk around the room. I found these warm-ups to be a tremendous asset throughout the pandemic, and they were the first thing I reached for when students started singing in person again.

Sight Singing and Kodaly Symbols: Teaching the basics of sight singing has always been intimidating for middle school students with little background in reading music notation. Using the Kodaly hand symbols has been a helpful sight singing tool. It helps students stay physically engaged with note reading while making it easy to assess which students are “getting it.” When singing in person again with masks on, we could use hand symbols immediately to engage active participation even though students could not hear each other well. Once they could sing the scale up and down with hand symbols, I introduced music notation by projecting simple sight reading exercises on the whiteboard. Sightreadingfactory.com is a website that creates unlimited original sight singing exercises based on the level, key, time

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signature, and voicing of your choice. We started at the basic level for beginning choirs and worked our way up. My students have enjoyed making this more challenging by singing the exercises in small groups and competing with one another. My more advanced choirs sing these exercises in multiple parts, increasing the difficulty level throughout the year.

Music Theory: Many middle school students entering 6th grade have only sung music by rote and had very little exposure to basic music theory. Because most of my students had asynchronous music class since the middle of fourth grade, there was a gap in understanding note values, note names, and intervals, along with time and key signatures. One tool that helped us learn and review these concepts was musictheory.net. These are online lessons that music teachers can customize for students to help practice lessons on these concepts. Each exercise takes just a few minutes and scores students on their progress. Another tool we used was S-Cubed Sight Reading Course. This method was developed by Dale Duncan and uses slides that are projected on the whiteboard along with interactive lessons and questions specifically developed for middle school students. A few of the most helpful concepts have been learning to count basic rhythmic patterns, find “Do” by looking at the key signature, build a major scale, and understand how to sing chromatic notes. Dale does a great job of breaking down these concepts into bite-sized lessons that take only a small part of a rehearsal. I highly recommend trying this with your middle school choirs.

Singing in Parts: The first time the beginning choir sings a chord in tune is magical! Singing rounds and partner songs when we

first started singing in person helped students hear how harmonies sounded when singing in a group setting. Some of our favorites are “Jubilate Deo,” “Ah Poor bird,” “Swing Low,” and “When the Saints Go Marching In.” We also practice singing triads on a single vowel sound like “oo” and “ah” while moving the chorus up and down by half step. When students became more confident in holding their own parts, I introduce three-part singing. Sight singing books have been essential for easing students into reading music in small steps before jumping into reading octaves. The Choral Approach to Sight Singing by Emily Crocker Vol I and Vol II has been especially helpful. Specifically for working with the vocal ranges of middle school students, teaching sight singing in parts starting with only five notes and slowly increasing in difficulty, reinforcing scales and triads in all keys, and teaching chord modulations using solfege. Much of the book is written in three-part mixed with options for baritone singers as well. There are also short songs throughout the book to reinforce these skills while keeping the middle school vocal range in mind.

Selecting Great Music: Selecting music to fit the needs of the middle school choir can be both exciting and daunting. One challenge is determining what piece will really “reel them in” without being too cheesy or babyish. Another challenge is finding quality music that fits comfortably in their ability level yet teaches a specific concept or reflects a cultural or historical aspect. The best tool I have found for repertoire suggestions is the

Facebook page “I Am a Choir Director,” specifically posts by other middle school choir directors who share their successful middle school pieces. In addition to endless repertoire suggestions, this page also contains rehearsal techniques and activities that keep students engaged and ideas for lessons on specific topics. Thanks to this collaborative page, I have found educational YouTube videos to show to my choirs vocal techniques for lifting the soft palate, such as the YouTube Channel by *singgeek*. I have learned about composers that middle school students love, like Pinkzebra, and have found great vocal coaches like Cheryl Porter, who share vocal lessons and warmups online.

Rebuilding the choir has been challenging, but it forced me to take a step back and assess what works at the core of our curriculum. By having to teach in “survival mode,” I saw clearly what my choir needed to engage in a strong, healthy, fun, and quality way. Most of the tools mentioned above were used throughout e-learning in some fashion, albeit not as effective. However, once we returned to singing in person, these were the basics I continuously turned to get students back to singing and understanding musical concepts. Whether this list affirmed the tools you were using or added some new ones, I hope these tools also help you and your middle school students continue a new season of musical growth as we bounce back together.

AMERICAN CHORAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

