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ILLINOIS ACDA EXECUTIVE BOARD

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Lee R. Kesselman
IL-ACDA Co-President

Going with the Flo(w)

Some would say, 'All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten'. In fact, it was the title of a popular book written in 1990 by Robert Fulghum. Some would say, everything you really need to know you learned from your parents. Or grandparents. Or in church or other house of worship. I think the key element is that most of what we *really* need to know we heard long ago – and probably didn't take seriously enough at the time.

These unprecedented times have forced us all to look for elemental truths which we heard long ago. Today, I'm going with: "Two thing are inevitable in this world -- CHANGE and the RESISTANCE TO CHANGE." CHANGE -- how painful is that?! These past 8 months have given us SO much unforeseen change. COVID19, George Floyd, #BLM, face masks, epidemiology studies, quarantines, massive unemployment, social distancing, no live performances, hand sanitizers. Those are just a few of the changes we have all faced in this country. If there's anything we need to learn in 2020, it is that we need to learn how to be flexible, how to go with the Flo (w), how to be willing to challenge assumptions – as citizens, as teachers, as musicians, as humans.

Why do I keep spelling 'flow' as 'Flo(w)'?

My 96-year-old mother has always been a font of wisdom, a role she continues to play in my life today. Florence Helen Rose Kesselman Slavick was born in 1924. She has outlived almost every relative of her generation. She has outlived two husbands who died of natural causes. She remembers party line telephones, stories about the 1918 flu epidemic her family's first car, 'hobos' coming to the door for bowls of soup during the depression, writing letters to servicemen during WW2. She has embraced, one way or another, computers, streaming TV, surgeries and drugs that only recently came into being, gay marriage, a constantly changing array of more-acceptable terms to describe populations of people, pop culture, contemporary film and fiction. And a host of smaller revolutions. If there is anything my wise mother has taught me, it's that one needs to embrace change, make it your friend where possible, go with the Flo(w). I hope I never forget that lesson.

I never expected to be writing another Podium article as IL-ACDA President! But Jeff Wilson's change of job to California (we wish you well, Gentleman Jeff!) has created a new model for us, as Laura Coster and I will serve as Co-Presidents for this year. Flexibility! While neither of us was ready to embrace an extra full year in our terms of office, we decided that a collaborative model was the best choice we could make. We look forward to working

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together for the greater good before she begins her 'real' term of office in July 2021.

As musicians/conductors/educators, we are faced with the most substantial set of changes our art form has seen since the death of patronage as the foundation of the arts. We will need flexibility more than ever – even as many of the institutions of our lives are struggling.

Virtual instruction, smaller choirs, lack of live performances, increased risks have all entered our choral world. Studying ways to minimize risk yet still teach the beauty and meaning of choral music at its best faces all of us. How do we keep our beloved musical art alive in this bizarre world? Will there be a place for composers, singers, choirs and how do WE become active agents in this quest?

Many of us are developing a new-found awareness of the need to shape our repertoire and instruction in a way that more clearly defines the importance of diversity, inclusion and equity in our choral world. This would be challenging enough even in an in-person, non-COVID19 world. The tragic death of George Floyd pushed us past the tipping point in our approach to racial justice. (I am re-reading Malcom Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*: *How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (2000) as I rethink the nature of change in my life.) How does our repertoire reflect the values we hold, the society we want, the people we serve? How does our way of working together reflect the way we want people to work together? How does our voice in our schools, institutions, country speak Truth, Beauty, Fairness? As conductors/parents// teachers/composers are we *leaders* in efforts to combat racism, to provide equity in our world, to think globally, to be part of active solutions to societal problems?

So, where does IL-ACDA come in? Our Summer InTreat focused on issues of Advocacy, Social Justice, and Virtual Learning. We have a variety of exciting plans, including our new Diversity Initiatives committee. We have a great Board, first-rate officers in treasurer Paul Nielsen, secretary Paul LaPrade and co-president Laura Coster, and wonderful people in key positions like Podium Editor (Monica Bertrand) , website (Jason Hawkins), membership (Jess Palmisano), social media (Grace Currie) and the Diversity Initiatives Committee (chaired by Eric Esparza). IL-ACDA is ready to help all of us meet these challenges.

BUT – in all seriousness, with all the love we have for choral music, our three most vital weapons have been with us all along:

We are passionate about teaching/ making choral music and believe that our art form holds an enduring, unquenchable legacy of Truth, Beauty, and Meaning.

We have a community of choral professionals (ACDA) who can provide a powerful synergy to face these challenges as a group. And the group is always more powerful than the individual.

We learned long ago, that Flexibility and Resilience are necessary components to survival, success, and accomplishment.

So, as I said in my title, "Go with the Flo (w)!"

Thank you, as always, for allowing me --- and Laura! – and your other IL-ACDA leaders to serve you. It is a privilege and an honor. I hope your fall is off to a good start.

Lee Kesselman

Co-President, IL-ACDA

August 2020

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Vocal Jazz Repertoire: Selecting Vocal Jazz Music that has Integrity

Jim McCullough
Vocal Jazz Chair

There are two approaches that I am going to share with you that over arch all VJ repertoire that I have selected over the years. These are not original ideas. Like many helpful things, these methods were shared with me and now they are shared with you.

Approach #1. If there are three pieces in a student's folder, they could be balanced in the following way. The 1st piece should be accessible enough to learn most of it in one day or one rehearsal (a head chart or lead sheet chart). This applies to notes, rhythms and text. The nuances and finishing touches can be added later. (Success and momentum breeds more success and more momentum). The 2nd piece should be attainable in about one week's time thus presenting a slight challenge. It can be rhythmically, melodically and/or harmonically more complex than the first tune. Perhaps the students are able to attain 8-24 measures at a sitting before getting frustrated or "full" of the piece. The 3rd should be their reach piece that would take approx. a month to learn. (The greater challenge cements the director/student relationship because they feel that they need us to help them problem solve difficult passages). This approach is borrowed from Alice Parker. The idea being all things are in balance and the student feels accomplishment (success) and challenges (complexity) together. Too much challenge and they grow frustrated, too easy and they don't learn work ethic or how to chip away at things for delayed gratification. The 4th, 5th and 6th pieces need to fall into the same checks and balances as you see fit.

1) Something old, 2) something new, 3) something borrowed and 4) something blue.

1) Something old. This approach works together with the above approach balancing challenge levels and historical variety to maintain the interest and education of the choir. Vocal jazz group singing has been around since the 1950s and our students would learn a great deal from 1) an historic piece, 2) a new release, 3) something that we gleaned from a colleague or concert/clinic we attended and (4) we should always have at least one "blues" piece in their folder. 1) Something Old. An example of an historic vocal jazz piece could be "Georgia" by Gene Puerling and the Hi-Los (complex) or "C Jam Blues/Dukes Place' by Dave Cazier (mostly unison) or "Over by the Bay by Jack Kunz (father of Kelly, easily attained ballad). I realize that I am dating myself with these pieces, but it is fun to dig up the past a little. I have copies of each as they are out of print. Contact me if you are interested in investigating any of these pieces.

2) Something new. Vocal jazz is growing, and publishers are making more titles available than ever before. New releases keep us fresh and learning new things. I will recommend digging through pieces by younger writers like Kerry Marsh, Michelle Weir, Rosana Eckert, Darmon Meader, Michael Engelhardt, Kelly Kunz and Jeremy Fox. To be sure there are many more out there to pick from (lucky for us). Publishers like Sound Music Publications, Kerry Marsh music and UNC Jazz Press are very supportive of young writers.

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3) Something Borrowed. This category is filled with examples of works that we heard at clinics, workshops, conventions etc... The best resources are our colleagues. I find that the vocal jazz world is one of sharing and support. If you ask for a copy of a piece, most people will share it so that your students may learn and grow as their own students did. "I Love Bein' Here with You" arr. Kirk Marcy is one of my favorite "borrows" that is not published.

4) Something Blue. Jazz has it's roots in the blues. Keeping a blues tune in front of our students helps nurture creativity and improvisation. It is the gateway piece to bigger and more adventuresome improv. It could be as simple as a "head" chart (all unison) or as complex as "Everyday I have the Blues" by Lambert, Hendricks and Ross (LHR-Sing a Song of Basie-multi tracked)

Regardless of which music you pick, all selections need to be music that you and your students will be passionate about, enjoy, learn from and look forward to singing. The arrangements must have integrity, beauty, quality texts, rhythmic vitality and sound great.

My soapbox speech: We are continually bombarded by publishers with low quality, unusable, and "flavor of the month" pop arrangements. These pieces do not present any growth opportunities for our students. They are usable as a novelty or (dessert) but they are not the main course (proteins and greens). It falls to us as choral professionals to discern the quality (or lack thereof) in all that we choose and program. Good luck with your selections. All pieces mentioned above are "share-able". Contact my email or call if you'd like to look at something I've referenced at jimmcculloughmusic@gmail.com. 630-715-0417

I am putting myself out there to be available for visits/clinics/advice/group pump up sessions, whatever I can do to support your vocal jazz classroom learning. As ACDA vocal jazz chair, it is the most effective way that I can think of to help the art form and your students to grow. I am retired, and I will travel anywhere within 50 miles of St. Charles at no cost. It is fun for me (and hopefully you and your students). If you live further out, call or email me and we'll talk about mileage, gas, billeting and other "fun" topics.

Words Are in the Mouth, Quality Is in the Throat

Brian J. Winnie, D.M.A
College/University Chair

CONDUCTOR: "*Choir echo me [s, s, s]"*

CHOIR: *"[s, s, s]"*

CONDUCTOR: "*Great, now with more energy."*

What are the possible goals to this basic exercise? Perhaps the goal is for students to be able to: a) connect sound with breath, b) create more audible unvoiced consonants, or c) energize the body to prepare for the rehearsal. No matter the goal, what are the potential flow-on effects? In other words, what else might we inadvertently be teaching along the way? How does this correspond to a dynamic marking above a phrase of music. Does a *forte* apply to all consonants and vowels in each word equally? Which consonants are louder than others? How loud does a consonant have to be to match the dynamic level of a vowel? In order to answer these questions, let's reflect on the title of this article. What does it mean, "Quality Is in the Throat?" We first need to understand the distinction between speech sounds (vowels and consonants) and voice quality.

Steinhauer et al (2017, 146) suggest that "speech sounds are produced primarily in the mouth or oral cavity; voice quality is produced by what is happening in the throat within the larynx and pharynx." Voice quality can be thought of as the overall characteristic sound of the voice regardless of frequency, loudness, or speech sounds. Basically, this means that the sound is not going to change its overall "color" even when pitch, dynamics, or vowel and consonants shift. This is important because speech sounds have the potential to influence the resonance, or color, of a particular voice quality. Vowels tend to get the greatest attention because voice quality can be most apparent when sustaining a vowel sound. However, vowels can be bright, dark, or somewhere in between along the continuum depending on changes of various voice structures. This occurs as voice structures change placements causing different energy boosts of harmonics which we perceive as brighter or darker qualities. For example, an [i] vowel, which is commonly perceived as a brighter vowel can be made darker by lowering the larynx, or even brighter by narrowing the epilaryngeal space via the aryepiglottic sphincter as in the childhood taunt "nyae, nyae, nyae." This showcases an independence between voice structures in the throat and speech sounds made with the mouth and tongue. Consonants can have just as much influence on voice quality and care should be taken to understand the common consonant interactions with both vowels and voice quality. Consonants can also help us perform more authentically in various styles of music.

Consonants are constrictions or obstructions along the vocal tract and can be voiced or voiceless. Voiced consonants occur with vibration of the true vocal folds due to the interaction of air flow. Voiceless consonants occur from air flow through the vocal tract without the true vocal folds set into vibration. Within these exist common consonants named by the manner of articulation: plosives, fricatives, affricatives, nasals, liquids, and glides (see Fig. 1).

Manner	Voicing	Common Consonant Examples
Plosive	Voiceless	"p, t, k"
	Voiced	"b, d, g"
Fricative	Voiceless	"f, th (thin), s, sh, h"
	Voiced	"v, th (these), z, zh (pleasure)"
Affricative	Voiceless	"ch" (choice)
	Voiced	"j" or dg" (judge)
Nasal	Voiced	"m, n, ng"
Liquids	Voiced	"l"
Glides	Voiced	"w" or "y" (yellow)

Figure 1. Consonant chart categorized by the manner of articulation

What follows are a few possible interactions between consonants and voice quality. Conductor-teachers should keep these in mind when working with consonants in order to develop consistency in desired voice qualities.

Consonants and Airflow/Subglottic Pressure

Conductors-teachers should be aware of the level of subglottic pressure in voiced consonants and the level of constriction and airflow rate in voiceless consonants, which can be adjusted with training. For example, when conductors-teachers ask singers for louder voiceless plosives, the constrictive behavior in the throat will likely increase and the abdominal muscles will contract abruptly. Is this the goal? If that bodily behavior is maintained into the subsequent vowel or if students anticipate this instruction too early while singing the preceding vowel, it can negatively impact the sustainability of those sounds. The likely result will be a constricted voice quality, breathy voice quality, or pressed (overadducted) voice quality due to the interaction of the voice quality and the high airflow rate "s".

Another example might be when asking for a stronger initial "g" as in the word "give". This could cause a larger build-up of subglottic pressure below the closed vocal folds causing a pressed sound to occur on the subsequent vowel. Therefore, care should be taken to avoid flow-on effects of consonants to preceding and subsequent vowels. Stopped voice plosives such a "b" and "d" can learn to be sustained if the constriction and subglottal pressure are reduced. Have singers try singing successive "b's" and "d's" as quickly as possible to explore the sensation.

Consonants and Onsets

There are three vocal onsets that can occur at the True Vocal Folds: Glottal, Aspirate, and Smooth (a.k.a. simultaneous or balanced). These can all be performed at various effort levels of vocal fold closure and rates of airflow. Voiceless consonants do not have an onset since the vocal folds are not set into vibration and can therefore intentionally or unintentionally cause a change in a subsequent vowel onset. For example, sing the word "happy" on a comfortable pitch. If you sustain the initial "h" with a high airflow rate and then proceed to sing the "a" vowel, the vowel quality of the "a" will either be breathy from an aspirate onset or "pressed" from an effortful glottal onset. Both could have been caused from the high level of airflow in the initial "h". Singers should be trained to perform any desired onset regardless of how the preceding consonant is produced.

Voiced consonants all have an initial onset which can have a direct effect on the voice quality as well, although these can be adjusted with training. For example, an aspirate onset, with air starting before vocal fold closure will likely produced a voiced consonant with a breathy quality. This may be advantageous for certain pop styles that use a microphone. A low effort glottal onset may help to produce a closure of the vocal folds prior to airflow, which will likely produce a louder dynamic result. This can be due to the interaction of glottal onsets helping to achieve a thicker vocal fold body-cover or chest register voice quality. A smooth onset can help achieve a softer dynamic result. Try to first practice these onsets with a vowel of your choice, such as [i]. Then have students sustain the vowel and then close to a voiced consonant such as [z]. As the change from vowel to consonant occurs, have students try to maintain the overall quality of the sound. Then have singers attend to these onsets starting on a voiced consonant instead of a vowel.

Consonants and Coarticulation

While singing the previous "happy" exercise, you may have noticed the phenomenon known as coarticulation. This occurs when production of one speech sound influences a surrounding speech sound. For example, the "a" vowel in happy influenced the "h" quality. Try to sustain the "h" in the word "hoot" and then sustain the "h" in the word "happy". You will notice the "h" sound is simultaneously influenced by the tongue position, and maybe even more importantly the larynx position, of the following vowel. These elements need to become independent of one another in a typical classical voice quality but might be desirable in a more contemporary commercial styling such as pop or jazz. However, remember the overarching goal is to train independence of speech sounds from voice quality.

Another example of coarticulation occurs when a nasal consonant such as the "n" in the word "hand" causes the preceding vowel "a" to

become nasalized. In a classical context, singers typically desire to remove this coarticulation, but this takes training and is not suitable for vernacular styles such as pop. In order to make a pop style sound more authentic, singers can allow the ending of the "a" vowel to become nasalized with a lowering of the velum (soft palate) before transitioning into the "n".

Consonants and Pitch

Since voiced consonants occur with vocal fold vibration, they have frequency. Therefore, it can be advantageous for singers to match the pitch of the voiced consonant with the pitch of the subsequent vowel, especially on an ascending interval. For example, sing the word "singing" with the first syllable "sing-" on a C3 or C4 and the next syllable "-ing" on a G3 or G4 respectively. Be sure to sing the "ng" on the G3 or G4 pitch. Now keep the "ng" on the lower pitch, and you might notice the difficulty.

Consonants can also influence the pitch of the subsequent vowel. If singers are required to sing louder voiced consonants such as "z", they may use the same subglottic pressure in the subsequent vowel. This can cause a raising of the pitch or sharpening to occur after the consonant. If the subglottic pressure and airflow are allowed to change as needed to produce a similar quality on each speech sound, the change in pitch frequency will not occur. Figure 2 depicts an acoustic spectrogram image of three different sustained consonants transitioning into a vowel. All three vowels were sung at the same frequency for each example. The first example [z] to [i] was performed trying to maintain the same subglottic pressure when transitioning into the vowel. The pitch fluctuated at the transition and momentarily sharpened. The second example [s] to [i] was performed trying to maintain the same amount of airflow when transitioning into the vowel. Again, the pitch raised at the onset prior to coming back to the intended pitch. The third example [z] to [i] was performed with adjustments to subglottic pressure and airflow to maintain the same pitch and voice quality during the transition from consonant to vowel. The pitch did not shift.

Consonants and Dynamics

Consonants are perceived softer than vowels, so if a consistent legato is desirable, it can be advantageous to make the consonants louder, especially voiced consonants. Fred Waring's *Tone Syllables* (1945), focused on equalizing the dynamics of consonants to vowels but did not specifically discuss voice quality interaction. Since dynamics are a result of changes in the vocal mechanism, it is important to consider voice quality in this equation. For example, if singing the word "sing" in a classical style, the initial "s" can be made louder by maintaining more constriction in the throat and a higher larynx position. The voice quality then needs to quickly adjust to a moderately low larynx with no constriction in the throat and a reduction of airflow from the "s" to the subsequent vowel. The last speech sound "ng" will need to be louder than the preceding vowel sound in order to match the perceived intensity of the vowel. This could be accomplished by singing the vowel in a thin fold or more head voice and then the "ng" in a thicker vocal fold body-cover or more chest voice. Another option could be to narrow the aryepiglottic sphincter to add intensity to the "ng". Sometimes the answer is also to make the consonant longer in duration.

Conductor-teachers can begin by incorporating these ideas into score preparation and the daily choral warm-up or tech-up. Eventually a scaffolded process can be developed to integrate these concepts in varied voice qualities. This can help conductor-teachers move toward a more comprehensive approach to teaching voice quality, and it can help singers explore expressivity from a more holistic view. These ideas can easily be incorporated into in-person or online teaching. Visit www.brianwinnie.com to learn more about the integration of these concepts into the choral rehearsal. For further professional development in voice science visit estillvoice.com or voicescienceworks.org which includes a wonderful list of additional resources.

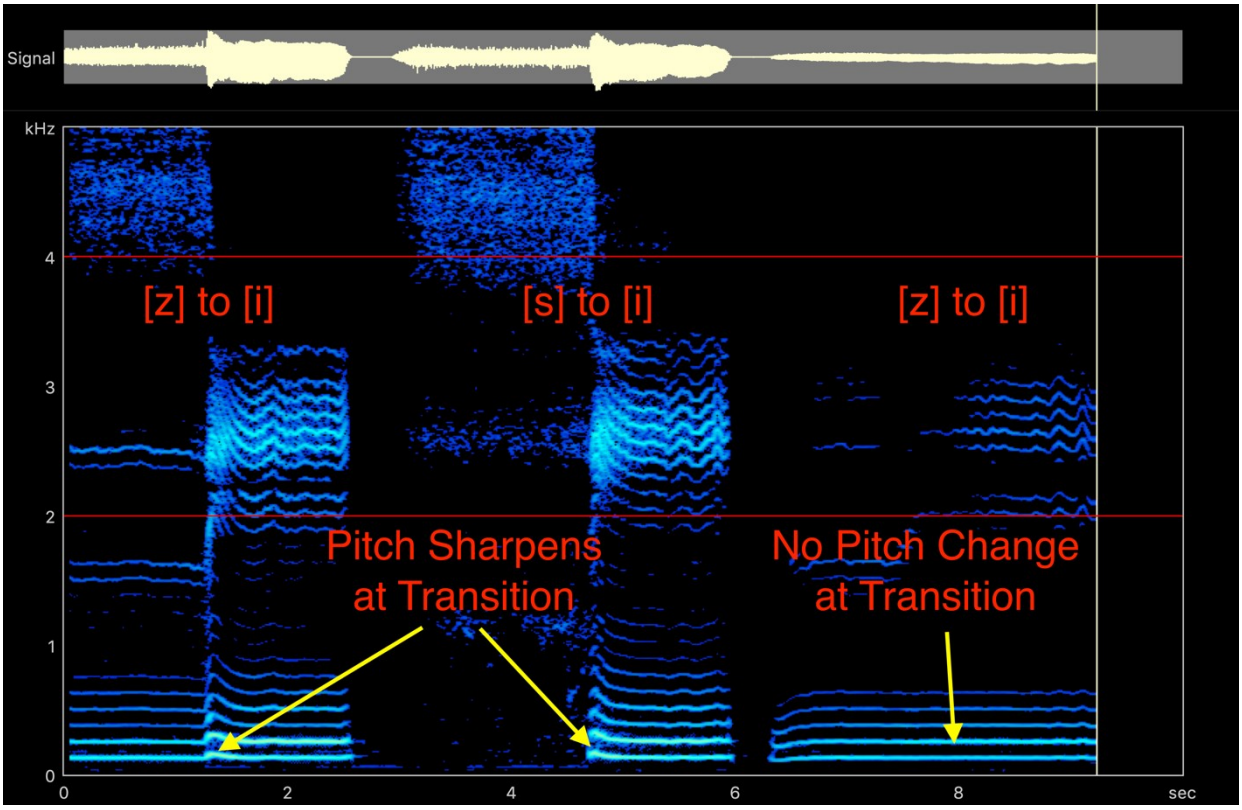

Figure 2. Spectrogram image of the relationship between consonants and pitch

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Christopher Windle
Music in Worship

The year 2020 has been difficult as a singer, conductor, and church musician. The things that I love – singing together and working with groups of people – have suddenly vanished, becoming dangerous public health risks in the wake of COVID-19.

It is easy to dwell on what we can no longer do. Gathering for music and worship in the same way is no longer safe. The act of social distancing has replaced hugs, singing, and even the sign of the peace. The work I love dearly – work that I have always insisted requires in-person interaction – has been moved online, or disappeared entirely.

In the middle of all of this, it is important to remember that humanity, music, and art have all made it through pandemics, wars, and all manner of challenges for thousands of years. Life has changed a lot since March 2020 and it will look different in 2021. The Episcopal Diocese of Chicago (the denomination for which I work) continues to prohibit singing in church for the health and safety of all, but we are finding ways to create beauty and art – we must. And ultimately, we will sing together again, and it will be glorious!

So then, what can all of us who want to create, sing together, and worship together do right now?

Since the beginning of the pandemic, I have advocated for a mix of virtual and at home music making in my church. I believe we have an opportunity to examine what is at the core of what we do. What if we take this moment to reflect on our true mission; what are we really striving for every day?

For my choirs, I have found myself reflecting on the purpose of church music and my goals for my choirs. Is the purpose of the choir rehearsal the quality of the final performance of an anthem? Or is the process, the connection, the community, and the act of worship the key experiences that have drawn me to music, providing me with joy and purpose?

Full disclosure: I believe that it is really both of these things. Ultimately, the quality of the music making is important, singing together is essential, and the repertoire we choose impacts those both our musicians and congregations.

Yet, we cannot achieve some of this without in-person work. It is essential that we recognize this and articulate this. Taking a breath together as a group, adding your voice to a room reverberating with song, and feeling that last 32' stop on the organ added at the end of a hymn are not replicable experiences in a virtual space.

However, if we must continue in this fashion for some time, how can we continue to use music to achieve our goals, especially as we enter what is the beginning of a new program year? Thankfully, we do live in an age where technology affords us the privilege of continuing to gather.

At the Church of the Atonement (the parish where I serve as Associate Director of Music & Choirmaster) we have three choral ensembles that – in normal times – sing choral mass most Sundays and feast days of the year, as well as Evensong services. At the core of this is the community and the act of worship itself. If we accept this idea, then the music and these gatherings serve a greater purpose than only beautiful choral performances.

Zoom has allowed our congregation to meet simultaneously in real time. Parishioners are able to see and greet each other before the liturgy begins. People can see and interact with each other, much as they do in the pews on Sunday morning. Here we can encourage people to set up spaces in their home for prayer and reflection. This provides us with the opportunity for real time interaction, something that is important and meaningful.

Unfortunately – as we are all painfully aware – the technological tools available to us still cannot support synchronous choral singing. However, we can have live music in a synchronous worship service; in fact, many resources already exist to provide a single person or a group of people on different computers to musically contribute to virtual worship, including music as ancient as chant.

At Atonement's Sunday morning virtual liturgy, live music includes a cantor chanting the psalm and the organist playing hymns and mass parts, while the congrega-

tion sings along from homes. Even though we may not be able to hear each other, we still make music together.

We also plan to continue including prerecorded anthems this fall. The size of our choir allows us to use the Acappella App which – instead of everyone recording a part independently – allows the singers to layer their voice and video over each other, in a quasi-synchronous fashion.

We have also held, and plan to continue holding, *live evensong services via Zoom. I emphasize "live" to distinguish this from other virtual Evensong services compiled from virtual choir projects and archival material. For this service, individual members of our volunteer choir sing the psalm on a plainsong tone, passing each verse to a new person in the choir. We do the same with the canticles and the responses.*

This was a beautiful and vulnerable act of music making. Few of those who sang were used to singing alone, let alone into the camera on their computer. But the courage, beauty, bravery, and vulnerability of that moment was extraordinary and moving. The choir came together in real time to worship, to sing, and to pray the office.

We also prerecorded an anthem as a virtual choir – a moment that was similarly vulnerable. And in that moment, the imagery of all those who had just sung individually coming together became even more impactful, highlighting the power of the whole group.

And in the end, isn't that what choir is all about? That we are bigger than ourselves, and that we alone are not sufficient. When we strive to be together – to accomplish something together – we achieve beauty, create art, and worship together.

The virtual space will never replace choir. So, what can we do? What are the goals we are actually striving to achieve in our programs? We have all been given a new canvas. So, let's accept its flaws, look deeper, and think about why we do what we do; and rather than trying to recreate, just create.

For me, this reaffirms that choir and singing are actually more than just the sum of their parts. It is in fact the process, the coming together, the community we build and the connections we make that are at the core of our work. And if we continue to examine and creatively address our goals, beauty will break through.

Music and liturgy continue to connect us. I want to encourage us all to continue to find ways to engage the music and the community. Share your ideas with each other – much like musical styles, not every solution will work for every choir or congregation. Perhaps – for now – that striving, that working together, that love, that vulnerability which draws us to choral singing is what we should focus on, as we seek to create and connect people within the environment available to us.

Your Light

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How are you feeling right at this moment? Before reading any further, take a moment and write a few words down that describe how you feel (mentally, emotionally, physically, or all three). "This Little Light of Mine," a simple, singable tune. We may all agree on the first verse, but after that, we probably have different versions learned as children or adults. Have you ever looked into the history of this well-known song? Perhaps you have an idea about its history that you have formulated over the years, but never looked any further. You will find this song has far more roots planted in our American history than you may have thought by doing a quick Google search. In a traditional, formal collegiate music education, there is little time spent on American roots music. "This Little Light of Mine" became part of the American folk music tradition after Alan Lomax's documented recording in 1939. Approximately twenty years later, the song became an anthem of the civil rights movement and recorded by many legendary singers, including Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Odetta, Pete Seeger, Ray Charles, and Bruce Springsteen. I think this is a song that is intensely personal and courageous, but so often, seen as a children's song with motions.

Look at the opening verse we all know: "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." Now, let's make this interactive. Close your eyes and sing that line out loud. (I am not kidding. Sing out loud.) You sound delightful! Have you been practicing? Now, sing it again like you

mean it. Improving…you are getting closer! Whatever you do, don't hold back this time. Throw caution to the wind! One more time! Sing from your heart and don't think about who might hear you, be watching you, or believe you have gone completely crazy. (That probably already happened during the shutdown anyway. On second thought, it is probably happening now as many of you are returning to your classrooms). How did it feel, singing from your heart? Friends, I believe it is more critical now than ever to remember that there was a unique moment in each of our lives when we decided to pursue the choral arts as a livelihood. That "little light" in each of us sparked enough to set off a fire that brought us to this point.

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." A quote typically credited to Yeats; however, there is no conclusive evidence he said those words! Research shows that educators play a significant role in lighting the fire for student engagement. Those of us in the performing arts know that music does something to us, unlike anything else. Carroll Izard, an American research psychologist, was a pioneer in researching human emotions. He identified ten primary emotions, one of them being interest. The Miriam-Webster dictionary defines interest as a noun, "a feeling that accompanies or causes special attention to something or someone." As a verb, interest is "to engage the attention or arouse the interest of." Plainly stated, interest motivates us to become emotionally invested, curious, active learners. Without an emotional response on the part of the student, without sparking the students' interest, it's doubtful there will be a fire for learning.[1]

Someone in your life helped to ignite the fire inside of you. We are navigating a new world in our classrooms, communities, and personal lives. Some of us can return to singing in a limited capacity; others are creating virtual learning environments and experiences. Nothing can ever replace the aesthetic experiences possible during rehearsals and live performances. However, just because we are standing farther apart, whether in a rehearsal space or looking at our singers through a computer screen, we can create a connected experience that sparks interest in every individual. How can we make meaningful connections when we are still experiencing distance?

Regardless of our current situation with our choral ensembles, we have to spark interest. Let's make this more interactive again. Take a deep breath and think of somewhere you would like to go that would decrease your stress levels, uplift your spirits, and make you smile. Take another deep breath. Imagine that place. What do you see around you? How does it smell? How does it sound? Take another deep breath. If you could describe this place as a color, what color would it be? Breathe. What are three adjectives that best describe this place? What is the strongest emotion you feel in this place? Take a deep breath. How are you feeling right at this moment? Before reading any further, take a moment and write a few words down that describe how you feel (mentally, emotionally, physically, or a combination of all three).

You might be thinking, where are we going with this? As humans, we need connection. We need to connect with our ensemble members, whether they are our students or community members. It is easier to communicate with people that share similar interests as you. The bottom line: we all share the connection of singing when we are face-to-face, and it is still possible in hybrid and virtual situations if we approach it with an intent to spark interest as an emotion. Think back to that person that inspired you or ignited the fire in you for music. Can you pinpoint what that person/s did to start the fire in you? There is a high probability that you felt connected in a way that caused an emotional response. We need to take the time to gather some kindling to start a spark every day we work with our singers.

Try the same technique with your ensemble that we did during this reading. At the beginning of your rehearsal, virtual class, etc., ask your singers to write down how they feel (you need to do this also). They can jot it in pencil at the top of their score or keep a piece of paper in their folder. Towards the middle of your time together, ask them to close their eyes and go somewhere else in their imagination. Ask them to check in with their senses (e.g. smells, sounds). Have them write down a word or two about how they feel. Continue through your rehearsal, and at the end, check-in with them to see if they feel different than they did initially. More than likely, everyone feels better, more connected, and more interested. You might be thinking that this seems like a waste of time when rehearsal time is precious. I thought this at first also; then, I started doing this. I noticed that my students are more focused, refreshed, connected, musical, and aware. I have spent less time correcting behaviors and gained valuable rehearsal time

because they “feel” more. More and more studies continue to show that our minds need a break to function more efficiently. Give this a try, and you may be surprised at the results.

I challenge you to look inside yourself. Sometimes you see the light, sometimes darkness, and sometimes fog. Take the Northern Lights, for example, you have to travel long distances to see them, yet you do not know if they will appear after your journey. When they do occur, you cannot predict what it will look like; they are ever-changing. But, when their lights do appear, they are always breathtakingly amazing! The year 2020…we certainly do not know what will happen daily, things are ever-changing, but we are still here. Share your light with others. It makes no difference if it is an initial spark, a raging flame, or a burning ember. Together, we are the Choral Lights. We must continue to plant roots in our young, amateur, and professional singers. Sing that opening line out loud again, “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine!” How are you feeling now?

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[1] Timothy Pychyl, “Education Is Not the Filling of a Pail, But a Lighting of a Fire,” *Psychology Today* (May 10, 2008).