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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

LAURA COSTER

Dear Choral Friends,

It is mid-December and many are finishing up a semester and year like no other. As you read this Podium Winter Edition, know that you are not alone in hoping for a brighter, new year. A year that includes live music, face to face choir rehearsals and new possibilities for connection with your singers. Things will still be different this winter, yet there is hope for change and resolution in the near future. Thank you for all you are doing for your singers every day. You are intelligent, hard-working, creative, and profoundly dedicated. Your perseverance is amazing and yes, you will make it through this.

Sometimes, growth occurs in the midst of hardship. I've seen this in many of you. Recently, I can't help but notice the many encouraging social media posts about directors sharing their experiences with their singers, families, and other directors. We are sharing posts about how we are caring more about our singer's well-being. Directors are speaking with more depth and empathy as I watch virtual choir performances online. Families and singers are sharing the im-

portance of music in their lives. It is as if the pandemic has allowed us to appreciate the very small successes with our singers and the music, rather than the end product of an excellent performance.

The stress of creating an excellent product has been replaced with giving what is possible in this moment to our singers and their families. We are sending out messages of genuine caring rather than creating and producing for an audience. I hope we don't lose this quality when we go back to "normal" rehearsals and performances. My hope is that we will never take singing together for granted again. Instead, let us continue to see and experience the beauty of a community making art together.

Here are some meaningful reflections from choir directors on social media this week:

"We had a live, virtual voice recital today and I was grinning the whole time. The kids did great and it brought so much joy to everyone listening. Sometimes we just have to appreciate the little things. My heart is full."

"Sometimes, as conductors, we focus our students so much on the concert or competition that we don't appreciate some of the most extraordinary

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moments of making music together. Here is a clip from our virtual concert that is far from perfect, but meaningful...."

I think we have learned a lot through our experiences in 2020. Perhaps even more than we did in past years. We've all experienced a loss in our profession and relationships over the last year. Thank you for continuing to support one another and for advocating for the importance of choral singing both inside and outside of IL-ACDA.

Please reach out and connect with us. 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.

Upcoming Events:

1. ACDA National Convention-Diversity in Music March 18-20, 2021- Virtual Convention

See acda.org for information and registration.

Keynote Speakers include- Eric Whitacre, Anton Armstrong, Francisco Nunez, Alice Parker, and Digna Guerra

37 performances including the King Singers

42 Interest Sessions, Reading Sessions, R&R Forums, composer meetings, and virtual exhibits

National Student Leadership Academy for grades 8-12-Invite up to four singers to this honors experience.

2. Summer ReTreat 2021: Celebrating Together in Color Wednesday and Thursday, June 23-24, 2021.

Attend in person or online. Location: NIU-DeKalb Register in late February at il-acda.org/

Join us to experience vetted diverse literature for all age groups and sing in a Director's Chorus 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 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.

Dr. Lynda Hasseler is the director of choral activities at Capital University's Music Conservatory in Ohio. She is passionate and well known for her dynamic programming and expressive choirs. Sing in a director's chorus that is socially distanced and learn from this master teacher and conductor.

Dr. Jill Trinko is a choral Kodaly specialist. Learn how to infuse Kodaly technique into your choral rehearsals through the repertoire. Jill will focus on indigenous music for choirs at all age levels.

CHORAL REPERTOIRE AND RESOURCES

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Composition Contest

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3. 2021 IL-ACDA Fall Convention at DePaul University in Chicago on Friday-Saturday, October 15-16, 2021

Join Voices High School Honor Choir

Children's Honor Choir:

Performance Choirs: Audition information will be announced soon by Constant-Contact email on our website. Consider bringing a group to perform at the convention.

Professional Growth is available for these events. For more information about our events or ACDA membership, go to <https://www.il-acda.org/>

May you find rest, comfort, peace, and new inspiration as we move ahead and continue to sing safely this winter.

Laura Coster
Co-President of IL-ACDA

YOU MATTER

Matthew Begale District 7

I can only imagine what we all feel right now. Personally, I have been stuck in a wave of not feeling good enough, to force positivity, to feeling pure exhaustion trying to meet my students in any way I can. This is new for all of us: remote learning, hybrid safety measures, your best students not turning things in, an eerily quiet December calendar. For me, the hardest part has been not seeing music change lives like we used to.

This past week while in an extra-curricular zoom rehearsal, our student leadership had arranged a bonding activity where each student had to go around and share their top five bucket list items. The students started sharing their adventuresome ideas: "Traveling Europe", "living in a big city", "swimming with sharks", and "making Victorian clothing" (that one was new to me too). The students were connecting, chiming in, and we weirdly, dare I say, felt normal. While continuing the zoom

popcorn, one sophomore soprano began to share, "My biggest bucket list item is to make and have music in my life every day." She then continued, "I really want to be a music teacher like Mr. Begale, he just makes music fun and makes everyone feel special. I want to use music to do the same for others."

There was swimming with sharks, making Victorian clothing, and then that. A surprise moment that refocused my purpose in one statement. I shared in the chat that she made my day and I'd always be happy to help them figure their future out in any way I could, music or not. We continued, but it had me thinking.

During this past semester, I have tried to lead with truth and optimism, with a growth mindset and acknowledging my weaknesses along the way. I have tried to provide musical/choral experiences that would continue to foster skills and love for the craft. I have and am still figuring out how to make a decent virtual choir. Time and time again, I have judged myself for not meeting the mark I have set for myself. I, like

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so many of us, have done my best to be my best. Yet, even when doing our best, it's hard to really know if we are making the difference we so desperately crave to make.

I know we may have moments where our purpose may lag in an unstable internet connection, but when we do connect and use music to do so, we change lives. When we're completely

frustrated by students turning off their cameras, we matter. When we continually talk for thirty seconds while muted and then laugh it off with our students, we matter. And even when we give the student who hasn't turned in anything all semester a chance to make it right, we matter.

What we do matters.

CHILDREN'S CHOIRS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Amy Branahl Children's Choir Chair

This year has been vastly different from any other year for our children's choir. I thought I would take some time to talk about a few different perspectives that I have from being an Artistic Director, a teacher, and a mom. Never in a million years would I have thought that chorus would be the most dangerous class of 2020! From aerosol studies, Zoom rooms, Google Classroom, unstable internet, singing on mute, and hybrid learning, this pandemic has taught me so many things about how I need to be flexible and understanding. I also have greater appreciation for *Frozen and Frozen 2* as I often find myself singing the two iconic songs, "Let it Go" and "Do the Next Right Thing." These mantras have helped me in my day to day operations in the pandemic. To say that teaching through COVID19 has been hard would be an understatement. In this Groundhog's Day cycle, I am reminded to try something new and try to improve learning a little each day. It has also taught me to appreciate "WHY" I got into the profession, and I hope this article can provide some practical ideas as well as some bigger thoughts to ponder over as we head into 2021.

The entire performing arts community has taken a hit during the pandemic, and Youth Choral Theater of Chicago is no different. In a matter of months we have gone from celebrating our 35th anniversary season, to fighting to stay solvent. Due to lost fundraising opportunities and decreases in tuition, we had to furlough employees and cut salaries across the board. Despite the seemingly endless cycle of applications for grants and PPP loans, funding streams continue to dry up. So what is on the horizon for us as directors of our organizations? Many of the things I will share in this article I have received from wonderful friends and board members of YCT, so I can't take credit for them all, but like all good things, they are better shared!

Some very practical nuts and bolts to year end giving and giving in 2021.

- If you haven't finished an Annual Fund Campaign letter, craft one so that you can get out to your donor base and ask them to support your non-for-profit choir.
- Did you know that under the CARES Act, even people who do not itemize deductions can claim up to \$300 of charitable giving to qualifying organizations on their 2020 income taxes? My board member and treasurer of our organization shared this

link with me. This is good news since the threshold for itemized deductions is very high. Donate to your favorite charities and write it off! Always consult your local tax professional. <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/how-the-cares-act-changes-deducting-charitable-contributions>

- Create content to share out from student performances coupled with an ask.
- Consider your fundraising goals, trim spending, and leave some reserves to make it through the pandemic.

In regards to teaching, we have been teaching remotely and continuing with our e-learning curriculum. We are consistently trying to find connections with our students but nothing will replace the in-person connections we make with our students every day and for our children's choirs every week. I think remembering that we are in a pandemic has put a new lens onto my teaching. Supporting our students' mental and emotional health has never been more important, whether that means checking in one on one, playing musical games, or even a fun game of trivia. If you are working in the schools, I know we spend a tremendous time on SEL (Social Emotional Learning) for our students. However, I wanted to also ask you directors, "How are you doing?" As a mom, e-teaching and monitoring my three kids e-learning from home has been an exhausting adventure. At the end of each day, after working harder than ever, sometimes I am just spent. We need to be gracious to ourselves so we can be the best versions of ourselves in the classroom or the virtual classroom. Here are some tips for self-care during the pandemic.

1. **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, THEN TAKE CARE OF OTHERS.** It reminds me of the safety card I used to read every flight I took prior to the pandemic. In case of an emergency, put on your oxygen mask first and then help others around you. I think the same applies to us as we continue to move day by day through the pandemic. Taking care of yourself will of course look different for everyone, so think about what habits keep you happy and healthy.
2. **TAKE A TECH BREAK!** I have been just realizing how much more I am sedentary and stationary at my work from home scenario. Even though I was always emailing and on my work computer, I wasn't staring at it while I was teaching throughout the day. So add in another 5-7 hours of computer time to your day

and you would think that you were seeing double! To combat the increased screen requirements, I set some extra alerts to blink, breathe, stretch, stand, go for a walk, or exercise. Also, in the true pandemic fashion we added a dog to our family. That has increased my daily step count by a lot!

3. **COMMUNICATE AND NAME YOUR EMOTIONS.** If (let's be real, when) you're having a hard time, take time to reflect on what you are feeling. "You feel what you feel, and those feelings are real." Share these feelings with trusted friends, or write in a journal if that's more your style.
4. **SHIFTING SAND CAN TURN TO CONCRETE.** Know which things are in your control to change, which situations you will need to be creative to make lemonade out of a lemon, and which items you will need to let go. For me, saying the serenity prayer, or prayers in general have been helpful to me to reduce my worry, stress, and anxiety surrounding Covid19 and its ever-changing landscape. Instead of feeling like you're sinking, find ways to make the ground you are standing on more solid with the choices for self-care.
5. **FIND JOY.** We are not talking about Marie Kondo-ing your home, which might have already happened earlier in the pandemic. But, it is about looking for connection and joy and being filled with thankfulness. I have been trying to be intentional about this since Thanksgiving, but some days are certainly easier than others.
6. **DO THE NEXT RIGHT THING.** Keep finding ways to keep the art alive and well during the pandemic, and know that "This too shall pass." Sometimes, instead of worrying about tomorrow, next week, recruiting students, marketing, fundraising, etc... I say, "What can I do in this next moment." Putting yourself in someone else's shoes really helps lay out your next steps in teaching.

Thinking of all of you and all the hard work that you have been doing these many months. I hope you had a wonderful holiday season with family and friends.

Ron Korbitz
Youth Choirs Coordinator
Junior High/Middle School R&R Chair

I teach in a large district that includes seven middle schools. Every year, we meet before school starts to look at pedagogy, review repertoire and go over the calendar. We met at the beginning of this year to discuss our approach to running choir rehearsals on a zoom call. After some significant conversation and exchange of ideas. We agreed as a team to focus on individual vocal development with our students utilizing music theory, sight singing and various unison/ solo pieces that would help students to grow musically and feel a sense of accomplishment and individual satisfaction.

My first thought after the meeting was, “how do I get music out to 120+ students without blowing my entire budget and without violating copyright.” Some of the major music distributors are offering “virtual choir packs” and song packages but they are anywhere from \$19-\$79 per title. I immediately decided to go to CPDL. It is the perfect place to find music that can be reproduced and distributed without concern for budget or copyright.

It is easy for me to get “lost” in CPDL so I won’t tell you how many hours I’ve spent there. Suffice to say, I could have spent much less time than I did had I stayed focused on the task at hand and not gotten caught up in the “Funf Duette for Waldhorn or Singstimme” by Schubert (they are lovely little teaching pieces for a young choir if transposed up just a touch). I found some wonderful ideas for unison and solo singing that range from old folk songs to art songs and Lieder. I’ve been using many of the titles with my students and they seem to be enjoying what we are singing. Some of my students are using these selections for the IGSMA solo festival in February and our se-

mester project will be a virtual “solo recital” that will be sent home to parents over winter break.

Below is a list of music I discovered. I hope that you can find some of this music useful. Remember to focus on what you can do, not what you can’t. Keep Singing!

O cessate	Scarlatti
The Blue Bells of Scotland	Traditional
The Meeting of the Waters	Irish
The Last Rose of Summer	Moore
Die Nachtigall	Brahms
Marienwurmchen	Brahms
Vezzosette e care puoilette	Falconieri
Angels Ever Bright and Fair	Handel
Long Parted Have We Been	Russell
Plaisir d’amour	Martini
Rich and Rare Were the Gems	Moore
Robin Adair	Traditional
Tre Giorni	Pergolesi



2021 IL-ACDA ReTreat

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Janet McCumber District 5

2020 has been a challenging year for educators in general (to put it mildly), but for those who teach performance-based classes, it is especially challenging to keep students engaged in fully remote, hybrid, and even in-person settings. Our students are struggling, as are we, and many of them are having great difficulty adjusting to the demands of the current situation.

Even if you have figured out the best way to do Zoom or Google Meet rehearsals; even if your students are proficient at recording themselves and you are brilliantly compiling those recordings into virtual performances- there is still a need for supplemental material to cover the remaining in-class time (or, sadly, for subs if you or your family are in quarantine).

I have spent this semester teaching the music history component for the MA in Music Ed program at Eastern Illinois University. This is an online program, so there have been no adjustments made for switching to virtual learning. My focus in teaching this class is to give my students historical and ethnological topics that they might be able to convert into lesson plans and units for their students, regardless of the age level or discipline in which they teach. The students prepare units and plans and then present them to the class in Zoom meetings; with their permission I then collate these presentations to share with their colleagues.

Given our current educational climate, I would like to share with teachers outside of this program some of the topics we've covered this semester, along with ideas for lessons and resources that can be used in either a virtual or F2F setting. This is certainly not an exhaustive list:

Topic: Music and Film

Lesson ideas and resources:

Sample topics:

- Music of an individual film
- Music of an individual composer (Bernard Herrmann, Jerry Goldsmith, Michael Giacchino, Alan Silvestri, etc.)
- Music of film shorts
- Music of Disney films

- Music of Pixar films
- How does movie music manipulate our emotions?
- Music of historical films
- Music of holiday films
- History of music in film

Some online resources:

- A Brief History of Film Music: <https://www.filmindependent.org/blog/know-score-brief-history-film-music/>
- The 25-year Evolution of Disney on Broadway: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=helWReSxxNw>
- Music of the Movies: Pixar: <https://oneroomwithaview.com/2015/07/28/music-of-the-movies-pixar/>
- One of the Disney Educator Guides- Moana: <https://oneroomwithaview.com/2015/07/28/music-of-the-movies-pixar/>
- There is a series on YouTube called "How Music Affects Movies" that is easily searched
- The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences also has an educators' guide: https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/complete_sound_and_music_activities_guide.pdf

Topic: Music and Politics

Lesson ideas and resources:

Sample topics:

- Gender in music
- Protest music/history of protest music
- Political campaign music/copyright/appropriation
- Politics in opera/musical theatre
- Nationalism in music
- Music of the Middle East as it relates to politics and world affairs
- The Civil Rights movement and music
- Hidden messages in music/musical steganography

Some online resources:

- A Century of Black Music Against State Violence: <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/26/883334741/we-insist-a-century-of-black-music-against-state-violence>
- The Silk Road Ensemble's curriculum guide for the movie *The Music of Strangers (Syrian conflict and refugees)*: <https://www.silkroad.org/>

[resources-tmos](#)

- Degenerate art and music in the Third Reich: <https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/politics-and-propaganda/third-reich/entartete-music>

- Messages in Freedom songs: http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/RFLM/Messages_Freedom_Songs_062013.pdf

Topic: Color in Music

(we focused on the music of black composers, but students had the option to research other composers of color including, but not limited to: Asian, indigenous/First Nations, and Latinx composers)

Lesson ideas and resources:

Sample topics:

*Students in the MA program were to research and report upon a black or other POC composer not covered in the course readings. Vocal/choral composers included the following:

Nathaniel Dett
Margaret Bonds
Florence Price
William Grant Still
Andre Thomas
Rollo Dilworth
Omar Thomas

Rosephayne Powell
Eleanor Alberga
Marques Garrett

Resources include the composers' websites, university websites, etc. Marques Garrett has compiled a comprehensive list of black composers that can be found on his website. Additionally, there are multiple academic articles on composers such as Florence Price and William Grant Still; however, some of the above composers from the early-mid 20th century are more difficult to research. And...we need to be programming their music!

Another topic of interest is popular artists of color, in country, pop, hip hop, R & B, etc. It is particularly interesting to look at black country singers/artists, such as Darius Rucker or Mickey Guyton, and their struggles to be recognized in that field. It is fairly easy to find articles and other resources on these artists.

This is a short list of topics that can enrich your students' musical knowledge- remember that music history does not have to be (and definitely should not be) limited to the dead white guys we all learned about in undergrad!

Janet McCumber is adjunct graduate faculty in the School of Extended Learning/MA in Music Education program at Eastern Illinois University, and is the District 5 rep for IL-ACDA.

A COLLECTION OF REPERTOIRE RESOURCES

Andrea Solya Treble Choirs

No classes ever stay exactly the same, but there is one particular class in my repertoire which changes year after year: choral literature. While continually trying to find the best repertoire for our ensembles can be challenging, it still is one of the best tasks, and is one reason I chose choral music as my profession. I am sure you can relate to this, and I know that many of you love and cherish this process. How could we not?

Although my main focus here is treble repertoire, the resources listed below are equally relevant to all choir directors. My intention is not to cover easily-accessible resources or the ones we already cherish, but, rather, to

encourage you to go the extra mile and broaden your resources. Don't you all love to discover new and exciting music? To me it is like walking into a candy store! (Or, as a European citizen, more like walking into a home office supplies store --if you have been to one of those small stores anywhere in Europe, you know what I mean.) Such treasures! Discovering new composers who then lead us to more composers and more good music is one of the most rewarding parts of the Art that we practice. I am always amazed at how much talent there is around us, and I am sure you have discovered by now that often we do not need to go far to find new music or old music -- music we did not know existed. Most of the resources below provide a vast amount of information for those seeking to create inclusive and culturally-conscious programming. I sincerely hope that, even if you knew about these resources before, having them in

one place here as a “go-to” list will be useful.

<https://www.earlymusicamerica.org/>

While this website needs no introduction as it has been around for quite a long time, some new and exceptional content has recently been added under Resources for Diversity in Early Music Repertoire. You will find a list of BIPOC composers writing before 1850, plus other useful links to complement the early music resources that we all know and are aware of.

<https://galachoruses.org/resource-center/artistic-directors/repertoire/>

“A world where all voices are free,” Gala Choruses is home to around 190 choirs committed to serving the LGBTQIA2+ Choral Movement. While there are plenty of excellent resources in its Resource Center here are also numerous excellent repertoire resources under the “Artistic Director” tab. While there, check out a handout from the Transgender Voices Festival from 2018 compiled by Mari E. Valverde and Michael Bussewitz-Quarm. You can find choral pieces there for ensembles from 3 part-mixed to high school and adult choirs. Other links will take you to databases on Gender Expansive Repertoire, Activist Songs and to Free Music (!), including the Justice Choir Songbook.

<https://www.mlagmusic.com/research/beyond-elijah-rock>

Non-idiomatic choral music of Black Composers...What a fantastic resource this is! Everything you need in one place, including a great chart that provides all the information you require to actually look at or purchase a score. You can browse all pieces and composers, or select a choir-specific tab to narrow your search by ensemble type. Dr. Marques Garrett, who compiled this exceptional list of pieces, will be presenting his resource at the 2021 National ACDA convention. While you are on the website, look around and discover composers of color right back to the 1700s. If you are particularly looking for treble repertoire, I highly recommend you check out B. E.

Boykin’s music on her website and on SoundCloud.

<https://www.composerdiversity.com>

The Institute for Composer Diversity “works to encourage the discovery, study, and performance of music written by composers from underrepresented groups,” according to this website. If you are passionate about data analysis you will love the site, as you can, for example, learn about general tendencies in concert programming by orchestras during our time. However, you will also surely appreciate the Composer Diversity and Works Diversity databases. Note that this page is not exclusively choral, so if you are also looking for compositions by under-represented composers for your bands you will find 2400 works listed. Those seeking orchestra repertoire will find no fewer than 11000 works waiting for them in this superb database.

<https://ocwomenschorus.org/women-composers/>

Likely the oldest resource listed here, this resource provides “sample repertoire for all voicing by women composers of all eras,” as stated by its authors, Eliza Rubenstein and Magen Solomon. There are a few things I love about this source. One is that it is international: the second column after the composer’s name takes you to her county of origin, which is wonderful if you are looking for composers from a certain part of the world. Secondly, the database includes not only pieces written by female composers for treble choirs but for all voicings. The table is easily searchable and provides you with instrumentation, duration, difficulty and source.

Josh Spear
District 4

Congratulations, colleagues, because if you are reading this, it means you have so-far survived what has been probably the toughest teaching stretch of your life and are still interested in improving your craft. I know it has been the toughest stretch for me, other than perhaps my very first year, which may or may not have included a Madrigal dinner performance featuring one senior boy accidentally setting another senior boy's costume fur on fire with his candle during the performance of the senior song.

And here we are at the end of 2020, nearly two-semester into the "adventure" of distance learning and all the other fun COVID has granted us. There have been so many frustrating and disappointing days. Like many of you, I also have been on an emotional roller coaster and wondered more than a few times if I was enough, if I was doing the best I could for my kids, and, in my lowest moments, if I should even be teaching choir anymore. Can anyone relate? From last Spring when I was required to provide lesson plans and activities for kids that they did not have to do and so many times did not complete, to facing zoom/google meet calls with attendance rates lower than this year's Fighting Illini football win percentage, to my school going to hybrid instruction this fall with 50% attendance and all the extra record keeping, seating chart work, recording and posting content for remote students while trying to attend to in person students, etc., it has been so overwhelming and discouraging at many turns.

It is so tempting to only focus on what has been hard about this crazy year called 2020, and let's be real - it truly has been awful for many, teachers, students, and families, and in ways far beyond the classroom. We all know people whose lives have been dramatically changed, and many of us will have empty chairs at our holiday tables, and not just because of social distancing. It is so easy to dwell in sadness, and to despair right now. And we should grieve. We should mourn with those who mourn, and should acknowledge that so much about this year has been difficult, painful, and traumatic.

But I also HAVE to remember and CLING to the fact that while chaos abounds, I have much to be thankful for this

year despite the incredible challenges, and in some cases, because of adapting to them. I MUST count my blessings, and I invite you to do the same. Yours may look a lot different than my list, but maybe someone out there can relate to some of these:

- Let's start with the fact it's winter break - HALLELUIA - and the weather has been beautiful!
- I have been blessed and inspired by the creative and diligent work of my exceptional colleagues in District 4 and elsewhere through seeing all of your posts of live-streamed virtual concerts & recitals, adaptations such as the ILMEA virtual festival, and university programs reaching out to offer virtual master classes, clinics, and both pre-recorded and live-streamed performances. These all prove that COVID will NOT keep us singers down forever, and that our field is so full of the most talented, dedicated, and creative people (but we knew that already!)
- This season has provided some time to teach musicianship, rhythm skills, and other areas of music that oftentimes get overlooked in the rush to prepare for the next concert. While my choral program and ensemble development is somewhat on hold, and my singers are not nearly as "gelled" as I would like, I am hopeful that my students HAVE grown in other areas of musical understanding.
- I have had the blessing of being allowed to still have students sing. I know this is a great blessing that many of my peers have not had this fall. It is only allowed under very specific circumstances including me wearing a mask AND goggles AND a face shield during singing activities, keeping singing to 30 minutes or less at a time in one space, being outdoors as much as possible, 6ft or more distancing, everyone masked, etc. Of course these all make it particularly hard to sing and hear, especially for my inexperienced singers, however, we have still been able to make SOME choral music like we want to, and for that I am grateful.
- I have learned a LOT more about technology, recording audio, doing video editing, etc. and I think there will be several things found for remote learning that I will keep and use in the future, even when things return to "normal" - whatever that means!

- I have been inspired by the community of music educators reaching out to each other to share ideas, resources, and help out in any way possible. Facebook groups for choral directors and the like have been invaluable resources for finding ideas and lesson plans during all of this.
- The most impactful blessing-in-disguise of this season has to be that I have had so much more time with my family this semester, particularly this holiday season, than I have had in nearly two decades. It's still several days to Christmas, and instead of last-minute-panic-shopping due to weeks of previous evenings being taken by Madrigal Dinner rehearsals, performances, concerts, and community events (which I absolutely love), I have only a few gifts left to wrap and have made so many little Christmas memories with my family that just would not be possible in a 'normal' year, and that has been so great for all of us.

I don't know what your blessings have been this season, or if you can see many of them at all. Maybe you're stuck in the gloom where I have been so many days this semester. Maybe you're feeling hopeful at the dawning of a new calendar year. As you reflect on all that has happened this year, I hope and pray you will be able to see blessings in your path in addition to, and in spite of the struggles; that you'll continue to have strength and determination to connect with students and inspire them, and that you'll indeed remember you are not alone as a choral educator. This is a great family of superbly talented, creative, and generous-hearted professionals. Please reach out if you are struggling or need help, ideas, or resources. To quote that dear famous poet, Evan Hansen, "You are not alone." May hope, peace, and many musical and other blessings be yours in 2021!