

PODIUM

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Podium Editor

Monica Bertrand
St. Charles East High School
mbertrand331@gmail.com

Podium Assistant Editor

Grace Currie
Aurora High School
grace.currie@sd129.org

ILLINOIS ACDA EXECUTIVE BOARD

Co-President

Laura Coster
North Central College
laura.coster@sbcglobal.net

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Lee Kesselman
College of DuPage
lrkmus@sbcglobal.net

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Aurora University
lfredenb@aurora.edu

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Grayslake North High School
nielsenacda@gmail.com

Secretary

Paul Laprade
University of St. Francis
plaprade@stfrancis.edu

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

LAURA COSTER

Honor Your Calling

There is no greater gift you can give or receive than to honor your calling. It's why you were born, and how you become most truly alive.

-Oprah Winfrey

In this year of uncertainty, we continue to work with our singers in a variety of formats, just responding and adapting to the newest information. Some will continue to direct choirs virtually, in a hybrid format, and some will be asked to return to full-time in-person rehearsals. When will your church choir be able to gather together to worship in song with your congregation? Will everything be "normal" in the fall?

It is easy to lose our direction and purpose with all of the uncertainties today. Remembering our calling can help us better focus on what is important. Our calling reminds us of what makes us fully alive-making music and investing in people.

Take a moment to reflect why you chose this wonderful, yet sometimes challenging profession. When did you make the commitment direct others to experience beautiful music? Reflecting on your commitment will reawaken your passion and energy.

I clearly remember the moment I decided to become a music teacher. It happened one day in my third grade music class with Mrs. Sally Small at Mill St. School. I had just moved to Naperville from a large public school in Chicago where I never had the opportunity to be in a music class. My life changed when I walked into Mrs. Small's music room. I knew internally that music was my passion and calling. It was inescapable. Sure, I changed my mind once in junior high and my interests shifted slightly in high school, yet I still moved towards becoming a music teacher and knew I wanted to share my love of music with others. The rhythm of the music and the beauty of a phrase still makes me feel alive today.

I continue to talk with musicians and colleagues who have experienced many hardships this year. Quite a few are feeling less competent as directors and teachers because of all of the technology and uncertainties. Some feel less confident. I believe as we continue to move through this, we will be stronger on the other side. We need to remember that music will draw singers to our program again. We just need to get them in the room! It will happen, and we have the opportunity to reach many new and returning singers with the beauty and power of music again.

IL-ACDA exists to enrich and provide inspiration to you so you can inspire

CHORAL REPERTOIRE AND RESOURCES

Youth Choirs Coordinator

Ronald Korbitz
Hill Middle School
ronald_korbitz@ipsd.org

Children's Choir Chair

Amy Branahl
Youth Choral Theatre of Chicago
amybranahl@gmail.com

Junior High/Middle School Chair

Ron Korbitz
Hill Middle School
ronald_korbitz@ipsd.org

Senior High School Chair

Aubrey Prince
Riverside Brookfield High School
princea@rbhs208.net

Collegiate Choirs Coordinator

DCI Committee Chair

Eric Esparza
DePaul University
eesparz7@depaul.edu

College/University Chair

Brian Winnie
Western Illinois University
Bj-winnie@wiu.edu

Two-Year College Chair

Irene Ieites
Black Hawk College
leitesi@bhc.edu

Student Activities Chair

Lynda Marshall
Kaskaskia College
lmarshall@kaskaskia.edu

Lifelong Choirs Coordinator

Abby Musgrove
Illinois College
Abby.musgrove@ic.edu

Community Choirs

Abby Musgrove
Illinois College
Abby.musgrove@ic.edu

Music in Worship

Christopher Windle
Music in Worship
Church of the Atonement
christopher.r.windle@gmail.com

your singers. At our winter board meeting, we decided to create multiple, 1-2 hour virtual events to encourage you and offer you learning opportunities that are both practical and enriching. I hope you will be able to attend and benefit while you learn in a supportive and friendly atmosphere. There is always room to increase knowledge, improve skills, and widen our network of contacts and friends as we live out our professional calling.

You will see the information for upcoming events in both our IL-ACDA Constant Contact emails and the website at il-acda.org

1. A Masterclass with Lonnie Norwood- Gospel Essentials Class

Date is TBD later in the spring

Sponsored by the IL-ACDA Diversity Initiatives Committee this will be a Free Virtual Event. <https://www.lonnieorwood.com/gospel-masterclass-with-lonnie>

Lonnie will speak about Black music history and style as we sing and put into practice what we are learning. Understand more about this important part of our American history from this scholar.

2. Jason Max-Ferdinand on Music and Social Justice

April 5th, 2021 7:00-8:30 PM CT

Dr. Jason Max Ferdinand will be addressing the intimate connections between music and social justice in a session for choral directors and students. His book, *Teaching with Heart: Tools for Addressing Societal Challenges through Music*, will serve as a platform for the discussion, which will delve into Dr. Ferdinand's experiences as a conductor of the *Aeolians* and as an agent for social change.

The sign-up link is: <https://>

www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C48AAAF2FA0FEC52-drjason

3. Takeaways and Silver Linings: What to Keep in the Post-COVID World

Sunday, April 25, 2021, 6:00 PM CT

A panel discussion with Kevin McBeth (St. Louis Symphony IN UNISON chorus), Dr. Deanna Joseph (Georgie State University), Chris Maunu (Arvada West High School), and moderated by John McDonald of McKendree University

The panel will discuss what they have learned, discovered, or improved on during the COVID-19 pandemic that can be applied in a post-COVID choral situation.

4. Summer ReTreat 2021: Celebrating Together

Wednesday and Thursday, June 23-24. Attend in person! Virtual attendance will also be available.

Location: NIU-DeKalb
Early Registration begins on April 1st at il-acda.org

Get the discounted early rate until May 15th.

Lodging-Holmes Student and Alumni Center for \$55 discounted rate. (King sized bed or two twin beds). [Get the discounted rate until May 30th.](#)

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

CHORAL REPERTOIRE AND RESOURCES

Repertoire Specific Coordinator

Aubrey Prince
Riverside Brookfield High School
princea@rbhs208.net

World Musics & Cultures

Darius Polikaitis
Dainava Lithuanian Chorale
darneviskas@gmail.com

Tenor/Bass Choirs

Brian Birch
Marmion Academy
bbirch@marmion.org

Treble Choirs

Andrea Solya
University of Illinois
At Urbana-Champaign
asolya2@illinois.edu

Vocal Jazz Chair

Jim McCullough
St. Charles East High School Retired
jimcculloughmusic@gmail.com

Show Choirs

Seth Durbin
Waubonsie Valley High School
seth_durbin@ipsd.org

Composition Contest

Donald Fraser
Composer, Conductor & Recording producer
Donald@donaldfraser.com

Membership

Jessica Palmisano
Geneva Community High School
jesspalmisano@gmail.com

ILMEA Choir Chair

Frank Piekarz
Downers Grove North High School
fpiekarz@csd99.org

Historian

Open: Contact Laura Coster for more information at
laura.coster@sbcglobal.net

Webmaster

Jason Hawkins
Western Illinois University
ja-hawkins2@wiu.edu

Student Representative

Lydia Walsh-Rock
University of Illinois
At Urbana-Champaign
lydiakw2@illinois.edu

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 Trinka is a choral Kodaly specialist. Learn how to infuse Kodaly technique into your choral rehearsals through the repertoire. Jill will share world music and also talk with us about how to vet American folk music for today's choirs. Music is relative to all age levels.

4. 2021 IL-ACDA Fall Conference: *Many Voices*

Friday-Saturday, October 15-16, 2021
DePaul University, Chicago

IL-ACDA COMPOSER COMPETITION 2020

The 2020 Composer's Competition was put on hold for reasons that are only too well known and understood.

However, it has been decided that the 2020 award should be reinstated and plans are being developed for a featured performance of the winning piece at the Summer Re-Treat.

The winner will be announced in May of this year.

As to the future, from here on in we will begin the process of the 2021 Award which will be given at the 2022 Retreat. This will be the pattern

Headliners-David Brunner and Diana Saez

Honor Choirs-

Join Voices High School Honor Choir-
Chicago Public School
students Diana Saez-conductor
Children's Honor Choir: Open to all
singers in grades 4-6 Ryan Henry Conductor

Performance Choirs: Consider bringing a group to perform at the convention!

The audition information is on the website at il-acda.org. Click here to learn more: <https://www.il-acda.org/fall-convention/>

***May 15th is the deadline to apply**

Feel free to reach out to me or another board member about your calling to be a choral director or any other ideas you have for IL-ACDA. We would love to hear from you!

Laura Coster
Co-president of IL-ACDA
North Central College, Naperville
laura.coster@sbcglobal.net

for future years.

As we set up this plan please be patient and check in regularly to the IL-ACDA website for updates and entry details. And, of course in the Podium.

Entries for the 2021 Competition will be accepted from September 6 2021 through December 31 2021.

Full details will be posted soon on the IL-ACDA website.

Donald Fraser
Chair of IL-ACDA Composer Competition.
donald@donaldfraser.com

IL-ACDA DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVES

District 1

Richard Nunley
Kenwood Academy (Chicago)
rnunley@cps.edu

District 2

Jen Reece
Dunlap HS
jreece2@dunlapcusd.net

District 3

Katie Bruton
Parkside Junior High School
brutonka@myunit5.org

District 4

Josh Spear
Rochester High School
jspear@rochester3a.net

District 5

Janet McCumber
Roosevelt University
jmccumber628@gmail.com

District 6

John McDonald
McKendree University
jtmcdonald@mckendree.edu

District 7

Matthew Begale
Niles West High School
matbeg@d219.org

District 8

Open: Contact Laura Coster for more information at
laura.coster@sbcglobal.net

District 9

Ali Kordelewski
Plainfield East High School
akord28@gmail.com

CALL FOR PERFORMANCE CHOIRS: IL-ACDA FALL CONFERENCE CHOIRS

Apply to perform with your choir at the 2021 Illinois ACDA Conference at DePaul University in Chicago (October 15-16, 2021)! Recordings from the past two years are acceptable.

We seek to represent the primary ACDA Repertoire and Resource areas—Youth, Collegiate, Lifelong, and Repertoire-Specific (Equity & Justice, Men's/TTBB, Women's/SSAA, Jazz, Ethnic, Contemporary/Commercial)—with a diverse, broad representation of our 21st-century choral art, and we invite audi-

tion recordings from choirs of all age levels, specializations (e.g. Gospel, Barbershop), or renown, including ensembles that represent historically underrepresented populations. Innovative and inspiring programming reflective of the choir's strengths should be the cornerstone of the proposed program.

Go to il-acda.org/fall-convention/ for specific information how to submit your application and files to OpusEvent.com

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THE SEA SHANTY?

Brian Birch Tenor/Bass R&R

I am thrilled to take on this new role as the Tenor/Bass Rep for IL-ACDA. I have been teaching at Marmion Academy in Aurora, IL since 2012. Given the fact that Marmion Academy is a Catholic Benedictine school for young men, music for tenors and basses is my primary focus. I am also required to have the choir prepare music for masses at the school which puts me in a unique position to address aspects of this genre that expand beyond education.

I came across a news article about a month back about sea shanties and how they have been going "viral," becoming suddenly popular. This article popped up on my CNN news feed only days after a former student had snapped me a YouTube link to *Wellerman*, which is perhaps the most popular of the recent craze. I thought to myself, what's the big deal? I do at least one sea shanty with my choir every year? So, let's explore it. Why are sea shanties so popular in the Tenor/Bass genre?

I came across a documentary on YouTube from 2018 featuring choir-master Gareth Malone which explored the origins of sea shanties and their

uses. He explains that these were work songs used to help synchronize the tugging of rigging in order to control the sails amidst treacherous conditions on the high seas. These songs were not created by musicians, but by men at sea looking to make their lives at sea more bearable. If you think about the cadences of some of these songs, you can sense the timing of the pulling on certain phrases such as:

*"It's the b'y that builds the boat, It's the b'y that sails her
It's the b'y that sails the ship and takes her home to Liza."*

"My Bonnie lies over the ocean, my Bonnie lies over the sea, my Bonnie lies over the ocean, so bring back my Bonnie to me."

What shall we do with the drunken sailor?

What shall we do with the drunken sailor?

What shall we do with the drunken sailor?

Early in the morning.

Hooray and up she rises, hooray and up she rises,
Hooray and up she rises, early in the morning."

With these lyrics, familiar to many choir directors, I noted the sheer rugged and physical nature that exists in these songs. Every man on the ship would sing, it was part of what they did. Imagine a world where every man brought on a ship would sing together, create new songs together for fun, add harmonies and lyrics and develop a musical experience that was unique to their own ship. Every man on the boat was included and no man was ashamed of his musical abilities. This music was always about the experience, never a product.

Furthermore, the content of these songs has always been very appealing to my young singers. These songs deal with danger, strength, courage, adventures, and heroism on the high seas. Still, Malone reveals that sea shanties aren't unique to men. While men went out on the boats, women in the fishing towns had their own songs that they sang while they worked mending nets, gutting fish, and taking care of their families. Many of these shanties are hopeful of the safe return of their husbands. Additionally, there are sea shanty hymns in the Methodist Songbook that pray for a safe voyage and return home. The sea shanties provide something for everyone.

Work songs aren't unique to the seafaring communities of Ireland and Britain, they are very much a part of humanity. It is important for us to explore work songs of under represented cultures as well. A lot of work has gone in to preserving the sea shanties through documentation, transcription, and recordings. As a community we can advocate for and support work songs from other areas of the world including those in our own backyard. These work songs are not as easily accessible, but no less valuable.

I use segments of sea shanties from time to time in my warm-ups. The physicality of them is helpful with my young singers to engage in motions that help them to activate the core muscles used for effective breath support. The physicality and energetic content of these songs gets the students to think less about how to sing and produce sound, but rather breathing and projecting in a synchronous well-supported sound. My biggest challenge is to encourage my young students to move the air and feel confident in their sound. Many students new to singing are literally afraid of their own voice. These sea shanties allow the opportunity to produce a strong "macho" sound while not concerned with producing a sound that has any particular quality other than well supported, strong, confident, and bold. Once this is achieved, I can begin layering other facets of vocal technique.

Finally, when it comes to performing a sea shanty, I choose to allow the students to have some fun, to move, to engage one another physically. These days it is more about simply making eye contact from a distance of at least six feet, but it does the trick. They begin to make connections and make each other smile and enthusiastic about singing together as a group of young tenors and basses. My biggest take away from this is that the performance of these songs should be about the experience of the singers. Allow them to be free, to move, to have ideas about how to perform the piece. It is the interaction between the singers that the audience enjoys to see and the vivacity that the singers will look forward to the next time they sing a sea shanty.

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT!

Abby Musgrove **Community & Lifelong Choirs R&R**

It was hard to find the words this month. While some other types of choirs, like schools and colleges, have found ways to keep singing (albeit with masks and distance and outdoors and....), most community choruses have, for safety and perhaps due to the average age of our singers, cancelled all live rehearsals and performances. Many groups have not been in the same room with each other for over a year now. Our members are displaced and discouraged, yet still determined - and hope is definitely on the horizon! As more and more vaccines are distributed, we begin to dream about the possibilities of the fall. And with those dreams come questions: will our singers return? Will our audiences? How (and when) will

we decide what is best for our ensemble and local community? With many of these thoughts in mind, my colleague Chris Windle (Worship Choirs) and I held two Round-Tables via Zoom - one in August and one this past February. The goal of these meetings was to simply share ideas: what is working, what is not, and what does the future hold? I came away from both sessions incredibly inspired and rejuvenated, and wanted to share with you some of the remarkable work our colleagues are doing. They are fighting the good fight!

First, as you might suspect, there is currently a huge amount of variety in rehearsal and performance modality. A few are still meeting live, with very small groups in very large rooms or outside. Most, however, have been meeting virtually in some capacity. Some meet through

screens to simply socialize and catch up – I heartily applaud this! Our singers need their hearts fed as much as their ears. Others are meeting virtually to rehearse, with all singers muted and a director and/or accompanist leading. Some invited guest speakers to their choir Zooms. Many tried outdoor Christmas caroling or other informal outdoor performances. If they could scrape together the money, expertise, and time, several attempted virtual choirs with strong results. A few are having success with “low latency” technologies such as SoundTrap, SoundJack, JackTrip, and many other products with names that sound like 80’s radio DJs. One of my favorite ideas was a worship choir director who wrote a rhythmic “rap” using the weekly scripture verse. She made a recording of the rap, and then sent it out to church members to make their own recordings. A variety of members submitted short videos, which she then edited together. What a fun idea! Bravo and brava to ALL of these intrepid directors for finding so many ways to stay connected and still share music!

As we begin to think and dream about upcoming seasons, Community Chorus leaders will face new challenges. When is the right time to begin live rehearsals? If we begin again, will singers return? How will we restore audience trust in indoor, live performances? Should we take it slow, or jump in with abandon? What will be the ultimate toll on budgets and fundraising? Now that

video and streaming have become an expected part of performing, how will I learn this new skill set? (Hint- you don’t need a special camera or a PhD in videography! Watch for an upcoming session on basic video tech coming soon!) As our ACDA members face all these new and difficult questions, I whole-heartedly believe we will rise to the challenge, just as we have in the past year, with creativity and compassion. Your Illinois ACDA Board is dedicated to helping in whatever way we can, so please send your questions – what can IL-ACDA do for YOU?

I’ll leave you with a few helpful links gleaned from our Round-Tables. If you have other helpful links to share, please do!

Grant Funding:

<https://blog.chorusconnection.com/new-pandemic-relief-funding-for-your-chorus>

<https://pages.chorusconnection.com/1000-grants-for-community-choruses>

Streaming Copyright:

<https://switchboard.live/blog/copyright-rules-how-to-avoid-getting-flagged/>

ADAPTING AND ADVANCING: A BREIF CONVERSATION WITH FOUR COMMUNITY COLLEGE DIRECTORS

Irene Leites

Two-Year College R&R

When I took over the position of 2-Year College Representative with the IL-ACDA Board of Directors, I wanted to meet as many community college directors within our membership as possible. Having recently moved from California, I was not only new to the IL-ACDA leadership but to the state at large. As such, it was important for me to reach out and meet my colleagues at 2-year institutions, learn about their various programs, and establish virtual spaces to get together, share ideas and experiences. To do this, I used the organization’s existing membership database to invite 2-year directors to virtual ‘meet-ups’. At these events, I got to know many wonderful colleagues working in a variety of full-time and part-time scenarios.

We gathered to share our stories, talked about what it was like to teach during a pandemic, brainstormed

strategies for recruitment, and shared ideas for appropriate repertoire for our groups. Through these conversations, I came to understand just how unique the teaching situation for community college directors really is. As a qualitative researcher who focuses on investigating individual experiences, I sought out an opportunity to feature some of my colleagues’ voices with this interview. The purpose of this interview is to highlight experiences of 2-year directors specifically, bringing attention to this often-overlooked group of choral practitioners and their unique teaching situation amidst an ongoing pandemic.

The voices featured in this article include:

LM - Lynda Marshall, Associate Professor of Music, Kaskaskia College (Centralia, IL)

NT - Nicholas Thomas, Department Chair & Director of Choral Ensembles, Moraine Valley Community College (Palos Hills, IL)

2021 IL-ACDA ReTreat

CELEBRATING TOGETHER

SING GROW CONNECT

Join us 6/23-24
NIU (DeKalb)



Arreon Harley-Emerson

**Diverse Literature and
Performance Practice
Creating a Safe Space**



Dr. Lynda Hasseler

**Choral Techniques &
Transformational
Programming**



Dr. Jill Trinka

**Kodaly Specialist
Navigating American Folk**

il-acda.org

**This event is cosponsored by NIU*

JR - Jenilyn Roether, Part-Time Adjunct Instructor: Choirs & Voice, Illinois Valley Community College (Oglesby, IL)

AJ - Andrew Jensen, Assistant Professor of Music, Southwestern Illinois College (Belleville, IL)

Each one of the directors faced a unique set of challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. This interview highlights those experiences, sharing ways in which they have adapted their teaching in a new learning environment, and shifted their mindset toward the future.

Can you briefly describe your teaching situation for this 2020-2021 academic year?

LM: I have a supportive administration that has looked to the faculty for best practices in individual programs and disciplines. All of our core music courses and ensembles met face-to-face because we could gain access to more than one large space for classroom instruction, rehearsals, and private instruction.

NT: For the fall 2020 semester, I was able to have the administration at the college agree to allow some of the music classes and music ensembles meet on campus each week for the entire semester. The music ensembles that rehearsed in-person were: Jazz Band, Concert Band, Percussion Ensemble, Orchestra, Chamber Singers and Moraine Chorale. All of these groups met each week. However, the number of people participated was down because of COVID and members being concerned for their health. I met the Chamber Singers each week for one hour in our 600-seat auditorium on the stage, spread out 9 feet apart. Ten out of normally what would be twenty singers participated. The Chorale did not start to meet until the beginning of November. This group has 85+ members normally, but only 35 came to sing in the Fall. We rehearsed in the theater with the chorale members sitting in the audience seats and I directed from the stage.

JR: IVCC allowed the ensembles and lessons to stay in person, at the discretion of the instructor. We were able to move our choir from our regular rehearsal space to the auditorium. We were on stage, masked, and 6 feet apart. While I normally have two sections of choir (one during the day and one in the evening), I had to cancel the daytime section. I have young children in school and choir conflicted with the adjusted school schedule. Voice lessons were moved from an office to a large lecture hall.

The students stood 20' from me and we were masked.

AJ: Our administration decided to take a conservative approach to COVID and cancelled all musical ensembles for the Fall. We hoped to resume this Spring, but the rate of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths dramatically increased just as we were setting the course schedule. As a result, my entire teaching load has been a split of two general education lecture classes: Music Appreciation and American Popular Music.

What have been some of the biggest challenges for you this year?

LM: The greatest challenge was hearing all of my students' voices during rehearsal. In a typical rehearsal, we would be standing much closer together, and I could move students around to get the best placement for all of my singers. During COVID, my students stood a minimum of 10 feet apart, and once we began rehearsal, I could not move them around. However, even though this was a massive challenge for me, it improved musicianship in my singers. They had to be much more independent with their parts and learn to trust each other, which gave them more confidence as individuals and ultimately more confidence as an ensemble.

NT: Not having my full complement of singers. Since last March, we ended up cancelling six sold out choral concerts: five at the college and one with the symphony orchestra in the area that was to take place the week the lockdown went into effect. Also, it was difficult not to have one-on-one contact with other faculty in the department. For those of us who did teach on campus, we taught our classes and then had to leave campus and not stick around. There was very little interaction with other faculty in-person.

JR: Singing and teaching with masks on has been the biggest challenge. My choir lost a handful of singers at the beginning of the semester that did not want to sing with a mask on. It took about three weeks for the choir and I to adjust to the new normal of masks. It was very difficult for me to hear them singing and it was difficult for them to hear each other and blend together.

AJ: Finding purpose and joy without collaborative music making.

What has been the biggest difficulty that you feel you've overcome this semester?

LM: Finding a way to reach our local community to share the positive energy we have in our music program. At the beginning of the semester, the Director of Instrumental Studies and I agreed that we need to continue to show that we are united as a department and share what we love doing with our students and the local community. We decided that we would compile a pre-recorded concert throughout the semester and present it in December. I learned so much about recording technology and audio/video editing to create and complete a massive project for our music program and community outreach.

NT: I was very concerned about our small numbers, since I have a pretty good number of singers involved in the choral program here at Moraine. When you normally have 100+ singers, then to go down to around 45, you can't do all the things that you had planned. However, we did give a livestream Christmas concert with the 40+ singers on December 7. The concert was 75 minutes long and both groups sang individual and combined pieces. We performed around ten octavos total, plus, I looked into the camera and told the audience we were going to end with a "sing-a-long" of four well known carols and that I wanted to hear them singing loud and strong! I was overwhelmed to find out that over 600 watched the show AND, we asked for donations to our "Build the Choral Library Fund" on the screen and we received close to \$1,000.00 that night from viewers.

I am also happy to report that all the other ensembles in our program also did livestream concerts and we have been told, that close to 2000 people viewed our department's various concerts. So, my worries and concerns seemed to be overcome by the support I received from the students who participated each week, the administration for letting us meet on campus, and the wonderful support of our community and audience base we have for all the academic music shows we present at Moraine.

JR: For me, it was figuring out how to teach singing to someone wearing a mask. The singers could hear themselves very well but that wasn't translating to a good, blended choral sound.

As a secondary challenge, I contracted COVID two weeks before the semester ended, which abruptly halted everything we were doing in-person. Fortunately, we did not have a concert scheduled but it was disappointing to not be able to finish the semester.

AJ: Honestly, I've worked hard to find other outlets for my creative energy and as a result have been able to handle the disappointment of not making music.

What is the one thing that you've done during COVID that you haven't done before while teaching regularly?

LM: I have made it a point to check-in with students on their wellbeing in the past. However, I have increased my efforts to connect with every student to see how they are doing more often.

NT: Wear masks all during class and during the Chorale and Chamber Singers rehearsals. Check phones for the "Campus Clear" app the students were required to have filled out before they came to class. Wipe down all areas after rehearsal. Direct and teach behind a plastic 6 x 8-foot screen.

JR: This semester was the first time I made rehearsal tracks for every voice part and every song. In the past, I only made tracks for difficult songs or one of the voice parts that was struggling to learn their music. It took a while to make all the tracks and send them out but it's something I will probably do again in the Spring semester. My students who don't have strong piano skills really appreciated the extra help the tracks gave them.

To what extent do you to feel connected to a network of colleagues at this time?

LM: I feel connected to my colleagues at my institution. Outside of my daily work contacts, I have continued to communicate with a network of colleagues; however, COVID constraints have not allowed for face-to-face visits like I have completed in the past.

NT: Not very connected, but it's been just a stressful time. I know that everyone is just trying to keep one step ahead. I have seen Facebook posts from other schools as to what is going on at their college and that's another way to learn about what is working during this time.

JR: I feel fairly isolated from my colleagues. The next closest community college is an hour drive away. Even within my own college, I rarely see those I work with. Being a part-time adjunct makes it challenging to meet and interact with those you work with.

AJ: I still feel like the community of professional friends and colleagues is still out there and willing to help, but I've taken this time to back away from music making as a

major part of life. I'm investing in other areas of interest and will resume when free to do so without reservation.

What is your mindset like to get to the end of the year?

LM: I would describe my mindset as positively curious! After seeing how hard my students worked last semester to overcome many obstacles, I cannot wait to see them continue to reach their potential and grow in their musicianship. I feel a renewed sense of energy because I have learned so much myself and look forward to applying the things I've learned to continue to improve my instruction to stimulate creativity, inspiration, and a desire to learn in my students.

NT: Now that I have gone through this "unusual" Fall semester and it turned out really well, I am hoping and planning on having the same type of experience and re-

sults for the Spring semester. I am hoping that some of the people who sat the Fall out will join us again for the Spring semester. I hope they do, as the choirs have three concerts scheduled for the Spring... even if they can only be livestreamed.

JR: I am hopeful. I hope we can recruit a few more singers and I do hope to be able to at least record a few songs and share them online if we are not able to have a concert at the end of the semester.

AJ: Stay focused on those things that matter most. For me, that's the physical, mental, and emotional health of my family. When I remember that, it puts the absence of music making into perspective and I'm able to find joy in each day.

Contributed by Irene Apanovitch-Leites, Instructor of Music, Black Hawk College (Moline, IL)

IT ALL COMES DOWN TO GRACE

Jen Reece District 2 Representative

What a journey we have all been on this past year. As I sit back and really look at where we started, now being able to see a faint glimmer of light at the end of a long tunnel, I feel SO blessed. Granted I couldn't have said this a year ago, but with a little help from my beautiful family, talented colleagues, trusting students, and a whole lot of grace, I am elated to say I believe I have finally found my way out of the Covid abyss.

So what is grace? Elegance, gratitude for a nutritious meal, an amazing song, the middle name of my youngest granddaughter? All are true, however, Webster also defines grace as an exercise of love, kindness, mercy, or favor; a disposition to benefit or serve another; a favor bestowed or privilege conferred. In the midst of disappointment, anger, and absolute heartache over losing what would have been a fantastic finish to a great year, offering anyone grace, let alone myself, wasn't something I could entertain. Instead I buried my grief and began busily playing the role of cheerleader in an effort to keep my students heads above water. But sadly, after hanging up the Googlemeets for the night, I was lost and feeling more and more guilty that I couldn't snap out of it.

Enter the IL-ACDA Summer Retreat and Scott Lang. I can't really say when everything came back into focus, but at some point during the virtual gatherings I began to wake up. Whether it was hearing the all too familiar stories of loss, beautiful stories of triumph, or just physically seeing

my colleagues, I was gently reminded that despite this incredible storm, the power of music could be a life raft for me and my kids. Even though I didn't have any answers as to how we would make this new reality work for us, I needed to get back in the boat and quick!

Then came the farewell address where Scott Lang spoke the words that my soul needed to hear. "If they say no, ask why, find another solution, and go back, ask again." Honest, respectful, and to the point...don't give up! Thus my theme song for the year was born. Combined with supportive parents, willing administration, and faithful students, we committed to meet each challenge this year with cooperation, creativity, and, here it is again...grace. Grace for the mistakes, the technical difficulties, the misunderstandings, the shortfalls, and for the best of intentions. It has changed how I teach, how I listen, how I react to situations both in and out of my control, and ultimately has changed the year I was able to give my students. Whether it was given or received, to me or to those who crossed my path, it all came down to grace.

*illinois
acda*

John McDonald **District 6 Representative**

I held a moment in my hand,
Brilliant as a start,
Fragile as a flower,
A shiny silver out of one hour.
I dropped it carelessly.
Oh God! I knew not
I held an opportunity.

What Might Have Been Hazel Lee

Saturday, March 7th, 2020 – The McKendree University choirs closed our tour to Kansas City with a home concert at St. Clare of Assisi in O'Fallon. For this particular performance of our closing encore, *In Meeting We Are Blessed* by Troy Robertson, we were joined by nearly one hundred additional singers from Mascoutah High School and Triad High School, standing in one large circle surrounding our audience. It was a truly magical experience. We packed up the risers, loaded the bus, and headed back to campus. I remember saying "goodbye" to the students as they grabbed their belongings and headed out to begin their spring break. Little did we know that spring break would be extended and the rest of the semester would be completed in a virtual format due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The months that followed probably sound familiar to everyone reading: Zoom rehearsals and classes, cancelled concerts and recitals, virtual choir recordings, followed by a slow return to in-person singing featuring masks, social distancing, industrial air purifiers, limited rehearsal time, and knowing far more about air changes per hour and aerosol distribution than I ever cared to know.

In recent weeks, I have started taking stock of all the things I will not take for granted once my musical life returns to "normal." I invite you to consider the following list but to also make a list personal to you and consider how your priorities might have changed, or should change, now that we have experienced what was previously unthinkable.

Opportunities for Community Building in the Choral Rehearsal

I have always made a point to dedicate rehearsal time,

typically in the early part of the academic year, to allow the singers to get to know one another – ice breakers, small group get-to-know-you activities, singer profiles, and so on. However, there are always times where the pending concert takes priority and community building becomes an afterthought, or exits the plan completely. In talking with my students following the 2020 lockdown, few mentioned missing practicing tricky melismatic passages, or nailing that tough interval. They missed their "choir family." They missed connecting with each other in spontaneous conversation and having organic relationships build out of their choral experience. This community building is not only between singers, but also between director and singer. In the future, I vow to never take for granted the opportunity to connect with a student on a personal level and to allow them to connect as peers. I encourage you to do the same, or do more than you previously have. Not that choir needs to become a social club where music takes a back seat, but notice how motivation increases when the singers feel more like a team than a collection of individual voice boxes.

Exploring and Finding New Repertoire

When programming for the year or concert season, it is very easy to fall back on the greatest hits of our choral library. Finding new composers and repertoire takes time and time is not a commodity we often have in abundance. Thus this practice can often get pushed further and further down our priority list. I dedicated a portion of time in lockdown to expanding my list of composers and repertoire. Here a few new-to-me composers that should be on your radar: Christopher H. Harris, Zanaida Robles, Joel Thompson, Carol Barnett, Linda Alexanderson, and Matthew Lyon Hazzard (just to name a few!). This practice not only keeps our performances and repertoire fresh, but it also sharpens us as conductors and musicians. We all have pieces we can rehearse, conduct, and nitpick from memory but studying a new piece broadens our musical language and skillset. I challenge you to not only discover new composers or pieces, but step out of your comfort zone and push yourself musically.

Programming Great Music

Now that I have pointed out the benefit of finding new, or new-to-you, composers and pieces, there is also something to be said for programming those great pieces. They are great for a reason, right? Losing choral singing last year brought to light just how much I missed singing and conducting great repertoire. We have all

found ourselves programming “fluff” or a piece that was “okay” for a multitude of reasons. When I discuss programming with my music education students, I often have them ask this question about a piece of music they are considering— *If I knew this was going to be the last piece of choral music one of my students was going to sing, would I still program it? After 2020, I am asking myself that question even more.*

The First Read-Through

If one thing is clear from this last year, it is that we should never waste an opportunity to make music with other people. We have all had the experience of handing out a new piece of music and barreling through it so the singers can “get an idea of what it sounds like” or to “catch as many notes as possible” with little to no intention on how the music will be performed. I know I have done this myself time and time again. This approach and mindset, which starts from the conductor, gives permission to all involved to phone it in. If we are just “working through it” then we do not expect phrasing or musicality. We do not

expect singers to read or begin to understand the text and its character or mood. Is it practical? Yes. Is it musical? Typically not. My challenge to you (and myself) is to make music with every possible second. If reading through the entire piece in the first rehearsal is the best use of rehearsal time, then start by giving a summary of the text or emotional context. Challenge your singers to apply their previously learned knowledge and skills in regards to phrasing and dynamics on the first read. We would never ask our singers to just churn out correct notes and rhythms, ignoring musicality, text stress, or expression, in the performance, so why do it in rehearsal? In some ways, I was blessed that my final choral experience in the spring semester of 2020 was a performance instead of the first read-through on new music. But now I strive to have a balance of technical and expressive goals in each first rehearsal. Try that approach next time you introduce a new piece and see if you miss having that first “barrel-through.” My bet is that you will still accomplish the technical aspects while also engaging and motivating your singers on that piece.

USING CIRCLES TO ENGAGE AND CONNECT LEARNERS

Katie Bruton

District 3 Representative

As teachers we have the incredible honor of shaping the voices and minds of our students. We create spaces where learners can connect with each other in a beautiful and unique way. Every teacher is doing their best to create that community, whether it’s happening virtually, in person, or in a hybrid setting. As we approach the fourth and final quarter of this school year, I have been using circles to engage and connect our choir. I became certified in Restorative Practices several years ago after attending a week long conference. I follow the entire Restorative Practice framework in my classroom, but the circles I discuss here are important subsets of this larger system. They are short and simple, yet effective exercises to increase student engagement, share experiences, and build community. At a time when many of our students are faced with isolation, we can use these circles to increase their sense of belonging and help bolster their engagement in our classes.

WHY CIRCLES?

You most likely have some activity worked into your class time to help students share with others. What makes circles a practice worthy of your class time? Circles go beyond superficial questioning, they can foster critical thinking and teach students to listen without interrupting. I have circle questions about 1 to 2 times per week, de-

pending on what we’re learning and what’s going on in our world. I can confidently say that every minute of our time spent in circles is repaid threefold. I have some fully remote learners who are reluctant to turn on their cameras (this is not required in my district) and actively participate. Nearly 100% of my students will turn on their cameras to connect with their in person peers when we have a circle question. After our circle ends, some turn their cameras back off, but most contribute more throughout our lesson because they have been engaged in low risk participation. Unless the circle is content specific, students have the opportunity to answer questions that aren’t necessarily right or wrong, which bolsters their confidence in participating.

Even before COVID-19 abruptly changed nearly every aspect of our lives, teachers have had to balance social-emotional wellness with academic learning. If you’re thinking that circles should be left to counselors, I counter that circles provide a space to proactively resolve feelings or issues that may have otherwise disrupted or distracted from learning and singing.

Circles can also be used for content specific material. Once students feel comfortable sharing with each other in this setting, it transfers well to productive discussions related to content.

PREPARATION

A conversation stating the purpose and expectations of the circle must happen before your discussion. Instruct students to sit in a circle, or if you're fully remote or hybrid, tell students you'll be asking them to answer questions in the order they appear on the screen. For hybrid classes, I have in person learners log into the meet to connect with their remote peers. It requires everyone else to mute themselves when they aren't speaking, but it works!

An important expectation of a circle is for participants to listen without the need to respond or interrupt. Responsive comments in the circle can be a fun way to interact if you so choose, but I have found the best listening and understanding happens when a student knows no one will interrupt or comment back. Any comments that do happen must be welcomed and supportive, and made after the speaker has finished their thoughts.

PROCESS

Circles can happen in as little as five minutes, or they can take the entire class period. As the teacher, you become the facilitator of the circle and should plan the circle's purpose, questions, and length before beginning. To align your circle with your goal, ask yourself what you hope your choir will gain from the discussion. There are wonderful resources available offering a myriad of questions for different topics. I encourage you to seek those out with a quick search if you're looking for a good place to start and I've included a couple of helpful links at the end of this article.

It is typically best to begin with a simple, low risk question to encourage participation. I detail three of the most common types of circles --check-in/check-out circles, content circles, and listening circles-- below with a short description, as well as an example from my own classroom. I did not include restorative circles specifically because they require a broader knowledge to facilitate, which I did not outline in this article. However, I highly encourage integrating restorative practices and circles into your classroom with proper preparation!

CHECK-IN/CHECK-OUT CIRCLES

Check-in/out circles are typically short, and placed at the beginning or end of, for example, a class, week, or unit. I like to pair a personal question with a rehearsal focused question. For example, in a 5 minute check-in circle I asked students, "What are you looking forward to most today?" followed by, "What do you need to do personally for us to have a productive rehearsal?"

Last week I did a check-in circle with my 8th grade chorus.

The focus of the circle was to touch base with each student, then to bring a focus to the everyday, simple gratitude we experience. In this time when we may have to look a little harder to find joy, gratitude prompts serve as a positive, energizing, and encouraging start to our class. I asked each student to share things they can see, hear, feel, and smell that they enjoy or find beauty in. A boy shared, "I really like to see my friends laughing or having a good conversation." Other responses included, "A hug from my Mom" and "The birds chirping in the morning reminding me that spring is coming." You can imagine after this ten minute circle we were all in a positive, grateful mindset ready to make music together.

CONTENT CIRCLE

I introduced a new piece to my choir, an arrangement of the Korean folk song "Arirang." I used a content circle to teach the history and context of the song. I previewed the topic by asking students to share what they know about North and South Korea, as well as folk songs. After translating the Korean lyrics into English, we then had a discussion about the meaning of the song and how we could relate to it. We sang through the melody in our circle and discussed the aspects of the piece that were important to honor and communicate, as well as the musical elements and techniques we should sing with.

I have also combined content circles with check-out circles. After teaching a theory lesson, I have used a five minute check-out circle to ask, "Describe the most important thing you learned in our lesson today" followed by, "What is a question you still have about this topic?"

LISTENING CIRCLE

I had a listening circle with my classes on January 7th after the events at the Capitol. I was nervous about how to discuss this and help my students process their feelings. At that time we were fully remote, so I did a listening circle over Google Meet. The prompt was simple: "How are you feeling after the events that took place at the Capitol yesterday?" This was not a time for me to lecture. Rather, it was an important moment for me to create a space for students to share their feelings and voice their fear, anger, and even hope. Every student listened with compassion and respect, never interrupting another or retorting with a contradicting opinion. Listening circles are best used to cultivate empathy and gain a shared understanding. In these circles, not even the facilitator comments or asks questions. You may not love or agree with what your students have to say, but unless it is harmful language, the best response is simply "Thank you for sharing."

FINAL THOUGHTS

I have found a lot of value in incorporating these practices into my classroom. Whether this is an introduction or reintroduction to the idea of circles, I hope these examples help you and your students to connect and engage in learning.

CHORAL ARTISTRY AND ETHNIC HERITAGE:

AN INTERVIEW WITH AHRA CHO OR LITTLE OL KOREA CHILDREN'S CHOIR

Darius Polikaitis

World Musics and Cultures

Among the many benefits of ACDA conventions are the wonderful and inspiring choral performances. However, at last year's Midwestern Region ACDA Convention in Milwaukee I experienced something truly extraordinary. The Friday afternoon concert session included a superb performance by the Little OL Korea Children's Choir from Chicago, Illinois under the direction of conductor Ahra Cho. These second and third generation Korean American singers displayed a deep appreciation for their heritage, while also presenting a highly polished and thoroughly professional performance. I found myself wondering how this young conductor was able to achieve such a high level of artistry and instill a sense of ethnic community and pride without sacrificing one for the other. Luckily, Ahra Cho graciously agreed to answer my questions about this and other matters. I hope you enjoy getting to know this wonderful young conductor as much as I enjoyed our interview.

Ahra, you were born and educated in South Korea? Can you tell us a bit about your childhood musical experiences and subsequent choral studies in South Korea? What brought you to the United States?

I was born and educated in South Korea until college. As a child, I was raised by two teachers who loved their work, and it naturally made me consider becoming an educator in the future. At the time, of course, I did not know what subject I wanted to teach, so I pursued all areas of interest with abandon. One of these pursuits was music. When I was ten, my father, who loves to sing, suggested that I join the World Vision Children's Choir, which is very well known around the world. I loved being in choir because of the music and the sense of belonging I felt when I was singing with others. The high school where I graduated focuses on art, and because of that, I was able to take several classes devoted to music education. It was in these classes that I made the decision to pursue music education as a future career. After I graduated from high school, I decided to go to college and earn a degree in Voice; it was a great chance to learn how to be both a talented singer

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Click Here for 101 Circle Prompts](#)

[Click Here for Circle Starters By Category](#)

and an engaging music teacher.

I knew that I wanted to study music at the graduate level, and I was determined to attend a university in the United States because of the reputation this country has for its music programs and because of the wonderful memories I had when I toured the country with World Vision Children's Choir under the direction of Prof. Hee Churl Kim. During these annual trips, we spent a month traveling across the country performing more than thirty concerts. I was able to see multiple universities in various geographic locations, and many of them gave us tours of their music departments and master classes in music. The emphasis on and respect for arts that I witnessed in the United States was unlike anything I saw in other parts of the world, and I feel so lucky to have had the chance to be a part of this educational system for the last seven years.

My first master's degree in Voice Performance was at Roosevelt University. While I improved a great deal through my studies, it was my extracurricular work that drove me to pursue an additional degree. In 2015, I began teaching at Chicago Little OL Children's Choir; the choirs are comprised of second and third generation Korean American children. Working with talented and devoted children is truly an amazing and rewarding experience. Soon after working for Little OL Korea, I was offered a job as music director at Calvary Presbyterian Church, and I was an intern at Anima, the Glen Ellyn Children's Choir. All of these experiences showed me what my strengths and weaknesses as a conductor were, and I made it my goal to become a conductor whose students benefit from expertise in both vocal training and pedagogy. With that in mind, I started private conducting lessons with Dr. Doreen Rao. At her recommendation, I applied to and was accepted at Illinois State University to earn a Master's degree in Choral Conducting while continuing to work. During my time at ISU, I am serving as the director of the Treble Choir.

How would you compare the choral tradition in Korea with the choral tradition in the United States?

The choral tradition in Korea does not have a long history like the United States. However, the country has adapted

very quickly, and the current Korean choirs produce a great quality of music. This comes from people who studied in America and Europe and brought back methods and styles of conducting to Korea. Nowadays, a lot of composers and directors are building from that foundation to create our own style of music based on the strong, unique sounds of traditional Korean music. That's why many composers want to use these unique sounds and techniques for their new pieces. For example, Sanctus, which my choir performed at the convention, has a traditional Korean drum rhythm called Gutgury rhythm.

What is the mission of the Chicago Little OL Korea Children's Choir?

We have the following three missions that guide our work:

1. We are God's Children.
2. We are Korean-American.
3. We are future leaders for this community to the world.

The fundamental purpose of the group is to ensure that new generations of Korean Americans know their musical heritage and pass it on to their children.

What does the OL refer to, and how is this meaningful to the choir?

It refers to the individual horizontal and vertical stands that are weaved together to form a piece of cloth. It suggests the intricate weaving and intertwining of an individual's Eastern and Western characteristics, and of the traditional with the modern, to ultimately form a fine performance.

Please describe the choral program of the Little OL Korea Children's choir. How many choirs are part of the program and what are the ages of the singers? How often do the choirs rehearse?

We have two choirs in our arts foundation. One is for first through fifth graders, and the other is for sixth through twelfth graders. Although there are two distinct groups based on age, we all meet together at the very beginning of each rehearsal to warm up our voices before going to individual choir rehearsals. This is because we want to build a sense of community among our singers and to give each child a sense of belonging to the organization. Our rehearsals include Korean language classes and dance classes as part of the program for our members because we want students to experience a full immersion into the Korean culture. The choirs meet once a week for three

hours, which includes the Korean class, choir rehearsal, and dance class.

Are your singers fluent in Korean? What techniques do you use to teach the language? Have you found that fluency can actually lead to singers paying less attention to diction due to familiarity with the language?

We have a mix of singers who are fluent and those who are not. I can estimate that when I started to teach for the very first time six years ago, about 70 percent of my singers could understand Korean very well. However, now I would estimate that the majority of them cannot understand Korean well, and even those who can understand tend to answer in English when asked a question in Korean. I too have seen this lead to students paying less attention to the pronunciation and diction of words. As a group, we must take the time to go through the text to ensure that they have a strong grasp of how to say each word correctly. I am not sure if this is unique to the fact that they are bilingual, because I notice the same problem in my college choir where students seem more concerned about hitting the correct note than using the correct pronunciation.

What language are rehearsals run in?

The goal of the program is to promote the Korean language, so they are run in both Korean and English.

Is the Korean community of Chicago your primary audience? Where else have you performed?

Our primary audience is Korean, although we have many non-Korean concert attendees as well. I am always trying to find a balance between those two groups. We have had various concert experiences including the ACDA conference, Chicago Symphony Orchestra Caroling Group, and Jeju International Choir Festival and Symposium. While we are based in the Chicagoland area, we travel outside of the city and state whenever an opportunity comes along to share and celebrate the Korean culture with others. We attend an International Choir Festival in Korea every three years, and I have seen firsthand the strong impact this trip has on our singers. It is one of the first times that they can see how the Korean music they are learning fits into the culture in Korea. They also experience audiences whose pride is palpable as they listen to them; people in Korea have a strong affection for the group and its efforts to honor their heritage.

What percentage of your repertoire is by Korean composers and in the Korean language? Do you sing in other

languages as well?

About 50 percent of what students perform is written by Korean composers in the Korean language, about 30 percent is in English, and about 20 percent is in Latin or in other languages.

How do you find repertoire, especially by Korean composers? Are there publishers that specialize in Korean choral works? Or do you use other methods to find repertoire, for example personal contacts with composers and other Korean choir directors?

The first place I look is a Korean publisher that specializes in choral music (web site - <http://joongangart.co.kr>, email - cs@joongangart.com). Usually I can find choir music there, but I also have great relationships with composers and other Korean choir directors, including my teacher. They often have pieces or composers that they suggest, and I find some of my repertoire there as well.

At the convention in Milwaukee you sang a Latin Mass that was, as the program notes stated, “a blend of Latin text with traditional Korean rhythmic sound”. However, the Kyrie and Gloria were by one composer, while the Sanctus and Agnus Dei were by another. Can you provide a bit of information about the Mass setting performed at the convention and also about the use of the Latin Mass as a musical form among Korean composers?

When I chose the above repertoire for the ACDA performance, I was keenly aware of the fact that I was choosing it for a Korean American choir. I wanted to introduce how composers have combined Western and Eastern music, and the first section of the song is perfect for demonstrating the blending of these two unique sounds. For example, the text of the four parts comes from a traditional Latin Mass. However, this piece blends the Latin text with a traditional Korean rhythmic sound to create something truly unique, something my students have never heard. The work is divided into four parts. Each part has a different tempo, but all the lyrics are in Latin. Using a Korean drum, the composer completes the sound through a combination of choir, piano and Korean drum. It gives students the opportunity to learn and practice something new about tempo, rhythm and language.

At first, I chose a Mass by one composer, but introducing two different composers was something that I thought would be very interesting for my students as well as the

audience. I used excerpts from these two different Masses after directly asking the composers for permission. The Latin Mass as a musical form is prevalent among Korean composers now. They usually try to combine Korean traditional rhythm with Latin text. However, there are so many different types of Masses composed nowadays.

My goal is to introduce my students to multiple cultures and genres, and with advances in globalization, it is now possible for people to share music all over the world. As a conductor, I try to capitalize on this for my choirs. I seek to choose music that reflects the diversity of cultures in the world while instilling an appreciation for the various styles of music that are represented in different countries. For this concert specifically, I chose pieces from both Korea and America.

As I mentioned before, knowing my students and their community is incredibly important. Given that I want to expose them to new genres of music, I have to start by getting an understanding of what they already know about the musical elements as well as the stories behind each musical piece. As a conductor, giving my students an opportunity to learn and grow musically is the most important factor I consider when choosing repertoire.

Can you describe any unique challenges encountered when working with a North American children’s choir that specializes in music from another culture?

It is very challenging for me to find a balance between ethnicity and artistry. The goal of Little OL Korea is to simultaneously teach students about their Korean heritage and create musical experiences for an audience. I am lucky because my arts foundation is very supportive of our work and believes in my choices as a director. I naturally try to teach Korean culture through music, but with the diversity in students’ background knowledge of the language and culture, I have to make sure that I cover the ethnic component without making some students bored because they already have a solid grasp of what I am explaining. I also want to make them grow as musicians who can present themselves on the stage with confidence, and it is more challenging for students to do this when they lack the linguistic skills or proper understanding of traditional instruments or other cultural components.

Are you rehearsing during the pandemic? If so, what model - virtual, live, hybrid - are you using? Can you share some information about your techniques and methods?

Yes, we are rehearsing during this difficult time. We are meeting via Zoom with the following schedule: 15 minutes of warm-ups and 30 minutes of sectional practice. Unfortunately, because all students' internet connections are a little different, we cannot sing together as a group because it would sound quite chaotic with students' vocals coming through at different times. This is no reason to give up on creating beautiful music, however, so I have worked with my colleagues to find new ways to teach music in a remote setting. I rely on programs that allow students to record themselves so that I can give them individual feedback. We also use a program to put the whole choir's voices together. This requires a whole new style of conducting where a lot of the work is occurring outside of when we meet. In addition to this, we give all of our students private voice lessons twice a week. At this time, we get a better sense of our students'

strengths and areas of challenge and can meet them where they are to make them the best singers they can be.

Is there anything else that you would like to share with our readers?

As a director of Chicago Little OL Korea Children's Choir, my words and actions are guided by these three hopes: I hope that all of my choir members grow up with an understanding of their own identity and Korean heritage. I hope that all my choir members have a strong sense of belonging as an important part of the choir. I hope that all my choir members look back on this time and have beautiful memories from choir just like I have from my early years in choir.

Thank you so much for this opportunity to share our choir's story.

DIRECTORS, KEEP YOUR SINGERS SINGING!

Cynthia Bridges

District 1, IL-ACDA Member

O.W. Huth Middle School

I too was one of those choral educators that were impacted by the Governor's shut down a year ago due to the pandemic. We had completed a successful December-February performance schedule. Then I had to quickly adjust to teaching choir classes remotely. The question that lingered in my mind was "*how do I keep my singers singing remotely?*"

In order to keep singers singing I had to remind myself of the health benefits of singing. The online resource *RawForBeauty.com* cited a few benefits:

- *Reduces stress and improves mood*
- *Lowers blood pressure*
- *Boosts the immune system*
- *Improves breathing*
- *Reduces perceived pain*
- *Improves a sense of rhythm*
- *Promotes learning in children*
- *Forges comforting memories*
- *Promotes communal bonding*
- *Provides comfort*
- *Motivates and empower*
- *Sounds can influence brain wave frequencies and promote well being*

WOW! In the midst of the pandemic, singing was definitely a plus!

It was sad that in the midst of this pandemic, school administrators canceled singing. Singing was necessary for both the teachers and the students. I was grateful for every technology resource that I could use to document our singing moments!

So, how did I keep the singers encouraged? Here's what I did;

- Individual development of the singers. With the help of a video record tool like *Flipgrid*, singers recorded themselves singing assigned songs.
- Continual teaching of musical concepts through choral repertoire
- Continual teaching of sight reading, music literacy, and music history
- Continual development of correct vocal technique
- Continual to make music connections through music selections
- Continual incorporation of the "social aspects" of being a choir member.

Since last March 2020, I kept creating fun ways to keep my singers singing. I saw growth in the students vocal, sight reading and music literacy. We finally came together to sing three selections, with masks on, for the Black History video recording. It was an amazing experience for teachers, students and observers. Until our last choir class of 2021, you will find us singing in Matteson 162.

Keep on singing!

Jacqueline Larry
District 1 IL-ACDA Member
UIC College Prep High School, Chicago, IL

During the summer of 2020 I spent countless hours obsessing over what my choir classes would look like for the upcoming fall. As we got closer to the start of school, it became evident that our network of schools would begin the year fully remote with a good possibility that it would remain that way through the entire 20 - 21 school year. That information, plus the limitations of time, technology and access to resources put me in a real quandary. I consulted, and commiserated, with fellow educators and music colleagues over the challenges that we were all facing. I swapped notes and ideas about curriculum, lessons, and “must have” technology resources. Admittedly, the more information I took in, the more overwhelmed I became. I realized that what I really needed to do was dig deep within myself, and trust myself, to answer the question that was relentlessly nagging me. “What is BEST for my students and me?”

One thing that I whole-heartedly embraced this school year is that there really is no “best practice” for the way we are doing schooling now. Especially in remote/virtual choir. I have adapted for myself the term “exploratory practice”. Meaning, I am allowing myself and my students abundant grace, and creating a plan that allows me to adjust and respond to student needs as I go. As the school-year began, I had created an elaborate course sequence for the year that included a year-long project, monthly article reviews, bi-weekly choice board assignments, and a series of assignments based on musicianship skills and music listening. It was an impressive and ambitious plan. It did not take me long, however, to realize that it was all just too much. This impressive plan, though it looked great on paper, still did not feel quite right and wasn’t meeting the real needs of my students. So, I decided to do something that I had not ever done before in my teaching. I included my students in the decision-making process and made space for a co-created curriculum for the year. The year began with a survey to students that gave my insight on the topics they would be most interested in and the activities they would find most engaging. I felt a shift happening within myself too and a willingness to release what I wished choir was and what I thought it should be while embracing the possibility of what it could be as I created with my students.

Along with the survey, I also was very intentional about adapting our school’s student core values as a necessary component to our choir classes. These core values are: Community, Love, Empowerment, Curiosity and Creativity. I felt, and still feel, confident that the primary goal for this school year would be to create a safe and welcoming environment that would allow us to foster genuine and authentic communities. I accepted that a return to in-person instruction, whenever that happens, will constitute a rebuilding of our choral program. I became less concerned with maintaining musical knowledge and skill, in favor of maintaining safe, supportive, relationships with my students. While we still engaged in a music curriculum, albeit paired down from my original plan, my main focus was on the well-being of my students. I started asking these questions: “How do I use this time to create a space where students know that they matter, individually and collectively? How can I inspire kids to develop a deeper sense of love for themselves and others? How can we engage with and share music that empowers us to impact our world in positive ways? How do I use relationships and positive experiences to spark their curiosity and creative minds?” This year I allowed myself to see music as the vehicle to arrive at the answers to these questions.

I am glad to say that at this point in the school year, I believe our purposes are being accomplished. Feedback from regular surveys and conversations with students reflect that overall they are having a positive experience in choir. At some level we have all grieved what we miss and what we remember of in-person choral experiences. But we also celebrate and appreciate the opportunity to hold one another in compassion and grace during this time. I truly believe that the development of relationships in choral ensembles cannot be underestimated. I also believe that when we return, these relationships will be the very foundation that will allow us to build again and to build greater.

Ali Kordelewski
District 9 Representative

In the month of March, we celebrate our women composers. I am thrilled to highlight Elaine Hagenberg, an incredible composer in our field. In addition to the beautiful, moving music she writes, Elaine has a large number of resources for educators, including a course called Intro to Choral Composing and virtual choir kits. To listen to more of Elaine's music or to view those resources, please visit her website at www.elainehagenberg.com.

Tell us about your compositional journey. Where did your love for music begin, and when did it transform into a passion for composing?

For as long as I can remember, I have loved music. As a small child, I was often humming and singing, even improvising my own melodies and harmonies on the piano. Throughout my school years, I participated in choirs, but most often I accompanied the choral ensembles, where I first began to observe the nuances of choral repertoire, including voice-leading, texture, and form. Ultimately, it was through singing in the university choir where I truly fell in love with choral music. I loved the repertoire, the unique quality of the human voice, the poetry, and the community. However, I had never met a living composer and so had never considered composition as a career option. With my background in piano and love for choral music, a degree in music education seemed like a good fit.

After two years teaching in the choral classroom, I paused my career to focus on raising our family. It was at this time that composing became my creative outlet and I began to truly explore and transcribe my musical ideas. Composing allowed me to express with music what often seemed difficult to articulate with words alone.

The premiere of my first composition took place at a little competition on the East Coast. I then shared this piece with a local high school director; from there, every performance led to more performances. Similarly, publishing my first piece in 2013 opened the door to sharing more of my compositions with the choral community. Within a relatively short period of time, I had commission requests, publisher deadlines, and guest artist invitations in addition to my return to the choral classroom.

In 2018, I decided to pursue composing full-time. Again, it never initially occurred to me that this could be my future career. What began as my creative outlet quickly became my passion; in many ways, it felt like I had truly discovered my calling.

What is your process for composing a piece of music? Where does your inspiration come from?

Inspiration, for me, always originates with the text. I seek texts that are deeply personal to me yet still relevant to others. Faith, nature, hope, wisdom, and stories of transformations are common themes found in my music.

After I've selected a text, I begin the work of constructing the musical elements of the piece. Because I compose specifically for the human voice, I strive to capture the natural rhythms of speech, beginning each piece by speaking the words aloud to identify the inherent accents within words and phrases. After I've considered the rhythmic possibilities for the text, I begin creating my favorite part—the melody! I find the melody to be the most beautiful and memorable part of a composition, so I try to create compelling lines and phrases that fit well within vocal ranges. I then seek harmonies to support the rhythms and melodies I've shaped.

My ultimate goals are to 1) be authentic in my writing and 2) create meaningful musical experiences for singers. I'm incredibly honored by the opportunity to write music from my heart that also speaks of our shared human experiences. We can then use the music and our voices to encourage one another and offer beauty and hope to our audiences.

What advice do you have for aspiring choral composers?

It's never too late to begin composing!

When I first began composing, I was 28 years old and knew I would never have the opportunity to study composition formally. I would sometimes see how many pieces my colleagues had published, and their notable performances around the world, and I felt really behind.

However, even though I had a late start with composing, I'm now grateful for the journey that has led me to where I am today. I'm thankful for the years studying piano because they have influenced my piano writing. I'm thankful for the years in the choral classroom because they have influenced the way I write for voices. I'm also thankful for the life experiences that have influenced my personality and perspective and led me to the poetry that inspires my music.

In addition, we can always be lifelong learners. Find ways to invest in yourself. Be curious, read textbooks, ask experts, watch tutorials, or take lessons—the possibilities are endless. It's never too late to pursue your interests and passions, and in many ways, you've been preparing for it your entire life. I'm always learning and growing, and I hope my very best music is yet to come.