

PODIUM

Winter 2022

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

LAURA COSTER

I Hate New Year's Resolutions

I hate New Year's resolutions. Why, you ask? U.S. News & World Reports states that 80% of people's New Year's resolutions fail by the 2nd week of February. They become one more thing to regret or feel guilty about. This is true in my own life. I'd much rather create a goal and take tiny steps, within reach, to move forward. This usually works for me.

This fall, I decided I was not happy with the pandemic weight I gained. I decided to lose 5 pounds in two weeks. It worked, and after three months, I had lost all the weight I gained and more! The baby steps gave me a feeling of success and a hope that I could accomplish my goal.

As choral directors, it is good to create a New Year *goal*. It can be something small that will inspire you to improve yourself, your singers, or your program. January is the time to re-evaluate what we do and how we can do it better the next time. We don't have as many performances and it tends to be a month of obligatory administrative duties. Take some time to re-evaluate what you do. Is there an annual activity you provide for your singers that isn't helping them grow and it is one more thing they must add to their busy schedule? Cut it and see if it makes your overall program better. Perhaps your solo festival is not encouraging your singers and it is time to tweak the format to make it more beneficial and positive. Sometimes the small tweaks are encouraging and they

add up quickly to improve your singers' overall experience. Maybe it is time to add a small event or activity. (I also suggest you cut something that isn't as helpful.)

It is important that we continue to share with one another and try new ideas. With input from peers and leaders you trust, it is much easier to create something new that will help you, your singers, and your program develop and thrive. The synergy created when we share can help us to be more creative and inspiring to our students.

We have events for you and your singers in 2022! We hope you will attend at least one event to get a few new ideas and perhaps bring a new sense of enjoyment and learning for your singers.

IL-ACDA Members Reception at IMEC - Thursday night, 1/27 from 9:00 pm-10:30 pm. Obed and Issacs's Brewery- 321 NE Madison, Peoria. Enjoy talking with colleagues over free appetizers and a cash bar.

IL-ACDA Reading Session at IMEC-Friday, 1/28 from 2:15-3:15 pm at IMEC. Sing through music vetted by the IL-ACDA Board. Stop by the Kidder Booth at the Convention Center to receive a discount when you purchase copies from the reading packet for your choir!

IMEC Collegiate Pizza Party-Friday, 1/28 from 6:00-7:00 PM. Calling all IL-ACDA Student Members! Meet other collegiate members from all over the state. This is a free event.

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Treble Choir Sing and Share, Central Illinois, February 10, 2022 (Day Event)

Washington HS, in Washington, IL Bring your treble choir to this non-competitive clinic. Questions can be directed to: Lara Reem, Washington HS: lreem@wacohi.net or Ben Luginbuhl, Normal Community HS: luginbbr@unit5.org

Midwestern Regional ACDA Convention, Chicago, February 16-19, 2022 Enjoy performances from some of the best choirs in the Midwest. Register students to sing in an honor choir. <https://acda.org/region-conferences>

T/B Festival, Western IL University, Macomb, April 26th, 2022 10-4 PM with Dr. Jerry Blackstone. Bring a few (or many) of your TB singers! Details and registration information will be on our website

Nearly There: Thoughts on the Road to Retirement

Lee R. Kesselman
Past-President, IL-ACDA
College of DuPage

I remember, once upon a time, when I said out loud, "I'd be happy if I just had one choir of my own to lead."

And now I find myself at the 'other end' – ½ way through my last year of teaching at College of DuPage, after 41 years there and another 5 years of college teaching before that. For 46 years I've been conducting choirs of my own, with only another few months to go. Is this how I imagined it would feel? Is this what I've expected? Is this how all those who came before me felt? I was asked to write some reflections on this stage of professional life. I know that I am not unique in confronting these thoughts. Here goes.

1. **I FEEL GREATLY PRIVILEGED** I have had the privilege of studying, teaching and conducting great music of all types, genres, origins. I have met and worked with some of the greatest people I could ever hope to know – singers, colleagues, COD co-workers, students, my ACDA and Choral Music Experience families. And someone has PAID me to do this!

soon. Contact Brian Birch at bbirch@marmion.org for more information.

Summer ReTreat 2022, June 22-23, 2022 at Bradley University in Peoria : SAVE the DATE! Sing in a Director's Chorus with Dr. Jerry Blackstone and learn diverse repertoire and techniques with Arreon Harley-Emerson, Diversity Chair of National ACDA. Connect with your colleagues! Registration will be open in the early spring. PD hours are available.

Kidder Music is the generous sponsor of the IL-ACDA Reading Session at IMEC



2. **CLEANING OUT** The process has begun ---- clearing out my COD office and making room for some of it at home. Lordy! A huge part of my life has been searching for and collecting single copies of far-reaching and diverse choral music. My whole personal library CAN'T stay with me. As I sort through and organize, I am trying to keep only those pieces that I have conducted OR that interest me greatly as a composer or conductor. Thus, I am building *mountains* of single copies which I hope will find homes with other conductors or schools. I'm only part way through the process and probably have over 1000 items for discard so far. And that doesn't include the files, the teaching materials, the research. If anyone wants anything.....
3. **REMEMBERING** With every discarded score, every old class list, every paper syllabus, I remember the rehearsals, the concerts, the classes, the people. There is a pervading sense of both joy and of loss. One can't remember it all -- I suspect the memory is selective. I am reminded of the Greeks who said that you drank from the River Lethe, the River of Forgetfulness, on your way to the

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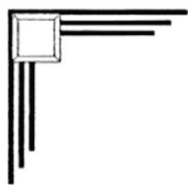
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Underworld. Seems humane some days, inhumane others. What I do know is that Legacy, whatever that is, resides in the consciousness and subconsciousness of those who sang, those who listened, those who learned.

4. **THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE** I think about my teachers, my mentors, the conductors whom I have admired who have all gone through this process. How much I owe them! I better understand them as I consider their retirement days. There is a group of once-a-month-coffee-meeting conductors in my region. I expect I will have time and space to join that club and reminisce, consider, ponder what we have all done, what we are all doing. I am *grateful* for those who went before and fed me on my journey.
5. **PASSING THE TORCH** Someday soon, someone else will sit in my office, considering music for *their* choirs, planning *their* seasons, contemplating the role of choral music (and the other subjects I've taught) in all our lives. I wish them profound success as they navigate these waters, become stewards of what used to be *my* choirs, *my* program, *my* singers. And I know they will make new choices, favor different repertoire, play a different role

at my institution. I wish for the patience to support and embrace the changes.

6. **MISSING & NOT MISSING** I know I will miss my students, my singers, my colleagues (COD, ACDA, choral). I have learned in the past year how to miss my mother and her attendance at every DuPage Chorale concert for almost 40 years. I'm sure I will miss the way I have learned so much as a conductor and teacher and learned from my eager (and not-so-eager) students. And I'm sure ACDA --- which has been a huge part of my life -- will take on a different role for me.
7. **WHAT WILL I NOT MISS?** Meetings: ZOOM meetings, in-person meetings. Administration -- both the kind I have had to do and the kind that is imposed. Collegiate red tape. Grading 1st year theory papers. Learning a new software platform almost every month these past years. Watching higher education move inexorably toward a pervasive Technicism --- the belief that technology, measurement and management by people who are not teachers will improve education the more they overwhelm the human elements. I will be glad to leave education before watching humanism erode even further.



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8. **BUT WHAT WILL I DO?** I have my lists. Some include more composing, more reading, more exercise, more travel, more time with my family and friends. Some are known only to me. And who knows? I haven't yet reached the point when I stop hiring, staffing, scheduling, planning for the future. I am trying to leave this campsite cleaner than I found it.

In many ways, I won't know what I truly value in retirement until I have conducted my last concert, turned in my keys, stopped checking upcoming enrollments and turned off my college e-mail address. And even then, maybe not. For almost 50 years I have thought of myself as a teacher and conductor. Maybe those roles will continue in some ways, maybe not. But I'm hoping that each day has some Mysteries and Magic, retains some of the best Memories, and is filled with Music and Poetry of all kinds.

Meet Yourself Where You're At

Matthew Begale

District 7

Lake Forest High School

First Semester is wrapping up and we're back in the joyous swing of things; full blown concerts, extra curricular groups tours, final exams, and the good old musician's crazy December. Yet, as choir directors we are on a whole different pandemic swing with inconsistent mitigations, constantly reinventing the wheel, and living in the back of our minds a persistent angst that a choir member may sneeze, cough, or worse get covid. When I look around at my choral colleagues, I keep seeing innovative choir directors making it work and finding the joy in all the little things despite all the extra they've been thrown.

In our school, we've been asked several times about how our students are doing. When we walked into this school year we knew we had a large task at re-assimilating students to school expectations of culture, rigor, socialization. I am beyond appreciative and proud that my school is worried not just about how our students are doing academically, but encouraging us to be mindful of how they're doing socially and emotionally. As teachers, I can only imagine we have all done our best and successfully met our students where they're at; adjusting our repertoire to the skills in front of us, taking the time to make sure they feel connected, and more importantly to make sure they feel safe in our classroom. We are meeting our students where they are at, but are we meeting ourselves at where we are at?

The other day, I read an interview with a former Minnesota teacher and now principal leaving their position on a state education policy board "admitting he can't do it all and needs to focus on his health."¹ In the article he continues, "most of my time is spent less on helping instruction happen and more on just making sure that our students are feeling safe, that our students are getting their needs met and trying to connect students and families to mental health resources that we may have in school, but also what may be available outside of school."² I have to be honest, the article forced me to pause. While in the midst of providing everyone else the space to feel safe and connected, am I feeling safe and connected? Are other teachers feeling safe and connected?

As choir teachers, we can understand why our profession is a high burnout career. With extra hours in the building, administration problems, students with continually varying skills/needs, recruitment, often siloed departments, and so forth. Our career demands a lot and we often put even higher demands on ourselves to be our best. To be our best, we have to make sure we also prioritize ourselves and make sure we acknowledge that we are facing the same re entry to life during a pandemic as our students.

While there might not be a lot of discussion about our students, I pose this question not to share my own personal response to this but to suggest that all choir directors/teachers take the pause to ask, are you meeting yourself where you're at?

¹⁻² Wurzer, Cathay; Franz, Julia; Rosas, Ariana. "Threats and burnout pushed a Teacher of The Year to resign education post." *mprnews.org*, *Minnesota Public Radio News*, 14 December 2021 <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2021/12/14/former-teacher-of-the-year-ryan-vernosh-shares-struggles-during-pandemic>

Mona Wis

North Central College

"Few things are so pressing that they cannot wait for a moment of breath."

T.K.V. Desikachar

Maybe you have had this conversation, usually with family or friends who are not in music or in teaching:

Them: "Are you on break now? How nice that you have *all that time off!*"

Us: "Oh, I am never really *off*. There's always programming for the next concert and score study and all the management and . . ." (our list goes on).

There's certainly truth in our response. Before we can walk into that first rehearsal after "break," we have to choose repertoire and take the time to order it or find it in our libraries or arrange it for our imbalanced ensemble. We have to manage our rosters (who is returning? who has not answered my emails?), our spaces, our budgets, and our protocols (ever evolving). Even if you are the ultimate planner and make lots of decisions in the summer ahead of the season beginning, there are always tasks to be managed and surprises along the way.

What "break?"

My usual strategy has been to devote some time every day to work, getting the structure in place for the semester and concerts ahead and communicating with singers and others, where needed, in order to hit the ground running when we return. My intent in this daily practice is to spread out the work, to avoid an avalanche of tasks at the last minute. Generally, this works for me.

But there is a downside to this strategy, one that I have become more and more aware of.

Without any true pause in the workflow, we never really experience restoration—a physical, mental, and emotional "clearing," a release from the decision making and time in our heads and in front of our devices that characterize our lives. Without a separation from the endless task list, we train ourselves to be "on" at every moment, to never fully let go, and to see life from one perspective: *do*. Without a pause we just keep churning it out and so, when we return to our teaching and conducting schedule "after the break" we feel like we never had one. Like we have been conducting *one long musical piece that has no rests*. Not one. Can you imagine how anxious and heavy we would feel with a piece like that, especially if it lasted for hours or days or weeks or months?

Yes, the ebb and flow of tempo, the variation in dynamics, the change of key—they all offer some modulation in our feeling state. But it is the *rests* in the score, the *silence* between movements, or in our mindfulness experience, the *pause* at the top of the inhale or bottom of the exhale, where something really powerful happens. Where we move from external to internal awareness, where we realize the effect of the action, and where creativity and insight and rebuilding of energy can take place.

Dare to pause. To truly detach, to stop, to observe, to sit. Trust that the space in time and heart and mind will bring what you need and surprise you in ways you cannot envision when constantly working. For a moment, or several moments during the day, or (most challenging), several days during the break, take a true pause. You might find that it punctuates everything else you do, giving it greater meaning and leading to a deeper experience, just like that artfully placed rest in the music where it all makes perfect sense.



Amy Branahl
Children’s Choir R&R
Artistic Director
Youth Choral Theater of Chicago

A lot has changed from my article last year and I hope that as I type, you and your loved ones are doing well. Our children’s choirs are back to meeting in person again (hooray!) and our students aged 5-11 were able to get vaccinated in this last cycle. This was a huge step forward in the solvency of our programs, however, with omicron variants coming it reminds me of the restorative ACDA Fall Conference (DePaul University) that we just had and how I was feeling about teaching at that time. Even though the fall was filled with uncertainty, I was thankful for the time to be immersed in music and how wonderful it was to lead a reading session for a packed group of teachers, professors, and students eager to learn the gems of music that both Elizabeth Weismehl (Avoca 37) and I were presenting. It reminded me that we owe the next generation of singers and teachers our very best, but how can we do this as the landscape is always changing? Here are some practical things that might help you.

• **Take time for you, give with joy.**

You need to recharge by taking some time for yourself individually, not you as a parent, sibling, spouse, or teacher. I know some of you might also recharge by seeing family and friends that you might not have been able to connect with during the height of the pandemic. It might be picking up that book you have been meaning to read, traveling, reconnecting with a hobby that helps you unwind or destress. In order to best serve others, (which for many of us is our calling in the choral world) your cup needs to be full to be able to give freely with joy.

• **Reconnect with mentors and friends in the profession by attending events as you are able.**

When I was at the ACDA Fall Conference I was able to reconnect with many friends and colleagues from all walks of life: mentors from my early days at ACDA, college classmates, and

colleagues who teach in my area in the North Shore of Chicago. Just having meals with friends (new and old) and going to see all the amazing concerts that were being presented was absolutely restoring to the soul. Our school had hosted several student teachers from Northwestern this year and I was able to connect with my mentor from student teaching and catch up on life and all the ways things have changed for them in retirement. I’m looking forward to IMEC and the upcoming Midwest Regional ACDA Conference in Chicago as well to fill my life with more music and to connect with friends. This connection helps you have a sense of community to get through the hard times.

• **Do what serves your students and program. Think of the dividends that will be forthcoming.**

It reminded me of something that happened the other day as I was packing for a family trip I was about to embark on. I was gathering chargers for our computers, ipads, and phones and realized that a whole bunch of them were broken. After trying my best to repair them I deemed them as unusable, tossed them in the garbage, and bought newer, faster, usb-C chargers. I realized through that one incident that I have been trying to hold on to traditions and benchmarks from my program pre-pandemic that I have been working on diligently, but needed to find a better, faster, and more efficient way of running our choral program. I thought to myself, “Why am I working harder, when I could be working smarter?” The guiding force in my teaching has been, does this benefit my students in the best possible way? Seeing our team making some changes to things that have been “tradition” for many years, has made me realize that I need to continue to seek out that faster usb-c charger for my choral program so that our students’ lives can be full and change with the times. By trying new things, we can continue to foster a love for music in new ways that will be passed on for many generations to come.

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

Love, Anjali

Jen Reece
District 2
Dunlap High School

Anjali made Madrigals her sophomore year, as a first soprano! She worked hard, practiced diligently, developed her leadership skills, displayed grace to her classmates, and dreamt of one day leading the royal court into The Castle on “Madrigal Knight”. And like so many students in 2020, she was forced to pivot. When she could have easily wallowed selfishly in disappointment, Queen Anjali and King Jake chose to lead the Madrigals through uncharted waters, creating new memories and traditions with their fellow singers. Though it wasn’t always easy,

their positive attitudes made everything possible, even in the midst of impossible circumstances. A year later, she wrote the 2021 Madrigals singers a beautiful letter, which I have been given permission to share.

Dear Madrigals and Court Singers,

It took me a long time to figure out how I wanted to say this, but I hope I have found a way to put it all into words. Firstly, I wanted to say how unbelievably proud I am of all of you. For a lot of you, I have had the privilege of getting to watch you grow in little ways over the years. Even for those of you I may not know, I can say for certain that you have worked incredibly hard since

the beginning of the year to make Madrigal Knight a success. But tonight, what matters more than how this performance goes is cherishing all the memories and little moments of inspiration it took to get you here. I hope you remember every fun rehearsal, every bonding moment, every time something clicked and all your voices wove together like a perfect musical quilt. All the hours of hard work, joy, and excitement you have all shared with each other can finally be celebrated, and I promise you that nothing will feel better than holding that in your hearts.

If this is your first or second Madrigals, I want you to know just how impossible it is to prepare yourself for the magic you're about to witness. To be in The Castle is such a surreal and treasured experience. Mistakes may be made, but in the end, everything will melt right into place, and you'll create your own version of a perfect Madrigal Knight. In the years to come, you will fill your heart with even more Madrigal memories. But to the Seniors, what I have to say is this. Ever since I met you, you have overwhelmed me with your charisma. You are one of the most united groups of people I have ever seen. You fight to work as a team, compromise, and hear each other out. You put your values above all else and make sure that everyone feels safe and loved in the environment they are in. You are passionate and driven--again, I have never really seen a group with so much love for music and performance. But what astounds me the most about you is your kindness. You are such kind people, every inch of your soul is brimming with compassion towards others, compassion towards yourself, and the will to bring those around you to be the best versions of themselves. Thank you for being the class to bring The Castle back to life. I love all of you so much and I cannot explain how grateful I am to have gotten the chance to sing with you and know you as human beings, and now, to see you perform.

Obviously, my final Madrigal Knight was a little less than normal, and it was hard to not feel a little heartbreak about that. Even now, it's hard to know that we all lost a year of our lives, at least in some way, to the craziness of the world. But in the moments

when I felt the deepest amount of pain about that, I remembered how much some kind, strong people like Ms. Reece fought for us to have something, *anything*, where we could let the magic run its course. The fact that we were able to sing something, when the world made it feel like we couldn't do anything--*that* in itself is magical. And even though that was my last Madrigal Knight, it is nowhere near the end of my story. Seniors, I hope you know that this is also not the end of your story--it is just the beginning. Whether you choose to continue your musical journey in college and beyond through your education, student organizations, or your own personal projects and endeavors, I hope you keep that love for it deep in your heart.

I recently found a note I wrote to myself in 2017, my freshman year, after my first Madrigal. My favorite line from it was this: "I have many families and places I belong, and I don't really think I have to choose between them, nor do I want to. But don't tell anyone: I do have some favorites. And this family is one of them." Needless to say, when I read that again, over three years later, I was sobbing. Madrigals is, first and foremost, a family. Remember to encourage each other, cheer each other on, and share your successes, pains, and joys of the night. You have worked hard for this. But also know that when these nights pass and you move on to the next thing, your family still can and will be there for you. I know that I am. I've already said it, but I am so proud of you and cannot wait to see the show and all the other exciting things that are still in store for each and every one of you. Remember, your great adventure has just begun.

Love, Anjali

Friends, what we do as music educators, what the students experience as members of our ensembles...it matters. It matters in ways we may not fully know and may rarely see...but it matters. Thank you for all of your efforts to bring back "normal" and inspire a new generation.

#WhateverItTakesWeSing

AMERICAN
CHORAL
DIRECTORS
ASSOCIATION



Illinois ACDA Presents...



tenor bass festival

2022

APRIL 26, 2022

10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

FINAL CONCERT: 3:00 PM

WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

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



CLINICIAN:
DR. JERRY BLACKSTONE

Professor Emeritus,
University of Michigan



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



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

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

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

Maximum \$100 registration fee per school

QUESTIONS? CONTACT BRIAN BIRCH AT BBIRCH@MARMION.ORG