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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### LAURA COSTER

#### *Light in the Winter's Darkness*

Sigh...It is another cold, dark wintry day. We expect nothing more during the months of January and February. As we look ahead, we know this season is brief and we will gradually see more sunshine each day. Eventually, we will see and feel the warmth of the full sun. 2022 was a dark year in many ways with the war in Ukraine, inflation, crime, and the lingering uncertainties in our world. I'm consciously choosing hope and looking in anticipation that 2023 will be better. In the meantime, we have music to share with our singers that will brighten their days. May this new year bring you joy as you create music and build community with your singers.

Did you know that you have one of the best jobs around? Sure, we have experienced difficult times in the recent past. Yet, consider that we have the privilege of leading a community that can offer others support, opportunities for artistry, challenge, and even a chance to relax and have fun.

If I take a step back to see the big picture, I see our profession as different from many others. It is hard to imagine sitting behind a desk working 40 or more hours per week building development code with a few team meetings throughout the week. What about a political career? Or even working in a medical profession with little to no opportunities to share artistry with others? If we take a moment to think about it, our profession is unique in that it offers both artistry and community in a variety of ways.

*No regrets...*

I still remember when I was in my first year of teaching at Downers Grove South HS in my early twenties. When I received my first paycheck, I couldn't believe I was getting paid to do two things that I loved so much; spending time with people and making music. I honestly enjoyed it so much during this time that I would have been willing to do it for free. Did you ever have this feeling when you first started teaching?

After a few weeks, I quickly realized that that I had a job and that I earned each of my paychecks. There were fun days and stressful days, some exhilarating and others exhausting. Then the imposter syndrome began and I started to evaluate if I had the skills that I needed to do excellent work. I knew I had much to learn and began to compete with myself to do better. In some ways, it began to dismantle all of the fun I was having. We are good musicians and unfortunately, it can lead us to perfectionism and ungratefulness. It was all going well, but can you relate?

Fast forward to many successful years with opportunities, trials, and tribulations. I was almost always frenetically busy, yet my heart was full. Now that I am retired, I still enjoy working with singers through adjunct teaching, clinics, choral long term sub positions, and directing a church choir. I continue to see our work is important and fulfilling. It is a special career that we share!

Enjoy your singers and the relationships you develop. There will be times it will be challenging or even annoying but aren't your singers worth it? Enjoy the music you make with your singers during rehearsals. Quality performances are exciting, too, but it is the

## CHORAL REPERTOIRE AND RESOURCES

### Youth Choirs Coordinator

Carol Munn

*McHenry Middle School*

### Children's Choir Chair

Amy Branahl

*Youth Choral Theatre of Chicago*

### Jr. High/Middle School Chair

Carol Munn

*McHenry Middle School*

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### Lifelong Choirs Coordinator

OPEN

### Community Choirs

Christopher Windle

Music in Worship

*Church of the Atonement*

Chicago

### Music in Worship

OPEN

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journey of creating something beautiful together and in the moment that is the most rewarding. Do you believe this? It took me quite a while to grasp this, but it is the day-to-day musical discoveries and the relationships that make the job worthwhile.

IMEC is quickly approaching and IL-ACDA is offering a few opportunities for you at the conference. You don't want to miss these two events:

#### IL-ACDA Reception/Beer Choir at IMEC

**Thursday, January 26, 9-10:30pm**

*at Obed and Isaac's (321 NE Madison Ave)*

If you are attending IMEC or are in the Peoria area and an IL-ACDA member, you are invited to our annual reception!

New this year— We will be join with Jake Stauffer, Chris Cherry, and Greg Matushak in a *Beer Choir* experience. We have reserved the full restaurant so members of IL-ACDA and IMEC attendees can all celebrate together. This will be the per-

### Teaching Choir Rehearsal Etiquette to Young Singers—Keep it Simple! —

#### **Carol Munn**

#### **Youth Choirs Coordinator**

#### **Jr. High/Middle School**

*McHenry Middle School*

#### **Problem:**

This fall we finally got back to a normal year of teaching. It has been a great time to establish new routines and procedures and well as see what's working and not working with fresh eyes. One of the things I noticed was that my chorus students had lost a sense of formality for the classroom. Maybe this has been happening gradually over time, but this year I noticed it more. Students would walk into the classroom and interrupt to make a request before saying "hello" or "excuse me." Students would complain about the music or put others down and walk off the risers at any time during the class without permission. Even these small incidents or lack of manners can start to negatively affect the learning environment. I decided to work on improving these classroom interactions with my students.

#### **Goal:**

My goal was for students to become more self-aware and contribute positively to the learning environment. I wanted to

fect opportunity to sing together and reconnect with friends. Enjoy free hot appetizers, including German pretzels and hot cheese, and a cash bar. The board is excited that we can all be together.

*Spread the word to your ILMEA choral friends who are not yet members of IL-ACDA.*

#### **IL-ACDA Reading session at IMEC**

**-Friday, January 27, 3:30-4:30pm**

*at Four Points Sheraton, Peoria*

Everything is in place for our reading session. Kudos to *Kidder Music* in Peoria for providing 400 music packets for the session. Special thanks to Monica Bertrand and our board for selecting new music for us to sing together. Consider purchasing music from *Kidder at IMEC*. You can also call Jamie, our Kidder choral rep. at [309-692-4040](tel:309-692-4040).

Musically yours,

Laura Coster

President of IL-ACDA

establish a mutual code of respect on how we speak to each other in the classroom. There was a need for commonly understood manners to be automatic and for them to understand how to keep the choir room a safe and positive place. My overall intention was to increase mutual respect for the rehearsal space and each other. These were not rules such as being on time, no gum or cellphones allowed etc. That was a different discussion. Instead, I decided to focus on the following three etiquette points:

1. Say hello when you enter the classroom
2. Keep it positive (complaining is rude)
3. Wait to be dismissed and say goodbye

#### **Obstacle:**

Teaching rehearsal etiquette expectations takes a small bit of planning and time away from music instruction. However, just like teaching classroom rules, I found that in the long run it pays off to stop and have conversations with students about what we can all expect from each other when we come to chorus. I am lucky that I teach a class where students have chosen to be there and therefore, I do not

# HONORS CHOIR FESTIVAL

Guest Clinician - Sarah Catt  
February 11, 2023  
at St. Charles East High School

Register [HERE](#)

No preparation needed  
No limit on student participation

Questions? Email [monica.bertrand@d303.org](mailto:monica.bertrand@d303.org)



See the link on the last page to  
register or go to [il-acda.org](http://il-acda.org)

## CHORAL REPERTOIRE AND RESOURCES

### Repertoire Specific Coordinator

Monica Bertrand

*St. Charles East High School*

#### Tenor/Bass Choirs

Brian Birch

*Marmion Academy*

Aurora

#### Treble Choirs

Andrea Solya

*University of Illinois*

*at Urbana-Champaign*

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have any major discipline issues. I'm sure at first my students didn't see their way of interacting in the classroom a problem at all. However, we could all feel small infractions chip away at the integrity of our mission and the effort it took to turn things around was well worth it.

#### Solution:

To solve these issues I decided to teach, communicate and reinforce rehearsal etiquette throughout the year. The first thing I did was have a 5-10-minute meeting with the students at the end of class to address how we spoke to each other and how to keep this room a positive place. I explained that there is a place for constructive feedback, but negativity without a solution to make things better was not helpful. We talked about the golden rule and how to respect the integrity of the chorus rehearsal by not interrupting the music or getting off the risers without permission. I explained that interrupting someone is rude, proclaiming out loud "I hate this song" is not helpful to our rehearsal and saying hello and goodbye is kind. I posted our three non-negotiable re-

### Three Gifts to Wish For: A Treble Choir Challenge

#### Dr. Andrea Solya

##### Treble Choirs

Associate Director of Choral Activities

*University of Illinois*

*at Urbana-Champaign*

As I write these lines we are right in the middle of the holiday concert season, and at the same time we have just ended the semester here at Illinois. So what can I say to you that you don't already know? I have decided to reflect upon what happened to most of us after coming back from a year of online learning, but also adding a holiday spin. What 3 gifts would you wish treble choirs to receive this holiday season? Here I'm sharing my answers with you, but it would be so much fun if YOU would share your gifts with me! I would be happy to compile a list of those gifts and share them with everyone on our Illinois ACDA Facebook page. To me the hardest part is that you MUST stick to three gifts – no more than that, please! Send your gift ideas to me, at [asolya2@illinois.edu](mailto:asolya2@illinois.edu). I promise to write

hearsal expectations in front of the classroom and referred to them when needed. After a week or two, I didn't have to remind students as often and I noticed that the majority of my students were trying to do the right thing.

#### Revisit the goal to assess if there is improvement.

I found that most of the students truly want to follow clear procedures and when that happens everything works much more smoothly. There was one student in my class who could not stop complaining about the music and many other activities that we would do in class. It ended up that this student dropped out of chorus when the trimester ended. In the past a drop from chorus would have bothered me, but I realize that being clear on my expectations attracts those who truly want to be in chorus. The biggest compliment was paid to me last week when a student who was being bullied in other classes told me that chorus was his "safe space." If I were to be honest, improving classroom etiquette has made chorus a "safe space" for me too!

back! (No need to write descriptions, just the gifts)

#### **1. The joy of singing together again, without restrictions.**

I know, this has been said so many times, but *seriously!* Think about it. How can you keep singers in your treble choirs far away from each other? We are back to singing live and giving concerts to live audiences. Do you all remember the silence resulting from my singers not being able to talk to each other during rehearsals because they are so far apart? It is way more disturbing than any chatting during rehearsals. I want my singers to have a comment to make, to have ideas about what they have just done, and to tell their ideas to their neighbors. One cannot do that with 6-foot distancing, nor even with 3. I wanted to have the older and more experienced singers be able to sit by a young and new singer and to be able to help that singer by pointing out things in their music or by explaining what words like "system" mean. I had been missing



## IL-ACDA DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVES

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*Payton College Prep High School*  
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### District 2

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*Dunlap HS*

### District 3

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### District 7

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# Lee R. Kesselman

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this connection within the choir, especially in my youth choir. Sitting together, having older singers (we call them mama-birds) helping younger ones creates a buzz. This is a buzz that I did not hear for a year, and I missed it SO much. If you had told me before the pandemic what I thought about singers chatting in rehearsal, I would have told you 'it drives me crazy'. I will never say that again. What a gift it is when we are sitting close to each other, enjoying each other's company while making great music! I wish you all the best community you can create within your choirs!

### 2. The rewarding experience of having a relatable theme/program

Creating a sense of ownership by grouping different pieces together under one relatable topic or theme is something I started unconsciously many years ago with my Glee Club. And how much we have grown because of it! Whatever the topic might be, by trying to make a difference in your little corner of the world you raise stronger humans in our society. Singers will feel that they matter, that their views and opinions matter and that they can make a difference. You do not have to aim for 'big' topics. Although we have explored many ideas under the umbrella of social justice, we have also talked about and made our singers aware of suicide, mental health, immigration, and about unity in light of all our differences. This reflected in our theme last year, "We Sing as One," where we look out for each other and understand that,

while being always happy is not a realistic goal, holding each other up and helping each other get through tough times is admirable. Admitting that we were "not ok" many times during this semester united us in ways I never imagined. Every single piece we performed spoke about this topic. Text is just as important as the music itself. We are so lucky that our art is not silent. I encourage you to empower your treble singers with great texts in music they can draw energy from. They will always remember those programs.

### 3. The beauty of being brave enough to leave the beaten path

This is something I have discovered over the years that my singers loved. Singing music no one else was singing, and supporting composers who not many people knew about just yet. Commissioning pieces is easier said than done, I realize, mainly due to the financial strains it places on any organization/choir. However, being conscientious about the composers one selects does not cost anything. Singers of color in my choir are especially grateful to see music on the program by BIPOC composers. That is super inspiring. When it comes to Treble choirs, purposely programming several pieces written by female, non-binary or transgender composers strengthens your community by giving power to all groups among your singers. I also believe that being mindful about whose music you perform empowers all members of the choir to be more aware of their surroundings.

## Caroling for the Car Line

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**Matthew Begale**

**District 7**

*Lake Forest High School*

I recently came across a social media post from a choir teacher in Orlando, Florida. It details an experience she had with her students when caroling for their car line before school one day. Here's the post:

Today was a tough day, probably one of the toughest for me as a teacher, ever. We decided to perform Caroling Concerts to raise awareness for our Chorus Department and to raise funds for our trip to NYC in March. "Caroling for the Carline" was suggested and I thought it was a cute idea. We printed flyers to pass out to the drivers/parents to invite them to our future caroling events. I had a few students stationed to pass out flyers while the rest of the group performed for the cars as they went by. I expected honking, people saying "good job", "thank you", "happy holidays" etc. Unfortunately, the drivers (I'm assuming mostly parents) wouldn't even roll down their windows to accept a flier or to listen to the students perform. They just drifted on by, like they were ignoring a homeless person. There was even some heckling mostly from nearby students.

The folks in the car line ignored their friends and neighbors, children, and students who work so hard everyday to build community. I am devastated for my students. They performed their hearts out while feeling ignored and embarrassed-it was so hard to watch.

We cut it short, went back to the classroom and had a great Candlelight Rehearsal, then we had dinner together, built Gingerbread Houses and did a full Candlelight run for their parents. So all in all a great night- however, how sad the start was as it shows an even bigger picture regarding our "community"-one of the things we really focused on as a new school. I don't even know where to start when I talk to my students about this tomorrow.

To provide context, this teacher, Linda Boot, is a rock star veteran teacher. She has taught 38 years, spending the majority at a different high school (27 years). Two years ago, she started a brand new school in a brand new community. When I taught choir in Florida as a young teacher, she was a teacher I always looked up to. Her groups sounded amazing, she was warm and welcoming and always had music and the students' well-being at the forefront of her teaching. More, when her students performed they all performed

with a sense of pride, honest story telling, and community. She is a model teacher.

Upon reading Boot's post, I had the same reaction as them. I was sad, mad, and then thought what would I do if that happened to my students? As I unpacked all my thoughts a lot of other questions emerged: What's the role of choral music within a high school choir? Can we shield our students from the world around us? How can we provide our students opportunities for success? How does our role of sharing choral music fit into school culture? How can we use choral music to change culture? How do we make a place for choral music in school culture? How do we teach students to embrace the hard opportunities? The list could go on and on. As I thought through it, it all comes down to doing what's best for our students. The students we teach every day, and know. As teachers we are constantly mini sociologists, reading our students' energy, dynamics, attention and constantly trying to provide the best instruction and experiences we can. It's our job to meet them where they're at.

I spoke with Boot on the phone and she said after the caroling experience, she went back to the choir room and listened to the students speak at length about what had happened and their experiences with performing at school. They said, "they're used to it." Boot replied, "You should not be used to it." Boot listened to her students, made them feel heard, and validated their feelings. Then, coincidentally or not, the students had a successful musical experience performing for their families that evening.

Upon reflection, Boot shared, "I need to be more aware of how to build the community. People aren't automatically going to like choir music, and you have to build that with the community."

To me, this is what makes Boot a true master teacher. She provided opportunity for vulnerability, growth, and then figured out what the students and community needed so that her students could be successful. While it will take time, Boot is excited to build a community that values the arts and different experiences even with the growing pains.

As choral teachers, I can only assume that we will all face a situation perhaps similar to this in our own schools. It is important to take the beat, and see what our students need and how our own philosophies connect to our students and the community. For Boot, moving forward her focus is on building the relationship of choral music with her choir community and the community at large. For you, that could and maybe should look different.

## Continued Hope Through Networking after the Pandemic

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**Amy Branahl**

**Children's Choir**

*Youth Choral Theatre of Chicago*

This is the first year since 2020 that my choruses haven't had to cancel a concert due to an outbreak of a Covid variant!!! Let the celebrations commence! The world seems to be getting back to normal but getting back to normal also meant the reintroduction to Flu A, RSV, and other cough bugs that crept into the mix. I know it was a challenge to get through this fall flu season, but I hope you and your programs have been staying healthy.

I have been thinking a lot about our bandwidth as educators. Our profession includes continual advocacy for our field, schools, and communities, as well as re-engaging young singers back into the program or retaining them amongst the laundry list of other available activities. How can we make choral singing accessible to all young singers? How do we fill our own cups with joy to then spread that joy with our choristers? How do we educate administrators to understand the importance of choral music within their own buildings? Despite these challenging questions, when I think about our children's choirs today, I am filled with hope for the future. Our singers continue to do amazing things, and the joy they bring in

making music keeps me going again and again. So let me share with you some areas that have really helped me this year so far and ways I am hoping to engage for the future.

I was asked to be a guest conductor at my alma mater in Des Plaines, IL. Jim Schiffer and the District 62 teachers were just amazing to work with. We had an entire bleacher/auditorium filled with singers, grades 4 through 12. The articulation was amazing and the day was so much fun, from the music that was chosen to the logistics of the day. I was incredibly thankful to see such eager students and for them to see me as someone who was just like them, in the same seats just 20 years prior. We were able to make such wonderful music that day. I was incredibly inspired to try to figure out a way to do that at my current school and also to think about ways we can get information out to our ACDA Membership about the value of the festivals in the state. I wanted to impress upon the audience the importance of encouraging their young people to "Keep Singing." As we are filling these months in preparation for concerts, I want to encourage you to keep an eye on our IL-ACDA website.

Ask yourself: "Are there any clinicians coming to town that would benefit my students? What festivals are out there? For which honor choirs can I prepare my students? How can I provide opportunities for middle and high school directors to come articulate with my elementary school students?" Make use of our IL-ACDA resources to help build meaningful connections for your singers.

Another event that has greatly benefitted me is going to the ACDA reading session at IMEC to experience new music while singing together with my colleagues. I hope to see you there this January!

### IL-ACDA February Events:

**Friday, Feb. 3rd:** Treble Choir Sing and Share: Northern IL: College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn. Andrea Solya, chair. Registration for this event is closed.

**Thursday, Feb. 9th:** Treble Choir Sing and Share: Central IL: Five Points, Washington, IL. Lara Reem, chair. Registration for this event is closed.

**Friday, Feb 10th:** University & College Sing and Share: WIU, Macomb, IL, 9:30 am-4:00 pm. Contact Brian Winnie at [bj-winnie@wiu.edu](mailto:bj-winnie@wiu.edu) for more information.

**Saturday, Feb 11th:** Freshman/Sophomore Honor Choir: St. Charles East HS. Monica Bertrand, chair. Sarah Catt, Director. Register your students [HERE](#)

**Wednesday, Feb 22nd - Saturday, Feb 25th:** National ACDA Conference: Cincinnati, OH. Register at [acda.org](http://acda.org). Early-Bird pricing ends January 19th at 6:00 PM

### IL-ACDA Summer & Fall Events: SAVE THE DATES

**Wednesday, June 21st - Thursday, June 22nd:** ACDA Summer ReTreat: Bradley University, Lisa Fredenburgh, chair. Cory Boulton, host. Headliners include Dr. Andrew Megill, UIUC, and Emily Ellsworth, Former Artistic Director of Anima.

**Friday, October 27th - Saturday, October 28th:** ACDA Fall Conference: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Laura Coster, chair, Andrea Solya, host. This event includes auditioned choir performances, interest sessions, reading sessions, and an honor choir

If you are interested in joining the leadership planning team for this event, contact Laura at [laura.coster@sbcglobal.net](mailto:laura.coster@sbcglobal.net)

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Please also consider joining us for an ACDA sponsored hang at Obed & Isaac's on January 26, 2023 starting at 9pm. Come with friends, sing, and network with other choral directors! In terms of upcoming events, I encourage you to explore all the sessions com-

ing up at the ACDA National Convention. Lastly, did you know we also have a conductors' retreat for Children & Community Youth Choirs? Check the ACDA website for more information about a retreat happening in January 2024!

May you find peace, love, and joy with your family and friends. Can't wait to see and connect with many of you in these upcoming months!

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