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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

LAURA COSTER

Hi Everyone,
Happy Spring to you! 'Tis the season for spring concerts, musicals, Holy Week services, and graduations. Try to go outside and take a walk when you have a few minutes. Breathe in the fresh air and know that you continue to make the world a better place for your singers. You are a blessing to many people.

It has been a busy winter for the board. You may have noticed that we have a new and improved website! Special thanks to Lisa Fredenburgh and Paul Laprade for their tireless work in getting the new site ready with our web designer. They have spent many hours working on the site over this academic year. Be sure to check out il-acda.org.

Did you know that Jason Hawkins has been our webmaster since 2005? He holds the record for being on the IL-ACDA board for 18 consecutive years in one position. We can't thank him enough for volunteering his time. Jason, we wish you well as you enjoy more free time with your family. Please welcome Aaron Mejrada, our new webmaster. Aaron is a choir director at Plainfield North High School and we are thankful he has stepped up to fill this much-needed position on the board.

We are also getting ready for our

summer and fall conferences. The summer ReTreat is on June 21-22 in Peoria at Bradley University.

The other news is that we are getting ready for two Illinois conferences during the next several months. The Summer ReTreat is coming up on June 21-22 in Peoria at Bradley University. If you have attended a ReTreat, you already know that it is a great way to get to know other IL-ACDA members from across the state. We attend sessions, sing together in a director's chorus and actually get to know each other better as we eat meals together and spend time with our headliners. The atmosphere is more casual, and everyone is relaxed.

The theme of the ReTreat is **Artistry for All Ages**. We know singing music is a powerful tool to reach children, teens, and adults of all ages. We have the opportunity to help our singers discover their artistry, no matter how young, old, or inexperienced they may be. Emily Ellsworth, former director of Anima (formerly Glen Ellyn Children's Choir) and Andrew Megill, Director of Choral Activities at U of IL in Urbana-Champaign will be our headliners. Come build your artistry toolbox as we learn from these experienced leaders in our field! Lisa Fredenburgh is chairing the ReTreat and Cory Boulton is the site host. Registration will open soon, and we will send you an IL-ACDA email message with a link to register within

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the next few weeks.

Every other year we host a fall conference. This year, our Fall Conference will be held at the U of I in Urbana on October 27-28 in Smith Music Hall and Krannert Center.

The theme is ***Singers' Banquet: Programs with Beauty, Balance, and Truth***. A strong choral program provides a variety of experiences so that everyone can find a seat at the banquet table. All humans have a universal need to experience beautiful and inspirational music. Providing balance through a variety of repertoire-old and new, genres, course/choir offerings, cultures, genders, inspirational texts, and musical settings will help every singer connect to the music and feel a sense of belonging in the ensemble. Texts that touch the heart and mind with truth, justice, and a wide spectrum of emotions will be relevant to all. The gift of belonging begins when our singers relate to and appreciate the music they sing together.

We are pleased that Dr. Andre Thomas, President of National ACDA will join us as a headliner. Andre is a choral director, composer, author, and an expert in spirituals. We will sing in a director's chorus/reading session and learn more about the future of ACDA.

Fernando Malvar-Ruiz is also a headliner and he currently directs the Los Angeles Children's Choir. If you attended the national ACDA conference in February, you saw him direct an amazing children's honor choir with over 150 singers. For our conference, he will share with us and also direct the High School Honor Choir. Information will be shared in early May about how to register students in grades 10-12.

We are also thrilled to offer a one day JH Honor Choir on Saturday directed by Belford Hernandez. Belford is an accomplished pianist, arranger, and

choral director. He has directed at the JH, HS, College levels. You may have seen him accompany the All-State Jazz Choir at ILMEA over the last several years. We are excited for Your MS/JH students!

We are also offering performing choir auditions and Interest Session applications. If you are interested, you can find the info on our website by going to the Events Tab/Fall Conference. Directors of youth choirs, school, college, university, worship and Community Choirs are invited to apply for a performance. The application materials are due no later than April 15th.

Interest session applications are due April 21st. We are looking for sessions that focus on our theme, A Singer's Banquet. Go to il-acda.org under the events tab and click on Fall Conference for a description of the theme and the application. We will also offer six mini-reading sessions including SATB-HS, SAB-Junior High, Treble Choir, Vocal Jazz, Community/College, and Church & Worship.

Consider attending, performing, or bringing students to participate in the honor choirs. It will spark you and your singers to grow in the fall and beyond!

Special thanks to Andrea Solya for being the site host for the fall conference. We are co-hosting the Friday evening concert with the culmination of her ***Lift Every Voice Conference*** where the U of IL choirs will perform with selected minority choral directors from all over the US. They will work with Andre Thomas, Fernando Malvar-Ruiz, Anton Armstrong, and Pearl Shangkuan the Monday through Thursday before the Fall Conference begins.

Musically yours,
Laura Coster
Fall Conference Chair
President of IL-ACDA

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A Brief Guide to Commissioning

Christopher Windle

Community Choirs R&R Chair

Chicago Chamber Choir

William Ferris Chorale

The process of commissioning and premiering new music is an especially rewarding experience for singers and conductors alike. For those who are interested but are unsure of where to begin, I hope the following article provides a starting point for this process.

How do you find living composers to commission, or simply to program? There is no right way to do this. I have commissioned dear friends, as well as composers I have never met, and to whom I simply sent a cold email.

Finding living composers is one of the most exciting things I do. My process is based on exploration and curiosity. It may sound simple, but I go to concerts, Google constantly (search phrases like: “choral composers” or “recent choir concerts”), scour YouTube, listen to newly released recordings on Apple Music and Spotify, and ask my friends and colleagues who they are most excited about.

Other conventional resources include program booklets and CD liner notes. These are invaluable and are often accessible as PDFs online. In addition, numerous composition competitions have started around the country in recent years, and many publish lists of their winners online. There are also several independent publishers who specialize in living composers, such as MusicSpoke, Graphite Publishing, and NOVA Editions. These publishers are a wonderful resource that make the music of living composers more accessible.

Once I have identified a composer in whom I am interested, I go to their

personal website to learn more about them and review their entire catalog. Composer websites are increasingly common – if not ubiquitous – and can be found with a quick Google search.

How do you choose the “right” person?

I have felt the pressure of this question in particular when a choir is commissioning for the very first time. It is important to first identify a composer whose work you love, and then look at what type of music they have composed in the past. Does their body of work fit the commissioning ensemble? And after you have contacted them, are they excited to write for you and your ensemble?

What is the budget for a commission?

You can fund a commission through general operating funds, a special designated gift, or even a grant. If this still feels out of reach, you may look for or start a commissioning consortium, where you pool resources with multiple organizations to fund a commission that you each premiere.

There are an enormously wide range of commissioning rates and fees. These rates are often determined by the length and instrumentation of your commission, though some composers may charge a flat fee instead. Typically, however, the longer and more complex a commission is, the more expensive it will be. Once you learn a composer’s fee, be clear and upfront about what you are able to afford, as this may determine several key aspects of the completed piece.

How do you determine a timeline for a commission?

Many composers are very busy and will only be able to commit to a commission several seasons out. Ask them what their availability is, and

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know when you want to give a premiere. Consider how flexible your organization might be in advance. Once you've agreed on a timeline, let the composer know when the concert will be and when rehearsals will start; and then communicate when you hope to see the completed score so that you can prepare it for the first rehearsal.

What should I communicate about my ensemble to the composer?

Know – and be honest about – your ensemble. Take time to carefully assess the strengths and weaknesses of your choir, and any potential changes to it that may happen between the commissioning of a work and its premiere. Be ready to tell the composer the size of your choir, the approximate ranges of each section, and their overall skill. You may consider telling them whether the ensemble is used to premiering new music.

In addition, be prepared to talk with a composer about the intent of the commission, and even the occasion. Ask yourself, is this a truly open prompt for the composer, or is this for a concert with a specific theme? Is it written for a special occasion or moment in the life of the choir? Are there other works on the program that might inform the chosen text, or even the difficulty of the final work? Or maybe you have a specific text you wish the composer to set to music. If this is the case, make sure you investigate whether the poetry is in the public domain or is otherwise available for use. As with much of this process, communication with the chosen composer is key.

What should I do when I receive the completed score?

Continue to communicate with the composer. Let them know if there is anything you do not understand or if there is something that your ensemble might have trouble with; and remember

to tell them what you love about the piece. Remember that the composer is the expert on their music – ask them to write something for you, your choir, and your audience about the commission. It's always illuminating to know what they were thinking when composing and what they are hoping to communicate.

Consider bringing the composer into your rehearsal to work with the choir, or just talk about the piece. The choir will be excited to meet this person, and it will help develop the final performance. Encourage them to talk about the process of commissioning and composing, what they are hoping to communicate, and their personal musical style. Consider sharing with your choir why commissions are important and what excites you about the process.

For your audience, you might have the composer record a video of themselves talking about the piece and their compositional process as you promote the concert. It is important to communicate with your entire community of support – singers and audience – about why commissioning is exciting and important. A commission is a big moment for an organization, and something to celebrate.

Even if you do not end up commissioning someone – reach out to composers. Living composers want to talk to you, and they want their music performed. They may have a piece they have already written just waiting for you to come along and premier it.

It has been a privilege in the past 15 years to commission four new works, give 20 world premieres, and work with countless living composers – these experiences are truly rewarding and highlights of my professional life. I encourage all conductors to work with living composers, and lift up new compositional voices.



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Autonomy - Supportive Teaching in Choirs and Choral Education

Irene Leites
Two-Year College Chair
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Autonomy-Supportive Teaching in Choirs

In 2021, I became a parent for the first time. This new chapter in my life has yielded many new life lessons. Currently, I am learning how to incorporate autonomy-supportive parenting, or 'choice' driven techniques, into life with a fiercely independent and whimsical toddler. When I was completing my doctorate degree in 2018, I came across Self-Determination Theory in music education. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) supposes that individuals are capable of exerting control over their environment. SDT outlines three basic psychological needs that underlie human behavior: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2009). The need for autonomy refers to having agency and control in one's environment and interactions with others – the freedom to make choices and decisions. I started using tenets of SDT with my choirs as a graduate student and contribute to do so now while teaching at Black Hawk College – I find it to be a very useful

framework in helping college students shift their perspective about choral music-making, moving away from seeing it as something led by the conductor to an endeavor motivated by their own unique need for competence and autonomy. This article will discuss practical ways in which SDT can be applied in a choral setting, focusing on five specific recommendations.

Autonomy-Supportive Teaching in Choral Education

At first glance, it may be difficult to see how autonomy-supportive teaching can occur in a setting that has traditionally depended on a central leadership figure (i.e. conductor). The time constraints experienced in ensemble teaching often make it difficult for teachers to give singers individual choices and one-on-one attention.

Choice is meant to facilitate learning, not simply kindle interest in choral music. In a study by Wallace & Sung (2016), high school students were asked about their perceptions of autonomy-supportive actions by their teachers. Choice was interpreted as means to realize of develop skills for future goals. In fact, "student interpreted the significance of providing choice as evidence of

teachers' global investment in their long-term learning.” (Wallace & Sung, 2016). Teachers that gave students options in their teaching were seen as people who accepted students as individuals with different skills and talents.

So it is worth asking: is there a practical way to incorporate choice into rehearsals while also working on things like ensemble intonation, diction and phrasing? In their book *Motivation in Education: Theory, Research and Applications*, Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich (2014) listed a set of five recommendations for fostering autonomy in a regular classroom. Here are some practical ways in which these recommendations can be adapted specifically for choral education settings.

1. Nurture inner motivational resources

Motivational resources refer to students' interests, preferences, psychological needs (Reeve, 2009). Part of nurturing students' interests and preference involves creating opportunities for student initiatives (Jang, Reeve & Deci, 2010), which can entail selecting tasks, goals, work methods, and mode of evaluation for their work (Katz & Assor, 2007). Depending on the educational context (i.e. high school or college) and the skill level of the choir, nurturing inner motivational resources can comprise simple tasks like allowing singers determine the order of pieces during rehearsal to more complex tasks like allowing students to select small groups with whom to practice a composition that isn't quite coming together.

Outside of actual time spent singing, interests and preferences can be nurtured via short informal sharing of music that students listen to outside of class. Regardless of musical preferences, regularly scheduling time during rehearsals for students to bring their favorite music enables them to actively contribute to the learning process and exposes them to new works. To ensure that each student's contribution is valued, directors can create a playlist of all of the songs that have been shared in class. At the end of the academic term, a portion of a rehearsal can be dedicated to revisiting the playlist. Listening to the same selections (even partially) can create a positive atmosphere, and boost confidence in the students' ability to listen to the same music with 'new ears' – an enhanced ability to listen gained through their participation in choir.

In a setting like choir, where so much emphasis is placed on the collective, encouraging students to showcase their interests outside of the choral rehearsals highlights the value of the individual. This type of activity also opens doors for students to see choral education as an open-minded and inclusive experience – it shows acceptance of

the singer's whole self, including everything that inspires their inner musician. More importantly, it encourages students to be proud of their musical taste and gives them an opportunity discuss their preferences in a respectful and engaging with others.

2. Provide explanatory rationales

Rationales articulate why a certain concept taught is useful to the student. Utility can be determined by the musical context (i.e. why singing the crescendo in the score is useful to the interpretation of the composer's music) or by the real-life context (i.e. why singing with others helps choristers relate to each other outside of rehearsal). How much more powerful would a performance be if conductors connected what is covered in a rehearsal to students' life outside of the classroom? In order for this to happen, choral directors will need to think 'outside the box' and find creative ways of attributing what happens in rehearsal to their students' day-to-day life.

Choral conductors frequently ask their ensembles to “balance” a chord while singing. This process, though somewhat ambiguous in its nature, requires singers to listen to each other and calibrate the volume and timbre of their individual voice on two different levels: within their voice part and within the overall texture of the other voice parts. Listening in a group context is a skill that can be translated outside of the musical setting. How, then, can the connection between the rehearsal and day-to-day contexts be made?

On a recent choir tour to Europe, a colleague and fellow alto commented that after spending numerous hours talking to someone with whom she usually does not interact, she was able to clearly hear that person's voice within the overall sound texture of the choir. While it is outside the scope of this article to investigate why a change in listening habits occurred for this singer, in a conversation, she attributed this change to spending many hours talking to and getting to know her fellow ensemble member. Not every choir has the luxury of travelling on tour, and not every director has the time for endless icebreakers. So what can be done?

In a recent blog post, titled “52 Questions to Bring You Closer Together”, members of Team Lemonade offer prompts for meaningful conversation. Some of these prompts include questions like “What is your ideal weekend?” to “What do you think about most?” Using this blog post, or any others of similar nature that can be found online, choral directors can develop ask singers to group into pairs and spend 5 minutes answering one of these questions during a short break in rehearsal. This simple

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exercise will help students make potential friends that develop outside of rehearsal, making their choral experience relevant to their day-to-day lives. By providing a rationale for this type of exercise (i.e. “We are doing these short ‘get-to-know-me’ prompts in order to get to know each other so that we can listen to each other in a different way”) directors leave it up to their individual singer to tell their story and develop their listening skills in two contexts: as a musician and as a peer.

3. Rely on non-controlling and informational language

Historically, the archetypal conductor used pressuring, ego-evolving language with choirs. This language neglected value and importance of requests from the singers. In education, teachers who use words should, have to must on a regular basis employ controlling language (Jang, Reeve & Deci, 2010). Informational language, by contrast, provides choices and options, and sees requests as valuable, useful and meaningful to the overall learning process (Jang, Reeve & Deci, 2010). This type of language encourages students to diagnose and solve their motivational problem instead of ignoring the problem altogether. Although the role of the conductor has evolved from what it was historically, controlling language can still be a prominent feature in generating musical product from an ensemble.

Choral directors tend to resort to this type of language when singers experience a lack of energy in rehearsal. Although this issue can be in part physiological, the singers’ inability to sustain engaged behavior in rehearsal can be a motivational problem as well. One of the most typical ways for the choral director to respond to this issue is to demand of singers to sing with more energy. While this directive diagnoses the issue, it does not provide singers with autonomy-supportive choices to solve it. Using the framework of Self-Determination Theory, the conductor can take an alternate course of action: give 2-3 minutes for the members of the group to conduct a self-guided breathing or meditation exercise during the specific moment in rehearsal when energy levels are lowest. This type of mindful practice can be especially powerful in a setting where music-making occurs — the silence can serve as a ‘reset’ button and act as a kind of instructional language of its own. While some conductors may perceive this type of exercise to be harmful to the traditional ‘flow’ of the rehearsal, practitioners of yoga and meditation would argue otherwise: it is an opportunity to slow down cognitive processes, tune into the ‘individual’ self, and come back to the task at hand with renewed concentration. Adopting mindfulness practices in rehearsal requires the conductor to use non-controlling language to facilitate the exercise and allow each person in the room go through the

process at their own pace. For those who do not wish to engage in meditation or breathing, the allotted 2-3 minutes still gives singers an opportunity to ‘reboot’ without pressure from the conductor.


4. Acknowledge and accept expressions of negative affect

On the surface this recommendation appears to hinder motivation: wouldn’t having singers say that they are “bored” in rehearsal undermine all the hard work that is being put into creating a positive atmosphere in rehearsal? While negative affect may or may not have short-term impact on ensemble morale, if handled by listening carefully, openly and understandingly, it can provide a valuable opportunity for autonomy-supportive teaching. In a choral setting, applying this suggestion means taking a moment to ask how the singers feel about the task at hand, or what they think about a certain composition that the group is working on. Encouraging both positive and negative feedback facilitates singers’ understanding of their individual role in the ensemble. If statements of boredom and dissatisfaction are ignored, singers may perceive their opinion and feelings to be devalued, which would in turn affect their degree of intrinsically motivated involvement in the choir. Furthermore, when addressed, expressions of negative effect can create valuable opportunities for working through motivational challenges in an open and accepting manner.

5. Display patience and allow for self-paced learning

Unlike a math classroom, where students are given time to complete work in class (either individually or in groups), singers in choir are expected to contribute as a collective. Thus, tracking singers’ individual progress and giving individuals time to understand musical concepts becomes extra challenging. Directors do not have an opportunity to come around a check in with a specific singers during rehearsal (not in a way that wouldn’t potentially embarrass them). How, then, can self-paced learning occur in a team-oriented environment like choir?

One way of facilitating self-paced learning is through the use of short written reflections. At the start of every class, directors can pass out ‘feedback forms’ that give students a chance to ask two questions: “what did you find interesting about what we covered in today’s rehearsal?” and “what did you find confusing in today’s rehearsal?” With these forms being readily available in every class, students can document learning challenges in real time. Ramona Wis, in her book *The Conductor as Leader*, also supports this suggestion by encouraging choral directors to use feedback forms. Singers who decide not to take advantage of using the feedback forms



Sing with Dr. Julia Davids, Stephen J. Hendrickson Professor of Music, Director of Choral Activities, and Co-Author of the book *Vocal Technique: A Guide to Classical and Contemporary Styles for Conductors, Teachers, and Singers*.

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would have still had the opportunity to do so, and therefore also experience autonomy-supportive instruction.

Conclusion

In our teaching practice, I believe that it is important to value people's motivation to study music and not assume that they will continue to do so because of intrinsic factors. Self-Determination Theory, specifically in its emphasis on choice and autonomy-supportive teaching, can be a useful lens for conductors to use in reflecting on their teaching practice. The formula of choral training (i.e. rehearsals, preparing for concerts) can sometimes undermine the key principle of all education: supporting people's learning about themselves. While there is no reason to change the rehearsal format, nor is there incentive to, it's valuable to consider educational perspectives from outside the choral discipline when deciding on what path to take as a director. In my own journey, learning more about how Self-Determination Theory manifests itself in different contexts has enriched my life as both a teacher and a parent.

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John T. McDonald
District 6 Representative
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In the summer of 2022, I had the honor of being selected as one of six conductors to represent the United States in the 2023 International Conductors Exchange Program between ACDA and their sister organization in Germany. I became aware of this program years ago when one of my friends and mentors was chosen to participate in the exchange with Sweden. The program began in 2010 and has included partnerships with Cuba, China, Sweden, South Korea, Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Uruguay, Kenya, and South Africa.

In late 2022, each of the six American conductors were paired with a German conductor and put in contact with one another to schedule our visits. The cohort of German conductors attended the ACDA National Convention in Cincinnati in February and then completed regional visits with their partners either immediately before or after the conference. I was partnered with Tristan Meister, a freelance conductor based out of Hamburg. Tristan began his musical studies in the Limburger Domsingknaben, a boy's choir at the Catholic Cathedral in Limburg. He then went on to study choral conducting with Georg Grün, Frieder Bernius and Harald Jers and orchestral conducting with Klaus Arp at the Mannheim University of Music. Tristan currently conducts seven choral ensembles across Germany including a 150-plus voice symphonic choir, a semi-professional chamber chorus, a mixed youth chorus, a tenor/bass youth chorus, and two adult tenor/bass ensembles. His choirs have recorded numerous professionally produced albums and have won national and international competitions. He also currently teaches choral conducting at two music universities in Germany.

During his regional visit to Southern Illinois, I arranged for Tristan to have a wide variety of experiences exposing him to the choral practices in our area. He worked with choirs and gave presentations at McKendree University and the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and had the opportunity to observe and provide feedback to choirs from two high schools, three ensembles from the St. Louis Children's Choir, and even work with a professional vocal ensemble on some of the German choral classics. Of course, no trip to the St. Louis area would be complete without a trip to the top of the Gateway Arch!

In late May, I will travel to Germany for the Marktoberdorf

International Choral Competition where I will get to observe some of the finest choirs from across the world in multiple categories compete over four days. I will then travel with Tristan to Hamburg where I will have the opportunity to work with his choral conducting students in a masterclass setting with a professional ensemble. I will finish my visit with the German National Choral Competition (Deutscher Chorwettbewerb) in Holland. This is a competition only open to amateur German choirs who qualify at the regional level the previous year.

I conducted a brief interview via e-mail with Tristan to include his thoughts on the exchange program in this article:

John: *What was your favorite part about the ACDA conference in Cincinnati? What is something you learned and are implementing with your choirs back in Germany?*

Tristan: *It was wonderful to see so many enthusiastic singers, especially so many young people singing on an impressively high level. I loved to hear that many contemporary pieces. That's what I will try to focus now a bit more on in Germany, because it is such an important thing to strengthen the living composers and to work together with them to develop the choral music world. And of course I loved the Beer Choir!*

J: *What was your favorite part about the regional visit to the St. Louis area?*

T: *In St. Louis I saw the importance of singing in schools. I visited some high school choirs and it was touching to hear them singing quite difficult pieces with such joy - that should be the same in Germany. But it was also impressive to see and hear the university choirs work and being flexible in completely different styles of music.*

J: *What skills or insights are you hoping I will share with your students/singers during my visit to Germany in June?*

T: *My students and singers (and myself) will be very interested to learn about the difference between the American way of using the voice in a choir. Because I think the choral tone is one of the biggest differences between German and American ensembles. I also experienced you as a great music educator and I would love for you to share your experiences and techniques working with young singers and musicians with my music education students.*

The ACDA International Activities announced in Cincinnati that the next two exchanges have already started developing with Israel and the Philippines. If you

are interested in applying for those opportunities, keep an eye on ACDA.org/resources/ICEP and join the ACDA International Activities Facebook Group.



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Summer Singing with Middle School Students

Carol Munn

Youth Choirs Coordinator and Jr. High/Middle School Choir

McHenry Middle School

At the close of my first year teaching middle school choir, the students were talking about missing the comradery we had formed together throughout the year. They loved chorus and wished to continue singing together over the summer break. The following school year, I decided to create a summer singing experience for students who were available over the 8-week vacation. I contacted my local park district and secured a class space to hold choir rehearsals once a week on Monday nights. The small lake house building offered to me by the park district was a beautiful environment with a "summer camp" feel. My summer choir advertisement was placed in the local brochure and that summer we had our first official summer choir.

Meeting during the summer at a different location offered us a refreshing change. Our lake house location was a completely different setting than my middle school classroom. We were dressed in shorts and tank tops, sang camp songs as warm ups and performed easy, crowd pleasing music at the end of the summer for a casual "informance" for parents. For the set up, I brought my keyboard, sound system and some music and folders I borrowed from my classroom. This was so much different that the spring season we had just finished with concerts, competitions, uniforms and grades. Both the students and I enjoyed this contrasting atmosphere as we learned new music.

There was a great advantage to combining different grade levels together into one choir. Although my first thought was to combine new students from the local area along with my middle school students, summer choir usually consisted of about 15-20 students from my middle school. Local students would also sign up and we welcomed them with open arms. There have been some great friendships formed this way! The choir was advertised to

students entering 6-8th grade. However, the following year, the graduated 8th graders loved it so much they asked to come back. The 8th graders enjoyed teaching the younger students our warm ups and solfege exercises. Sometimes we would bring back songs that we had learned in choir in the past years and the 6th graders got to sing with the more experienced singers. Additionally, this was an opportunity for students to bring in younger siblings that had never been in choir before. This helped with recruitment and gave students from the same family a chance to sing together.

Since, there was a more casual feel and less pressured to the summer choir, it was a great place to try out new music. Sometimes there are

songs that would not fit into the concert season during the school year, but worked perfectly during summer choir. Also, students would give me song suggestions throughout the school year and we never got a chance to try them out. Since my summer choir was quite a bit smaller than my school choirs, I could afford to purchase enough sheet music to try new songs. Over the years a few of our biggest hits have been: Sh Boom Sh Boom, Here Comes the Sun, Defying Gravity, We Go Together, You Can't Stop the Beat and songs from the musicals Hamilton, Dear Evan Hansen and Six.

The students who wanted to be a part of choir over the summer were the ones who were most dedicated to singing. They bonded together over this experience and learned from each other with the older students leading the younger ones. When we came back to school in August, students had built friendships over music and shared summer memories. They asked to sing the summer choir songs during the school year, and sometimes we would teach them to the rest of the class and add them to our concerts. The best advertising is word of mouth and each

spring students would ask when summer choir was going to begin again. Graduating 8th graders asked to come back over the summer and help out. We taught new warm ups to the rest of the class and had a head start on the school year because of it.

Teaching choir over the summer was a refreshing change for myself as well. I placed the rehearsal at a time and location that was accessible to my summer schedule. There were no extra duties, grading, and in this scenario, no behavior problems at all to deal with. Students were there to sing and I was able to enjoy making music with them. This past summer a bonus was that we were asked to sing the national anthem at a local car show.

Meeting with your chorus students over the summer months can keep them excited about singing, expose them to new music and have them returning to school in the fall with enthusiasm. Consider contacting your local park district or finding another creative space to hold rehearsals. You may be surprised how this experience will benefit both you and your singers!

For the Love of Music

Brian Birch

Tenor/Bass Choirs R&R Chair

Marmion Academy

Aurora


Recruiting young men to choir can certainly be a challenge, particularly at the high school level and even harder if there isn't an elementary/middle school from which to draw passionate singers. Convincing students to try singing is the biggest challenge. Like a roadblock at the start of a long, beautiful journey. Once they are in choir, they find fun, social connection, beauty, and an experience worth their little spare time. But many will refuse to go past that first barrier.

Perhaps you find this scenario familiar: I might spend plenty of time and energy coercing a young student to join or even just try singing in choir. Finally, the student joins and then I hear him sing. Oh boy, have I got my work cut out for me... The student finds the love of music, the fun in singing, and the fellowship of a spirited ensemble; he is hooked. Who am I to spoil his first meaningful connection to music because he doesn't already have a good singing voice?

There are times where the musical integrity is compromised by the joy of singing. What is more important,

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the singer, or the quality of the music? I believe it is the individual. For me, male singers are motivated to project confidence, power, and cool. Even an emotional song can convey strength. Many of my young singers find themselves singing inaccurate or very out of tune pitches very strongly. Who am I to ask an out-of-tune singer to sing more softly and sacrifice his strength for the integrity of the music?

I have always been confident that I can teach anyone to sing, but it never happens immediately. I discovered that the biggest hurdle was teaching the students how to sing out and make a good sound. They first must overcome the cycle of fear, which is perhaps another article all itself. The cycle of fear is where singers would not sing out, because they were afraid of sounding bad. As a result, the very thing they do to avoid sounding bad causes them to sound "bad." After convincing them to sing out, they do... and so do the sour notes. But when a student sings out his best, he hears himself better and learns to match pitch and then tune, he learns to read music better, he learns to articulate better, and he is able to adjust his tone quality for different musical styles and genres. THIS student sometimes progresses to be among my top students. If I hadn't withstood the sour notes, and powerfully out of tune voices, I would have never trained some of my top

singers to be as passionate and dedicated to music as they have become.

The individual singer must come before the music. If male singers are discouraged or left feeling weak, their

desire and devotion to singing will diminish. If they are made to feel strong, given the tools to grow, and motivated by growth and success, they will become valuable contributors to the ensemble. If the individual singer ceases to sing, what is the value of his music?

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ReTreat Chair-Lisa Fredenburgh, President-Elect of IL-ACDA

You will receive an email when registration opens on the website.

2023 IL-ACDA Fall Conference:

Singers' Banquet: Programs with Beauty, Balance & Truth

Friday and Saturday, October 27-28

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Headliners-Dr. Andre Thomas and Fernando Malvar-Ruiz

Honor Choir Directors are Belford Hernandez, JH/MS and Fernando Malvar-Ruiz, HS

Conference Chair-Laura Coster, President of IL-ACDA

Apply to bring a choir to perform or to speak at an interest session at the fall conference!

Applications are due on April 15th.

Register your students for the MS/JH Honor Choir and the HS Honor Choir.

The link to register will be available by May 1st on our website.

If you have questions, contact:

Lisa Fredenburgh, ReTreat 2023, fredenburgh@gmail.com

Laura Coster, 2023 Fall Conference, laura.coster@sbcglobal.net

Paul Laprade, Choir Auditions Chair paullapradeacda@gmail.com

Deb Aurelius-Muir, Interest Session Chair, debbieaureliusmuir@gmail.com



IL-ACDA Jr. High Choral Festival with guest Jacob Narverud at Bradley University in Peoria, Oct. 13, 2022