

# PODIUM

Fall 2011

Volume 38, No. 1

## ILLINOIS ACDA EXECUTIVE BOARD

### President

Beth Best

Hill Middle School

Beth\_Best@ipsd.org

### Past President

Brett Goad

Hinsdale South High School—retired

rbgoad52@sbcglobal.net

### President-Elect

Karyl Carlson

Illinois State University

kcarlson@ilstu.edu

### Treasurer

Leslie Manfredo

Mahomet-Seymour High School

lmanfredo@ms.k12.il.us

### Secretary

Joy Schertz

Princeton High School

jschertz@phs-il.org

### Podium Editor

Andy Jeffrey

Glenbard West High School

andrew\_jeffrey@glenbard.org

### Podium Assistant Editor

Jen Burkemper

Hinsdale Central High School

jburkemp@hinsdale86.org

## President's Message

I know that we're all recently back into the routine of rehearsals, lessons, planning programs, and the other important things that define our lives as choral directors and teachers. I hope you found time to rest and revive yourselves before jumping back into the thick of it! Over eighty choral directors found that revival through the IL-ACDA Summer ReTreat at Illinois State University in July. We enjoyed singing in the director's chorus, led by Dr. David Rayl of Michigan State, whose precision, sense of humor, and marvelous repertoire selections made it a fabulous experience! Dr. Mary Goetze, renowned musicologist and composer, shared her passion for and work in multicultural music. Illinois' own Dr. John Jost taught us about performance practices that can be used with choirs at any level. I always come away from the Re-Treat with a renewed sense of purpose and energy that helps take me through even the toughest spots of the school year.

If you have not had the opportunity to attend the Re-Treat before, maybe next year is your big chance! We are moving the Re-Treat earlier in the summer to June 27-29, 2012, still at Illinois State University. We are still finalizing our headliners, but they will be announced in The Podium as soon as possible!

In the meantime, ACDA will again be sponsoring a reception at IMEA

in Peoria on Thursday evening, January 26. We also will be offering the ACDA reading session, with sponsorship by Kidder Music, on Friday, January 27. Please join us for these events, and see what ACDA is all about!

Good luck (break a leg!) this school year, and we hope to see you in Peoria in January, and especially at ISU next June!

Beth Best

IL-ACDA President

## In this Issue

President's Message	p. 1
Worship Spotlight - Our Choir Matriarch	p. 2
(Re)Discovering Joy	p. 3
Save the Date—ReTreat 2012	p. 4
Worship Repertoire Project	p. 5
Harold A. Decker Nominations	p. 6
Reflections on Chinese Choral Music	p. 7
Save the Date—Central Division Conference 2012	p. 9
Vocal Jazz Spotlight - Why Vocal Jazz	p. 10
Spotlight on Chicago Public Public Schools—Exploring Chicago	p. 11
From the Editor	p. 13

## Repertoire and Standards Chairs

### Membership Chair

Sarah Smith

Pleasant Ridge School

ssmith@glenview34.org

### Middle School

Jill Rinkel

Mahomet-Seymour Jr. High

jrinkel@ms.k12.il.us

### Senior High

Jeremy Little

Vernon Hills High School

Jeremy.little@d128.org

### Jazz Choirs

Stacy Cunningham

Leyden High School

scunningham@leyden212.org

### Female Choirs

Sarah Graham

Illinois State University

sgraham@ilstu.edu

### Male Choirs

Ted Hesse

Millikin University

thesse@mail.millikin.edu

### Two Year Colleges

Philip Spencer

Joliet Junior College

pspencer@jjc.edu

### Music/Worship

Jeff Hunt

Baker Memorial UMC, St. Charles

mmsdir1@aol.com

### Show Choir Chair

Mark Meyers

Waubonsie Valley High School

mark\_meyers@ipsd.org

## Worship Spotlight – Our Choir Matriarch

Kay was a 40 year member of the church choir I am privileged to direct. She lived a simple life while living with and taking care of her parents. Kay never married. She also never learned to drive. She would get herself around town to the grocery store, to church and to choir by riding her old bike or by walking. Aside from her parents, church and choir were her life. She rarely missed church services or choir rehearsal.

Choir was her extended family and Kay was the matriarch. On the very, very rare occasion that Kay was not at choir, we all knew it. You couldn't quite put your finger on why, but rehearsals were different. Perhaps we were all in our thoughts, quietly concerned that Kay was stuck in a snow bank with her bike. Kay was funny about her cherished independence. She knew everyone cared deeply for her and almost each Sunday or Wednesday someone in the choir would say "are you sure I can't give you a ride Kay?" and would kindly respond, "no, I am just fine but thank you all the same". Only on the very cold or rainy Wednesdays or Sundays would she relent and call one of her friends in the alto section for a lift.

I would often wonder what it was about Kay that made her the unquestioned matriarch of the choir. After all, in directing the choir for 27 years I don't think I ever heard Kay's voice. Even sitting next to her once in a while singing hymns and responses, I don't think I ever heard her voice. She wasn't the vocal leader of the section by any means. She also had the funny habit of falling asleep like clockwork about 12 minutes into the Sunday sermon. We had someone assigned to give her a gentle nudge each Sunday. She would offer her comments on the music to me only once in a while, maybe when she thought I needed to hear something. Not long ago, my church choir performed the Bach Christmas Oratorio. It was a lovely afternoon as we sang Cantatas 1-3 had a church potluck then finished in the evening with Cantatas 4-6. It was a challenge for my choir and at times I feared I overstepped the appropriate musical boundary for my all volunteer choir. After the performance, Kay thanked me for bringing this wonderful music into her voice, and for believing in the choir and in their ability to experience great music.

Kay died this past summer doing what she loved to do. She was on her way to the grocery store when she swerved into traffic and the driver couldn't stop in time. I still grieve Kay's loss but only now can I understand with clarity why this very meek, gentle yet strong lady with the tiniest singing voice could stand as the matriarch of a family of singers. With her we were joined by a common purpose; to sing with beauty and understanding. Her quiet dedication and inner strength helped us along our path, and still do to this day. I also know she helped me in my desire to do the best I can in service to God.

I am sure you have a Kay or two in your choir. Honor them and encourage that small voice to sing!

Submitted by Jeff Hunt—IL-ACDA Worship Chair

## (Re)Discovering Joy

When fellow teachers happen upon each other over summer break, there is a kinsmanship like no other. The unique demands of our profession foster many deep relationships; much like military veterans discussing their time spent deployed.

Each year my colleagues and music friends make statements like, “It has been a great summer and I am ready to get back”. Rejuvenated by the summer respite, August finds us rested and anxious to start another school year. Recently, however, I am hearing much different sentiments from fellow music educators. Budget cuts and consolidations are just a couple of the challenges that adversely affect our choral programs. The pressure of *No Child Left Behind* puts music educators on the defensive since music is not evaluated in the “high stakes” testing. Although initially I was not concerned, it is now apparent that much funding is dedicated to the tested subjects and alarmingly less to the arts. Even established programs are seeing the negative ramifications of these societal and legislative changes. The most positive teachers react with fear, anger and ultimately feel discouragement using words like “burn out” and “futility” to describe their jobs as they approach this academic year.

How can we navigate through these difficult times and still lead with inspiration? How can we support our school’s responsibilities to *No Child Left Behind* without undermining our own subject matter? How can we rediscover the thrill of music making that propelled us to choose it as a career? It is my mission to rediscover the joy of music teaching. Through study, reflection, and soul searching I am working to change my approach to the year and reorient the place of choral music in the curriculum. In my research, I have found scholars who have offered suggestions, if not answers, to these vital questions.

As choral directors, we use the term “resonance” describe tone quality. The authors of the book *Primal Leadership* use “resonance” to describe the positive group dynamics of an organization when lead by an affirming and enthusiastic leader. (Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee p. 5) Research consistently defends what we all know: the emotions and demeanor of a leader drive performance. (Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee p. 9) When I approach rehearsal with true joy and enthusiasm, my students respond in kind. Endless day to day administrative tasks can mar our ability to act on this. When a non-musician or community member discovers what you do, their response more often or not is, “It must be wonderful to be able to share your passion with young people.” Their words should remind us that teaching choral music is a privilege. The exercise of viewing each day as an opportunity to enlighten will switch the dynamic of your classroom to one of resonance and positive energy.

Rosamund and Benjamin Zander in their book, *The Art of Possibility*, suggest that in order to move away from a position of self pity and self concern, we view ourselves and our work as a contribution. (Zander, P. 61) Music teachers continuously justify the place of music in the curriculum and this

### Repertoire and Standards Chairs *continued*

#### College /University

Susan Davenport  
Southern Illinois University  
sgds@siu.edu

#### Composition

Lee Kesselman  
College of Dupage  
lrkmus@sbcglobal.net

#### Children’s Choir

Ron Korbitz  
Brookdale Elementary School  
Ronald\_korbitz@ipsd.org

#### Community

Steven Szalaj  
McHenry County College and Voices  
in Harmony  
szjsings@mac.com

#### Ethnic/Multicultural

Clayton Parr  
DePaul University  
cparr@depaul.edu

#### Youth/Student

Mary Lynn Doherty  
Northern Illinois University  
mdoherty@niu.edu

#### IMEA Representative

Rick Murphy  
University Lab High School  
rgmurphy@illinois.edu

#### Webmaster

Jason Hawkins  
Plainfield North High School  
jasonhawkins@comcast.net

#### Historian

Bob Boyd  
Northwestern University  
bealextoo@aol.com

**District 1**

Diane Marelli  
 Riverside Brookfield High School  
 marellid@rbhs208.org

**District 2**

Michael Zemek  
 Augustana College  
 michaelzemek@augustana.edu

**District 3**

Debbie Aurelius-Muir  
 Olympia High School  
 Debbie.aurelius-muir@olympia.org

**District 4**

Erin Stegall  
 Macomb Junior High School  
 stegalle@mcusd185.org

**District 5**

Jacob Elam  
 Central A&M Middle School  
 elamj@cam.k12.il.us

**District 6**

Susan Davenport  
 Southern Illinois University  
 sgds@siu.edu

**District 7**

Paul Rausch  
 Woodstock High School  
 prausch@d200.mchenry.k12.il.us

**District 8**

Jon Hurty  
 Augustana College  
 Muj-hurty@augustana.edu

**District 9**

Bryan Kunstman  
 Kaneland High School  
 Bryan.kunstman@kaneland.org

**Student Representatives**

Brian Albertsen—Illinois State U.  
 bcalber@ilstu.edu  
 Brett Kirhofer—Northern Illinois U.  
 brett.kirhofer@gmail.com

*(Re)Discovering Joy (continued from page 3)*

often creates a lingering empty feeling that we haven't done enough. When we replace the question, "Have I done enough?" with "How can I be a contribution today?," we shift our goals and our purpose to one of possibility. When this happens, we are in a position to clearly discover how the arts can make a difference. In my own school, we use the annual holiday concert to raise money for families and students less fortunate. One year my students prepared a PowerPoint presentation about rural poverty to be shown prior to the concert. The presentation evoked strong enough emotions from the audience and several hundred dollars were raised for families in need. The students were motivated and inspired by experiencing their positive impact on the community, especially those less fortunate.

Parker Palmer has dedicated much of his professional life studying the art of successful teaching. Palmer surveyed hundreds of students, asking them to describe their most effective teachers. In his book, *The Courage to Teach*, he writes that a common trait of all good teachers is their capacity for connectedness. He deduced that effective teachers "are able to wear a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that the students can weave a world for themselves". (Palmer, p. 11) Palmer suggests that the best teachers move beyond technique and teach with intuition from the heart. In choral music, we are constantly connecting text to melody, the arts to "core" curriculum and the place of music in society. I would like to suggest that we extend our "connectedness" to helping our schools meet the requirements of *No Child Left Behind*. Rather than complaining about the inevitable disruption of academic schedules created by testing, we need to connect by helping our schools meet state testing goals. Each

**Make plans now to attend this Summer's IL-ACDA Retreat!**

**June 27-29 at Illinois State University**

**Please make sure to note the change of date which is different from past years.**

(Re)Discovering Joy (continued from page 4)

year during state testing, the band director and I individually test students who may need special accommodations. We also move music events off of testing weeks and support our school in any way asked. This act of “connectedness” to the realities of our school has helped us gain respect with our colleagues and administration.

As a final suggestion, take a moment to remember when you first fell in love with choral music. Whether singing in kindergarten or participating in All-State Choir, we all have had remarkable aesthetic experiences that lead to music teaching as a career. Remember that you weren’t concerned about budgets or whether there were enough tenors to cover the part; you simply loved the unique experience of choral singing. Regain the youthful enthusiasm you once had for choral singing to guide your attitude through this school year.

As you begin this school year, take a new perspective. Be *resonant* and share your gifts. Lead with positive emotion and make a *contribution*. Be *connected* to your students and your school community and above all *love your art*. Best wishes to everyone for a great year of teaching.

#### Bibliography:

Goleman, Daniel, Boyatzis, Richard, and McKee, Annie – Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence. Harvard Business School Press, Boston, Ma., 2002.

Palmer, Parker J., —The Courage To Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1998.

Zander, Rosamund Stone and Zander, Benjamin – The Art of Possibility. Penguin Press, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 2002.

Submitted by:

Erin Stegall, National Board Certified Teacher, EAYA Music

District IV Area Representative

Macomb Junior High School, Macomb Illinois

### ***Worship Repertoire Project***

Our music and worship chair Jeff Hunt recently sent out an e-mail requesting help to compile a repertoire list of sacred music for the website. I am including a portion of his original request along with a beginning of the list of responses from our members.

I’m hopeful the list would have several benefits to our church choir directors within Illinois. Benefits might include:

1) Provide a way to reach out to the many directors (often volunteer) directing the small church choir by providing them a working list of unison, 2 part and 3 part anthems. This may encourage them to join ACDA and get more involved and also is a way for us to foster and nurture this important grass roots level of singing.

2) Provide a comprehensive list of SATB sacred anthems that could be of benefit to the beginning choral director balancing the role of music educator and part time choir director. This is a common role for many of us.

3) Provide a comprehensive list to all directors of church choirs who are at various stages of their careers. I’m hoping the list will represent the “chestnuts” of your program and thus inspire all of us to look what we may have missed for our choirs.

If you would like to participate, please send by email a list of 5 or so anthems. As a main goal is to reach out to the smaller parish, please include at least 1 that would be unison, 2 or 3 part. Please include the arranger/composer, publisher, voicing and season of usage. As an added benefit, I would like to include anthems from this list in our reading session for the 2011 Summer Retreat. Please send all repertoire suggestions to Jeff Hunt at [Mmsdir1@aol.com](mailto:Mmsdir1@aol.com).

## Nominations for the 2012 Illinois-ACDA Harold Decker Award

Harold Decker was the Chair of the Choral Division of the School of Music at the University of Illinois from 1957 to 1981. He was a charter member and past president of ACDA. In 1979, the Illinois Chapter of ACDA chose to institute the Harold Decker Award, with Dr. Decker being the first recipient. The award is given "in recognition of the significant contribution made to the lives of innumerable choral singers, conductors, and audiences who have been privileged to experience the finest in choral music as presented under his or her direction."

Requirements of the Harold Decker Award

1. Quality leadership and service to the art of choral music. 2. Minimum of 20 years of leadership in choral music. 3. Minimum of 15 years of choral service in Illinois. 4. A record of active service in ACDA.

### Process

Any IL-ACDA member may nominate someone for the Decker Award by submitting, before January 1, 2012, a letter of nomination, at least two letters of support, and biographical information or a current resume of the candidate. At the January meeting, the IL-ACDA Board will vote on the recipient of the Decker Award, to be awarded at the summer ReTreat.

Send materials before January 1 to: Brett Goad, 2526 Ravinia Lane - Woodridge, Illinois 60517. Email: [rbgoad52@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rbgoad52@sbcglobal.net)

## Harold A. Decker Award

*presented by the*

Illinois Chapter of the American Choral Directors Association

In recognition and appreciation of the significant contribution made to the lives of innumerable choral singers, conductors, and audiences who have been privileged to experience the finest of choral music as presented under his/her direction. The Illinois Chapter of the American Choral Directors Association hereby presents the Harold A. Decker Award to:

Harold A. Decker University of Illinois	Elwood Smith—1995 Northern Illinois University
Sten Halvorson Aurora High School	William Olson University of Illinois
Colleen Kirk University of Illinois/Florida State University	Mary Selk—1998 Bloomington High School
Walter Rodby Joliet / Homewood- FlossmoorHigh Schools	Dennis Sparger—1998 Belleville Community College
Leonard Van Camp Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville	Bob Hills—1999 Eastern & Western Illinois Universities
John Maharg Eastern Illinois University	Richard Griffiths—2000 Monmouth College
John Davis Bradley University	Diane Hires—2001 Downers Grove South High School
Richard Hoffland Millikin University	Janet Watkins—2002 Mahomet-Seymour HS
Elvis Coble—1988 Homewood-Flossmoor High School	Chester Alwes—2004 University of Illinois
Frederick Swanson—1989 Moline Boys Choir	Donald Armstrong—2005 Illinois State University
William Schnell—1990 Glenbrook South High School	Robert A. Boyd—2006 Lyons Township High School
Margaret Hillis- -1991 Chicago Symphony Chorus	Doreen Rao—2007 Glen Ellyn Children's Chorus/ Roosevelt University
Judy Marderosian—1992 York High School	John DeGroot—2008 Waubonsie Valley HS
Ronald Benner—1992 West Chicago High School	Calvin Hedegaard—2009 Moline High School
James Wilson—1993 Greenville College	Joe Grant - 2010 University of Illinois
Robert Snyder—1994 Eastern Illinois University	Judy Moe - 2011

## ***Reflections on Chinese Choral Music***

This summer, as part of my sabbatical, I spent the month of June in the Peoples Republic of China. I had been invited by Tian Xiao Bao to rehearse and conduct a concert of western choral music--mainly consisting of American selections and a few Renaissance motets. Many of you heard Tian Xiao Bao with his wonderful women's choir, the Tian Kong Choir, at their performance at the national ACDA concert this past March. In addition to working with the choir, I lectured on western Renaissance choral music and worked with the choral conducting graduate students, introducing them to various western choral selections. I spent most of my time in Wuhan, a city with about 16 million people in central China. I also had the opportunity to travel to Kunming, a much smaller city of about 6 million to observe one of the major Chinese choral competitions, the Golden Bell Awards. I also traveled to Guanzhou and Shenzhen and observed and worked with two very talented high school choirs. Based on my exposure to multiple choirs at the Golden Bell Awards, I would like to share some of my observations and thoughts about Chinese choral music.

### **The Golden Bell Awards**

I spent three days in Kunming about halfway through my stay in China. During this time I observed 30 Chinese choirs, each singing 15 minutes of Chinese and western music. The highest percentage of choirs was university mixed groups, but there were also a number of women's ensembles, a few men's ensembles and about 10 or so were community-based groups. There were also two choirs that we might categorize as youth choirs, with singers that were in the 13-16 age range. My overall impression of the performances was positive, but there were also some issues that were problematic. I will break my comments down into three general categories--overall sound and tone color, literature selection and aspects of diction.

### **Sound and Tone Color**

My observations about sound are that the choirs tend to sing with a much richer and resonant tone color and generally louder dynamic than most western choirs. I suspect that the richness of the tone color is partially influenced by the sound of the spoken language as well as an obvious emphasis on resonance in the overall vocal technique. There were, of course, exceptions, but the dynamics tended to be balanced toward the loud and some groups became quite pushed at the loudest dynamics. In addition, a number of the choirs never employed softer dynamics in their performances so the overall dynamic palate was both relatively narrow and loud. The results in the groups that had a tendency to oversing were both unpleasant pushed tone color and especially problems with intonation at the loudest dynamics. On the other hand, the best of the choirs (corroborated by the judges scoring) were able to control the dynamics and create a great deal of resonance and exciting energy in their loud singing while also employing beautiful soft dynamics.

### **Diction**

I am unable to judge diction as it relates to music sung in Chinese other than to comment on a significant difference in singing diphthongs in comparison to most western choral music. Rather than sustaining a long note on the first sound of a diphthong and then moving through the second sound quickly, the two parts of the diphthong are often split equally across one note. This difference in diphthong usage is problematic when Chinese choirs sing western music. They tend to have more difficulty with remaining on the primary diphthong before moving to the secondary diphthong on a given note.

There were a few other problems with diction issues when singing western music. The languages that I

*Reflections on Chinese Choral Music (cont. from page 7)*

heard included English, German and Latin. Probably the most significant problem has to do with consonants and especially ending consonants. The Chinese language does not include words that end in consonants. Therefore, Chinese singers have difficulty enunciating the final consonants in western texts. They also have a natural difficulty in ending consonant precision. The vowels are mostly in place, but the consonants are often non-existent rendering the text unintelligible. I heard a group singing "The Snow" by Elgar in a rehearsal prior to the contest. It wasn't until I was looking at the score during their second time singing the piece that I realized they were actually singing in English. I have had my choir sing Chinese music on a number of occasions, so I am well aware that American choirs run into similar issues when approaching Chinese pieces. In fact, I have found Chinese to be a particularly difficult language for American singers. That said, I feel that the Chinese choirs need to spend much more time working on the diction issues in western music. This was also borne out in my rehearsal experiences with the Tian Kong Choir. This group is made up of very talented singers but we had to spend a significant amount of time working through various diction issues even though the singers were fairly proficient when speaking English.

There are some particularly problematic sounds for Chinese singers. The most difficult seems to be the "th" sound. Instead of bringing the tip of the tongue out of the mouth to form the consonant, the tongue stays behind the teeth and makes a "d" sound. In rehearsal it took constant reminders to affect a change, but once they got used to the physical movement of the tongue there was no problem. Other problems include harder consonants like "k" in the middle of words. There were also problems with words that ended in a hard consonant which were followed by a words beginning with a consonant such as "oft falls" or "and makes". Managing the connection and space between the words was difficult for the singers. This is similar to the general problem with ending consonants but is exacerbated by the addition of an additional consonant and the space between the two words.

## Literature Selection

The contest requirements were to sing three pieces lasting a total of 15 minutes or less. One of the pieces had to be a Chinese composition and one of the other pieces had to be a foreign (normally western) composition. The third piece could be chosen from either category. The choices for the Chinese pieces seemed fairly limited. There were about 7 to 10 pieces that were sung by a high percentage of the choirs. I spoke with Dr. Tian about this and he said that there are still a fairly limited number of pieces from which to choose. Since Chinese choral music is a relatively new phenomenon (not much existed before the 20th century) there are just not that many pieces available. The Chinese selections included both a cappella works and pieces accompanied by piano. The accompaniments tended to be florid and romantic in character. The texts of the Chinese pieces were all secular and the themes revolved mainly around nature and beauty. It was obvious that there was a strong Russian influence on the overall musical style of the compositions.

The western selections were different from what I think one might normally find in other choral contests. There were a few American and South American selections but there were very few from other countries and regions. There were also very few Renaissance, Baroque or Classical selections. The three selections I heard from these three time periods were "For Unto Us A Child Is Born", "Fair Phyllis I Saw Sitting All Alone" by John Farmer, and the "Lacrimosa" from the Mozart Requiem. There were also only three or four selections from the 19th century and Brückner's "Ave Verum" was performed by two different choirs. When I talked to some of the choir directors, after the contest, they indicated that the Brückner was considered a standard of their repertoire but no reason was given. I know that many western conductors also consider Brückner a standard, but would likely include many other 19th century composers works. Eric Whitacre's "Cloudburst" and "Lux Arumque" were two of the American selections I heard in addition to an arrangement of "I Could Have Danced All Night" from "My Fair Lady" (with choralography).

My overall opinion of the literature sung is that there appears to be some lack of diversity both in Chinese

*Reflections on Chinese Choral Music (continued from page 8)*

choral selections as well as western choral music. The lack of diversity in Chinese music seems to be a result of a shorter historical period of Chinese choral composition and therefore a dearth of choices. The lack of diversity in western choral music selections seems to be a result of lack of exposure to the literature. In the sheet music stores that I visited, there were very few options and it is currently difficult for Chinese choir directors to obtain literature through online resources. As the Chinese society becomes more globally oriented, I believe this will change quickly. Choral directors like Tian Xiao Bao are now traveling to western countries more frequently and through that process exposing themselves and their choirs to many more pieces. They in turn are exposing other Chinese choirs and directors to these western pieces through contests and other performance.

Submitted by  
Jon Hurty  
Augustana College  
District 8 Representative



**Make plans now to join your colleagues from ACDA Central  
Division in Fort Wayne, IN**

**Wednesday, March 7th—Saturday, March 10th**

## ***Vocal Jazz Spotlight - Why Vocal Jazz?***

Jazz is an incredible genre of music that challenges our students to grow as musicians. Teaching jazz harmony and rhythm helps develop students' aural and sight reading skill sets. Teaching improvisation allows the instructor an opportunity to teach their students about the freedom of having their own voice.

Teaching students to independently hold harmonies is not only challenging and fun, but incredibly rewarding for both you and your students. The harmonies found in vocal jazz are not typical. They present many more colors to chordal extensions and often include several dissonant clashes within multiple voices. Teaching the difference between the natural and flat seven, the beauty of the nine, or the tension of the sharp eleven can be even more exciting. Not having the basses sing their expected "do" or "sol" may be really hard for them at first, but soon they will find that challenge really fun! You and your students will learn to love these chords! Thinking back to when I first started my Vocal Jazz program, I remember how my students would fight every tension chord and try to resolve it. Ten years later, they try to add as many tension notes as possible in EVERY song we sing!

Teaching our students about these harmonies really helps them develop their aural skills. It's amazing how fast your students will be able to hear chromatic intervals found within your normal choral pieces. It's also amazing how much their sight reading skills improve from being taught to hear these kinds of intervals.

Jazz rhythm is another great teaching tool. Basic syncopations, such as dotted quarter or dotted eighth notes, can be difficult and really fun and rewarding once the students get it! Syncopations found in jazz music have the additional challenge of including the swing element. Learning this skill aids students in both traditional and nontraditional rhythm reading.

Perhaps the most important reason to teach vocal jazz is the opportunity for improvisation. This skill set is not only necessary in jazz music, but it is a basic skill for everyday life. Almost all of our daily conversations are improvised. We don't script what we say to our friends and family! We talk about our day, share stories and respond to what we hear. THAT IS WHAT WE DO WHEN WE SCAT! We are given a melody and story from the song that we are singing. This acts as our topic. When we improvise, we react to the topic by adding our own colors and opinions on that topic. Then sometimes, we even share that topic or story with another person, and elaborate on what we've heard. Yes, improvisation can be scary, but it is REALLY fun! I watch kids and adults go from hiding under the piano when it's their turn to react to the topic, to begging for a chance to tell me what they want to say about that topic! Watching people learn to have the freedom to say what they want to say, or tell you something in their own way is magical.

If you haven't experimented with vocal jazz, or it's been a while, I highly suggest that you add it to your repertoire! Not only will your students be excited to try something new, their aural and sight singings skills will improve. They will also learn to love the beauty of these new harmonies and rhythms and the freedom that improvisation allows.

Submitted by

Stacy Cunningham  
Vocal Jazz Chair

## ***Spotlight on Chicago Public Schools - Exploring Chicago***

Visiting Chicago is a favorite pastime of many. Countless choir directors bring their choirs to Chicago to perform in the historic churches and inspiring concert halls. These trips to Chicago provide wonderful memories for the visiting ensembles. Others, however, do not simply visit Chicago; they experience the glorious skyline up-close every day as teachers in the Chicago Public Schools. Being a choral director in Chicago has many benefits and rewards that receive little serious consideration by the media. This article seeks to widen that lens and offers insight into the Chicago Public Schools and choral directing opportunities, therein.

The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is the third largest school district in the country. More than 400,000 students are enrolled in the 650 public schools throughout the city. This massive district has incredible diversity concerning race, socioeconomic status, and achievement. While CPS does control some of the worst performing schools in the state of Illinois, it also includes some of the best schools in state - schools in which 99% of the student body meets or exceeds state standards. This outpaces districts with the some of the best reputations. This immense variation demonstrates that each school in Chicago has its own unique climate and culture. This article hopes to shed light on the rewarding choral positions present in the Chicago Public Schools. Here is an example of the history and turnaround in one CPS building.

James Weldon Johnson Elementary was one of those schools on the bottom of the list in 2009. Many of the negative stories told in the media regarding fistfights, police intervention, and low testing results were true of this school. As a result, CPS “closed” the school that June, and reopened it the following Fall with many changes. The school had a new administration and faculty, and the building was remodeled. The new principal, Alice Henry, has a strong love of music. She created an environment for strong general music and choral programs to take root. As a result, the James Weldon Johnson School, “Wildcat Singers” have impressed audiences at local concerts and festivals with their precision and choral sound. This successful choral program was a result of the “turnaround” process that took place under the supervision of the non-profit organization called Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL).

AUSL’s mission is to “improve student achievement in Chicago’s high-poverty, chronically failing schools through its disciplined transformation process, built on a foundation of specially trained AUSL teachers.” AUSL oversees 14 CPS elementary schools and 5 CPS high schools. Most of these schools experienced the same “turnaround” transformation as Johnson Elementary. This turnaround process also appears to be the plan of the newly inaugurated mayor, Rahm Emanuel. Mayor Emanuel has pledged to continue this tradition to improve the failing schools in CPS. This process does place a hardship on the displaced teachers, but the overwhelming majority will find other positions in CPS, if they desire. However, this turnaround process is opening many opportunities for music educators in the Chicago Public Schools. AUSL supports the arts, especially choral music.

Opening a new school opens amazing opportunities to build a choral program from the ground up, while having the support of other educators and a network of similar schools. These choral directors will have the opportunity to uncover hidden talents and refine raw talents of students who have a deep passion for music, without some of the unnecessary pressures present at other locations. Music is a part of many of these student’s everyday lives. Many sing at home, social gatherings, or church. This diversity enriches the choirs with more authentic performances.

At Johnson Elementary, there is an outstanding musician who, as a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student, provided better piano accompaniment than musicians twice his age. If it weren’t for his school being turned around two years ago, he would have remained an unknown talent who was regularly ridiculed, or worse.

*Spotlight on Chicago Public Schools—Exploring Chicago ( continued from page 11)*

Instead, he has the esteem of his classmates and is getting the formal training that he was previously lacking. His school is a safe, respectful learning environment. One piece of evidence for this is that 20% more of its students meet or exceeded the Illinois State Standards in 2011 than did in 2009.

The students in the Chicago Public Schools have the talent to be molded into great singers. Many schools already have great choral directors and are creating breathtaking choral music. Many other schools are waiting for outstanding choral educators to join the ranks of Chicago Public Schools Teachers. Many have found that the challenges are minuscule compared to the rewards of changing the lives of these children.

Submitted by  
Christopher J. Cvengros  
James Weldon Johnson Elementary  
Chicago, IL

***It was great to see so many at ReTreat 2011. We look forward to seeing you next year.  
Be sure to check out more pictures on the IL-ACDA facebook page.  
The photo below is from the performance by Opus 24.***

**[Click here to see a performance of I am in Need of Music by David Bruner from the ReTreat Concert.](#)**



## ***From the editor***

The beginning of the school year always brings a mix of excitement and anxiety. After 12 years of teaching, there is still so much to learn. The constant pursuit of better methods and refining my craft leave me looking for new sources of inspiration and new ideas from everything from repertoire to warm-up methods and sight-reading materials. As a new teacher, I can remember the feeling of being utterly overwhelmed by the task of teaching and assessing so many students who represented such a vast array of musical backgrounds. I have been blessed to develop many good friends and mentors in the profession over the years and have learned to rely on them for fresh ideas and inspiration. Sometimes there is still a need for ideas from outside my regular circle of influence and in this age of digital media, there are many available resources.

While many in the teaching profession have been dissuaded from using social media tools such as Facebook, there are many valuable resources for choral directors through this networking site. ACDA and IL-ACDA both have Facebook pages for sharing ideas and communicating information about conferences and ReTreat. The recent addition of the group, I'm a choral director on Facebook has been a great source for teachers from around the country to network and share ideas. If you haven't joined this group yet, I would highly recommend you check it out. The ability to share ideas and resources with others from around the country is available at the click of a button.

The ACDA national website and IL-ACDA websites have great resources for sharing repertoire ideas, particularly since the merger of ACDA with Choralnet. It is my hope that this publication will serve as a resource for directors to contact each other and share ideas. It has been my experience that most directors are more than happy to share their experiences and ideas with others who ask. Perhaps you might read an article in this issue and contact the author for further information. This might be the beginning of an exchange that leads to further knowledge and friendship. That is what makes this organization great in my mind and why I continue to go to conferences and ReTreats, year after year. I hope that many of you will take the time to attend our upcoming Central Division Conference in Fort Wayne, IN. It is yet another opportunity to reach out and gain new ideas and perspective as you continue to seek to better yourself as a musician, educator, or conductor. It is my hope that the coming year will be a great year of growth and success in whatever field you work. As always, I encourage and value your feedback. If there is any way that this publication can be of greater value to you, please feel free to share those ideas with me.

Best regards,

Andy Jeffrey  
Podium Editor  
andrew\_jeffrey@glenbard.org

*The Conductor's Podium* is the official publication of the Illinois chapter of the American Choral Directors Association. It is published three times a year, using the following deadlines.

Fall issue: Copy deadline August 15  
Winter Issue: Copy deadline December 15  
Spring issue: Copy deadline March 15

Send all written materials to Andy Jeffrey at [andrew\\_jeffrey@glenbard.org](mailto:andrew_jeffrey@glenbard.org)

**Advertising rates Size**

1/8 page (business card) \$40  
1/4 page \$70  
1/2 page \$120  
full page \$200

10% discount for ads placed in three consecutive issues.

Full page: 7.5" wide x 8.5" high  
Half page horizontal: 7.5" wide x 4" high  
Half page vertical: 3.5" wide x 8.5" high  
1/4 page: 3.5" wide x 4" high

The best format is a one color black (can include grayscale images) high resolution pdf with embedded fonts.