

ANTIPHON



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of the AMERICAN CHORAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

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From the President:



Ted Gibson
AzACDA President
Gilbert Classical
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Dear AzACDA members,

As I come to the end of my term as President of the Arizona Chapter of the American Choral Directors Association (AzACDA), I want to take a moment to reflect on the accomplishments of the past year and express my gratitude to all of you for your support and dedication.

Together, we have continued to promote excellence in choral music throughout our state. We have offered professional development opportunities for choral directors at all levels, sponsored events that showcased the talents of our singers, and provided scholarships to deserving young musicians. I am proud of what we have achieved together and I know that our efforts have had a positive impact on the choral community in Arizona.

It has been an honor to serve as your President and to work with such talented and passionate individuals. I have been inspired by your commitment to choral music and your willingness to share your talents and expertise with others. I am grateful for the trust you placed in me and for the opportunity to serve our organization in this capacity.

As I pass the torch to the incoming President, Katie Gerrich, I am confident that AzACDA will continue to thrive and grow. I know that our organization is in good hands and that the new leadership team will build on our successes and take us to new heights. Thank you again for the privilege of serving as your President. It has been a truly rewarding experience, and I will cherish the memories and friendships that I have made during my time in this role. ☰

Sincerely,
Ted Gibson



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Keep informed about
AzACDA news and events by
signing up for our [email list](#).

FROM THE EDITOR



W. Aaron Rice
AzACDA Antiphon
Editor
Director of Music
Ministries - First
Presbyterian Church of
Granada Hills
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Hello Arizona Choristers and Conductors!

I am thrilled to bring you the Spring Edition of *Antiphon*, which is filled to the brim with helpful classroom and programming tips that we hope you will find useful as you are preparing for your next cycle.

Foodies will be delighted to read Dr. Jonathan Talberg's insightful comparison of programming and pizza preparation. If you like the way he thinks, be sure to attend our Summer Conference! Dr. Talberg is this year's Conference Headliner and will be directing our new All-State Collegiate Choir experience.

Speaking of conference choir experiences, our Membership Chair Cami Clausen and Past President Aimee Stewart have both offered a reflection on similar experiences. Aimee shares her own experience singing in a conference choir, and Cami shares how great it has been to send her students on to National Honor Choir experiences. Take a look at what they have to say, and follow their lead! As directors, we don't always have many opportunities to sing with our peers the way we used to. And sending students to an Honor Choir experience benefits both the students and our classroom! As these two report, it's worth every second.

Were you a heavy metal fan before your choral days? Dane Carten offers a unique perspective on vocal production that tells us how healthy singing techniques can inform our production of both Heavy Metal and "extreme" vocal techniques for modern repertoire. Expand your technique with Dane and follow up with some of his source material that's cited at the end of that interesting read.

Katherine Rosenfeld shares an interrogatory method of instruction that she uses in her middle school choir to encourage critical thinking and a sense of engagement with the rehearsal process. There are nuggets of wisdom and cute responses from her kids that you're sure to enjoy.

Check out our Repertoire Reviews in this issue, which include pieces for Middle School and Junior High reviewed by Jennifer Pearce, works for Community Chorus reviewed by Matthew Frable, and music for Church Choir featuring Filipino composers reviewed by Sinamar Respicio. There are tons of excellent options offered that we hope you'll choose to sing!

Overall, this issue is jam-packed with reflections and information. We hope that you can use some of what you find here in your own rehearsal space, and we hope that some of the personal reflections will inspire you to be a part of our Summer Conference. Bring yourself, bring your students, bring a friend! We are excited about the lineup, which you can find just after Dr. Talberg's message, and we hope that you are, too.

Thank you for being a part of AzACDA, and we look forward to seeing you at this year's Summer Conference - July 28th through 30th at the Mesa Community College Performing Arts Center. 🎵

Long days and pleasant nights,

W. Aaron Rice
AzACDA Antiphon - Editor
UArizona Choral Conducting DMA, ABD
First Presbyterian Church of Granada Hills - Director of Music Ministries

Pizza, Repertoire, and AzACDA



Jonathan Talberg, DMA
Frank Pooler Professor of Choral Music
and Director of Choral Activities
California State University Long Beach

During ACDA's Western Conference in 2022, I had the chance to sit down with your editor, W. Aaron Rice, for dinner at one of my favorite Italian restaurants in Long Beach. We got to talking about how much I love cooking and how I use cooking analogies for pretty much every aspect of the choral art.

I was blessed that my mom taught me to cook and to sing (and to sing *while* cooking!) at a very early age. I've come to believe that there's a lot of cross over between the two. Mom's belief that, "cooking is about three things—a recipe, your technique, and the best quality ingredients you can afford," aligns perfectly with what I believe sums up choosing the repertoire for a great choral concert, "a fantastic theme, carefully thought-out sets, and the right pieces for each choir."

As music directors, we are constantly planning concerts in a similar way that executive chefs plan their menus. And while I don't have time in this article to do a comparison between a Michelin starred restaurant's 13 course menu and a choral concert, I can tell you how to compare planning a concert's repertoire to making a magnificently executed pizza.

I'm not snobby about pizza. I like gourmet pizza cooked in a woodfired oven, but I'm thrilled to eat Pizza-Hut on choir tours. I'll gladly wait 45 minutes for the perfect deep dish, but when my godson (who is the best amateur pizza chef I know) brings over his homemade 48-hour dough, it's a joy to crank the oven as high as it

will go and bake a Margherita in 7 minutes flat.

Life's about the decisions we make, and choral directors and chefs have LOTS of decisions to make, so I'm going to mix my metaphors here, like I mix my mozzarella, burrata, and Parmigiano-Reggiano for my favorite pie...

First, you choose your crust, as it's the base of everything! Do you want it flat and airy, like a Neapolitan pizza, medium and chewy like the Dominoes of your youth, or thick and pastry crusted like in a real Chicago style pie? The wrong crust cannot support your sauces and cheeses; we need to choose carefully and use all our resources to be sure that the underpinnings are strong.

Your concert theme is like great pizza crust; it undergirds your repertoire. The theme of your programming is the part that allows people to understand your artistic choices. It supports the composer's musical intent and gives your musicians the right amount of structure to make it through a concert.

Most of us have made the mistake of programming a bunch of pieces we like, but that don't really go together in any logical way. The mistake is not having structure. Choose a theme and stick to it.

What kind of sauce do you like on your pizza? Traditional red sauce? Pesto? Alfredo? Just a little garlic and extra virgin olive oil? They're all wonderful, and they're ultimately going to be what sets off the flavors of your toppings. **In**

a choral concert, the ‘sauce’ is the feeling that you hope to take from your musician’s hearts and voices to your audience. Sometimes, I like to make pizza with TWO sauces. Maybe half is serious (like a deep, dark, homemade red sauce) and half is fresh and aromatic (like a good pesto). A heavy first half and a lighter second. Yes, please!

In my metaphor, pizza toppings represent the individual pieces—or, maybe, the individual sections (or choirs) in the program. A tomato sauce has very little fat in it, so you need some good cheese, maybe some slices of prosciutto, Spanish chorizo, or pepperoni. I love black olives and sausage with a red sauce. But I also like fresh basil, mozzarella di buffalo, and just a little crushed red pepper. And, I like to mix it up! Yesterday, I went to a new cheese and meat shop in Long Beach. At the suggestion of the cashier, I tried a hard cheese that she said ‘melts into intensely flavorful globs of deliciousness’ instead of my usual mozzarella. We also bought a capicola that I’d never tried. It was fantastic! It had notes of smoked paprika and fresh bell pepper at the same time, and it was absolutely perfect with the thin crust pizzas we made.

I could have stayed with my tried-and-true cheeses and toppings—the things I know. But I ventured out of my comfort zone and asked someone for advice. This is what our ACDA colleagues are especially good for. Instead of programming only music that we know, we can ask for suggestions of pieces that have worked for them in their programs. My friends have been my greatest teachers, because they’ve recommended repertoire that has allowed me to become the teacher I want to be.

Social media is also a great tool to help us program our concerts, but we’ve got to be careful. It is way more helpful to post, “I’m looking for a four minute, up-tempo SSA piece in English that has a theme of empowerment” than it is to say, “favorite SSA pieces, go!” One will probably provide you the perfect topping for your already deliciously sauced dough and the other might just be random flavors that don’t really make sense with the rest of the dish.

Bon Appetit and happy programming! I’m excited to be with you in the summer! 🍷

Jonathan





A Place For You

Summer Conference June 28th - 30th, MCC

AzACDA Summer Conference

The AzACDA Summer Conference is coming up soon, and it offers three days packed with opportunities to connect with your fellow Arizona choral enthusiasts and educators over everybody's favorite class: choir!

Wednesday, June 28th features an open rehearsal to watch the illustrious Dr. Jonathan Talberg shape the sounds of our first ever Arizona Collegiate Honor Choir. We are excited to see if we pick up a few rehearsal techniques to add to our toolkit, and we hope you are, too.

Each day of the conference offers multiple chances to hear about some tried and true repertoire in varied styles and for several experience levels. Come see if some of it strikes your fancy - our presenters love them! Check out the many presentations on topics meant to help YOU develop your program and get the best possible sound. Whether it's branding, pedagogy, engagement, or handbells, there's bound to be something going on that you will enjoy and benefit from. And be sure to stick around late for the return of DBacks Night and Beer Choir - It's going to be a blast! 🍻





A Place For You



Wednesday, June 28th
Mesa Community College

8:00 - 8:45	Conference opening	
9:00 - 10:00	Az Collegiate Honor Choir Open Rehearsal	Keeping it Personal
	Social Media: Building a Brand	
10:15 - 11:15	Functional Vocal Pedagogy	Programming: Elementary/Youth
11:30 - 1:00	Concert	
1:00 - 2:30	Lunch	
2:30 - 3:30	The Male Changing Voice	Programming: Community/College
3:45 - 4:45	Church Music Panel	Deep Dive: Vocal Jazz/Contemporary
5:30 - 9:00	DBacks Night	



A Place For You



Thursday, June 29th
Mesa Community College

8:30 - 9:30	Every Rehearsal a Voice Lesson Plenary Session	
9:45 - 10:45	The Harmonic Lattice	Programming: Show Choir
11:00 - 12:00	Brain Break Bonanza!	Deep Dive: TTB
12:00 - 1:30	Lunch	Choral Legends Lunch for Students
		Garrett Breeze Roundtable
1:30 - 2:30	Handbells 101	Programming: Junior High
2:45 - 3:45	Let's Talk About Choral Inclusivity Plenary Session	
4:00 - 5:00	Student Composition and Arrangement: Do it!	Programming: High School
6:00 - 9:00	Beer Choir	



A Place For You



Friday, June 30th
Mesa Community College

8:45 - 9:30	Program Advocacy	Programming: Cantaremos
9:45 - 10:45	Active Vocal Technique for Young Singers	Deep Dive: SSA
11:00 - 12:00	Come On and Commission!	Deep Dive: Church
12:15	Conference Closing	

Register by June 9th:
 for ACDA members - \$60
 for non-ACDA members - \$110

Register after June 9th:
 for ACDA members - \$75
 for non-ACDA members - \$125

students - see more information about our Collegiate All-State Choir. Register for both the choir and conference for only \$40!

Save \$50 by being an ACDA member!

ACDA National Honor Choirs

How They Can Help You and Your Program



Cami Clausen
AzACDA Membership Chair
Casteel High School

For secondary choir directors, it is no secret that traveling with your group is a highlight of every student's year and can be a huge recruiting tool for your program. Whether you go to Anaheim or New York City, tours bring team building and group bonding to a new level. It seems that after a choral experience together that lasts more than one rehearsal, our students learn to love music and each other far better.

Let's back up to Spring of 1990 when as a 7th grader, I was selected to perform in the Fresno Western Region honor choir. I don't remember much, but I remember it solidified a desire for me to be involved with choir my entire life. In 1992, I had the honor of singing in Honolulu for ACDA. I met great friends there with whom I kept in touch for years (through snail mail)! Again, my love of choir grew and I knew I would be back with my own choir students someday.

A few years ago, I heard about the ACDA western region holding auditions for honor choirs for the conference. I remembered the honor choirs of my youth and, after auditions, I had six that were selected. They came from all different backgrounds, as different as students could be and although they came from the same high school choral program, they weren't close. And yet, after that trip, they were best friends! They made such lasting memories that can never be taken from them. To this day, those kids keep in touch. That conference in Salt Lake City in March of 2020 would prove to be the last choral experience some of my students ever got. We all know what occurred the next week: global shut down! My seniors who would not go on to sing in college still reminisce about that

wonderful conference and how singing in the Tabernacle with others from neighboring states was life changing. They still talk about getting to see the premier of Eric Whitacre's Sacred Veil and how they were wiping tears after that beautiful experience.

You may be thinking, this is all hunky-dory, but how does this help a choral program!? After that experience, other students in my choir program and even some not involved yet, started wondering how they could participate next time! Word of this amazing select group of singers attending a national conference got around and people wanted in! Unfortunately, Covid 19 shut down the traditional conference for a few years, but in 2023 it was back!

This past February, eight of my students made the national honor choirs in Cincinnati. Again, students that were not close previously, are now joined together with memories and music. Since I teach at a 7-12 school, I had students make the JH choir, the HS SSAA choir, and the HS Mixed choir.

As we prepared the music together and traveled together, these students became extremely close. Upon our return, students asked me, "when and where is the next national honor choir and how can I audition?"

Having students in the honor choirs does not mean you have to miss your favorite conference sessions! You can bring other chaperones, elect to have an ACDA chaperone assigned to them, or chaperone them yourself. Personally, I enjoyed the dinner and evening time with my students, creating new inside jokes and making memories. Students are in rehearsal most of the time sessions occur, generally from 9-5. I feel like every

session I wanted to attend, I got to attend. Sometimes, I would just watch honor choir rehearsals, soaking in rehearsal tricks from the industry's best. Watching my students learn from such incredible choral directors and composers was inspiring!

As part of the honor choir experience, students got to attend the exhibits. One of my students who plans to pursue a degree in choral education was so excited to meet businesses we've worked with and to get free sheet music!

How is my program better because of my students' participation in ACDA honor choirs? Their musicianship improves because of the high level of repertoire chosen. They get to work with icons in the field! Andream Ramsey, Pearl Shanghuan, Eugene Rogers?! This makes them a

better student in your own choir. They bring back potential repertoire for your program. Some of them already know it, right!? They learn about humanity as they work together with others from places different from their own. They grow together as teammates. They become better leaders in class. They get to experience something unique that is found nowhere else.

As membership chair, I was intrigued to find out that only four AZ directors submitted students for audition to the national choir. For being such an amazing state with incredible talent, it is curious that more don't audition. I encourage you to consider having students audition for the conference honor choirs. You will find that as great as the conference is, your favorite memories just may include watching your own students experience it! 🎵



ACDA Salt Lake City 2020



ACDA Cincinnati 2023

Deep Dive

A Place for You

June 28th - 30th, MCC

Get into the mind of some of our great directors on why they picked a piece, how they would teach it, and more!

- Vocal Jazz/Contemporary
- TTB
- SSA
- Church

My Gospel Choir Experience and why YOU should sign up for the next opportunity!



Aimee Stewart
WACDA Community
and Children R&R Chair

As I was preparing my Chandler Children's Choir singers for the WACDA Long Beach Conference Honor Choir auditions back in 2021, I noticed some small print on the descriptions of the different choirs. There was the usual Junior High Choir and a High School SSAA Choir, but then I saw something new: A Gospel Choir for SATB singers. Upon further inspection, I noticed that it said, "ACDA members may also audition for this choir."

It was Fall 2021, and to be honest with you, I was feeling majorly burned out. I had just completed my service as president of AzACDA, almost entirely during covid, and was trying to keep my small high school choir and my large children's choir afloat through it all. It had been rocky, but I don't need to tell you that. It was rocky for all of us. I'd planned two conferences during covid, and for some reason, the thought of attending a conference overwhelmed me. So at the very last minute, I recorded my Gospel Choir audition and submitted it.

When the results came in, and my daughter Ivy and I were both placed in the Gospel Choir, I was elated! We looked at our music and, compared to the SSAA music, thought how simple it looked. I wondered what we would be doing for all those rehearsal hours, but was grateful to have a place to hide out during the conference.

Conference arrived. We met for the first time and I learned how to pronounce Rosephanye Powell's name. I scanned the diverse group of singers and saw very few other adults. Then we began. Dr. Powell was superbly talented yet relatable, gentle yet strong, patient yet demanding with us - a hodgepodge of singers who for the most part had never sung in a gospel choir before. She had her work cut out for her.

I grew up learning to play the violin, piano, and sight singing in my church and school choirs. We never deviated from what was written. We sang from the score and the score was the gospel. We aspired to tall vowels, solfege, and bel canto singing, which at this point in my life, I'm really good at! But now, sitting in this ACDA Gospel Choir, the real question was how teachable was I? How malleable was my voice? How open was I to learning a new way to sing, to read, and to interpret a new style of music? I decided to lean in and let the master work her magic.

The thing about a gospel choir is that its very definition tells you this is going to be a religious endeavor. I loved that Dr. Powell did not shy away from that! She shared a sincere and reverent respect for the origins of gospel music. Her openness inspired me. Then she taught us more technique than I've ever experienced in a choir setting, molding us from a

traditional choral sound to a gospel sound. She taught us how to bend the pitch and the vowels to emphasize the message of the music. It took time, repetition, and sometimes her calling out individual voices and being perfectly blunt with us. She kept us on our toes for sure! We learned where to find that big gospel voice within ourselves, and how to sing with technique that wouldn't tire our voice. If you see one of us put two fingers and try to touch the back of our throats, we're not trying to gag ourselves, we're reminding ourselves how to open up to create that bigger gospel sound.

I love that gospel music isn't in a rush. I am usually a very efficient conductor - always trying to get the most out of every minute of my rehearsals. But I learned that sitting in the music, sitting in the moment, almost getting into a trance with repetition or really going deep into the music takes time. The choir will go along with you; the audience will go along with you, if you, as a director, go there and settle in.

But above all this, the most revolutionary aspect of this experience was beyond the gospel message and beyond the technique. It was the pure musical process and experience. We are always teaching our students that the score is not the music and that we have to lift the notes off the pages to create the music. Nowhere has that ever been better demonstrated to me than during Rosephanye Powell's Gospel Choir. Watching how she used the score as a starting point, for which she then was a director in the full sense of the word - leading the (truly incredible) band and a large ensemble, using conducting gestures as symbols for what was next, and deciding what we would do in the moment of the performance was exhilarating and liberating. She dissected the score, moved pieces of it around; we played with it in different ideas and scenarios. My decades of traditional performing had a hard time letting go of the fact that we never started and ended the piece in the same way, or were told how we would be performing it. I kept thinking, surely, at the dress rehearsal, sound check, or maybe backstage, she will tell us exactly how we are going to perform for an audience full of choral experts? But no, Dr. Powell, in total confidence and control, let the music guide her, and trusted that we would follow. Which of course, we did, to wild success.

When it was required, of course we could sing what was written, as we did for the premier of the new commissioned piece "Lift Your Voice and Sing" by Raymond Wise. But then, she took the 36 measures of

"The Storm is Passing Over" and created a six minute experience for our audience. She taught us and showed us: "Don't sing AT the music, MAKE the music."

You won't be surprised to hear that I came away from the 2022 Long Beach Conference feeling inspired, rejuvenated, and ready to go back and tackle my jobs again - exactly the way you should feel after attending an ACDA conference. But I did it without attending a single class or interest session. Sometimes you learn more by doing. An interest session on gospel choirs could never have given me that experience I had.

I was thrilled when Herbert Washington, my good friend and Artistic Director of the Phoenix Boys Choir, brought Maria Ellis to Phoenix to create a gospel choir experience for youth choirs and music educators, of which my choirs and I whole-heartedly participated.

There is so much value in connecting to the most musical parts of our choral making experience, and gospel choir was the perfect vehicle for me to do that. The next time you have the opportunity to sing or be involved with a gospel choir, take it! You won't regret it, and it might remind you, too, of why you love this field. 🎵



Extreme vocalization: Mixing Death Metal and Bel Canto techniques for healthy, non-idiomatic phonation



Dane Carten

Director of the Neoteric Chamber Choir

Assistant Director of the Helios Ensemble

Masters Student in Choral Conducting U of A

Well before my time as a choral conductor and educator were long nights spent in clubs of the Detroit Metro era screaming edgy lyrics into a microphone, while 4 of my friends played aggressive metal behind me. *Corrupt Within* eventually had some minor tours and studio recordings, and my time as a metal front man came to an end sometime around 2013. There are a great number of techniques and skills I learned from this time and, when surveying the changing landscape of choral music, have noticed some overlap in those produced sounds and the wonderful influx of non-idiomatic sounds from contemporary choral composers; Growling, shouting, yelping, nasal tones, and other “extreme” forms of vocal production outside of the Bel Canto tradition are growing in popularity within the canon. It’s likely that many of our students (and many of us as well) have received a Bel Canto-adjacent vocal training but are not as well versed in *healthily* creating extra-musical effects. This article aims to strike a balance between “traditional” vocal pedagogy that we and our students might be familiar with and the wild world of Metal vocal pedagogy in hopes to provide a nuanced approach to healthily creating extra-musical and “extreme” vocal effects.

The term “extreme” vocal production will be used and

defined as such: “any type of phonation which requires full or nearly full abduction coupled with incredible levels of loudness which sits outside of the realm of Bel Canto-style singing. The following techniques/concepts can fall into this category: shouting, screaming, yelping, screeching, hooting, or otherwise.” This is in no way a perfect definition, nor are the examples provided an exhaustive list, but it will serve to give a deeper sense into the ideas moving forward.

Confidence, and achievement of a sense of liminality, are paramount in the exploration of these vocal effects. Singing is cerebral – our hearts and minds are always at the core of expression, but with extreme phonation this concept is amplified. It is important to guide your singers into the expression of the piece and help them achieve this mindset. Why has the composer used these sounds? Are they culturally aligned sounds and, if so, what do they mean and why has the composer arranged them in such a way? What about the narrative, story, or otherwise meaning of the piece is heightened by these extreme phonations? Exploring new and exciting extra-musical sounds with your choir can be a rewarding and emotional process, but you must take great care in providing a safe space for vocal experimentation as they

are learning and creating (at first) what can feel like awkward sounds. Lack of confidence can contribute to a “locking up” and holding tension in the body, which can translate into the glottis and cause damage to our singer’s voices.

Melissa Cross’ *The Zen of Screaming*, a seminal guide to metal vocal production, has a great many resources including a laryngoscope of a metal vocalist as they create a number of different vocalizations from screams and growls to throat singing and random cartoon voices. When observing the more shouting-like sounds, one can notice a relaxation of the vocal folds, and that they are closer in function to how they look when once is simply exhaling. This is an important thing to consider when working with things like shouting in choral music. I believe most of us know how to shout but not how to do it *healthily* and in a way that is conducive to loudness, rather than antagonistic. A lowered larynx and relaxed throat are a good place to start, like Bel Canto’s concept of *Gola Aperta*. I find that for shouting, singers should “imagine” a pitch, and one that is roughly approximate to their upper registration. You can practice using pure “oo” vowels and sirens to feel out that area if they aren’t aware of it already, and practice chanting whichever their yelled line is on. Once that easy resonance is found, you can ratchet up the intensity and have your singers shout-chant near the pitch before slowly moving the pure tones out and having them simply shout. I am currently rehearsing Ethan Sperry’s arrangement of *Desh* (which contains a lot of shouting) with my contemporary ensemble The *Neoteric Chamber Choir*. This approach has helped my singers shout with resonance and without tension in their throats so they can continue to sing and rehearse without becoming vocally exhausted.

Breath connection lies at the heart of both Bel Canto and Death Metal vocals. Unsupported metal screaming sounds strained and raspy (derogatory), while unsupported Bel Canto singing can cause pitch issues and strain in the upper registers. This likely comes as little surprise to us, but these extreme vocal productions require a lot of energy and as such, the breath to match. In general, Ideal singing/screaming in these camps of thought requires a balance of pressure in the glottis as it relates to loudness and pitch at the very least. When yelling or yelping, the energy demand is high and a lack of solid breath connection can lead to the arytenoids doing the “heavy lifting,” causing vocal fatigue and potential injury in the long run. If you’ve

ever yelled all night at a loud concert, you’ve probably felt this form of fatigue the next morning! Focusing on solid breath connection as it relates to your repertoire is good pedagogical practice, so if you are rehearsing music that calls for this type of phonation you might wish to extrapolate etudes in warmups for your choir to work on. To use *Desh* as another example, we have also worked on not “locking up” in the more rhythmic shouting sections. I have extracted the rhythm and worked on a simple “huh” to help the singers remind themselves to engage their intercostals and abdominal region overall, and to relax their throats (to go back to my previous point).

When working through extra-musical sounds perhaps outside of the western canon, or western composers who emulate it, it can be important to break down the sound in to its constituent parts and contemplate what pedagogical tools are necessary to support a healthful sound. For example, Katarina Gimon’s *Fire* from *Elements* utilizes siren-like glissandi, shouts, and “yips, shouts, ominous laughs, etc...” A mindful approach might be working on a few sounds individually through vocalizes created from some of the advice mentioned previously. For example, you may have your singers siren through their range, then pick a note in the “head registration” for them to land on with a pure [u] vowel. Once established, you may have them try to siren up and way above their range and “throw the sound away” to achieve a stratosphere-breaking siren for her written glissandi. For an “ominous laugh” a False Fold exercise can be a great way to get harsh, sinister sound – you could have them begin with diaphragmatic exercises on major triads to get the breath aligned. False Fold phonation is created by diverting subglottal pressure into the false folds and is often how rock singers and metal screamers get a distorted sound without harming their voices. To experience this, you can emulate the sound of a creaky door from an [i] to an [ae] vowel. The sensation this creates is a sort of “bubbling” often to the left of the glottis. Once singers are comfortable finding this effect, they can move into other vowels through it and forward-placing ones are typically easier at first. Eventually, you can work into “hah” and the effect this creates is a rather Machiavellian almost witch-like laughter.

Ultimately, you should strive towards guiding your singers healthily and with care to their emotional well-being when approaching these techniques. To reiterate

my first point – it is paramount that there is a prevailing sense of trust between everyone in the room, and that your classroom is a safe learning environment. These extreme phonations require a sense of bravery to explore, and it should be at the core of your pedagogy to give a space for your singers to be brave! In my experience coaching metal singers and teaching more “classical” styles of singing, there is an almost night-and-day difference when a singer is able to come of their proverbial shell and sing with confidence and bravado. Just like we shouldn’t fear high or low notes when first learning to navigate extreme parts of our ranges, we must not fear the swath of extra-musical effects and extreme phonations that contemporary choral composers have been so apt to use. 🎵

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Smart Singers: Using Critical Thinking Questions to Deepen Understanding and Ownership in the Choral Classroom



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Edited by Monica Anthony, Dean of Arts, Arizona School for the Arts

The following is a conversation took place in my 4th period class, Cantabile - a goofy, energetic, and sharp group of 5th through 7th grade treble singers at Arizona School for the Arts.

“Which do you think is harder: singing in unison or singing in parts?” Raise your hand for unison...raise your hand for parts. Z, you raised your hand for unison. **Why?”**

“Well, we all have to do everything the exact same way for unison singing and you can hear anything that goes wrong.”

“Exactly! Z told us that we can hear anything that goes wrong in unison singing. **What sorts of things might she be talking about?”**

“Sliding!”

“Wide vowels!”

“Cutoffs!”

“So how do we accomplish a beautiful unison?”

“Knowing your part and singing the right notes.”

“Yup. That’s step one. So once I know my part, how do I interact with the singers around me to create a beautiful unison sound with them?”

“Listen to their vowels!”

“Don’t sing louder than them. If they’re like *mumble-singing* don’t be like ‘AAHHHHH!’”

This class discussion just before spring break told me a lot about what my students understood about choral singing. Somewhere in the first 3 quarters of the school

year, discussions of matching vowels and dynamics, listening to your neighbor, and other “choralisms” had sunk in. This line of questioning challenged students to apply their knowledge of vocal production, teamwork, their role within a choir, and their understanding of an ideal choral sound to describe the challenges of unison singing. My role shifted from instructor to discussion facilitator. By this point in the year, the students had all the right answers. All I had to do was ask the right questions.

Critical thinking questions help our students analyze the “why” behind the music and move away from rote memorization. Thoughtful lines of questioning help students develop ownership, self-awareness, problem-solving skills, a stronger ear, and an independence in their musicianship. Critical thinking questions can be infused into any part of the rehearsal process, from warm ups to sight reading, to the stage. Here are some of my favorite ways to use them in each step of the process.

Warm ups:

Once students have a baseline understanding of vocal anatomy, healthy vocal production, and choral vowels, I move away from telling students how to adjust their production in warm ups, and instead ask them to describe what they hear and figure out how they might want to adjust.

Questions I regularly ask in my warm ups by second quarter include:

- Which vowel was not “in the house” with the other vowels? What adjustments do you need to make to get that vowel to fit in?
- For ascending leaps of more than a 3rd: how can we set the top note up for success? What adjustments might we need to make? When do we make those adjustments? On the top note? Before we get there? (Before we get there.)
- I’m hearing a lot of breath in the tone. What are some techniques we’ve used to take that extra breath out of our sound? When might we intentionally use a breathier tone? What is the opposite of a breathy tone?
- What is the natural tendency of a descending line? How do we prevent a descending line from going out of tune?
- What part of our vocal tract and our bodies are we focused on in this exercise?
- How does it FEEL when we sing it correctly?

(Note: The point of this question is to prompt students to tune in to and describe physical or mental adjustments made to achieve a sound as opposed to “it felt good” or “it felt easy.”)

- What do YOU hear? How would you modify or adjust our sound to make it more beautiful today?

Sight reading:

An unexpected benefit of using critical thinking questions in sight reading is that the process has become more clinical and less emotional for my students. Instead of throwing their hands up and shutting down when sight reading goes poorly, my students are now in the habit of retracing their steps, pinpointing what went wrong, and figuring out what tools they have to fix it.

Critical thinking questions that have developed problem-solving skills in my students during sight reading include:

Before sight singing

- Does anyone see any tricky rhythms, intervals, or accidentals? Discuss how you are going to approach them with a partner.
- If you were given 30 seconds in an audition to study this, after identifying the time signature and key signature, what would be a smart use of your time?

After sight singing

- What measure should we go back and fix?
- Did we have issues with notes, rhythms, or something else?
- What tools do you have to prevent that issue from happening when we go back and sing it again? (If the issue was tempo, guide students towards a tool that will help them internalize the beat. If the issue was notes, guide students towards using their solfege hand signs etc.)
- What went well? (I use this question to boost morale and develop their ears when the sight reading does not go particularly well. “We started and ended together” “We didn’t lose Do” “We slowed down but we slowed down TOGETHER!” are all popular answers in my classes.)

Repertoire and preparing for performance:

Our school’s top high school choirs recently performed

the 18th movement of Brahms' Liebeslieder Walzer Op. 52 for our Masterworks concert. The score is peppered with staccato articulations throughout. But **why?** A close analysis of the text reveals that the staccatos represent the way foliage trembles when a bird brushes against it ("and so my soul trembles... whenever it thinks of you"). Critical thinking questions can be a key part of helping students understand composer intent, craft their own interpretations, memorize and internalize articulations and dynamics, communicate meaning, identify different compositional techniques (and eventually use them in their own compositions), and connect to the music on a deeper level.

Try these questions to deepen critical thinking skills as you work on repertoire and prepare for performance with your students:

- If this song were a chapter in a book or a scene in a movie, what happened in the previous chapter/scene? What happens in the next one?
- How does this marking in the score relate to the meaning of this line of text/the piece overall?
- What musical decisions did the composer make to communicate the meaning of the piece?
- What is the primary emotion we are trying to portray in this piece (or this section)?
- If we perform this piece with the wrong facial expression and emotion, how might the music be misinterpreted by the audience?
- What is the central message of this piece? Who needs to hear it?
- What background information does the audience need to understand and appreciate this piece?

Additionally, you can try these activities that will deepen critical thinking skills while preparing works for performance:

- Pose the question "Why did the composer include this dynamic marking/ articulation/ tempo marking?" but do NOT allow students to answer yet. Sing the passage once with the marking in the score, and then sing the passage with the OPPOSITE dynamic/articulation/tempo as the one marked. Have them compare and contrast the two performances in partners, small groups, or as a class. Come back together and ask again: why did the composer include that marking? How was the music affected when we took that marking out?

- **Composer and Musicologist:** Choose two pieces that your choir is working on that they know fairly well. Have students partner up and choose one partner to be the composer and one to be the musicologist. Both partners need their scores. The musicologist asks questions about the first piece. Encourage musicologists to ask open-ended or "why" questions about text, dynamics, tempo, modality, range, articulation, harmony. The student role-playing the composer uses their background information on the real composer, the text, the time period, and elements of music to answer the musicologist's questions to the best of their ability. For the second selection, have the students switch roles. At the end of the activity, come back together as a class to compare and contrast "composer" responses.

Just like any skill in the choral rehearsal, we have to practice answering critical thinking questions. At the beginning of the school year, especially with younger singers, the questioning starts small: comparing and contrasting, questions that encourage personal connection and reflection, and fewer questions that require application of music theory and vocal pedagogy knowledge. As the school year progresses, the questions require more synthesis of knowledge, more application of learned skills, and result in more buy-in, more ownership over the artistic process, more beautiful singing! No matter how simple the questions are, students are never "off the hook" for answering. I am diligent about my lines of questioning through the whole school year. If a student is stumped by a question like "how can we make our sight reading better on the next run?," I will break down the question further. "Did we make a mistake in measure 1? Measure 2? Okay. Was it a note or rhythm issue? What tools do you have to fix that issue?" I took a big, open-ended question and broke it into a combination of close-ended and open-ended questions to show to the class how to approach these more in-depth questions. They see the line of reasoning needed to arrive at a logical conclusion. With time and lots of modeling, students will need less and less coaching towards the answer.

The power of critical thinking questions is endless! I have seen the right questions unlock confidence, self-awareness, pride, and ownership in so many singers from junior high through seniors in high school. As you finish out your school year, I encourage you to look for moments in your rehearsals where you can ask your students questions that will highlight and celebrate their growing knowledge of choral music! 🎵

Choral Reviews for Junior High/Middle School



*Written by Jennifer Pearce
Casteel High School*

If You Heard My Voice

Sherry Blevins

2 Part Treble Chorus, with Piano and Optional Cello

This is a beautiful piece that was inspired by Robert Frost's poem, A Minor Bird. It has stepwise motion and unison in the verses and then adds harmony, which makes it accessible for a beginning choir. The sophistication comes from the dynamic contrast and tempo variations. This piece provides the perfect opportunity for discussion about learning to listen to the thoughts and feelings of others, especially when they are different from our own. Celebrating our differences is a message that is so valuable for this age group. This is a great piece for the beginning of the year, as it will help build a positive culture of inclusion within your choir.

I Can Sing, I Can Fly

Richard Ewer

2 Part Treble Chorus with Piano

This piece was commissioned for the Chandler Children's Choir for their 10th Anniversary Season. It begins with a solo or small group asking, "How can I make a difference? How can I help things change? How can I make the world a better place, or ease another's pain." The choir continues to ask similar questions before responding that singing is the way we can touch people's lives. This piece will give your choir experience with changing meter as it alternates from 4/4 to 6/8. It also provides contrasting dynamic sections, before arriving at the powerful ending. This piece would be great as a closer for any concert.

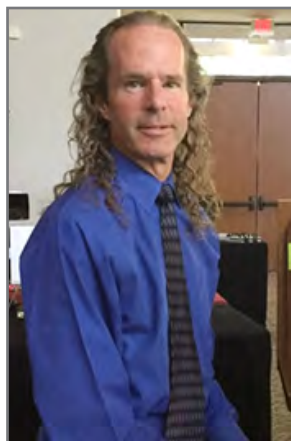
Walk Through Life

Pinkzebra

2 Part with Piano, or Optional Accompaniment Track
(Also available for SSA, SAB, and SATB)

This is an upbeat, pop-style piece that your choir will absolutely love. The 8ths notes are sung in a swing style, combined with the use of syncopation, and the strategic placements of rests, provide a great rhythmic study for your students. The claps and snaps give the audience the opportunity to participate as well. The message of this song is a positive one...every day is a new beginning for you to shine your light and be your best self. This fun and catchy tune is a great piece to help retain students new to choir, or aid in the recruiting of new students to help your program grow.

Choral Reviews for Community Choir Selections



*Written by Matthew Frable
Vocal Jazz R & R Chair
Artistic Director – Fountain Hills
Community Chorus*

Into the West

Words and Music by Fran Walsh, Howard Shore, Annie Lennox
Arranged by Alan Billingsley

SATB with piano

Also available: SAB, 2-Pt, Accompaniment CD

Publisher: Alfred # CHM04056

Published 2004

This selection was performed by Annie Lennox in the motion picture "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King." The verses are basically two-part and build up to the homophonic four-part refrains with beautiful harmonies. At first glance, the arrangement may appear fairly simple, but the dynamics, counting and interpretation will take a little work to do well. There is a flowing accompaniment which provides a nice foundation for the vocal lines.

Singin' in the Rain

Lyrics by Arthur Freed
Music by Nacio Herb Brown
Arranged by Mark Hayes
SATB with piano
Also available: SAB, SSA, 2-Pt, SoundTrax,
SoundPax parts for Chamber Orchestra
Publisher: Alfred # 33179
Published 2010

Originally written in 1929 and made popular by the 1952 movie of the same name, "Singin' in the Rain" is now available in a fresh arrangement by Hayes. The setting begins with a layering of the four parts, entering one part at a time singing a four measure pattern which leads into the familiar melody. There is a lively, upbeat middle section before returning to the shuffle tempo and feel. This is a fun arrangement that your singers will enjoy learning.

When You Believe

Words and Music by Stephen Schwartz
Arranged by John Leavitt
SATB with piano
Also available: SSA, SAB, ShowTrax, Strings and Percussion
Publisher: Hal Leonard # 00334975
Published 2020

This selection was written for the 1998 movie and musical "The Prince of Egypt" and has been beautifully arranged by Leavitt. Although somewhat complex, this arrangement is within the reach of groups of singers willing to put forth a little effort. A few short optional solos are included and there is middle section in Hebrew. The piece includes a range of emotions and tempos with the primary message being: "Who knows what miracles you can achieve – when you believe."

You Don't Own Me

Words and Music by John Madara & Dave White
Arranged by Jay Althouse
SSA with piano
Also available: SoundTrax and SoundPax parts for instrumental ensemble
Publisher: Alfred # 30939
Published 2009

Composed in 1963 and performed by Lesley Gore and then included in the 1996 movie "The First Wives Club," this selection is a great piece for your SSA singers to learn. The voice parts are homophonic and include repeated sections, helping to simplify the learning process. To make this song successful, your singers will need to project the appropriate attitude – but they will most likely have fun doing so.

Choral Reviews for Music in Worship Repertoire



*Written by Sinamar Pascua Respicio
AzACDA World Music
and Culture Chair*

*Music Director, Academy of Tucson
High School*

*Choir Director, Christ Church United
Methodist*

Great is thy Faithfulness

SATB/Congregation/organ/opt brass quintet
Arr. Alejandro Consolacion II
Consolacion's Publication
<https://ajconsolacion.weebly.com/>

A beloved hymn for a lot of churches and sacred celebrations. This wonderful piece is a great addition to your anniversary music and special Sundays. Beautiful solo organ line to start off a very majestic entrance of the choir in unison with the congregation. It's an easy piece to include the congregation in singing while being accompanied by a very heartfelt organ playing. The first verse starts off with just the choir and congregation in unison. The second verse begins with a soprano and alto, and tenors, and basses take over the next line. And all the voices join together at the chorus unaccompanied. Another organ solo before the last verse introduces a descant singing on top while the choir and congregation sing in unison and come to a big AMEN at the end. A great way to end a majestic choir anthem with the congregation. You and your church members will love singing along.

One thing I Ask of the Lord, Psalm 27:1-4

SATB/piano/glass/flute/violin
By Jandel Cabasura
jandzzdel@gmail.com

Newly composed music which was dedicated to Rincon Mountain Presbyterian Church in Tucson, AZ. This piece is an exciting way to introduce the use of glasses in music. From the composer "Psalm 27 is one of my favorite chapters in the book of Psalms. When I composed this song, I thought of the meaningful and challenging experiences in my life that depict each of the verses in the chapter. This psalm has been a great reminder that our faith in God will never be in vain. There can be no life without fear, but faith can call us to live God's will rather than let fear and anxiety shrink our lives." Wonderful meaning to a beautiful piece of music. Starts with

a haunting beginning of the choir with a repeated stress on "The Lord is my light and my salvation," and a sudden change of character when the solo soprano/alto enters and sings a wonderful line of the melody. Followed by the entrance of all the voices, wherein SA sings the melody and TB harmonizes. A lot of interesting parts wherein there are few changes of meter which coincide with the change of texts. This piece is in the soprano's comfortable range and not too high or low for your entire section. A perfect match for a church choir that sings really early in the morning.

Silence my soul

Unison/TB/Unaccompanied/thai ching chap
(percussion instrument)

By Francisco Feliciano

For permission purposes contact jbatra1@yahoo.com

This is a beautiful poem by Rabindranath Tagore set to music by the National Artist for Music Francisco Feliciano. One of his

creations in a compiled church music for all, entitled Asian Institute for Liturgy and Music Collection. It begins with the metallic ring of a Thai ching chap, you can use bells playing G4 if the Thai instrument is at hand. A soft male voice follows in its wake singing a drone with the text "Silence my soul," followed by another, and another. Over the soft haunting chant of "silence my soul," a single soprano sings the melody and soars. A chorus of females then repeats the solo soprano's melody as it represents a leader-chorus type of singing. A good opening for a very intimate service or celebration in churches. 🎵



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