



OCDA *news*

BULLETIN OF THE OHIO CHORAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

FROM THE DESK OF OUR PRESIDENT



Dear Choral Colleagues,

As I write this, I am preparing to receive from Mark Munson, President-Elect of OCDA, over 1000 packets for our upcoming reading sessions at OMEA in Cincinnati. As you read this, those sessions will have concluded, and we will all be well on our way to contest and concert preparations. I would like to thank Mark and his student volunteers at BGSU for compiling the packets,

and all of our Repertoire and Standards chairs for conducting during the reading sessions. This event is one of our most visible in the state, and one that we provide for free as a service to our choral colleagues.

You will find in this newsletter an article from Gayle Walker describing our upcoming annual summer conference at Otterbein College. This is Gayle's last year as conference coordinator. She has been instrumental in making the summer conference at Otterbein such a success. Under her leadership, with the assistance of the OCDA board, the conference attendance has grown significantly over the past five years. The board and membership of OCDA are grateful to Otterbein College and its Music Department for their continued generosity and support.

Lucinda Houck is busy preparing election materials for our new state board. This year, we will elect a new president-elect, a new secretary and regional chairs in the Northeast, Southwest and South-central regions. Lucinda will be finishing her two-year term as past-president in June, whereupon she and her husband will move to North Carolina! Many thanks are due to Lucinda for her guidance and leadership in the OCDA. She has been an integral part of the OCDA board for six years, and the State of Ohio is the worse for losing such a talented teacher, mentor and musician.

My term as president will end during the summer conference and Mark Munson will take over the helm. At this time, all of the Repertoire and Standards chairs I appointed finish their terms on the board, and Mark will select a new team. I would like to congratulate these R&S chairs for their hard work in preparing reading sessions and their behind-the-scenes work at our summer conference. Thanks to you all!

In closing, I wish you great success with your upcoming adjudicated events, concerts, tours and graduation activities. I look forward to seeing you all at the OMEA summer conference in June.

Regards,
Tom Merrill

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OCDA Summer Conference 2005

June 20-22

Otterbein College
Westerville, OH

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Conference Coordinator
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YOUTH AND STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Ann Usher, Youth/Student Chair

Honor Choirs

One of the benefits of membership in ACDA / OCDA is the opportunity for our students to participate in Honor Choirs under the direction of some of the best choral conductors and teachers in our profession. Having had students participate in several of the divisional Honor Choirs, I can attest to the impact the experience had on their lives, their attitudes toward choral music, and their motivational levels. Unfortunately, many in our organization don't take advantage of these great opportunities! If you have ever considered encouraging your students to apply, please do so this year. It is not a difficult process and chances are very good your student(s) will be selected to participate. Past Central Division Honor Choirs have focused on all levels – Elementary, Junior High / Middle School, High School, Collegiate Women, and Men / Boys. Next year's conference will be held in Chicago on Feb. 15-18, 2006 and will include several Honor Choirs. Some choirs require a simple audition tape and others only the director's recommendation. Audition forms and tapes will be available in the division newsletter Resound, and are typically due at the end of September.

An exciting new opportunity awaits elementary teachers this year as the first ever Ohio Elementary Honor Choir will be held at the summer OCDA conference at Otterbein on June 21 & 22, 2005. We hope many will recommend students for this privilege. Further details on application procedures and deadlines will be forthcoming from Central Division Children's Choir chair, Robyn Lana. Contact Robyn at Lanarr@uc.edu.

Collegiate ACDA Chapters

There are nine active ACDA Collegiate Chapters in Ohio and several that have been chartered but have lapsed into inactive status. Collegiate membership in ACDA / OCDA entitles college students to all of the benefits of a regular member, plus the collegiate newsletter, The Student Times, and an active Student E Forum at <http://acdaonline.org/forums>. Becoming an ACDA member in college helps students experience first-hand the benefits of our organization and build a valuable network to aid in securing a job. Many collegiate chapters are recognized as official student organizations by their colleges and universities which enable them to obtain funding, web space, etc. Typical college chapter activities include attending local concerts together, whether professional groups, exemplary high schools and middle schools, or other colleges; sponsoring guest speakers such as area faculty, professional singers, and vocal health experts; assisting the choral department by working in the choral library, fundraising, and sponsoring workshops; collaborating with the OCMEA chapter and serving as choral adjudicated events workers; organizing social events to foster camaraderie within the choral program; and of course, attending state, divisional, and national conferences.

Collegiate members, if your school does not have an official ACDA chapter, take the first step toward establishing one today by requesting a Student Chapter Starter Kit available from Dr. Lori Wiest, ACDA National Chair of Youth & Student Activities, lwiest@mail.wsu.edu. Collegiate faculty, help your students learn the benefits of ACDA membership by sponsoring a new chapter or resuscitating an inactive chapter – it's well worth your time.

There are many exciting opportunities for our students in ACDA / OCDA. Please take advantage of every one!



OCDA News, the official publication of the Ohio Choral Directors Association, is published three times annually, from Ashland, Ohio, and is distributed without charge to members of the Association as well as to selected members and officers of the American Choral Directors Association.

OCDA reserves the right to edit any application for appearance and to edit all materials proposed for distribution on the basis of content and length.

Copy and Ad Deadlines

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Spring Issue	April 15

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Please make checks out to: Ohio Choral Directors Association.

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FROM YOUR EDITOR

First of all, I would like to thank all the authors of the many articles that were submitted. We have a tremendous store of knowledge and experience here in the OCDA, and I for one am proud to serve among you. Plus, no one knows everything, so no matter how well or long you have known something, it's very likely that a number of us have never encountered that information, technique, or perspective before. This is the essence of collegiality - learning from each other.

A variety of topics and points of view are offered to the membership in this issue. Andy Call's "Dialogue" is thoughtful and relevant, and could have applications even outside the field of church music. Steve Caracciolo wrote an article that hit me squarely between the eyes. While I'm sure most of us pay attention to the words, do we consistently emphasize the poetry and its message as we ought, or do we too often degrade them into vowels, consonants, phonemes, syllables? Bill Schwepe brings his experience to bear on the most basic act of choral conducting- truly hearing our choirs. His practical, yet sound (pardon the pun) advice should shake up a few rehearsals.

Thanks to Gayle Walker for serving up a delicious feast of refreshment for our summer conference. The Men's Choral Festival at Oberlin was a grand success, and we thank Jody Kerchner for providing us with a positive summary and some photographs of the young men who participated.

I have included two articles from other state journals that help to round out this issue. Sandy Cordes from Missouri provides a quick overview of tuning problems and possible solutions, based on decades of experience. And Nina Nash-Robertson's bibliographic review covers most of the important books in our field.

There is a schedule through which Board of Directors members are specifically requested to provide a report or article, and we anticipate reading those. However, please know that you may submit articles for any issue, on any choral topic: don't feel limited to that schedule. And any OCDA member may send me items of interest, which will be included if deemed appropriate.

Thank you for being part of the most influential professional organization in my life.

Ron Blackley, editor

DIALOGUE

Andy Call, Music/Worship R&S Chair

Does any of this sound familiar? *I'm a liberal. I'm a conservative. I do traditional music. I do contemporary music. I'm a Roman Catholic. I'm a United Methodist. I'm Jewish. I'm a vegetarian. I'm a red meat eater. I'm an alien.*

Okay, maybe not the last one, but you get the idea. Why is it that we spend so much time focusing on what separates us from one another? Could it be that in our effort to define our distinguishing characteristics that we can only see the differences between ourselves and others? Might it be that our insecurities drive us to compare ourselves with others in ways that portray us as more positive than others?

We've recently had a minor controversy at my church regarding our displaying a large sail with rainbow colors on it. It is a colorful attention-grabber that lets others know something is going on here and is, in my mind, a wonderful symbol of diversity. But some people have complained recently, arguing that displaying a rainbow is a sign that this church is gay-friendly (so what?). This, for some reason, has caused dissension within part of our congregation. People seem to be choosing sides - Conservatives vs. Liberals (or Progressive Thinkers, as I like to portray myself).

After engaging in direct conversation with a couple of the complainants, I realized that there may be another solution. United Methodists (my denomination) are known for having open dialogue (and disagreement) about all sorts of issues. A sign that scares people away doesn't open the door to dialogue. Maybe there's another way to celebrate our diversity and advertise our openness - perhaps another sign, one that doesn't contain a symbol that is so politically charged. Maybe we can build bridges to more open dialogue about inclusiveness by not drawing lines in the sand.

I've been monitoring a discussion on the United Methodist Musicians list serve about educational opportunities available for contemporary worship music. Not surprisingly, most of the discussion is emotionally charged, clearly making this a territorial defense. (Does this sound familiar?) Why are people so determined to stand on one side of the fence or the other? In the past several years, more walls have been built than bridges on this issue.

Admittedly, I'm a traditionalist. I don't particularly care for "contemporary" worship music, and I really don't program music that falls under that category. I'm not comfortable worshiping in "contemporary" churches. But if we as well-trained choral musicians really want to ensure that the shifting climate doesn't make all of us obsolete in church music, wouldn't we be better served to find the goals and faith we share in common with those on the "other side"? Shouldn't we set aside our prejudices and fears and work for substantive solutions to the debate?

I know, this is a pretty steep challenge, more easily said than done. But the need for dialogue is real, the gap is widening, and this world that is growing smaller is also growing more impersonal and divided. If we truly want the world to be united, maybe we should begin in our churches.

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Soundwaves

All the performances and selected clinics at this past summer's OCDA Conference were recorded and are available from Soundwaves. (*Soundwaves is a member of the OCDA.*)

By the way, the OCDA Conference recordings can be found and ordered at the new Soundwaves website: www.soundwaves.org Just search for "OCDA."

Dan Canalos

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Attention Young Singers

Celebrating 30 years of musical excellence, the Ohio Boychoir announces auditions for participation in its 2004-2005 concert season. The ensemble is composed of outstanding singers drawn from throughout Northeastern Ohio. Interested singers must be 7-9 years old for the training ensemble and at least 9 years old for the advanced ensemble. The ensemble rehearses on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings from 7 till 8:30 pm at Schaaf Community Center in Parma, and is located on West 54th, just south of Snow Rd. Auditions will be held throughout September and October by appointment. For further information and to schedule an audition, please call 440-915-2396.

THE OCDA SUMMER CONFERENCE:

Refresh Your Soul!

Gayle Walker, 2005 OCDA Summer Conference Coordinator

Each year, following the OCDA Summer Conference, I have the pleasure of reading reflection papers written by conference participants who have attended the conference for graduate credit. As I have read about the effect that the OCDA conferences have had on participants' lives, I have noticed a recurring theme - soul refreshment. There is something inherent in the OCDA Summer Conference that brings our spirits back to life. Participants are energized by the learning that takes place, by experiencing the new and sometimes surprising perspectives presented by conference clinicians, by hearing and singing great choral music together, and by making contact with many likeminded lovers of the choral art. After a year of teaching, singing, and conducting while dealing with typical workplace stresses, there is nothing like the OCDA conference to recharge your batteries and refresh your soul.

We invite you to join us for the 2005 OCDA Summer Conference, held at Otterbein College in Westerville, OH this June 20-22. Here is a summary of the exciting offerings you will find at the conference.

Eric Whitacre is one of the brightest stars in contemporary concert music, and has quickly become a much commissioned, published and performed choral and symphonic composer, as well as an accomplished conductor and clinician. In addition, he also writes for the motion pictures and has a Grammy nomination to his name. Whitacre's composition *Cloudburst*, for mixed chorus, piano, hand bells and percussion, received first prize in the American Choral Directors Association's "Composers of the Future" competition. Additionally, he has received composition awards from ASCAP, the Barlow International Foundation and the American Composers Forum. He is rapidly becoming a favorite composer of choral directors around the country.

Rebecca J. Rottsolek served as Artistic Director of the internationally renowned Northwest Girlchoir in Seattle, Washington from 1982 to 2001. Under her leadership, the Choir's outstanding repertoire and creative performances became a model for other choirs throughout the country. Rottsolek frequently presents workshops on treble voices and effective teaching and conducting techniques, and is a series editor for Alliance Music Publications, Inc. Additionally, Rebecca taught elementary music for 16 years and directed several adult and youth church choirs

Lynda Hasseler, professor of music and director of choral activities in the Conservatory of Music at Capital University, directs the Chapel Choir and Choral Union and teaches choral methods and choral conducting. Hasseler taught elementary, junior high and high school choral music before pursuing a master of music and doctor of musical arts degree from Michigan State University. She is active as a guest conductor, adjudicator and clinician throughout the United States. An active singer, Hasseler shares Grammy honors with the Oregon Bach Festival Chorus and Orchestra, which, under Helmuth Rilling's direction was awarded the 2000 Grammy Award Best Choral Performance for their recording of Krzysztof Penderecki's *Credo*.

Also performing at the conference will be The OCDA Children's Honor Choir, Directed by Rebecca Rottsolek; The Capital University Chapel Choir, Directed by Lynda Hasseler; and the Trinity United Methodist Church Chancel Choir, Directed by Richard Schnipke. As always, the summer conference will include choral reading sessions for all levels, a director's chorus conducted by Eric Whitacre, and festive *gemüchlichkeits* (social gatherings). Again, the 2005 OCDA Summer Conference will be held at Otterbein College in Westerville, OH (a suburb of Columbus), June 20-22. Registration brochures will be mailed to OCDA members in April, and registration forms will soon be available on the OCDA website at <http://www.ohiocda.org>. For more information call Gayle Walker at 614-823-1318, or email walker@otterbein.edu.

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OCDA Summer Conference

June 20-22, 2005

Otterbein College, Westerville, OH

OMEA Conference

January 26-28, 2006

Cleveland

ACDA Central Division Conference

February 15-18, 2006

Chicago

ACDA National Conference

January 31 - February 3, 2007

Miami, Florida

Spring 2005 Newsletter

In the Spring 2005 Newsletter you can look forward to articles from your:

- President
- Vice-President
- OCDA President-Elect
- Secretary
- Community Choirs R & S Chair
- Multicultural R & S Chair

TO STIR THE BARD WITHIN

Cultivating Singers' Appreciation of Sung Texts in the Choral Rehearsal

Stephen Caracciolo, College/University R&S Chair

A bard might be described as a 'singer-poet'; the performer who relies on an artistic combination of words to elicit a response from an audience, the singer who relishes in sounds of phonemes strung together in sequences to create an arabesque of vocal color, the poet who employs singing as a mode of oratory purposely shaped to suggest the meaning of text and to inspire the human spirit. If we can accept this description of a bard, how far, then, might a vocal musician go to suggest that a choral ensemble is a collection of such artists, joined to create corporate meaning in the sounds of the words they sing? Finding choral conductors who embrace an ideal that echoes the rhetorical tradition of classical Greece might be an easy enough task. Convincing the singer of a choral ensemble (experienced or no) to accept the role of singer-poet as an integral part of his job description may prove more challenging. Choral conductors can create, however, a learning environment that unveils this poetic world of sound and meaning for their singers through rehearsal techniques designed to stir the bard within.

At the core of their art, choirs primarily sing musical settings of poems; however one might describe what a poem is, exactly. There are certainly choral works that employ texts in experimental ways, moreover settings of texts that are harmonically driven and less text-generated. But in the vast majority of choral works the text is "the thing;" the "first cause" for the musical setting. For the director who seeks to awaken the singer-poet in the artists she is teaching, the following are a sampling of strategies that this conductor has used over an extended period of time with college-age students as well as high school, professional, and amateur singers, in a variety of venues.

Recite the Text as Poetry

Before introducing a score, place into singers' hands the text for the choral work to be rehearsed.

Print the text in poetic lines

- centered in the middle of the page;
- sectioned as best describes the rhetoric of the text; and/or
- to illustrate the design of the musical setting.

The conductor always begins by reciting a short phrase of the text and asking singers to repeat. It is imperative that the conductor and singers recite the text in a hyper-inflected voice; a vocal mode more than common speech, but less than singing. If the conductor judges that the sounds of the text, upon repetition, need to be more richly experienced, he simply repeats the phrase expressively as many as three or four times to cultivate the desired vocal color and meaning. The process truly becomes mesmerizing.

While these techniques work for all manner of texts (especially poems of madrigals and part songs), experience has revealed a couple of observations that are well worth sharing. Males are frequently less self-conscious about speaking in a hyper-inflected voice. Females often need a constant reminder to speak higher in the voice; "off the cords". The more you use this technique, the more students become comfortable with the process. After five or six initial attempts at this strategy singers will know exactly what you want and come to enjoy the opportunity to savor the sounds of the words they sing as well as the meaning (both literal and metaphorical) those words create.

Introducing a Setting in a Foreign Language

Begin a rehearsal of a work in a foreign language by providing students with a side-by-side translation of the text to be sung; or better still, a format that emulates Ron Jeffers' reference text, *Translations and Annotations of Choral Repertoire*.¹ Mr. Jeffers provides the original text (by phrase) on the left side of the page under which is printed a word-

for-word translation. In a column to the right of the original text is a grammatically accurate equivalent in English. In this way students can begin to absorb both the meaning of the text and the syntax of the original language.

The conductor begins by reciting (in a hyper-inflected oration) phrases of the original text followed by singers reciting, in like mode, the English translation. Students may revel in the fun of reciting the convoluted word-for-word translation. It is recommended, however, that singers respond with the poetic translation; though occasional use of the word-for-word rendering reminds singers of the syntax of the original language and will reveal, for instance, which words are verbs, nouns, adjectives; all of which inform the shape of a sung line of music.

Immediately follow with the conductor reciting the original language and singers doing the same. In another rehearsal recite the phrases in the original language out of order! Students quickly site the line of translation and respond in English. Turn the task around; the conductor recites the English, the singers scan the text and respond in the original language.

Changing vocal modes from hyper-inflected speech to reciting on a given pitch during this process is crucial. Singers frequently demonstrate that they can isolate new sounds in speech mode only to resign most of what they have mastered when asked to sing a new foreign language text to a musical line, even if one task follows immediately after the other. Better to bridge this learning gap by cantillating the text (reciting on a single pitch; presumably the setting's tonic or dominant, or both) to the natural cadence of the words during the teaching process. After the text has been experienced as a cantillation, the conductor incorporates rhythmic units from the musical setting in a call and response pattern.

Ask students to do all of these exercises expressively and with nothing more than a handout of the text with its' translation. When they open the score to begin rehearsing, students will have already experienced the text as poetry in both the original language and in translation, and been introduced to rhythmic units of the work to be studied. The adventure of discovering how the composer designed the setting takes on new and more interesting musical dimensions.

Singer-Poets

Singing is a form of oratory, a tradition of communication designed to convince the hearer of a given argument or point of view. When choirs come to know that the syllables they sing can sound poetic, that individual phonemes combine to create words, sentences, whole thoughts, and that the texts they present, when married to music, take on a meaning more profound than either music or text individually could possess, then singers have the skills to 'make a compelling argument' for the music. Their musical rhetoric will 'prove the case' of the composer's setting.

Singers are the stewards of a special gift that instrumentalists do not possess. The media of elongated vowels and well-timed consonants are the stuff of our shaping, and are arguably more connected to our experience as humans than are constructs of pitch and rhythm vacant of text. Bards have long understood that the sounds of words arranged in artistic combinations have the power to create worlds in the minds of the hearer. Choral conductors can begin more rehearsals in a way that celebrates the text to be studied and stirs singer-poets to find the beauty in the worlds they create.

1Volume I: Latin Texts, Volume II: German Texts. Available from earthsongs.

ACDA Advocacy Resolution

Whereas the human spirit is elevated to a broader understanding of itself through study and performance in the aesthetic arts; and

Whereas serious cutbacks in funding and support have steadily eroded state institutions and their programs throughout the country;

Be is resolved that all citizens of the United States actively voice their affirmative and collective support for necessary funding at the local, state, and national levels of education and government to ensure the survival of arts programs for this and future generations.

Lancaster Chorale

A Spiritual Afternoon

Sunday, May 15, 2005 – 4:00 p.m.

First United Methodist Church

163 E. Wheeling Street, Lancaster

In a concert to be remembered, Lancaster Chorale welcomes guests, The Brown Sisters, in a celebration of melodic, rhythmic, soulful stylings, guaranteed to inspire! Beginning with the rousing music of Moses Hogan and continuing with timeless Hymns and Spirituals, the joy and beauty of this concert will have toes tapping, tears flowing and spirits soaring!

Tickets available at the door, or by calling the Chorale office (740.687.5855).

Adults \$12; Senior Citizens \$10;

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STOUT-HEARTED MEN PARTICIPATE IN MEN'S CHORAL FESTIVAL

Jody L. Kerchner, Community Choirs R&S Chairpersons

On Saturday, October 23, 2004, eighty-eight young men in sixth-through twelfth-grades participated in the first Men's Choral Festival 2004, at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. Student singers came from 13 public and private schools and community middle and high schools in Lorain and Cuyahoga Counties. The festival was a cooperative effort between the Ohio Music Educators Association (OMEA) District IV and the Oberlin Choristers. The singers' teachers were invited to select quartets of tenor and bass participants and to prepare them to sing five songs that were chosen by the guest conductor, Dr. James Gallagher. The festival day was structured so that the morning and early afternoon were dedicated to group and sectional rehearsals that culminated in a free concert open to the public in the late afternoon.

In an effort to celebrate the American male singing tradition, the festival was designed to bring together young men of secondary-school age having various musical and choral backgrounds. A primary goal of hosting this event was to motivate young male singers to continue singing in school and community choirs by demonstrating life-long singing opportunities throughout the day. According to Katherine Plank, Artistic Director and Founder of the Oberlin Choristers and festival organizer, "The day certainly accomplished all the goals that the planners had for the singers. They heard for the first time the sound of many tenors and basses, giving them more confidence in their own voices. They had the amazing opportunity to learn from and perform with one of the finest directors of men's choirs, Dr. James Gallagher. The singers and their teachers returned to their

own choirs with renewed confidence and enthusiasm for choral singing."

Dr. Gallagher began rehearsal time with warm-ups that focused on developing the falsetto voice, a focused sound, and an energetic musical presentation. A recurrent theme throughout the day was Dr. Gallagher's reminders that the singing sound

changes as the singers became more engaged in the music-making process. The idea of facial gesture and body/mind energy shaping the choral tone was also a major focus of the day. Other conceptual information that Dr. Gallagher taught included the placement of final consonants, singing legato and less legato musical styles, breath support, singing as an ensemble, interpreting conductors' gestures, and healthfully using the changing, new baritone, and settling bass/baritone voices.

As a rehearsal break, "The News," a barbershop quartet from Elyria, OH, sang "standards" for the young men. After explaining the voicings for barbershop quartet singing, The News taught a "tag" to the festival chorus. Each part was assigned a vocal line of the tag and then sang it together. Individuals and small groups of young men volunteered to sing the tag for other members in the festival chorus. According to many of the participants, their experience with The News was one of their favorites of the day.

In addition to the men's festival chorus, "The News" and the men of the Lorain County Community College's Civic Chorale and Collegiate Chorale, directed by Nancy Davis, also performed.



The First Men's Choral Festival

The concert program was as follows:

Lorain County Community College Men’s Chorus 2004

- Brothers, Sing On.....Grieg/McKinney
- Down in the Valley.....arr. Mead
- Go Down Moses.....arr. Hogan

“The News” Barbershop Quartet

Men’s Chorus Festival Choir 2004

- With a Voice of SingingMartin Shaw
- Till the Stars Fall from the Skyarr. Jay Althouse
- When I Hear HerMark Templeton
- When I Hear MusicMichael Martin
- Swing Down ChariotAndré Thomas

A memorable moment of the concert, as stated by a participant, was when the choir finished the song, “When I Hear Her.” He said, “We finished the song, and then Dr. Gallagher made us sing the song again! He also told the audience that we had practiced hard on the piece and that it was still a work-in-progress. The song was performed much better the second time we performed it. It was difficult to sing, but we relaxed and concentrated on the music and words.” Indeed, in that moment, Dr. Gallagher reminded parents, teachers, and singers that it is being engaged in the music-making process that is equal in its importance to the actual performance itself. Dr. Gallagher dared to permit the young men to sing the song without being overwhelmed by performance perfection. Throughout the day, he exhibited his expertise as a true choral music educator.

It was pedagogically and musically satisfying to see and hear men of all ages (middle-school, collegiate, middle-aged, and retired) come together as a community to experience and celebrate the joy of singing. Warner Concert Hall at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.



The First Men’s Choral Festival

OCDA Children’s Honor Choir

June 21-22, 2005
 OCDA Summer Conference
 Otterbein College

Rebecca Rottsolek, Guest Conductor
 Stephen Caracciolo, Commissioned
 Composer

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Please share this information with your
 colleagues in the Elementary schools!

*How many conductors does it take to change a
 light bulb?*

Nobody knows. No one ever watches them!

ARE YOU REALLY HEARING YOUR CHOIR?

William P. Schwepe, Northwest Region Chairman

This semester, in my Secondary Vocal Methods Class at UT, I asked my students if they had ever heard a recording of one of their choirs in which they recognized something that was not detected in the live performance. Each of them responded that they had experienced this when they were performers in a choir. The next question was, “Do you believe that that can happen when you are the director of a choir?” The discussion that followed was very interesting.

Have you ever heard a tape of a concert or contest performance and not recognized the sound as that of your choir? Have you ever thought that all was correct only to hear mistakes on tape? What do you listen for and actually hear in a rehearsal or performance? Have you ever been surprised by something in performance that you didn’t hear in rehearsal?

All of us have experienced the problem of not hearing everything in rehearsal and/or performance. Here are a few ideas that may help solve this problem:

1. Tape

- The idea of recording rehearsals to help detect problems seems obvious; however, many directors don’t do it. For many, listening to their own rehearsal is one of the hardest things in the world to do. If you don’t listen objectively in rehearsal it is hard to do so when you hear a tape of the rehearsal. Objective or critical listening, as opposed to subjective hearing, is vital to understanding what is going on in the sound of the choir. Sometimes we, as directors, get so close to our ensembles that objective listening turns into subjective hearing. Listening, objectively, to a rehearsal recording can be very positive and enlightening. Objective or critical listening is much more valuable than subjective or emotional hearing.
- Another idea concerning recording is to stop the tape during the rehearsal and play it back for the choir. Many times the choir does not hear everything that is going on within their sound. When all hear what they have just produced in rehearsal more concentrated effort on the part of the choir members may result. From time to time, all need to hear the whole sound. Studying the sound from a different perspective can always be a learning experience.
- Tape rehearsal every day if possible. Hearing these recordings can help guide your approach to each successive rehearsal.

2. Move people / sections within the choir.

- If a choir has been in the same formation or position for a long time, the director, and the whole choir for that matter, may become so accustomed to the sound that objective listening may be very difficult. The sound produced by the choir may become acceptable. When all become so comfortable that they become complacent, it may be time to shake up the mix. Move people within sections. Put the choir in another formation. When individuals are moved in the choir they hear from a different place within the sound. The director may hear the sound differently as well. The director may hear things that were not recognized before.
- Putting the choir in a circle as Robert Shaw did can be very productive. In a circle the choir sings into itself. All singers can hear the sound of the choir more completely than when they are in a block formation on risers. In this formation have the choir close their eyes as they sing to ‘bathe’ in the sound. When singers open themselves to the sound in this way, many experience the sound more deeply which can help improve listening skills. This idea can also help the director to more accurately hear what is going on in the sound.
- Putting the choir in mixed formation can also aid the director in hearing the sound more objectively. In this formation the choir members must be much more independent. Dr. James Jordan of Westminster Choir College has suggested a formation where each section is spread over the entire width of the risers on one row:

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BBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBB
SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS
TTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
  
```

This modified mix produces a quartet mix vertically while a sectional feeling horizontally. I use this formation with the University of Toledo Women’s Chorus. Choir members in each section can hear the whole sound more easily than when in block sections. This will also help blend and intonation. A quartet mix is also very advantageous:

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STABTAB
TABSTABS
ABSTABST
BSTABSTA
  
```

Any mixed formation can help the director better hear individuals within the choir as well as hear the whole.

3. Focus on the music more than the notes.

- There is a difference between listening to hear the correct notes and listening to the music to guide its development. Both are important but at different times in the progress of the choir toward performance. At the beginning of the learning process listening for correct pitch is vital; however, as the choir learns the notes, listening to the music to guide its development becomes much more important. As the director focuses on the requirements of the music the choir will do the same. As all involved center their attention on the music, technical problems will become apparent. As the choir becomes more aware of the sound, many of the problems will disappear. The director will then recognize those problems that remain and address them. When too much time is spent listening for notes much in the music can be missed. When I was teaching in public school I spent a great deal of time listening for notes. Many times I missed much in the music. After studying with Dr. Robert Fountain at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, I learned to focus more on the music. This required that I give more responsibility to the choir for the technical aspects of the performance. I found that the more I did this the more the choir improved and produced more beautiful music. While listening critically for the technical aspects of the music is important, listening to the music as a whole to guide its development in rehearsal is vital.

These are only three general ideas that have been presented to try to stimulate some thoughts about the questions stated at the top of this article. As choral conductors, we all have had experience with some of the problems listed here. I have had some success using the concepts discussed here. I hope that you will as well. In another methods class a student said that she had experienced something unusual during one of her observations of other choirs. She said that she heard three high school choirs. During the first rehearsal she said that she had a number of ideas to help the sound of the choir; however, by the end of the third rehearsal she has fewer and fewer such ideas. She wondered if she had begun to accept the sound produced by the choirs instead of focusing on how to improve the sound. This also stimulated an interesting class discussion. That will be the seed of a second article.

Have a great rest of the year.



TREASURES

Lancaster Chorale presents 'TREASURES', performing some of the great classics in choral music, on Sunday, February 27, 4:00 PM at St. Mary of the Assumption, 132 St. High Street in Lancaster.

Featured guest baritone, Raymond Feener, sings Libera Me from Requiem (Faure); other highlights will include Adagio (Barber); O Vos Omnes (Casals); Pilgrims Hymn (Paulus) and works of Dressler, Poos, di Lasso and Rimsky-Korsakov. Tickets are available at the door, or by calling the Chorale office (740.687.5855.)

Adults \$12; Senior Citizens \$10; Student \$6

Lancaster Chorale is Ohio's only 32-voice professional choir. Singers come from throughout central Ohio, but approximately half are located in Lancaster or Fairfield County.

Chorale has received consistent critical acclaim, and was listed twice in the top ten musical events in Columbus and central Ohio during 2004, by Barbara Zuck, Chief Critic for the Columbus Dispatch.

TREASURES is part of Chorale's subscription series, presented locally each season. Historic St. Mary of the Assumption is a cathedral-like acoustic, unmatched in the region and a wonderful setting for this concert, both acoustically and aesthetically.

Additionally, Chorale performed in Chillicothe, Logan, Columbus and Newark, and are negotiating with Mansfield to join the Mansfield Symphony next season in a celebration of 75 years of symphony performances in that city.

Chorale is in its 19th season, and has been conducted by Artistic Director, Robert Trocchia for the past 18 years.

ESSENTIAL LIBRARY FOR THE BEGINNING CHORAL CONDUCTOR

Nina Nash-Robertson, President-Elect Designate for ACDA-Michigan

Reprinted from the Winter 2005 Bella Voce, the official publication of the ACDA-Michigan chapter

The first few years of teaching can be exciting and frightening, exhilarating and lonely. New music teachers are frequently the only musicians in their building and have few friends with whom to share ideas and concerns. The problems and challenges of starting a new choral program, or continuing one, can leave the young teacher overwhelmed with questions. There are many books and videos available that can provide information and inspiration. The following is as short a list as I could devise, containing some of my favorite books, many of which I continue to use as a reference on a regular basis. I refer to several of these books each summer as I prepare to return to music-making. I was most grateful to have the assistance of such books when I was a beginning teacher, and I hope that current students and professionals will find some reference in this list that offers encouragement, support, and answers to very practical questions.

Inspiration and Philosophy

Jordan, James. *The Musician's Soul*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 1999.

Lautzenheiser, Tim. *The Art of Successful Teaching*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 1992.

Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998.

Swan, Howard. *Conscience of a Profession*. Chapel Hill, NC: Hinshaw, 1987.

Conducting

Green Elizabeth A. *The Modern Conductor*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997.

McElheran, Brock. *Conducting Technique for Beginners and Professionals*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Rehearsing

Bartle, Jean Ashworth. *Sound Advice - Becoming a Better Children's Choir Conductor*. NY: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Bertalot, John. *Immediately Practical Tips for the Choral Conductor*. Augsburg, 1994.

Brinson, Barbara. *Choral Music Methods and Materials - Developing Choral Programs (Grades 5-12)*. NY: Schirmer Books, 1996.

Caldwell, Timothy. *Expressive Singing, Dalcroze Eurhythmics for Voice*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995.

Collins, Don L. *Teaching Choral Music*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.

Conable, Barbara. *The Structures and Movement of Breathing: A Primer for Choirs and Choruses*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2000.

Decker, Harold A. and Julius Herford. *Choral Conducting: A Symposium*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973.

Decker, Harold, and Colleen J. Kirk. *Choral Conducting: Focus on Communication*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988.

Haasemann, Frauke and James Jordan. *Group Vocal Technique*. Chapel Hill, NC: Hinshaw, 1992.
(Book, video, and warm-up cards available.)

Heffernan, Charles W. *Choral Music: Technique and Artistry*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1982.

Neuen, Donald. *Choral Concepts*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002.

Pagel, Randy and Linda Spevacek. *The Choral Director's Guide to Sanity...and Success: How to Develop a Flourishing Middle School/Junior High School Choral Program*. Dayton, OH: Heritage Music Press, 2004.

Phillips, Kenneth H. *Directing the Choral Program*. NY: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Robinson, Ray and Allen Winold. *The Choral Experience: Literature, Materials, and Methods*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1992.

Robinson, Russell and Jay Althouse. *The Complete Warm-Up Book*. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 1995.

THE ART OF TUNING YOUR CHOIR

Sandy Cordes, President, Missouri Choral Directors Association

Reprinted from the Winter 2005 issue of The Reporter, official newsletter of the MCDA

The more I work with choirs and individual vocalists, the more I am convinced that the number one difficulty in singing is the fine art of tuning. The tone can be wonderful, the vowel acceptable, and the literature of the highest quality, but the first thing that our ears hear is whether it is in tune. There are a number of possibilities we need to address that contribute to out-of-tune singing in our vocalists. I hope that you find my observations helpful and some of the solutions useful as you work with your individual choirs.

Incorrect posture. Make sure that everyone has a long, straight upper torso that allows each singer to get strength through breath. Check to see that the singers have a level upper chest and straight shoulders. Their arms should be placed at the sides and one foot should be placed slightly in front of the other to insure that they can produce a correct, in-tune tone. Also, check the placement of their heads and necks; often, under-pitch singing is the result of an extended neck.

Correct breath placement. Work for a consistent low breath. Have them check this by placing one hand on their upper chest and the other at their diaphragm. When their hand moves in the upper placement, this is incorrect. If it moves at the belt area, this re-affirms that their breath is working in the low part of their body. As the singers progress, have them move both hands on either side of their waist. This way they can feel the expansion working at the entire mid-section. Use the inflating tire illustration to confirm the low breath placement.

Make sure that all singers understand the **head/chest voice** and how the voice needs to be placed for in-tune singing. Check each singer's voice and the location of his or her "break" note. When he or she hears that note and understands the placement it will help his or her tuning.

Work for **consistent vowel placement.** Make sure that all singers look at you and at each other (and listen) to match the correct vowels.

When they are consistently singing out of tune have them **sing on the vowel "oo"** in a light "boy choir" tone. This will quickly tune those trouble spots.

Work for a **light vocal projection**; over-sung forte sections tend to be sharp. Make sure that the singers understand the difference between a supported forte sound and a loud, out-of-tune production. I have never used the word "loud" with my singers; I always tell them to sing a full/forte sound. Remember that sharp singing is the result of "over-singing" the pitch. Flat singing is often from too little breath support.

These observations have been made through years of experience working with all ages and levels of singers. Always remember that if they are singing in tune, half of the battle for vocal excellence is achieved.



ANNOUNCING!

SUMMER WORKSHOP AT THE
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Vocal/Choral Pedagogy

This workshop combines principles of vocal pedagogy with choral singing, as well as emphasizing appropriate repertoire for teaching healthy voice production. A resident high school mixed chorus comprising approximately 40 rising juniors and seniors will serve as the demonstration choir. High school choral teachers and youth choir directors will be invited to bring a balanced quartet of singers to participate. Private voice teachers or anyone wishing to take the workshop without bringing students is welcome to do so.

The workshop will be held at North Broadway United Methodist Church in Columbus from noon on Wednesday, June 15 - noon on Saturday, June 18. Cost is \$295 for adults (including two quarter hours of grad. credit) and \$75 for high school singers.

For information, contact Dr. Hilary Apfelstadt, School of Music, at 614-292-9926 or via e-mail (apfelstadt.1@osu.edu)

"Too many pieces of music finish too long after the end."

—Igor Stravinsky

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