

From Your President

Choral Music in an Evolving World

GREETINGS OCDA MEMBERS! I hope that by the time you read this, you will be winding down what is probably the craziest school or church year of your professional life. You've *done it all* over the last 12+ months, and while you may not always feel you have been successful (after all, we music folk have *very* high expectations of ourselves), you have kept music alive in some way for the many musicians who depend on you, and for this you should be proud.

As I write this, I realize that in two months, my OCDA presidency will come to an end. It has been a fast two years and nothing at all like I thought it would be. After all, I will have never gotten to host an in-person Summer Conference as President! But I am proud of the way our Board and our association have stepped up to respond to the circumstances the world handed us. In so doing, we have also learned a lot about ourselves as an organization, and this will no doubt be reflected in the way we conduct ourselves (pun intended!) in a post-pandemic world.

While I still believe in-person events are more effective, I love that we have been able to offer so much virtual professional development. Our New Directions webinar series has provided resources on virtual teaching, choral repertoire by Black composers, working with trans and gender expansive singers, putting together virtual choir projects, and decolonizing the choir experience. We have offered roundtable meetings for several different choral areas and for BIPOC conductors. And last summer's Virtual Conference, focusing on leadership in challenging times, social and emotional learning, and preparing for the year ahead was truly inspiring and resourceful.

Having much more time to plan in 2021, I am even more excited about this year's two-day Virtual Summer Conference, held June 21–22. Our roster of clinicians and their session topics cut a wide swath across the many issues relevant to our profession, as we both return to some kind of normal and recognize how our world is evolving. Janet Galván will focus on conducting, building community, and empowering individuals; Derrick Fox will delve into inclusiveness, assessment, and avoiding burnout; Zebulon Highben will ask us to look deeply into the role of music in worship; Maria



OCDA President
Brandon Moss

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A. Ellis will teach us responsible ways in which to present African American choral music; and Lynn Brinckmeyer will examine the important role of advocacy in choral music today. Mixed in throughout these jam-packed two days will be virtual concert sessions, a reading session of titles selected by our wonderful Repertoire & Resources chairpersons (along with access to the full list of titles they have selected, made possible by J.W. Pepper), a virtual exhibit hall, interest-area roundtables, and, of course, a happy hour where you can visit with old OCDA friends and meet new ones. Professional credit for the conference is also available through Otterbein University. You

will probably never see a conference registration price this cheap again, so register today and encourage others to do so as well!

One benefit of virtual events is that they increase access. With no travel costs or time involved, more people—regardless of where they are located—are able to participate. At last year's Virtual Conference, we had attendees from all over the world. This year's event is open to anyone as well, and we have been marketing nationally. Unlike typical years where our Summer Conference is available for members only, registration for this year's Virtual Summer Conference is wide open, with non-members paying only a slightly higher fee. We un-

derstand how hard-hit many families have been during the pandemic and want to make our offerings available to all choir directors, regardless of whether or not they can afford membership this year.

Like most organizations, OCDA has taken a membership hit during this time. As many have been forced to cut back, professional associations have fallen down the priority scale. However, as we move forward it is my parting wish that choral directors see—now more than ever—just how valuable organizations like ours are. If you asked me a little over a year ago what my plan was for teaching choir during a pandemic, I would have had very few answers. It was because of the lead-

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ership our national organization took, the resources my colleagues brought to the table in webinars and roundtable meetings, and the sharing sessions I had with other members that allowed me to forge ahead with a plan for my year.

OCDA is here for you—all of you—and will continue working to provide the support and resources you need to explore the uncharted territories that come up in our work and our world.

I hope to see all of you at the

Virtual Summer Conference, and I look forward to working for you as Past-President in supporting our incoming President Doug O'Neal when he begins his term in July. Best wishes for a restful and rejuvenating summer! ♦

Building Confidence in Middle School Singers by Building Community

Laurel Labbe, Junior High/Middle School Choir R&R Chair

THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR has been like no other. Although there have been some lessons I would like to forget, there is one lesson I have taken to heart and will certainly

carry into future years. In any year, enabling middle school singers to sing with confidence is a challenge, but it has been even more difficult this year due to masking, social

distancing, and smaller class sizes. Students feel more vulnerable and uncomfortable at this age when all they can hear is them-



selves. The most successful remedy for under-confidence in singing has been building community. When I recently asked my students what makes them feel confident to sing out, one of my seventh graders said, "I'm not afraid to sing out because I know everyone here is my friend." Building a space where kids feel safe to be themselves is critically important.

I have always tried to provide team building in my high school choirs, but I've been reluctant to do so in my middle school classes. My middle schoolers don't always take it seriously, and it can be challenging with large numbers of kids in a relatively small space. However, this year, with one day a week in Google Meet, I decided it was the perfect opportunity to try more of it, and I had the feeling it was more important than ever to get kids to connect.

Last fall I led a book study in my district, on *Hacking School Discipline: 9 Ways to Create a Culture of Empathy and Responsibility Using Restorative Justice*, by Nathan Maynard and Brad Weinstein. It contains tools to help students take responsibility for their actions, ways to address the underlying factors that lead to certain behaviors, and methods for building community in the classroom. One of the methods I learned in this book was circle time. I had already been using a modified circle time with my classes, but this refined my process, and gave me some ideas of prompts to use. Resources are readily available on the web to find good prompts, but it is also helpful to create prompts that are mean-

≡ *Don't miss the Summer Conference!* ≡

Daniel Landis, Conference Chair

The 2021 OCDA Summer Conference will be held on **June 21st and 22nd**, and you won't want to miss it! OCDA remains committed to offering high quality professional development at affordable costs. ACDA members who are students or retirees pay just \$20, and ACDA members who are not students or retirees pay just \$35. (Non-members of ACDA who are students or retirees pay \$40, and non-members of ACDA who are not students or retirees pay \$55.)

The headliners for the 2021 Conference are **Janet Galván, Derrick Fox, Zebulon Highben, Maria Ellis, and Lynn Brinckmeyer**. These headliners will present interest sessions on a variety of important topics. Whether you're a college student, a new teacher, or a veteran in the field, you'll find something useful and meaningful at this conference! Be sure to check out the full lineup of sessions by visiting ohiocda.org.

This past year, staying connected to our craft and to each other has been arduous to say the least. The 2021 Summer Conference is sure to help rejuvenate that connectivity. Come see choirs from all over Ohio perform in our **virtual concert sessions**. Enjoy new high-quality repertoire in the **reading sessions**. See colleagues new and old in **roundtables** by interest area, be sure to stop by the **virtual exhibit hall**, and definitely do not miss OCDA's traditional **Gemütlichkeit/Happy Hour!**

If you have any questions about OCDA's 2021 Summer Conference, please email ocdaconference@gmail.com.

ingful to what your class needs at the moment. For instance, last week we talked about each singer's positive intentions for rehearsal this week because I thought we needed a little more direction in the time we do have together in person.

Each Friday at the start of class, I give the students a prompt and everyone gives an answer. In a pre-pandemic classroom, we would sit in a circle and simply go around the circle. In our Google Meets, students raise their hand to share, or I call on them. Some students

put their answers in the chat, and I share them with the class. Sometimes I am reluctant to give up the ten minutes of rehearsal time that it takes to complete the circle, but I know it is well worth it in the long run. At the middle school level, students do not tend to give long, involved answers, so the process is actually pretty quick. As students feel more connected to each other, especially at the high school level, answers can become much more in depth and even emotional. I am constantly amazed at how the singers respond to each other, and



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how willing they are to build each other up in positive ways. I also feel I know my singers much better because of this activity.

I'm sure many of you are already

building community in your classroom in a variety of ways, but if you aren't, I encourage you to give it a try. When your students share small things in a non-threatening

atmosphere, they lay the foundation for taking the bigger step of being vulnerable in their music making. ♦

Mindfulness for the Conductor



Doug O'Neal, OCDA President-Elect

AS I WRITE THIS, we just finished our school musical, *Children of Eden*. I was so happy we were fortunate enough to have one this year! It was so beautiful to hear my students sing with such passion as well as act again. However, there is one downside to the success of the five performances: I now have ear-

worms of all the music! Ugh.... At least we didn't do *Mamma Mia*—those songs just won't let go!

When Ohio went into "lock-down" last March due to COVID-19, I figured it would be a great time to knock out some graduate hours and move up on my district's salary schedule. While taking a

course on anxiety awareness, I started reading about mindfulness and became very interested in the benefits for students as well as myself. Following that course, I took another course on incorporating mindfulness in the classroom, and I fo-

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cused on my personal practice through various resources.

For this article, my goal is to provide the reader with some practices that will help the educator/musician before we start bringing the practice into our rehearsals. Over the course of my upcoming OCDA presidency, I will continue to offer insights into mindfulness and activities that could be used in rehearsals or classrooms.

Oxford Languages Dictionary defines mindfulness as “a mental state achieved by focusing one’s awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one’s feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations; used as a therapeutic technique.” It is a practice and does not happen overnight. As we inform our stu-

dents, practice will make you better, and this is the case for mindfulness training. Success is best achieved when setting a schedule and practicing a technique every day. I am not always the best at this, but I do make sure to do at least some breathing exercises every day (even if they only take a minute). The goal is to train your mind to let go of bad patterns and focus on the present.

Mindfulness has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety, increase focus, reduce rumination, improve sleep, possibly lower blood pressure, and also improve heart health. It may also help provide a faster rebound from negative thoughts and feelings, and it may increase compassion.

One of the most important sug-

gestions made during all of the mindfulness practices I have tried is to acknowledge when your mind strays from focus (it is bound to happen), not scold or be upset with yourself, but consciously return your mind to the practice without judgement. It is similar to watching a cloud float away. The following exercises are just a couple I have found helpful.

Square Breaths This is one of my quick go-to practices and can be done anywhere. When instructing my students, I have them make a peace sign with both hands and match up the pointer fingers as well as middle fingers. The result is a visual square that may be helpful in the beginning of this practice. For each side of the square, breathe

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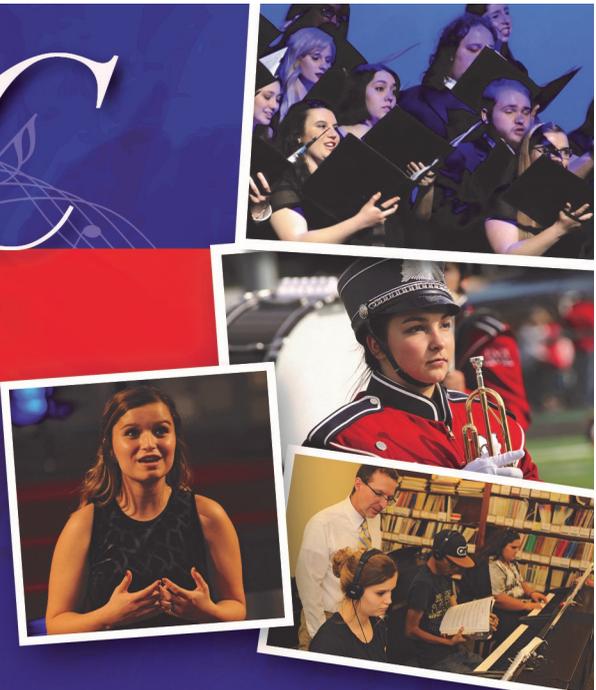
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in slowly for a count of four and then exhale for a count of four. If I wake in the middle of the night or have those dreaded earworms, it may take me a couple times around the square, but I usually find success!

Mindful movement I would imagine we all understand the importance of stretching before conducting, whether we remember to do it or not. Mindful movement helps create a way to cultivate awareness of the body through simple and small movements. It is always important to consult a physician prior to doing exercise or even these simple stretches if there may be a concern.

These movements focus on a stretch and then some breaths al-

lowing one to think about how the body feels about the stretch. There is a stretch to the side and above the head, stretches to each side as if one were picking apples, hands on hips and bending to the side as a “little teapot” and more. I will avoid using the space in our publication to describe this practice in detail but advise visiting an audio guide (with a British narrator who is very soothing!): <https://assets.penguinrandomhouse.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/30141409/03-Meditation-3-Mindful-Movement-1.mp3>

Mindful Eating This one is one of my favorites and is a great way to start the practice of mindfulness. Start with a piece of chocolate or a raisin. As with most of the prac-

tices, you will begin by taking a few deep breaths and letting go of tension you may feel in your muscles. Open the chocolate and inhale the aroma. Does your body have a response? Do you start salivating? Look at the chocolate, how does it affect your senses? Break off a piece and look intently at it. Examine the crevices, bubbles, grains and more of the chocolate. If comfortable, close your eyes. Now take a small bite and let it slowly melt in your mouth. Remember, if your mind starts to wander, acknowledge it, and return to the sensation of the chocolate. Make note of how the chocolate tastes. Become absorbed in your experience. Notice your breathing. Try holding the chocolate on your tongue and allowing it to melt. Is there any re-



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Virtual Summer Conference

June 21 and 22, 2021



Janet Galván

Recently retired Director
of Choral Activities at
Ithaca College



Derrick Fox

Director of Choral
Activities at the University
of Nebraska-Omaha



Zebulon Highben

Director of Chapel
Music at Duke
University Chapel



Maria Ellis

Owner of Girl
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Lynn Brinckmeyer

Director of Choral Music
Education at Texas State
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sistance, craving, or desire? This is a judgement-free time. Just notice. After the chocolate has completely melted, very slowly swallow it, and feel the sensation and how your body responds as it goes down your throat.

I hope that this basic intro has sparked some interest. Beyond the materials used in my courses, I found a couple resources to be especially useful in my own practice.

Headspace App There are many free as well as paid resources in this application. It is available free for

current K-12 educators at <https://www.headspace.com/educators>. Here you will find not only practices for many different situations, but animated videos you can show in classrooms to help understand mindfulness. I have really found the ambient music aspect of the program to be helpful in providing deeper sleep and overriding the dreaded ear worms.

Mindfulness: An Eight Week Plan for Finding Peace in a Frantic World, by Mark Williams and Danny Penman Not only does

this book provide some simple practices that can be incorporated into daily life and a plan to follow, but there is an audio component that can be found at <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/mindfulness-meditation-downloads/>.

In future articles, I will provide some mindful exercises for students, and advice before beginning mindful activities in your classroom or rehearsal. Enjoy breathing and focusing on the moment. It has definitely made a difference in my life during these trying times. ♦

A Holistic Audition Approach: Creating an Educational Opportunity for All

Beth Vaughn, Secretary

IN EVERY STAGE OF OUR LIVES, we are given feedback. As a young child starts its first ride on a bicycle without training wheels, words of advice and encouragement are given until the child can ride unassisted and feels comfortable. The rehearsal space is filled with all manner of feedback, and as educators we ourselves receive feedback on our instruction and teaching practices. What did we do right? What can we improve upon? The absence of this critical information can lead to frustration since we need the critical eye of others to help motivate us to the next level.

In our music classrooms, we give feedback every minute when rehearsing repertoire. This constant feedback helps the written

page evolve into the music we hear. Why, then, do we seem to withhold this information in the audition process? Auditioning is a significant activity in most choir programs, and we've all been through them: auditions for musicals, college entrance auditions, solo auditions for a selection, auditions for select ensembles. As I look back, I realize that I never received feedback when I could have used it the most. There were honors groups, ensembles, and chair placements I received (or didn't receive), but I had no idea why. When I first started teaching, and I was on the director side of the desk, I followed the same path. Auditions were held, I posted lists to my students with no feedback, and that was

that. I look back and remember seeing smiles of elation, but I also remember the devastation on the faces of students who weren't cast in the role or hadn't received a part in the ensemble for which they had worked so hard.

When I came to teach at my current position, the drama department had what was called "envelope day" after auditions. Each student was given an envelope that held not only a letter informing them of the role in which they were cast, but also feedback sheets from their audition. Students could see areas of strength and areas where they could improve. Not only did the students receive valuable feedback, but there was also less stress





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for them since they could absorb the information in any way that felt comfortable. They could take the envelope home and open it in front of their friends or open it while they were alone. They didn't have to face feeling disappointed or rejected in front of peers. They could do it in their own way and at their own time.

I quickly adopted this as the policy for my choral ensemble auditions and the outcomes have been very positive. I have the opportunity to validate what my students have done well while also identifying areas in which they can improve. Even high-achieving students appreciate knowing what they can continue to work on and how to improve. Those who may have not been placed in the ensemble they wanted seem more at ease knowing *why* they were not placed there.

For musical auditions, students are given feedback in three areas: singing, acting, and dancing. They are scored using a rubric that has emerging, developing, proficient, accomplished, and exemplary as ratings for each category. Subcategories exist in each area and are defined according to their parent category. The singing area includes the subcategories: projection, tone, intonation, and stage presence. The acting area includes the subcategories: carriage of body, vocal expression, energized reactions, physical suitability for role, and stage presence. The dancing area includes the subcategories: rhythm and movement, memorization, confidence, and technique. For concert ensemble auditions, the rubric was similar, but the areas

scored were intonation, tone, sight reading, interpretation, and note/rhythm accuracy.

If you are interested in making the audition process a positive experience for all, I highly recommend that you reevaluate how you post your audition results and consider using this approach. Not only will this aid in the development of individual students, but it will also be beneficial for your ensembles

and classes: students will become more self-aware and know what they need to improve; for some students, the audition experience will provide a boost in confidence that helps their daily performance; and since the audition rubric highlights the areas in which we directors strive to improve every day in our ensembles, student and director goals in ensemble rehearsals will be even better aligned. ♦

MEMBER MILESTONES

Introducing: a new column within *OCDA News*! This recurring column will provide an opportunity to recognize member milestones, including degrees earned, appointments and relocations, years of service, retirements, and passings.

Below are a few such recent milestones. For future issues, submissions from all OCDA members will be welcomed—there will be a form available on the OCDA website for submitting these milestones. In the meantime, please direct any submissions to Historian Amy Gelsone at ajgelsone@yahoo.com.

New Members

We welcome new OCDA members: Sadiyah Babatunde, Maureen Berney, Devin Blair, Jeff Hlutke, Emilio Jarufe, Rachael Jenkins, Nolan Kelly, Nick Martz, Jacob Miller, Kearsten Miller, Paige Morris, Lindsey Mutter, Lindsay Osterholt, Clarence Smith, Hannah Smith, and Sara Tobe.

Degrees Earned

Former OCDA President Dara Gillis completed the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at The Ohio State University in Fall 2020.

Current OCDA President Brandon Moss completed the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at The Ohio State University in Fall 2020.

OCDA Membership Chair Libby Hainrihar completed the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at The Ohio State University in Spring 2021.

John Warner completed the Master of Music in Choral Conducting degree at Bowling Green State University in Spring 2021.

Christian Longberry completed the Master of Music in Choral Conducting degree at Bowling Green State University in Spring 2021.

(cont. on p. 13)

Recruit, Retain, and Inspire

Ian Stasko, South Central Region Chair

AS THIS ACADEMIC YEAR draws to a close, it is appropriate to give ourselves and our colleagues a pat on the back. Despite closures, online schooling, virtual and live concerts, and a myriad of other challenges, we choral educators have managed to navigate the unfamiliar waters of a school year during a pandemic. As we approach the respite of summer, we may find ourselves at a key transitional moment with the opportunity to adjust our course for the next year of choir. Many programs have seen a decline in enrollment, engagement, and achievement this year. Remember that if you were affected in this way, it is not your fault! To rebound, explore all of the ways in which you can create a meaningful and communal learning environment for next year. This is the time to make positive changes!

Planning is the most important step. Begin brainstorming ideas for next year. It's impossible to know exactly how things may pan out, but the more ideas and backup plans you have, the more adaptable you will be. Talk to administrators to get an idea of what they intend for the next school year. How do you want to structure concerts? Are you interested in doing some other activities like adjudicated events or special trips? While planning, consider the gaps you may face from where your students might "normally" be and where they may be now. If you normally

plan for a fall concert in October, but fear your students are out of practice after a year of virtual learning, consider pushing back or cancelling that event. Remember, if we meet students *where they are* and provide positive learning support, they will always find success.

Communicate with your students. Once you've got a vision for next year, share it with them! They will

be more excited and on board if they also have a shared vision for choir next year, and they will be less likely to disengage or drop out. You could also consider making them a part of the planning process, and that will make their learning more student-centered and meaningful. Anything that is seen as a positive change from this year will be met with en-



MEMBER MILESTONES, cont.

Appointments

Brock Burkett, outgoing ACDA student chapter president at Bowling Green State University, has accepted a position teaching vocal music in grades 6-12 at Maumee Middle and High Schools.

Shelvin Burns, recent Bowling Green State University graduate, has accepted a position teaching choir in grades 9-12 at Perrysburg High School.

Retirements

OCDA Historian Amy Gelsone retired from Anthony Wayne Schools in Spring 2020.

Vocal Jazz R&R Chair Chris Venesile is retiring after 39 years of teaching that included positions in Brooklyn City Schools, North Olmsted Schools, and choral music education at Kent State University.

In Memoriam

Karen Biscay, Professor Emeritus of Music at Lourdes University, passed away November 28, 2019. <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/toledoblade/obituary.aspx?n=karen-lynn-thornton-biscay&pid=194748275>

Julie Sterman, former choir director at Brecksville-Broadview Heights High School, passed away December 7, 2020. <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/ohio/obituary.aspx?n=julie-gregory-sterman&pid=197250985&fhid=27647>

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thusiasm. They will be more inclined to work for you if they see how much you are working for them.

Don't be afraid to reach out to potential students. This year poses some new obstacles for recruiting and retaining students, and we educators may need to make adjustments to our normal recruitment process. If you've lost students this year, it's important to consider why they left. Some may have been overwhelmed with online school, or became disconnected with a

new class format, or wanted to prioritize other classes/activities. All of these are okay, and they aren't your fault! Take the opportunity to talk with those students, and offer the opportunity to rejoin. Remember that planning and communication are key so that students know what to expect. This is the perfect opportunity to build excitement, if students were denied many of the "normal" choir experiences this year. If you are lucky, your current students will convince their peers who are on the fence for you! Any communication can be effective,

and sometimes simply caring enough to ask is sufficient to bring a student into the fold.

The next school year is sure to be just as uncertain as the last. However, with a year of trials, experiments, and experience, we are now better equipped to handle the journey. Keep your program student-centered, and allow for leniency. If we look forward with enthusiasm and optimism, we are sure to find success and inspire our students to join in the magic of music. ♦

Upcoming Events

OCDA Virtual Summer Conference

June 21–22, 2021

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OCDA News, the official publication of the Ohio Choral Directors Association, is published three times annually and is distributed without charge to members of the Association as well as to selected members and officers of the American Choral Directors Association. Distribution is by PDF file that is posted at ohiocda.org. OCDA reserves the right to determine inclusion of materials submitted and to edit all materials proposed for distribution.

Copy and Ad Submission Deadlines: September 15 for the Fall Issue, January 15 for the Winter Issue, and April 15 for the Spring Issue.

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Tim Cloeter, Editor • timothycloeter@gmail.com • 262-527-8151



Ohio Choral Directors Association

Virtual
Summer Conference
June 21 and 22, 2021

MONDAY, June 21

- 8:00-8:30 Welcome and Concert Session 1
- 8:30-9:30 **Janet Galván**, Conducting with Purpose, Process, and Passion (Part 1)
- 9:45-10:45 **Zebulon Highben**, Beyond "Special Music": The Church Choir's Role in Worship
- 10:45-12:15 Featured Titles Reading Session
- 1:00-2:00 **Janet Galván**, Conducting with Purpose, Process, and Passion (Part 2)
- 2:00-3:00 **Derrick Fox**, Acknowledgement, Affirmation, and Action: Cultivating an Inclusive Choral Community
- 3:15-3:45 Concert Session 2
- 3:45-4:45 **Zebulon Highben**, Sing Many Names: Expanding Imagination and Imagery in Sacred Music
- 4:45-6:00 Gemütlichkeit/Happy Hour

TUESDAY, June 22

- 8:00-9:00 **Derrick Fox**, Assessment in the Choral Rehearsal
- 9:00-9:30 Concert Session 3
- 9:45-10:45 **Maria A. Ellis**, Ways to Present Historical and Contemporary African American Music in the Choral Setting
- 10:45-11:45 Exhibit Hall
- 12:00-1:00 OCDA Annual Meeting (attendees are also encouraged to eat lunch during this time!)
- 1:00-2:00 **Lynn Brinckmeyer**, Why Should I Care About Advocacy?
- 2:00-3:00 **Janet Galván**, Building Community and Empowering Individuals in the Choral Rehearsal
- 3:15-4:00 Interest Area Roundtables
- 4:00-5:00 **Derrick Fox**, The P.A.S.S.I.O.N.A.T.E. Director's Guide to Longevity in the Choral Classroom
- 5:00-5:30 Concert Session 4 and Closing

Leadership Roster

President

Brandon L. Moss
brandonlmoss@gmail.com
Central Crossing High School
First Unitarian Universalist Church of
Columbus

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rschnip@bgsu.edu
Bowling Green State University

President Elect

Doug O'Neal
rdohio@gmail.com
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bethvaughn@me.com
Bowling Green High School

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kwvandock@gmail.com
Perrysburg City Schools

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Katie Silcott
katherine_silcott@olsd.us
Olentangy Shanahan Middle School

NE Region Chair

Jennifer Call
jennifer.call@cim.edu
Cleveland Institute of Music

NW Region Chair

SeaHwa Jung
jung@findlay.edu
University of Findlay

SC Region Chair

Ian Stasko
istasko@jcs.k12.oh.us
Jackson City Schools

SW Region Chair

Sarah J. Baker
sbaker@lmsdoh.org
Little Miami High School

Standing Committee for Diversity Initiatives Chair

Bryon K. Black II
bkblack28@gmail.com
Kent State University

Standing Committee for Professional Development Chair

Emily Pence Brown
brownep@bgsu.edu
Bowling Green State University

Conference Chair

Daniel Landis
landda@wapak.org
Wapakoneta High School

Exhibits Chair

Holly Lewis Pemberton
HollyLewisPem@gmail.com
Worthington Kilbourne High School
Capital University

Membership Chair

Libby Hainrihar
hainrihar.3@osu.edu
Ohio State University

IT Coordinator

Eric West
ewest@defianceschools.net
Defiance High School

Newsletter Editor

Tim Cloeter
timothycloeter@gmail.com
Masterworks Chorale of Toledo

Mentorship Chair

Jon C. Peterson
jpeterson@malone.edu
Malone University

Historian

Amy Gelsone
ajgelsone@yahoo.com
Retired

Retired Representative

Vacant

Student Chapter Representative

Kendell Edgerton
edgerton@otterbein.edu
Otterbein University

Elementary Festival Chair

Lei Ramos
lramos@oldtrail.org
Old Trail School

Children's Honor Choir Chair

Michael Grimm
mcgrimm.music@gmail.com
Southwest Ohio HOBY

High School Honor Choir Co-Chairs

Meredith Smith
msmith@lhschools.org
Licking Heights High School

Josh Dufford
dufford.joshua@gmail.com
Ottawa Hills Jr./Sr. High School

Repertoire & Resources Chairs

Youth Choirs

Area Coordinator: Laurel Labbe

SCHOOL CHILDREN'S CHOIRS

Cynthia Mira
Cynthia.Mira@bellevueschools.org
Bellevue City Schools

COMMUNITY CHILDREN'S CHOIRS

Jeanne Wohlgamuth
jeanne@columbuschildrenschoir.org
Columbus Children's Choir

JR. HIGH/MIDDLE SCHOOL CHOIRS

Laurel Labbe
llabbe@woodridge.k12.oh.us
Woodridge Local School District

HIGH SCHOOL CHOIRS

Jason McKee
mckeej@masonohioschools.com
William Mason High School

Collegiate Choirs

Area Coordinators: Marie Bucoy-Calavan and Laura Kitchel

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY CHOIRS

Marie Bucoy-Calavan
mbucoycalavan@uakron.edu
mariebucoy@gmail.com
University of Akron

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Laura Kitchel
lkitchel@capital.edu
Capital University

Lifelong Choirs

Area Coordinator: Mario Buchanan

COMMUNITY CHOIRS

Hae-Jong Lee
hlee01@ysu.edu
Youngstown State University

MUSIC IN WORSHIP

Mario Buchanan
mario.buchanan@christchurch
hudson.org
Christ Church Episcopal

Repertoire Specific

Area Coordinator: Bradley Naylor

CONTEMPORARY COMMERCIAL:
CONTEMPORARY A CAPPELLA

Alex Phan
alex.phan@nocseagles.org
North Olmsted High School

CONTEMPORARY COMMERCIAL:
SHOW CHOIR

Jeff Clark
shwchr78@aol.com
Indian Hill High School

MEN'S/TTBB CHOIRS

Bradley Naylor
naylorb@ohio.edu
Ohio University

VOCAL JAZZ

Chris Venesile
cvenesil@kent.edu
Kent State University

WOMEN'S/SSAA CHOIRS

Jordan Saul
saul.52@osu.edu
Ohio State University

WORLD MUSICS AND CULTURES:
DEVELOPING VOICES

Kelly Winner
winner.kelly@gmail.com
Dempsey Middle School

WORLD MUSICS AND CULTURES:
INTERMEDIATE/
ADVANCED VOICES

Lisa Wong
lwong@wooster.edu
College of Wooster