

From Your President

2018 Summer Conference is Upon Us!

A QUICK LOOK at the schedule for our exciting upcoming Summer Conference (June 18–20) will assure every OCDA member of the conference’s benefits! The conference activities will provide professional growth for directors of all choirs, and a wonderful opportunity to network and reconnect with colleagues from across the state in this more intimate conference environment.

We are thrilled to welcome Jake Runestad and Hilary Apfelstadt as this year’s conference headliners. Jake is one of our country’s leading choral composers, known for his innovative yet accessible compositional style. In addition to his work as a composer, Jake is also regularly engaged throughout the US and abroad as a guest conductor and clinician. He will bring his perspective as a composer/conductor to our conference, sharing his newest music, revealing his compositional process, and providing insight for commissioning new works and for collaborating with living composers.

Having just retired this past month as Director of Choral Activities at the University of Toronto, Dr. Hilary Apfelstadt is excited to reconnect with Ohio friends and colleagues. Many of us know Hilary well from her 17 years at The Ohio State University, where she served as Coordinator of the Graduate Conducting Program, Director of Choral Activities, and eventually Associate Director of the School of Music. She is well known throughout the US and Canada for her leadership in our profession, having served as ACDA national president. Hilary’s body of work includes publications, research, and presentations pertaining to professional mentorship, choral leadership, Canadian repertoire, women’s choirs, and conducting and rehearsal pedagogy. She will share a wealth of knowledge on many of these topics as well as lead a conducting masterclass with our conference attendees.

This year’s conference will feature several wonderful performing choirs. Our opening session will begin with a concert by the Granville High School Women’s Chorus, under the direction of Kristen Snyder. On Monday evening, we will hear the Bay High School Choraleers, directed by Devon Gess, followed by our OCDA Women’s and Men’s Honor Choirs. This year’s Men’s Honor Choir is conducted by Otterbein University’s Dr. Gayle Walker and the Women’s Honor Choir is led by Ohio University Professor



*OCDA President
Richard Schnipke*

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Emeritus Dr. Peter Jarjisian. On Tuesday afternoon, Columbus Children's Choir Artistic Director Jeanne Wohlgamuth will conduct a performance of the New World Singers, the CCC's flagship ensemble. On Wednesday afternoon, we will be treated to a performance by OCDA's Children's Honor Choir, led by Dr. Kristina MacMullen from The Ohio State University. Kelsey Burkett's 8th Grade Women's Choir from Memorial Middle School in Hilliard will open the Wednesday afternoon concert.

As is our tradition, reading sessions for all types of choirs, selected by our OCDA Repertoire and Resources Chairs, will take

place throughout the conference. Music for high school, junior high/middle school, elementary school, church, community, college/university, and single gender choirs will be provided to all conference attendees through the generous support of J.W. Pepper. Dr. Ron Blackley of Ashland University will also present a session of "Choral Gems," focusing on wonderful, standard choral repertoire that should be part of everyone's choral library. A new reading session/clinic will also be presented this year by OCDA R&R Chairs Brody McDonald, Chris Venesile, and Jeff Clark, pertaining to special considerations for performing

music from the contemporary a cappella, vocal jazz, and show choir idioms.

Luncheon roundtable discussions, organized by R&R area, will bring together conductors of similar choirs to discuss challenges, successes, and future OCDA initiatives. All registrants are also invited to the Conference Luncheon and Business Meeting, where members of your OCDA board and executive committee will provide an overview of workings of the organization. And, our Monday evening Gemütlichkeit and Tuesday All-Conference Party (sponsored by Bob Rogers Travel) will give participants an opportunity to

connect and network in more relaxed, informal settings.

As you can see, the 2018 OCDA Summer Conference is going to be a

wonderful event, not to be missed. If you have not already registered, I highly encourage you to do so. All my best wishes for a wonderful

summer, full of time to recharge, relax, and plan for an incredible 2018–2019 season. I hope to see you at Otterbein June 18–20! ♦

Making Every Moment Count

Wei Cheng, East Central Region Chair

FOR CHORAL CONDUCTORS, the struggle to build a successful and vibrant ensemble is a constant challenge. It is only heightened in a school setting, where the choir roster often changes each semester. On top of that, it can really sting when students who have worked with you for years, and have become first-rate singers and leaders, graduate! These situations, along with handling challenging personal attitudes, skill levels, and experience levels, have helped me learn to be a better conductor and leader. I am a firm believer in the cliché: when life gives you lemons, make lemonade. None of these issues should keep us from striving to ensure our singers shine on stage.

I have not perfected dealing with the ups and downs of leading a choral program. But I have learned from all of my experiences, and I hope that sharing some of what I have learned over the years might prove useful.

Every attitude counts. We do so much more than just classroom teaching to build the ensemble. People often compare choral ensembles with athletic teams. There

are many reasons that China’s national soccer team has not been able to compete on the world’s stage; in my opinion, one of the reasons is that they have not yet learned how to operate as one: they still play like 11 individual players. As choir directors, we want to love our students so much that we give our all, as much as we can. We do this, in large part, by being positive and supportive. However, one person’s negative attitude can affect the people around him/her, even impeding our own working efficiency. Professionalism, the idea that we are working together and are responsible for one another, needs to be taught, with frequent reminders and nurturing. I encourage upperclassmen to model this attitude for freshmen and sophomores. If your older choir members embrace this added responsibility, the entire choir benefits.

Sometimes our graduating singers experience “senior syndrome,” and get distracted from the leadership role. It is our job to maintain a positive classroom—that is our number one responsibility! And part of the responsibility is reminding every student, even sen-

iors in their final weeks, that we are best only when we work together. I talk about this a lot, because it should be an ingrained part of our work together as musicians.

Bonding experiences are another key way to build a feeling of oneness. We should talk to them about the music, but we should also ask for and listen to their thoughts. Choir retreats are a lot of work, but time away from the structured classroom environment creates a space where singers are more comfortable to open up to the music and one another. Our society works against human interaction. We can spend the entire day on our phones, not talking or interacting with other people. Choral singing is a great place for students to experience interaction and empathy for each other. A lot of times, after the beginning of the rehearsal, I ask my students to take a short moment of “meditation” or do a humming exercise on a long note, encouraging them to leave their busy minds (or troubled emotions) out of the rehearsal room, so we can tune their energy into “one voice.”





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Every rehearsal counts. We are always busiest at the beginning and end of the year. It is crucial to begin each year with a successful audition week, which sets up a great start of the semester. And all too often the end of the semester has us frantic, focused on tightening the final measures, ensuring transitions between certain pieces go smoothly, getting posters and programs made, and covering all the logistics of concert production. We need to ensure, however, that rehearsals in the middle of the semester don't get overlooked. Once the semester is up and rolling (normally after second week of school), we can slip into auto pilot, using the same warm ups and routines to learn notes and text. While rou-

tines are welcome, we should always inject something new to add a bit of excitement into each rehearsal. How can we do something different and creative? How can we make the learning process less homogeneous? If we treat every rehearsal as equally important, our ensemble will grow more quickly and more profoundly over the semester.

Every effort counts. Every choral director is different—each has a personal way of rehearsing. Many of us teach notes and text first, focusing on music-shaping and refinement later. While there is nothing wrong with this process, I caution you to manage your time wisely. I have watched as people

spend too much time learning notes, without leaving enough time to make music. Learning correct pitches and diction is of course essential, but it is just as essential to teach music making, even if it is just five measures in each rehearsal. Since the voice is an internal instrument, part of the learning process is muscle memory, and you want musicality to be part of that memory from day one. I encourage music teachers to teach singers vocal technique, dynamics, and notes simultaneously.

Less experienced singers tend to learn musical notes through repetition. Instead of simply drilling notes over and over, layer in other aspects of the music (e.g. dynamics, vocal technique, the shape of a

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phrase, learning where the climax is, etc.) to increase rehearsal efficiency. You will be setting foundations of musicality indirectly into your singer's musical genes.

Here are three technical issues I consistently hear in choirs, that can be quickly fixed in a pinch.

Sustained note: Singing a long note does not mean “standing still.” This kind of temporary “rest” is so easy to do, just like taking a pit stop during a long run. When singing a long sustained note, continually engage your air support to maintain pitch tuning and move the musical phrase forward. Oftentimes, inexperienced singers withhold energy on a note longer than 4 beats, resulting in a straight tone, lacking color and direction. We often neglect the technique behind singing the long note. We must pay equal attention to the accompanying layers to ensure the melodic material shines. Sometimes, when a note is held for two or more measures, I ask for a crescendo and diminuendo to add color and sustain intensity.

Ascending leaping notes: Choirs often struggle with ascending leaping intervals. Either the higher note is under pitch, or the focus of the sound is lost. Many factors contribute to this issue, such as poor air support, delay in taking the breath, poorly formed vowels, or poorly executed consonants. Fixing this is simple: a) sing less on the low note, and instead focus on the higher note. Resist expending too much energy and time on the low note, leaving no space or time to properly prepare the higher note. b) In the leap between a low and high note, the beginning consonant can get in the way of the well-produced vowel. Ask the section with the high note to sing only the vowel, allowing the other voices to provide the consonants of the

word. This should allow for a warmer, more rounded sound on the high note.

Sluggish, low-energy singing: This is a subtle problem, but happens more often than we think. Are there times your choir sounds not bad, but you know something is missing? Maybe the choir is slowing down, or the energy isn't quite at the level you imagined, or perhaps the whole piece just sounds sluggish. Everything in the score is there, but the sounds needs a bit of salt and pepper to jazz it up. Energizing the initial consonant of pivotal notes (either by speeding it up or exploding the initial sound) makes a world of difference. Pivotal notes include syncopated notes, notes falling on the down-beat, notes marked staccato. Asking the singers to “spit” the consonant out faster will erase laziness while adding energy and clarity to the passage.

These tips are just a few ways to fix choral problems. To some, they might sound too obvious or trivial to pay attention to, but implementation can lead to dramatic improvement. It's not easy to build a great team, and harder still to maintain one. The challenge is constant, but we learn and improve from these challenges. Do not let a single rehearsal go by without having an end goal, and doing all you can to achieve it. Only when our students can think and speak the same musical language will we know that we are making an impact on their musical lives. ♦

It Begins With a Quality Chart!

Jeff Clark, R&R Chair for Show Choir

“CAN’T WE JUST sing the latest song from [insert latest animated Disney feature/musical theatre hit/pop tune-infused movie here]?”

As if show choir doesn’t already get a bad rap in our world, it makes things even more difficult when the arrangement doesn’t serve the choir. Too many times, I will see both the competitive and non-competitive pop ensemble work tirelessly to refine something that is inherently lacking the very refinement they are trying to polish.

What makes a quality “show” arrangement and how do we find the proverbial “diamond in the

rough?” Well Mr. Aladdin, sir, let us investigate.

Know your strengths. If you are short on men, teach the SAB voicing rather than the SATB to avoid splitting your guys. They will sing out more if they feel they have the support of their “bros,” and if they learn the single part with confidence, *then* teach the divisi. But only if you have the horsepower to do so!

Got a great soloist? Find a piece that would fit their range to showcase them. Remember, you can always turn that unison opening line into a solo.

Alter harmonies (yes, you may re-voice!) as needed to ensure sonorities lock with your choir’s unique vocal presence. Sometimes I have taken the alto part and turned it into a soprano descant line on repetitive choruses. The worst thing you can do is repeat the same chorus the same way over and over again!

The latest isn’t always the greatest. We love that our students know the latest hit pop tune and have an interest in learning it! I



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think it is important that we acknowledge the music and continue to advocate for them to enjoy it. However, not every piece is ripe for learning it the next day in choir class. Be candid and frank: let your students know that your choir may not be able to perform that piece like they heard it on the radio. Or, bring it back to them and say, would this piece have harmonies for us to work on? What can we learn by rehearsing this piece?

Then it's time to do *your* homework. Is there a recent hit that has a quality arrangement available? Does it stay true to the original but also have choral elements that would be beneficial for your ensemble's unique needs and level of execution?

Make it your own. Check the tessitura of the piece. Will it fit your ensemble? Are altos and tenors stuck on the same note for the entire piece? Does it repeat too much? Chances are, it does, and you will need to make some cuts to ensure proper pacing (yes, this is permitted as long as it doesn't change the overall integrity of the chart!). Need a dance break? Have the choir tacet during the chorus and feature the band instead.

Does it have quality text? Sure, that new piece is catchy! Ask yourself though, is this a piece that will stand the test of time? Can I do it again many years down the road? The "flash in the pan" hit today can often be forgotten tomorrow. Look

for quality lyrics that can engage further discussion and promote a deeper understanding. If the lyrics are pretty standard but you love the tune, look elsewhere to see what other educational moments can be pulled from it. Does it have a cool dance break you want to use to feature your group? Great! Make sure you work breath support/endurance as well as dynamics so that the singing always remains paramount and the students maintain focus to refining the elements of singing.

A good song is a good song, and a bad song is a bad song. Now comes the time I sound like a grumpy old man. Not every song today is a well written piece of music. Sometimes there is a lack of a good melody and

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no matter what you do to it, it is putting lipstick on a pig. Does it have a singable melody with a good range? What exactly attracts you to it? Can you *live* with hearing that same song for several months? We owe it to our students to make sure that the pop tune of our choosing promotes healthy vocal technique and has teachable moments. Sometimes that latest hit just doesn't offer much!

Custom may not always be the way to go. In my discussions with

directors, I have found that many often look to custom charts for their pop and show arrangements instead of stock—especially competitive ensembles. Hal Leonard arranger Mark Brymer says “those of us arranging ‘stock’ arrangements work very hard to enable choirs to sound their best when singing. It involves strategic choices of song keys, understanding what voicing will sound the most solid, and dozens of other factors we’ve learned by doing thousands of arrangements and

working with choirs of all ages. Keep in mind that the ‘custom’ part of your song choice can be achieved with unique costuming or challenging choreography.”

In the end, remember that careful evaluation of each piece will go far in your long-term success with your selection. More time spent on the front end will reduce any headaches with getting that quality chart! ♦

Our Singers Are the Inspiration for Success

Brad Naylor, R&R Chair for Student Activities

AT THE CONCLUSION of my first year of teaching at Ohio University, I find myself grateful for the “crowd of witnesses” that have encircled me and our growing and thriving choral program in Athens. It truly does take a village, and the villagers—for many of us, our students—are the energetic inspiration that fuels the success of our choirs. In addition to being conductors, we are also directors (indeed our organization is the American Choral *Directors* Association, not American Choral *Conductors* Association), and there are many important ways we can direct our students toward success, leadership, and achievement.

Student Initiatives

One of the principal ways to encourage students' ownership of

their own choral experience is through your support of their initiatives: the fundraisers, bake sales, awareness campaigns, retreats, t-shirt designs, and other creative organizational projects are a great opportunity for students (depending upon their age and acumen) to take the lead. Your chief role can be one of connector—to vendors, to administration, and to financial and persona resources that will enable their project's success. Because I teach at the collegiate level, I was able to be an artistic director, largely on a week-long spring-break tour organized almost entirely by the student executive board of the Singing Men of Ohio. There were bumps along the way, but the benefits of student growth and leadership far outweighed them. A misspelled poster is a

small price to pay for an elementary choir fundraiser that teaches an 11-year old her voice has value. When you support student initiatives, your students will feel you have their backs and value their ideas and ability. Come concert time, those feelings and their energy will flow back into their performance!

Engagement with the Choral Community

I grew up in an outstanding K-12 choral environment; still, the moments that solidified my path toward a career in choral music were not the ones in my school's choral room. While the rehearsal room is where your students learn the necessary skills for success in a choir, travel and connection to the





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broader choral community are where their memories are made, and their future lifetimes of song made certain. For me, it was a 7th-grade regional choir where I got to sing in a tenor section of 30 beautiful voices, focused entirely on shared musical excellence. It's those eye-opening conference or workshop experiences that will persist in your students' memories. No doubt you've got a "turning point" memory of your own. I encourage you to urge your students toward these experiences—a summer OCDA honor choir, a local festival, or a travel opportunity—that will engage them with our wider choral community and help them find their place in the larger singing world.

Student Teachers

The choral classroom is a terrific opportunity to teach teaching. Whether you are the DCA of a program with dozens of choral music education students or a K-5 general music teacher, your classroom is a place where choir students are learning to lead. When I directed an elementary girls chorus during my graduate school years I

found that making a positive example of students was enormously beneficial. Done in the right way, identifying those students who are models for excellent pitch, tone, rhythm, or even behavior by having them demonstrate their excellence to others can be esteem-building and exert positive peer pressure on others to give their best. Beginning in middle school (and depending upon your particular students), students can be section leaders with musical responsibilities to their peers. If possible, have your middle schoolers visit a high school rehearsal so they can learn how the "big kids" do it and bring good habits back to junior high. As age and maturity grow, so should responsibility. Our choral music education students at Ohio enjoyed Skyping with working music educators all over the country, asking questions about what the first year is like, how they manage their classrooms, and advice about getting started as a choral director.

What Not to Delegate to Students

Acknowledging that each choral director organizes their program in

a unique way, there are two big areas of the program I would be wary of delegating to students: repertoire and attendance/discipline. After I finished my master's degree I taught for two years at a boarding school in Massachusetts. I stepped into a tradition in which each summer the "top" choir submitted a list of pop songs to the director to be arranged as the 9-song concert program for the upcoming year. I spent my summer with bad 80s Euro Pop and three-chord angsty grunge music and the Fall trying to wrestle the students into Vivaldi *Gloria* for December. It was not my favorite year of teaching. The next year we did madrigals and part songs (and still a few pop a cappella tunes) and *Chichester Psalms* in December. It got better. But when I left two years later to go back to school, the tug-of-war over who chose the repertoire was far from over. *You* are the expert in the room on what music is pedagogically valuable. Early, ethnic, electronic, and exciting music of pedagogic value must come before whatever tops students' Spotify playlists. Even when a sophomore tenor's mother calls you complain-

ing about Thomas Weelkes (yes, she did), trust your gut!

Especially with younger students, you—or better yet, an objective system—should track your students' attendance. Your syllabus is your contract, which spells out ex-

pectations and consequences clearly. The consistency with which you adhere to these norms will breed confidence in your leadership. Having students monitor each other's attendance can quickly breed resentment and animosity in

an environment that seeks harmony.

Best wishes as you take a break from your villagers this summer, and plan for how best to channel their energy come fall! ♦

Upcoming Events

June 2018

OCDA Summer Conference

June 18–20, Columbus, OH

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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 e-mailed and 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.

Advertising Rates: a full-page ad is \$135 per issue, a half-page ad is \$80 per issue, and a quarter-page ad is \$45 per issue. A 15% discount is offered on the purchase of three consecutive ads; other discounts are available. Please contact the editor for exact ad sizes and other specifications.

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Ohio Choral Directors Association

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Questions? Contact: Christopher Dent, Conference Chair
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CLINICIANS INCLUDE:



Dr. Hilary Apfelstadt,
Elmer Isler Chair of Conducting
University of Toronto



Jake Runestad,
composer and conductor

Children's Honor Choir Conductor:



Kristina Caswell MacMullen,
Associate Director
of Choral Activities
The Ohio State University

2018 OCDA SUMMER CONFERENCE REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Registration fees include parking, the Tuesday business luncheon, the Tuesday evening social event, and reading session music (guaranteed only for workshop participants registering by June 1, 2018).

Fill out the registration form and return as indicated below. The registration must be postmarked by June 1, 2018, in order for the pre-registration fees to apply. After June 1, a higher fee structure is in place (see below). Reading session packets cannot be guaranteed for those who do not pre-register by the June 1 deadline. A refund will be made if a written cancellation is received by June 1, 2018. After that date a deduction of \$80.00 will be made.

The option to earn graduate credit through Otterbein University is available **for pre-registrants only**. If you would like to receive graduate credit information, please indicate this in the appropriate space on the registration form below. A current copy of your teaching license must be either mailed in with your registration form or brought with you to the conference.

Mail payment and Registration Form to: Christopher Dent, OCDA Summer Conference Coordinator, 4503 Edgerton Drive, Grove City, OH 43123. E-mail or call Christopher with questions: ocdaconference@gmail.com, 614-208-6778. Make checks payable to the **Ohio Choral Directors Association**.

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