

September 15, 2021
Volume 4, Issue 1



Virginia Harmony



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President's Message:
Recharged for a New Season!
— Bonny Tynch



Dear Colleagues,

I hope that you had time to recharge and really step away this summer. Last year was a year like no other, and we should all be proud of the tremendous work we did to make it through! At the end of our careers, I imagine we will look back on the last 18 months or so with tremendous pride and recognize our immense growth as educators and humans. I think we will also be able to acknowledge the opportunities for a purposeful reset, both personally and professionally, this season has given us.

As we negotiate our way forward in each corner of our choral worlds, I encourage you to take advantage of the resources at your fingertips with the newly updated [ACDA website](#). In this newsletter, you will find articles from some of your R&R chairs and the contact information for your VA-ACDA Leadership Team. We are here for you whether you need to find a copy of the updated protocols for safe singing in your place of worship or community; ideas for how to program for young singers that have been 'away' from singing chorally for a year; or inspiration for repertoire that will work for your choir. We have someone who has volunteered to help you! If you are not sure where to turn, you can always email me at btynch@vaacda.org and I will help point you in the right direction. Consider engaging with other members and keeping up with choral events in our Facebook group, [Virginia ACDA](#).

We strive to make membership in ACDA relevant, accessible, and meaningful for all who work in the rich variety of choral arts in our state. We recognize that we have tremendous room to grow, and we commit to thoughtfully examining our organization's structure and programming through the lens of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion principles.

We value your participation and depend on your help in identifying ways to serve choral communities throughout Virginia—even those who are not currently a part of our membership. Perhaps you have new colleagues or veteran colleagues that have not found the resources or reasons to become members of ACDA. Please invite them to join us in VA-ACDA! Starting today, September 15 through November 15, we are participating in the SingUP! Membership campaign and have several complimentary memberships to share! And, for renewing members: beat the deadline and be entered for a chance to win a free membership next year!

I am looking forward to music making this year, and I hope you will share your joys, successes, challenges, questions, failures, hopes, needs and ideas with your choral community throughout it all. Here's to you, Virginia ACDA.

Warmly,
Bonny M. Tynch
President
Virginia ACDA

ACDA
UPDATE

AMERICAN CHORAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

UPDATE

**COVID-19 Resources and Guidance from
the CDC and Our Collaborating Partners
Platforms**

[READ MORE → choralnet.org/announcements/](https://choralnet.org/announcements/)



American Choral Directors Association
SOUTHERN REGION CONFERENCE

RALEIGH, NC

FEBRUARY 23-26, 2022

The Radford University ACDA Student Chapter presents:

ACDA STUDENT ACTIVITIES MINI CONFERENCE

Featuring Dr. Elizabeth Hogan

- Ph.D. in Learning, Teaching and Curriculum from the University of Missouri and a Masters of Music in Choral Conducting from Michigan State University.

- Interim Director of Choirs at Washington University in St. Louis.

- Executive Director of the St. Louis Christmas Carols Association

September 25, 2021

11:30 a.m.

Online meeting via ZOOM

<https://radford.zoom.us/j/97081493571>

Password: VAACDA

UNITED WE STAND- Techniques to Unify the Mind and the Body in the Choral Rehearsal

In this session, Dr. Hogan will share philosophy, vocalises and movement ideas to assist in creating a peaceful and holistic approach to choral singing.

For more information,
contact Dr. Meredith Bowen at
mbowen16@radford.edu



From your Membership Chair: Leslie Dripps



- [Join or renew by Nov. 1](#) for a chance to **win next year's membership for free!** *You can renew within 3 months of current membership expiration; renewal will begin on the current year's expiration date. NEW! Active Memberships can sign up for auto-renewal or monthly installments (avail. Oct. 1) and get your life back!*
- Request a [Complimentary Membership](#) by Nov. 1 for a free, one-year membership.
Complimentary Memberships are for...
 - Any new or returning member experiencing organizational or personal financial limitations
 - Any teacher in the first year of teaching chorus
 - Any newly enrolling member whose institution serves minority populations of 50% or more
 - Any newly enrolling member who identifies with any historically underrepresented group in ACDA, in recognition of the significant artistry those groups have continuously provided
- [Advocacy Resources](#) for your school administration (COMING SOON!)
A year-long project has been launched to assemble a collection of **evidence-based support and best practices** for building strong choral programs **designed specifically for distribution to school administrators** or boards of directors. We will leverage the decades of choral, singing, and music education research into a powerful tool for our membership. We need your input! [Complete this survey](#) to contribute to this project or sign up to become involved.

QUESTIONS? NEED HELP RENEWING? Email Trina at membership@acda.org the national office directly, or Leslie at lesliedripps@gmail.com. We both welcome your questions!

ACDA MEMBERSHIP *for dummies, please!*

I have a confession. I'm The Person. You know that person. The person who forgets *every year* that her membership is expiring. The person who *does. not. have. time.* to read renewal reminders. The person who, six hours before an honor choir event, renews membership in a panic and then needs an email from Trina to show the event hosts.

To the appalled Organizing Czars out there who placed an annually recurring task on their calendars from the very first day they joined, I apologize and am impressed and inspired. However, my limited "organizational powers" (I use the term loosely) too often find themselves at capacity to even conceive of this.

So, as your new Membership Chair (irony, am I right?) I have some requests to submit to the national office to help folks like me renew in a timely manner:

1. For any who request it, please fund a small tasteful tattoo of membership number and renewal date. *Tattoo location should probably be easily visible without a mirror.*
2. Offer subdermal implants which send mild electrical zings with ever increasing frequency and vehemence as renewal date approaches. *Maybe add a feature to make it react to junk food, too?*
3. Commission a mass-produced, old-timey automaton, jack-in-the-box wound up annually to spring out (horribly and leeringly) on the renewal date. *I would do just about anything to avoid this.*
4. Sub-contract Amazon delivery drivers to also distribute in-person verbal renewal reminders. *These folks are some of our most frequent visitors, anyway. Let's harness that resource!*
5. Create an auto-renewal process on the website, which takes credit cards. *If I could manage renewing once I'd be set.*
6. Along with auto-renew, maybe offer monthly installment payments. Charged automatically to my credit card on file? *Heaven. Sigh...*

As you can see I'm an ideas gal, though requests 1-4 seem unlikely. But there *is* good news: both the **auto-renewal option** AND **monthly installments option** are happening! (Installments available Oct. 1.) www.acda.org/membership-central These options are bound to change my life, and the lives of many like me; after all, we live in times where small things need to be celebrated. So, when your calendar reminder prods you to renew this year: *wow, the options!*

There is a question every organization should ask itself regularly, and while I can't imagine that anyone has ever muttered in an exhausted undertone, "Why ACDA, anyway?," I've been thinking carefully about exactly that question. Just what makes ACDA membership worth all that calendar trouble? After chatting with colleagues, ACDA leadership, and even folks who aren't yet members, we compiled a complete and, dare I say, energizing list [here](#), both for your enjoyment and to share.

Included in that list is a new endeavor I am particularly excited about:

[Advocacy Resources](#) for use in conversations with school administration

Are you occasionally treated as if you single-handedly invented the entire spectrum of choral arts merely for your personal convenience? Just me? A year-long project has been launched to assemble a collection of **evidence-based support and best practices** for building strong choral programs **designed specifically for school administrators** and boards of directors. We will leverage the decades (possibly centuries) of choral, singing, and music education research into a powerful tool for our membership.

- This project needs your input! Please [complete this survey](#) so we have a thorough sense of what is needed.

If you have any additional suggestions--no matter how wild!—(Automatons are on the table!) to make renewal easier, send them to me! I'll be glad to hear from you. Have a great year!



From your Jr. High/Middle School R&R Chair: Kevin Sapp

What is Your Why?

Kevin Sapp is starting his twenty-first year as a choir director and teacher. A veteran of the USAF Band, Kevin enlisted in 1992 and joined the US Air Force Band Singing Sergeants. The USAF Band afforded many splendid opportunities, including performing throughout the United States in many prestigious concert halls. Kevin has shared the stage with many musical legends such as Jester Hairston, Lena Horne, Billy Taylor, as well as contemporary musical greats like Denyce Graves and Michael McDonald. In addition, Kevin has performed with “American Idol” winners Ruben Studdard and Taylor Hicks and pop stars Lee Ann Rimes and Chris Brown. In 2000, Kevin joined Fairfax County Public Schools as Director of Choirs at Mt. Vernon High School in Alexandria, VA where he taught Choir, Music Theory, IB Music, and Guitar. In the fall of 2006 Kevin moved to his current position as Directors of Choirs at Joyce Kilmer Middle School.

My Why

Even in the best of times, we sometimes struggle to get ourselves going. This Summer I, like others, sometimes found it difficult to get started with planning, choosing repertoire, and completing all the tasks associated with the start of a new school year. Also, having been separated from those like-minded hearts and souls that always helped me stay motivated, I found myself feeling drained and uninspired. And, in mid-August, with the start of school fast approaching, I was uninspired and unmotivated. I found myself simply going through the motions. However, I was recently reminded that sometimes we need to reflect on *why* we do what we do. Although I am not generally given to reflection, this has helped me to find a path to rekindle my enthusiasm. So, if you are finding it difficult to find your fire, I encourage you to try this. Ask yourself “What is *My Why*?” I hope that you did not find that too “preachy.” If you did, then maybe knowing more about me might help.

Much of my time as a youth was spent singing in and listening to church/gospel choirs. Growing up in the Dunbar Heights neighborhood of Ft. Myers, Florida, singing in church choirs was common. Most churches had four or five choirs, and, at my church, I sang in two. The entire community was steeped in church/gospel choir singing: every Sunday morning as well as at Wednesday evening rehearsals and monthly gatherings of church choirs (called Choir Unions) at churches throughout the community. There were separate events for youth choirs, men’s choirs, and adult mixed choirs. Clearly, my upbringing had instilled in me a great appreciation of the value of the choral singing tradition. I had been given a sense of the intrinsic value of choral singing, if not always a realization of the financial value. It was not until college that I became aware that one could be paid as soloist/section leader of a church choir.

I entered college as an engineering student; however, one of the first things I did upon arriving was to join the college gospel choir. Eventually, I changed my major to music and my world made sense all at once. Recent times have presented many roadblocks to the ability to collaborate with each other. As music teachers and choir directors our greatest resource is each other. Therefore, I hope to use this position to connect with colleagues and to promote the sharing of great ideas for new and innovative resources and repertoire.

From your High School R&R Chair: Theodore Thorpe

Diversifying Our Choral Literary Palette: A formal introduction, a transparent conversation, and an encouraging resource

It's the first day of school. The first full day of in-person learning in almost eighteen months. Wait, did I just say that? You mean no more virtual or hybrid learning? You mean no more requesting students to turn on their camera? You mean no more, at least not for now, constantly following up with students about turning in their audio and video files for our virtual choral "window-pane style" projects? You mean no more imagining or reimagining what our ensembles sound like collectively? Yes, like you I'm both nervous and excited. I'm pacing around the classroom making sure chairs and stands are sanitized and in the right place. Making sure syllabi, handbooks, singer's masks, and tuning forks are ready to be passed out, all while keeping optimism at the forefront as students make their way to the classroom. The bell rings, students take their seats, and I ask for an A-natural hum from the soprano and bass section. Altos and tenors soon find the third and fifth scale degree, respectively. A choral warmup begins, then ends. We take a thirty second pause to internalize and reflect on what we just did, and what we haven't been able to do in quite some time. Never again will we take for granted the privilege to do what we just did collectively.

"Good morning!", I say to my Advanced Choir Class, and they respond, "Good morning Mr. Thorpe!" "I've missed each and every one of you." And my heart delights to hear them say, "We've missed you, too." "My name is Mr. Theodore Thorpe III, and my students call me Mr. Thorpe." To those of you reading this, I am currently serving in my twelfth season as Director of Choral Activities at the Alexandria City (formerly TC Williams) High School "where excellence exceeds expectations." I am honored to serve in leadership as your High School Repertoire & Resource chair. Now that we've been formally introduced, let's have a conversation. A continuing conversation. One that is ironically built on the inquisitive nature of young student choral musicians. My students know that any piece of literature introduced in the rehearsal space is not only theirs to execute musically, but also theirs to historically and socio-economically digest. As a man of African descent, my choral curriculum will naturally include literature by Black composers. Yet still, without informing my students right away of the ethnicity of the composer, these scholarly musicians have a keen sense of being able to differentiate the breadth of music from the African diaspora, versus simply checking the proverbial box. With that being said, I invite you to join this continuing conversation.

"Wade in the water," "Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel," "Elijah Rock," "Soon Ah' will be done," "My Lord what a morning," "Deep river," and "Ride the chariot." Any of those sound familiar? Yes, they are some of the many Spirituals that we as high school choral music educators have taught, programmed, and performed on the concert stage. Most of us understand the intrinsic value of the Spiritual and its overall importance to the diaspora of American music. We also are aware of the many contributions of African American composers and arrangers to said Spirituals. This is because these compositions are idiomatic to the usual canon associated with Black musicians. Other examples of this association would be jazz, rhythm and blues, funk, rap (hip-hop), and gospel music. While we certainly hold dear the idioms of American music by Black composers and continue to celebrate them, there was and is so much more!

"Atonement" Op. 53 by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and *"I Am Only One"* by Adolphus Hailstork were both written by black composers. Any of these titles sound familiar? How about *"Psalm For The Living"* by William Grant Still or *"Scenes from the Life of a Martyr"* by Undine Smith Moore or *"Arise Beloved"* by Rosephanye Powell or *"Music of Life"* by B. E. Boykin or even *"Stars"* by George Walker? The musical pieces mentioned here are just a taste of an existing, ever growing, and developing catalog of non-idiomatic compositions by black composers. This compilation is a resource for any music educator who would love to continue to broaden and diversify their choral literary palette. Herein lies my conversation with friend and colleague Dr. Marques L. A. Garrett, assistant professor of Choral Music at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and founder of the compilation of *Non-Idiomatic Compositions by Black Composers*.

Dr. Garrett, a Virginia native, conducts the University Chorale, Chamber Singers, and teaches courses in graduate choral literature and undergraduate conducting. In addition to these responsibilities, he is a renowned composer, vocalist, guest clinician, and lecturer. His lectures and presentations specifically on the non-idiomatic compositions of black composers have been sought after by state and regional conferences of the American Choral Directors Association. In our conversation, I asked Dr. Garrett what inspired him to research this topic as well as compile such a catalog. He mentioned while in his graduate studies at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, he was surprised at how many of his colleagues were unfamiliar with the non-idiomatic choral music of black composers. Many of these contributions have been around for decades and even centuries but have not received the recognition nor graced the stage as regular choral programmatic material for public consumption. These contributions include but are not limited to choral anthems, choral art songs, choral motets, cantatas, masses, suites, oratorios, rhapsodies, folk songs, and choral meditations.

With so many pieces of choral literature composed by so many Black composers, it begs the question: how could such treasures go unnoticed? Are they accessible? Is it possible that they're unpublished? Have they been performed regularly? Have they been given a national platform or main stage to be performed regularly? Are they a part of the literary teaching tools used in classrooms where choral literature is the subject area? While all of these are valid questions, they are a secondary topic for another discussion. The good news is, thanks to the research and work of Dr. Marques L.A. Garrett, we have a resource. See below.

<https://www.mlagmusic.com/research/beyond-elijah-rock>

Here you will find a full list of non-idiomatic choral music by black composers for SATB, SSAA, TTBB, and other voices. Some are accompanied, others unaccompanied, and even some settings are with full or chamber orchestra. You will also find the publishers of each piece as well as specific links for purchase. What's wonderful about this compilation of music is that it also shines a light on black composers both past and present. Musicians like William Grant Still, R. Nathaniel Dett, Undine Smith Moore, José Maurício Nunes Garcia, and Florence Price. Musicians like B. E. Boykin, J.S. Mzilikazi Khumalo, Ysaye Barnwell, Ken Burton, Jason Max Ferdinand, Marques Garrett, and yours truly.

Blake Morgan, an incredible composer, arranger, educator, vocalist, and member of renowned ensemble *Voces 8*, compiled a non-comprehensive list of thirty-one black composers that he advises should be on your programs and playlists. I certainly concur with his sentiment. As we continue to include the compositions of these great musicians in our concert programming, it is of equal importance to discuss in

our classrooms the historical significance of these composers, and the socio-economic reasons that inspired their writings. (See Below)

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e49ef526b594c4c6ca3db0c/t/5f5539f636732345b4dfef5d/1599420945355/Black-Choral-Composers-Blake-Morgan.pdf>

I'm sure you would agree that teaching music through a pandemic has been both challenging and humbling. It has also given us a greater perspective on life as we fought to find the silver linings, while not knowing when or where our next performance would be. In full transparency, some of us weren't sure another virtual choral year was even fathomable. We have now reentered the classroom, with all those beautiful, partially covered faces looking to us to lead. It's now our responsibility to use as many tools and resources as possible to teach, inspire, build, cultivate, and unify with our hearts as well as continue to move the choral conversation forward.

From your Four Year College R&R Chair: Erin Freeman

The other day I saw a meme that captured my entire ethos this semester. A man is sitting at a table. To his left are multiple sized jars of lemonade. To his right is an unruly pile of lemons, with more lemons pelting him at rapid speed. He has his head on the table in defeat, allowing the lemons to continuously hit him on his head, shoulders, back, and arms. He has no more energy to catch and squeeze them, no more sugar to add, and no more jars in which to pour his homemade concoction.

I feel his pain—we all do. Since March 2020, we have caught the lemons midair, sometimes deftly, usually awkwardly, and turned them into something somewhat drinkable. Can't meet in person? Okay, let's invent a new form of choir called ZoomHearsal! Can't perform for people? Okay, let's get all dressed up, perform for an empty auditorium, and livestream for our families at home. Budget cut? Okay, let's learn GarageBand, Adobe Premiere, QuickTime, and Camtasia ourselves and create some palatable videos to give our singers some inspiration and motivation. Let's cheerlead, compromise, and pivot. Oh, how we'll pivot. And we'll do it with enough enthusiasm to mask our fear, anger, and dread.

At our best, we'll consider how all these new skills and outlooks can make the choral ensemble better in the future. At our most vulnerable, we'll break down sobbing on Zoom in front of our entire ensemble while singing "My Way" with alternate lyrics. (That may or may not have happened last year, and I think it was recorded!)

And now, we're just tired. Out of ideas, hit with random bits of news that threaten to derail our precarious plans at any moment. The lemons keep coming, and we, as choral leaders, are out of sugar and jars.

So, what can we do? Last semester, my mantra was "People First, Content Second, and Technology Third." This year, I'm still trying to live by those words, but given the inability to feel secure in any long-range planning I'm pivoting (yet again) to a secondary modus operandi: "The little things matter." Without confidence that a performance will actually manifest and with the novelty of meaningful videos

and Zoom games wearing off, I'm focusing on exposing my students to those valuable little things that ultimately create the magic of choral singing. Here is my list of techniques that I'm hoping my students learn this semester.

1. Overtones – How to produce and hear those mysterious and magical choral byproducts
2. Chord Tuning – What is the true trick to tuning a chord?
3. Count Singing – The key to life (and rhythmic accuracy, energizing long notes, singing in tune, and building vertical awareness)!
4. Solfege – More than just learning the notes of a scale, but understanding the function of the Ti, matching vowels, and building chords
5. Active and Targeted Listening – How to be mindful of the parts around you in an intentional way
6. Silent Practicing – How to approach and learn music without always having to sing full volume (or at all)
7. Correct Nomenclature – How to talk about music in a way that is mindful of our continued awareness of justice and equity in music
8. Speaking – How to ask a question or give instructions in a clear, focused manner (page number first, then system, then measure number, etc.)
9. Professionalism – How to write an email to your professor!
10. Co-Leading – Who is truly the leader in the ensemble? How can you lead from your position in the ensemble? How can you truly share the role with your colleagues?

Each time I'm able to address even one of these in rehearsal, I have an internal celebration. I feel powerful and triumphant; perhaps even more powerful than standing on a podium in a concert. I feel like I'm giving them the tools they need to catch a few of those lemons that are coming our way and in the future make a delicious choral elixir of their own.

To my colleagues across the Commonwealth: hang in there!!! You don't need to create over-the-top performance experiences every semester. Our students need you to teach them the little things, so that they can eventually make a big impact. And . . . if you can't make any more lemonade, there's always a martini with a twist!



From your Vocal Jazz R&R Chair: Keri Staley

Make Connections and Have Fun with Vocal Jazz

This fall gives many of us the ability to hear our singers in person again and allow for them to hear each other. Hooray! With that joy comes new challenges of rebuilding confidence and remembering how to blend and match vowels. Choosing activities and repertoire that meet these challenges and bring forth a sense of community is essential. I challenge you to take a deeper look at what vocal jazz has to offer.

Our singers are coming to us with a craving for connection; connection to music, to each other, and to life. Vocal jazz represents community. Singing jazz brings people out of their comfort zone, which beautifully aligns with how we all inevitably feel during and after the Covid pandemic. It's a great time to give it a try!

Vocal jazz sometimes gets a bad rap from choir directors, viewed as "light" or "easy." True vocal jazz music is a wonderful world of new chords, dissonance, give and take, and vowel blend. All singers must be confident in their individual part, which can feel incorrect at times, needing to trust the dissonant harmonies by locking in the chords with matching vowels. It's a choir director's dream! Taking time to clean each chord and listen carefully challenges singers to trust, gain confidence, and make "fun" music sound truly outstanding.

Where do I start? Because vocal jazz derives from mimicking instrumental jazz, try listening to musicians like Benny Carter, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis with your students as an introduction. Have them identify what they hear, recognizing the various timbres of each instrument and how beautiful they blend with each other. Compare how voices have similar sounds and can blend with similar timbres. (The listening activity is a great time to let the aerosols dissipate when breaking up a longer rehearsal.)

Here are some more ideas on how to incorporate vocal jazz concepts with choir singers:

1. Swing your favorite vocal warm up by snapping on the 2 and 4 and turning it with a swing style. Play around with different vowel sounds (doo ba doo, doh van doh, etc.) to teach vowel blend. Watch the smiles in the eyes light up!
2. Build tall chords in your vocal warm-up. Divide parts in thirds, keeping adding.
Examples:
 - A. Basses: Do, Tenors: Mi, Alto: Sol, Sop: Te (Te)
 - B. Basses: Do, Baritones: Mi, Tenors: Sol, Altos: Ti (Te), Sop: Re
 - C. Basses: Do, Baritones: Mi, Tenors, Sol, Altos: Ti (Te), Sop2: Re, Sop1: Fa
 - D. Options:

- Once the chord is understood, play around with singing on the same vowels/words.
- Invert the chords with different voice parts on different solfege, remember to embrace the dissonance. Try telling your singers, “Sing it like it’s right.”

3. Play around with rhythm and improvisation!

- Have your singers stand in a circle, put a track like this on <https://youtu.be/5XdjRYtHe2M> (There are so many wonderful swing tracks on YouTube that students can use both in the classroom and at home to gain skills with their improvisation.)
- Share a fun article or short story to take turns reading aloud with swing rhythm. (You could even use a music theory study guide to reinforce other concepts learned in class that you want to stick in their brain. Hello, reinforcement!)
- Each student reads one sentence aloud, playing around with the jazz rhythm to fit with the track.
- When students feel ready, they can add some vocalization to their rhythm. (Note: the trick is to have fun, get comfortable with improv, and be OK with making mistakes. Laughter is good!)

This year brings more uncertainty and new challenges. I hope these vocal jazz concepts and activities bring you and your students a smile and something new to play with as we navigate back to the choir classroom. Remember to trust your heart, have fun with your students, and lean on your colleagues for comfort and reassurance. We all will be a little like Bud Powell, Un Poco Loco! (Look this one up on YouTube.) Bring it on, 2021!

From your Children’s and Community Youth R&R Chair: Jane Morison

Happy fall, y’all! For the past six years I have served as the Membership Chair for VA ACDA, and I have now flipped roles with Leslie Dripps to become the R&R Chair for Children’s and Community Youth.

I would like to get to know our Virginia Children’s and Youth Choir directors better, and I hope we can plan some get-togethers at both state and regional conferences. I would also encourage you to join the Children’s and Youth Choirs Repertoire Forum on Facebook: [https:// www.facebook.com/groups/408679839272450](https://www.facebook.com/groups/408679839272450). In addition to a great exchange of ideas and some wonderful information, they sponsor a fantastic biennial workshop which I attended in Atlanta in January 2020. Hopefully we will convene January 15-16, 2022 in Tucson, AZ.

I am also available to meet you on my bike! My other passion is cycling--both mountain and road--and I would love to host you on my favorite local ride, the beautiful Virginia Creeper Trail, or meet you at the New River Trail or any other trail or road you love to ride. I had an awesome “bike meeting” with our Shenandoah Valley Children’s Choir colleague Janet Hostetter this summer!

I hope you are having a great start to your semester, and if you have any ideas about how ACDA can serve you better, please let me know.

From your Repertoire Specific Coordinator: Sherlee Glomb

Creating a Safe Space in the Choral Classroom

On August 7, 2021, I was asked to be a part of a talk back panel at the VA, MD/DC, and DE ACDA Voices United Virtual Conference titled, *“Preparing for a New Tomorrow.”* I was approached by VA-ACDA Ethnic and Multicultural R and R chairperson Daniel Jackson to join his talk back, *“What is Equity? The Variety of Challenges Facing Today’s Choral Director”* alongside Dr. Marshaun R. Hymon (Co-Founder of True Change Alliance, LLC), Dr. Kari Adams (FSU Professor), Daniel Jackson (Stone Bridge H.S.), and A.J. Rodriguez (South County H.S.).

Our conversations covered a broad range of topics within equity, including defining equity through our own lens, discussing what it means to be ‘equitable,’ to discussing how we respond to some people’s point of view that choral music’s primary purpose has become social justice and a political breeding ground.

With school starting around the corner, I focused primarily on some more practical ways to create a safe and more equitable classroom environment for all students and what it means to have a “culturally responsive” classroom. The following information is taken from a handout that I created for this talk back.

It’s important that students can have a safe place to release their thoughts and feelings about the negative things they see, hear, feel, and fear each day. Enabling conversations about these issues empowers students to voice their concerns and questions about unjust situations in their lives or in the lives of those around them.

1. Be Transparent

- Teach through who you are (your family, hobbies, food, music, culture, beliefs)
- Explore texts in a choral piece and how it connects with your emotional life
- Fully embracing and accepting who you are helps your kids do the same for themselves

2. Create ways for students to share who they are with you.

- Icebreakers
- Index card and have them write their given name, preferred name and pronouns, favorite song, hobby, and one thing they hope to get out of the class.
- Question or Quote of the Day (write answer on stickies and stick on board)
- Run a weekly poll using a Google form
- Use exit slips
- Use a teacher reflection survey
- Use a one-minute reflective journal with prompts
- Soundtrack of My Life project

- “This I Believe...” Board: Anonymous notes written at end of class of what they believe in (e.g., “I believe all students should be seen and heard”) and read them at the end of the week. Then, put it up on a Positivity Board for all to see.

3. Be fully present and deliberate in communication

- Use transition times between classes, lunch, recess, or bus duty to engage students
- Greet students by name and offer a friendly comment or ask questions about their day. Be sure to say their name correctly and ask about their pronouns.
- Make specific comments to students to show you care and that you see them

4. Celebrate the artistry of people from marginalized segments of society

- Be highly inclusive in the repertoire you choose and the ways you talk about music. Program works written by women, the LGBTQ community, people of color, and from a wide variety of genres and time periods—and not just during Black History Month or Women’s History Month. Explore the many ways that people create music that speaks to their human experience.
- Theme your concerts to express feelings, concerns, resilience, social injustices
- Decorate your classroom with a broad representation of what it means to be a musician and artist
- Celebrate trailblazers who defy stereotypes
- Ask students to share who their musical heroes are with you

5. Make room for student feedback.

- Student reflection after concerts, performances, and class can give us insight into what is working within our program as well as where needs can be addressed
- Ask students to brainstorm concert themes or let them provide some input into choosing a single piece (assuming it’s appropriate both in terms of content and being arranged well for their skill level). It’s possible to give students some of what they want while also delivering the instruction they need. Your ability to balance these considerations can help with student buy-in and engagement within your program.

Creating Safe Spaces: Transgender & Gender Nonbinary Singers

- ◆ **When posting for singer auditions** keep language about voice parts gender-neutral
- ◆ **Include a rainbow sticker** or other symbol as an LGBTQ ally in your chorus rehearsal space
- ◆ **In the audition setting, ask new and returning singers what pronouns they use** and include this question on your audition form for each singer to fill out
- ◆ **Post signs for gender-neutral bathrooms in rehearsal and concert spaces.** Educate your chorus and audience regarding the protocol and importance of gender-neutral restroom space.
- ◆ **Use gender-neutral language in rehearsal** and insist that all section leaders and singers also follow these same guidelines
- ◆ **Invite all singers to audition for any solo that fits their vocal range** regardless of gender
- ◆ **Invite transgender and gender-non-conforming** individuals, students, artists, speakers, and song writers to perform as guest artists in your concerts

- ◆ **Program songs by transgender and gender-non-conforming composers and song-writers.** Share stories in your classroom that educate the student singers regarding gender nonconforming individuals in history or current day experiences.
- ◆ **Examine requirements mandating gender-specific concert attire.** Forcing singers into gender specific (or incongruent) clothing may be seen as a public devaluing of identities and communicates indifference to the spectrum of gender identity and expression.
- ◆ **Assign voice sections for each singer dependent on their voice range and voice color.*** If a singer's voice is still transitioning check their range every 3-4 months and assist them in moving to a new vocal part as needed.
- ◆ **If a singer shares that they are transitioning via testosterone,** ask when they started and how the transition has affected their vocal range, etc. It will typically take 6-12 months for a singer's voice to settle to a consistent range and can take up to 2 years to be reached.

* You may encounter a singer who requests to sing in a voice part that doesn't fit their range. Choral directors should have a plan for what to do with trans singers who want to sing a voice part that matches their gender identity.

Guidelines to Building a Culturally Responsive Curriculum

First, we must figure out what defines culture and what cultures exist in our classroom.

Culture is often thought of in terms of just different ethnic groups but it can also be viewed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, abilities, or class. A student may belong to more than one culture in which case their cultures will naturally intersect. It is also important to examine the "invisible" cultures within the classroom which may include:

- What is the culture of the choirs, historically speaking?
- What cultures make "higher education" or "elite ensembles" what they are today?
- What cultures have been "privileged" in the creation and maintenance of our choir classes and how can we create a more equitable environment?

So, once we understand the cultures and biases that exist in our classes, then we can address guidelines for a culturally responsive curriculum. These include:

1. Respect diversity
2. Engage motivation of a broad range of students and cultures
3. Create a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment
4. Derive teaching practices from across disciplines and cultures
5. Promote an equitable learning environment

As we enter a new school year, it may be a good time to revisit some of our choir curriculum and give it a face lift toward being more culturally responsive. This may include:

- Dress code requirements (consider a more unisex uniform)
- Yearly fee requirements (scholarship fund or decreasing fees)
- Self-prepared auditions (consider student leadership or mentorship programs to help students without access to private teachers)
- Being aware of privileging specific types of instructional strategies
 - ◇ Sight-reading over rote learning or improvisation
- Concert Programming – Equal representation of composers, poets and genres of underrepresented groups
- Community building activities
 - ◇ The design of sectionals and small group rehearsals
 - ◇ Class parties (especially when food is involved)
 - ◇ Parties where money is collected
 - ◇ Any fundraising opportunities, class trips
 - ◇ Any after school functions, rehearsals, concerts, assessments, special gigs out of school (anything involving parents having to pick up students after hours).
 - ◇ Communication (using remind101, text chain, email) not every family will have access to cell phones or computers

Language of communication, too—do we only provide written information in English even when we know we have families who primarily speak a different language at home?

In conclusion, creating a safe and equitable music environment can provide a break from judgment, unsolicited opinions, and having students explain themselves. It also allows students to feel supported and respected. This is especially important for minorities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and other marginalized groups. When schools provide students with the proper tools and resources to fit the individual student's needs and circumstances, the entire classroom environment will improve overall. Not only that, but the important of equity extends beyond to our society as a whole. In equitable communities, everyone has the opportunity to succeed regardless of their original circumstances.



VA-ACDA Calendar of Events

All Year	Sing for Virginia composer advocacy initiative #sing4va
September 1, 2021	Newsletter Publication #1 articles due: Voices United Wrap-up, Leadership Team highlights, membership drive information
September 15, 2021	Newsletter #1: Published via website, email, and social media
Sept. 15 - Nov. 15, 2021	ACDA membership drive - encourage someone to join!
November 7, 2021	<i>Executive Board Virtual Meeting @ 7:30 PM</i>
November 18-20, 2021	VMEA Conference: VA-ACDA membership meeting during the conference, date and time TBD
January 2022	Recruitment for open R&R chair positions
January 15, 2022	Newsletter #2 articles due: Voices United Conference information, All Virginia Middle School Chorus Information, articles from membership, membership drive updates
January 29, 2022	<u>VA-ACDA Leadership Team virtual meeting</u> - 8:30am-9:30am
February 1, 2022	Newsletter #2: Published via website, email, and social media
February 23-26, 2022	Southern Region Conference, Raleigh, NC
March 28, 2022	<i>Executive Board Virtual Meeting @ 7:30 PM</i>
April 21-23, 2022	All Virginia Honor Choirs, free professional development workshops, VA-ACDA membership meeting - Richmond, VA
May 14, 2022	<u>VA-ACDA Leadership Team Virtual Meeting</u> - 8:30am-9:30am
May 15 2022	Newsletter #3 articles due: All Virginia Middle School highlights, Voices United Conference information, state leadership information
June 1, 2022	Newsletter #3: Published via website, email, and social media
August 5-6, 2022	Voices United Conference - Manassas, VA www.acdavoicesunited.org

Voices United committee planning meetings: September, October, November, January, March & May. Interested in being part of the planning committee? Please email Amy Moir at amoir@vaacda.org

SING4VA!!!



ARE YOU A CHORAL COMPOSER LIVING IN VIRGINIA?
DO YOU KNOW A CHORAL COMPOSER LIVING IN VIRGINIA?
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VIRGINIA ACDA
American Choral Directors Association



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From your Newsletter Editor: Matthew Russell

Virginia Harmony



February 2022 Edition

The VA-ACDA leadership team and I would like to invite all of you to contribute your articles and ideas for OUR February 2022 Edition of *Virginia Harmony*. ALL Virginia ACDA members and R&R chairs are enCOURAGED to contribute submissions. TOGETHER, we are ALL made better by sharing our GROUP GENIUS!!!

Article due date: January 15, 2022

Publication date: February 1, 2022

Send to: mnr10707@gmail.com

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