

# Melisma

Official publication of the North Central Division–American Choral Directors Association

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North Central Division participated in ACDA's 2014 International Conductor's Exchange Program (ICEP) with China. David Puderbaugh, liaison; Prof. Ye Jin, Beijing Conservatory; Phillip Swan, Lawrence University, Appleton WI; Prof. Wu Lingfen, Beijing Conservatory; and Michael McGaghie, Macalester College, Saint Paul, MN. **See p. 3.**

## David Puderbaugh

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David Puderbaugh

### *Changes...they are a-comin'*

This issue marks my third year at the helm of *Melisma*, our Division's primary means of communicating with its members for many, many years. In July 2011, I took over for the beloved Bill Ross, who had passed away suddenly due to illness. This was my first editing gig, which made me nervous enough, but then I was informed that the start of my tenure would coincide with the very first issue of *Melisma* in online-only format. Although I was and am an avid reader of online periodicals and newspapers, I did not know the first thing about the process of producing online content. Lucky for me and—believe me—you, too, our Division is home to our graphic designer, Judy Periolat, experienced in layout, web publication, and Internet. With Judy guiding me, we have produced a number of issues of *Melisma*, in glossy virtual paper and hundreds of dots per inch.

In his column, Division president Bob Demaree writes of the proliferation of communication means available to us—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, websites, blogs, and more. The list seems endless and it is certainly ever-changing. With that in mind, the Division is revisiting *Melisma* again, just three years after the jump to the online format. Our goal is to make *Melisma* even more vibrant and relevant to your needs, and more nimble, too, with the ability to adapt to the evolving ways we connect to each other.

This will take a lot of planning; again, we are lucky in the Division to have Judy and her colleague/wizard of all things web and Internet, Vince Rose, with their wealth of expertise in online content development, on hand to help guide us to our goal. In order to effect change, *Melisma* will only appear in fall and spring issues in 2014–2015, forgoing the winter issue. The time and effort saved by this will be directed toward rolling out *Melisma* in an updated form in fall, 2015.

This is an exciting project that, although in its early stages, promises to connect each of us to one another and to the Division in ways that are more meaningful and valuable. Until then, we hope you find the last two issues of *Melisma* in its current guise helpful to your day-to-day work. This issue contains helpful information on college/university repertory, creating a successful show choir program, the importance of commissioning new choral works, and a review of an excellent new vocal jazz recording by Columbus (NE) High School's New World Singers. Thank you to all of the writers who contributed their wisdom and time to this issue of *Melisma*.



*“Lack of skill of communication makes oneself handicapped of sharing views and knowledge.”*

—Andrew Guzaldo

*“During the past few decades, modern technology, with radio, TV, air travel, and satellites, has woven a network of communication which puts each part of the world in to almost instant contact with all the other parts.”*

—David Bohm

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# North Central Division welcomes guests conductors from China

**Melisma**

Fall, 2014

Vol. XXXIV, No. 1

This past March, the North Central Division hosted two choral conductors from China as part of ACDA's International Conductor Exchange Program (ICEP).

Professors Wu Lingfen and Ye Jin, faculty members at Beijing Conservatory, each presented at the NC Division conference in Des Moines and participated in residencies within the Division.

Later in the summer, ICEP sent two of our own to China as part of the exchange—Phillip Swan, Lawrence Conservatory, Appleton, WI and Michael McGaghie, Macalester College, St. Paul, MN.



**At the NC conference:** 1. Prof. Wu Lingfen & Samuel Kwok, translator. 2. Prof. Ye Jin. 3. Prof. Ye, Prof. Wu, David Puderbaugh, ICEP liaison. **At U-Iowa:** 4. Prof. Wu Lingfen with conducting graduate students Benjamin Luedcke, Shannon Gravelle, & Sara Blessing. **At Central College, Pella, IA:** Prof. Wu, Prof. Mark Babcock, & students.

*Melisma*, the official newsletter of the North Central Division of the American Choral Directors Association, will be published **twice** this year: fall and spring, in preparation for our new web format for fall, 2015.

The North Central Division comprises over 2,900 members in its six-state area, including Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

NC-ACDA reserves the right to edit and approve all materials.

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## In 2015, the ICEP will involve an exchange with Sweden!

See [ChoralNet ICEP](#) for more information and details. The deadline to sign up was in July, but if you are interested in future ICEP opportunities, check it out!

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## Bob Demaree

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Bob Demaree

## What is the purpose of having Divisions in ACDA?

Greetings and blessings upon you who do so much for ACDA and our choral art! It is an honor to serve you all as President. *Service* will be a major theme in my presidency —look for it to be the central driving force behind our next conference on February 17–20, 2016 in beautiful Sioux Falls. I intend for my mantra to be *What can I do to help you in your choral world?*

Especially as it relates to NC-ACDA serving you as our members, this idea of service has been naggingly poking at me lately. Over the last three months, I have had several exciting and invigorating meetings with ACDA leadership and one question continues to gnaw at me:

### *What is the purpose of having Divisions in ACDA?*

I've had this question posed to me directly. I've asked this question of others in hopes of gleaning historical information. And I've mulled this question over in more practical terms with NC-ACDA folks. *What is or could be the purpose of our Division?*



### Here's what I've learned and come to believe:

When ACDA was founded in 1959, it adopted the same geographically based organizational structure that had been set up by NAFME (nee MENC). Sidebar—the North Central and Central Divisions were a single Division until 1980. Imagine! If you live in Rapid City, there was a time when your Divisional conference would have been in Columbus, Ohio!

Regardless, the intent at that time was for the geographic Division structure to foster a level of fellowship and communication on a regional level that was badly needed. Regional conferences allowed folks who couldn't travel to a national conference to experience an extremely high level of performing, learn from regional and national experts in the field, and create and maintain professional friendships with other devotees of choral music.

One key piece of this was the Division newsletter, which was mailed to your home or workplace, which had (and still has!) fabulous articles on repertoire, best practices, upcoming events, and scholarship. For decades, these two efforts—conferences and newsletters—have consumed the vast majority of all energies spent in NC-ACDA by generations of outstanding leaders.

If you think about it, both of these efforts have centered upon *communication* by disseminating information, encouraging fellowship, and celebrating artistic excellence. If we've truly spent the vast majority of our energies upon communication, then it's clear that communicating has been at the core of the original purpose of Divisions. But that was THEN. *Communication has changed radically...*

In 1959, the Internet, email, and cell phones were barely imaginative wrinkles on the brows of aspiring science fiction writers. The number of ways that we now can send and receive information is staggering, and I am personally overwhelmed by the variety, depth, and speed of the myriad communication platforms I have at my disposal! Like you, when I sit down to do programming, I can typically find at least a fraction of almost any score online and can inevitably hear some recording of it as well. In my earliest days of teaching, I treasured every printed R&S repertoire list I could get because those lists were my guides to pieces. Nowadays, I can go to my computer and find numerous lists of pieces that are recommended by excellent conductors and devour them.

And when I was a young warthog, traveling to a conference to SEE and HEAR the musical wisdom of Weston Noble or Dale Warland or Margaret Hawkins—that was

*“If we've truly spent the vast majority of our energies upon communication, then it's clear that communicating has been at the core of the original purpose of Divisions. But that was THEN.”*

*Continued*



## President's Voice, *Continued*

*“I know how  
NC-ACDA  
enriches my life.  
Does it enrich  
yours?”*

*“Your Divisional  
leadership is  
prepared to create  
new paradigms  
for NC-ACDA.  
And we are  
prepared to focus  
on three notions:  
Serve.  
Connect.  
Celebrate.”*

invaluable! Think about all of the YouTube videos that we now have at hand at our desks. Think of the number of Helmut Rilling, Tõnu Kaljuste, Eric Ericson, Robert Shaw, and John Eliot Gardiner recordings we have at the click of a finger on Spotify. One starts to wonder whether it's as necessary to actually convene in person as it once was.

There's one other thread worth mentioning. It's "brand loyalty." As a proud member of the Wisconsin chapter of ACDA, I feel a true sense of belonging and loyalty to Wisconsin. I DO go to their events. When I receive an email saying that *The Voice* has been published online, I go to see what's what.

Similarly, I pay close attention to what's going on with the home office in Oklahoma City. I'm a proud life member. I confess that I do not read every article in every *Choral Journal*. (Do those folks exist? If so, I stand in awe.) But inevitably, when I receive it, I flip through it and see what's in there. I read something. I digest something. And I cannot afford either the time or the money to attend every national conference. But I try to go and when I do, I ALWAYS come home reinvigorated. I mourn when I can't go. I have a treasure trove of memories of concerts and sessions and stories and friends that come from those trips.

But the Division level is odd. It's neither local nor national. Think about it—don't we all watch the local weather and/or the national weather? Don't we typically watch local or national news? Do I—do any of us—have the same sense of belonging or loyalty to our Division? I hope so. I think so. I live thirty miles from the dreaded Illinois state line, a line that demarcates our wonderful, virtuous NC-ACDA from the evil empire of Central ACDA. I feel little or no connection to those infidels south of the line. I'd bet that our team would beat their team...

I'm lucky though. I've been on the Divisional board already because I was a state president. And I have served on planning teams for multiple conferences, and have made a LOT of great friends in our six states. I think that I do feel a sense of belonging to NC-ACDA. But I may not be a representative sample. I know how NC-ACDA enriches my life. *Does it enrich yours?* Let's return to the first question:

### ***What IS the purpose of having Divisions in ACDA?***

Instead of me telling you what NC-ACDA can do for you, instead of promoting what I think you need, I need to return to another question from early in this epistle:

### ***What can I do to help you in your choral world?***

I need you to tell me what you think. Your Divisional leadership is prepared to create new paradigms for NC-ACDA. And we are prepared to focus on three notions:

**Serve. Connect. Celebrate.**

I extend an "extra credit" homework assignment to you all. Write to me at [demaree@uwplatt.edu](mailto:demaree@uwplatt.edu). Tell me what the Division can do to *serve* you. Tell me what

the Division can do to *connect* you to others. Tell me what you want us all to *celebrate*. That's going to be our mission. These responses will be used to help us reformulate how we communicate with you going forward. We have some ideas; we're trying to anticipate your needs. But communication goes two directions. Let me hear from YOU!

In closing, thank you for all you do for ACDA and for our choral art!

Bob

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Axel Theimer, Conductor

Now taking applications from high school singers for the  
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Questions? (320) 363-3154 or [ncyc@csbsju.edu](mailto:ncyc@csbsju.edu)



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## *CD Reviews*

**Get your choral recording reviewed  
in *Melisma*!**

A published CD review is an excellent way to get the word out. A *Melisma*-reviewed CD will get press across the six states of the Division. Not only will that help your sales; the visibility of your choral program will grow, too! Only recordings that are commercially distributable can be considered at this time; they must be intended for sale to the public, with mechanical rights secured.

If you would like your recording reviewed, e-mail *Melisma* editor David Puderbaugh at [david-puderbaugh@uiowa.edu](mailto:david-puderbaugh@uiowa.edu).





# “Singin’ in the Rain”

—Fred Kiser  
Ely, Iowa

## CD Review

“Singin’ in the Rain” is a delightful collection of vocal jazz charts presented by the New World Singers from Columbus High School, Nebraska. What permeates the recording is the joy of the performers as they work together to create beautiful music. At the time of recording, the ensemble was in its nineteenth year of existence. You can hear that sense of tradition and continuity through the attention to details of style, blend, balance and tone. The students sounded very comfortable in the jazz idiom. Although individual voices were recognizable, the overall vocal tone and texture were so expertly blended that they disguised the actual number of singers on any one chart.

Director Fred Ritter programmed challenging and varied selections that give directors new to vocal jazz a quick tutorial in publishers, arrangers, and styles. For example, Sound Music Publications and UNC Jazz Press, leaders in publishing vocal jazz, are represented by multiple works. Top shelf arrangers Phil Mattson and Kerry Marsh are included with both standard and unique arrangements. Swing charts, lush ballads, and percussive Latin are among the styles included in pieces that also range in difficulty from moderate to highly complex, especially in rhythm and harmonic language. Accompaniments range from a full rhythm section to a cappella pieces with vocal percussion.

Improvisation is one area of jazz that often causes insecurity for singers. “Down at Smokey Joe’s” and “Dancing in the Dark” both feature students jumping right into improvisational passages with ease. Two charts that were buoyant and fun to listen to multiple times were the arrangements of popular songs in jazz styles: “Fields of Gold,” arranged by Greg Jasperse, and the timeless Paul Simon classic, “You Can Call Me Al,” arranged by Jim Farrell. The collection ends with a different and thoughtful Marsh arrangement titled “New World,” based on the theme from the 2000 indie film *Dancer in the Dark*.

The listener is immediately drawn to the unity and clarity of diction throughout the recording. It can be difficult to move from traditional choral standards of diction to a more conversational standard without either losing words or sounding stilted. The New World Singers achieved that balance superbly. The first track, Ken Kraintz’s composition “Come on Down,” sets the tone of the recording through its relaxed swing style and clear invitation. The Kerry Marsh-arranged “Singin’ in the Rain/Umbrella” achieves clarity without being overbearing.

Director Fred Ritter, pianist Carolee Wurdeman, and the New World Singers have put together an excellent, varied, and joyful compilation. The students are extremely well prepared and, at the same time, you can tell that they really love what they are doing. This is a great recording for directors interested in vocal jazz, either new to the field or experienced and looking for new material.



Fred Ritter, director  
Columbus (NE) High School  
New World Singers

*“I never heard of  
a Jazz musician  
who retired. You  
love what you do,  
so what are you  
going to do... play  
for the walls?”*

—Nat Adderley

*“One of the things  
I like about Jazz,  
kid, is I don’t  
know what’s going  
to happen next.  
Do you?”*

—Bix Beiderbecke

## Lee Nelson

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Lee Nelson

*"I was in a church choir early on and that really helped me musically in terms of chops, learning how to sing harmonies."*

—Emily Saliers

*"For me, the virtual choir has taught me that, if anything, the Internet builds these post-national tribes, people finding each other any way they can."*

—Eric Whitacre

### 1. Title: *Alleluia*

Composer: Jake Runestad

Publisher/edition #: JR Music JR0035 ([jakerunestad.com](http://jakerunestad.com))

Voicing: SATB *divisi*

Jake Runestad is quickly becoming one of the nation's most exciting and innovative composers. His electrifying *Alleluia* is a great introduction to his vast array of compositions. Runestad comments about this work, stating, "Throughout history, the singing of 'alleluia' has served as an outward celebration as well as an introspective prayer of praise. This setting explores these two uses of the word within a spiritual context. The work begins with a rhythmic declaration of joy and builds intensity through metric changes, tonal shifts, *glissandi*, and hand clapping. This lively exultation soon gives way to a reverent meditation with soaring melodic lines and lush harmonies. The dancing rhythms from the beginning return with a gradual build in intensity as one's praises rise to the sky." At first glance, the work appears to be rather difficult, but upon closer inspection, you will find that the work is built upon carefully crafted repetition and motivic sequences that allow singers of all ages to learn the piece with relative ease. This work would serve as an excellent opening or closing piece in a variety of contexts. Runestad's *Alleluia* is one of the most exciting and refreshing new works I have come across in quite some time and I look forward to hearing future compositions from this dynamic young composer.

### 2. Title: *O Thou Great Power in Whom I Move*

Composer: Anthony J. Maglione

Publisher/edition #: GIA Publications, Inc. G-7968

Voicing: SATB *divisi*, clarinet

*O Thou Great Power in Whom I Move* features the first verse of the poem, "A Hymn to my God in a night of my late Sicknesse," by Sir Henry Wotton (1568–1639), an English diplomat and author. Written for *divisi* four-part choir and solo clarinet, the piece is based on an original hymn-like melody that recurs in variation throughout the work. The clarinet solo explores both high and low registers of the instrument, and stands in stark relief to the choir's rhythmic simplicity by way of virtuosic runs and elegant ornaments. The piece builds to a thrilling moment in which the clarinet and choir join in rich chains of suspensions that are indicative of Maglione's lush and lyrical compositional style.

### 3. Title: *i carry your heart*

Composer: Connor Koppin

Publisher/edition #: Galaxy Music 1.3374 (Canticle Distributing)

Voicing: SATB *divisi*

Connor Koppin is a promising new composer who exhibits great musical prowess in his compositions. His setting of the timeless e. e. cummings poem *i carry your heart* is a fresh and innovative addition to the repertoire that exemplifies his lush compositional style. Koppin utilizes only a few short lines of the poem, creating a mantra-like approach to the text. The phrase "i carry your heart with me" is repeated throughout

HIGH



the work using different textures, harmonies, and voices to depict two souls intertwining into one. Koppin often scores the texture with men's and women's voices echoing each other in a responsorial fashion, requiring a choir capable of *divisi* in all sections. There are many poignant moments where the two voices come together creating a sense of absolute unity in spirit and soul. The work is exceptionally well crafted and is learned quite easily, largely in part to Koppin's excellent voice leading throughout the work. High school, college/university, community and professional choirs alike will undoubtedly love preparing and performing *i carry your heart* while audiences will be moved by Koppin's sensitive and intuitive setting of this great poem.

#### 4. Title: *O Magnum Mysterium*

Composer: Daniel Elder

Publisher/edition #: GIA Publications G-8645

Voicing: SATB *divisi*

Simply stated, this is not your typical "O Magnum Mysterium." Daniel Elder has provided conductors and singers with an innovative and re-imagined setting of the Fourth Responsory at Matins, Christmas Day motet that will surprise and delight audiences. Mr. Elder comments about his setting, stating, "O Magnum Mysterium follows a uniquely instrumental approach to vocal writing. The textures and patterns relate to those found in orchestral timbres, with each word and idea representing a musical journey through mystical and fantastic areas of listening. The attempted result is a sort of 'tone poem,' a seamless progression from one emotion to the next, always serving the idea over the word, and capturing the wonder of this great mystery, that is, the Lord come to earth in the lowliest of circumstances." The rhythmic energy, combined with Elder's "mystical" harmonic language, creates a deeply moving piece that will serve well as a centerpiece to any concert.

#### 5. Title: *Rockin' Jerusalem*

Arranger: Stacey V. Gibbs

Publisher/edition #: Santa Barbara Music Publishing SBMP 1164

Voicing: SATB *divisi*

Stacey V. Gibbs continues to provide the choral world with a new and exciting voice that brings a refreshed vitality to the spiritual genre. While honoring the great composers of the past, Mr. Gibbs advances the spiritual art form in innovative and inspiring ways through his adept use of rhythmic drive, dynamic nuance, and vibrant textures. His setting of *Rockin' Jerusalem* is yet one more example of this. Mr. Gibbs ingeniously uses relatively simple ostinato motives combined with dynamic interplay among the voices to create an energetic piece that choristers will love to sing. Although there is some *divisi*, the repetition makes this piece accessible to choirs of all ages and ability levels. The dramatic ending makes this a wonderful closing piece for a concert or festival.

*"I did once shatter  
a chandelier.  
I was singing  
with my college  
choir in Wales.  
I was the soloist  
and I hit the  
high note and  
there was this  
massive bang  
and all this glass  
came down from  
the ceiling. I'd  
like that to be my  
party trick if I  
can perfect it."*

—Katherine Jenkins

## Andrew Robinette

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Andrew Robinette

*“[Re-voicing] has created additional new repertoire for male choruses, it has allowed treble choirs access to more historical repertoire, and it has allowed smaller or younger mixed ensembles greater variety through SAB and SAT arrangements.”*

## The Benefits of New Commissions

The need for new commissions is keenly felt by male choruses, and for logical reasons. There are fewer male choruses than mixed choirs or treble choirs, creating a smaller market. In a sales-driven economy, this serves as a deterrent to both publishers and composers. To supplement the smaller number of pieces written for specific voicing, publishers have compensated by reworking compositions and selling them in multiple voicing options. I was introduced to re-voiced arrangements as an impressionable undergraduate in the UNC Greensboro Men’s Glee Club. We performed a piece by Emma Lou Diemer for the composer when she was visiting campus. After the final chord rang out, she smiled, thanked us, and said “Huh, I didn’t realize it had been released for TTBB.” While I was surprised at the time, the reality is that re-voicing has had many positive effects for choirs. Notably, it has created additional new repertoire for male choruses, it has allowed treble choirs access to more historical repertoire, and it has allowed smaller or younger mixed ensembles greater variety through SAB and SAT arrangements.

However, there is a downside to the re-voicing of compositions: the absence of a distinct repertoire. In a text-driven medium, the ability to pair specific texts with specific voicing is a valuable tool. Some texts work better from a single-gender perspective, be it male choruses or women’s choirs. Other texts lend themselves naturally to a mixed gender/mixed choir perspective. Because mixed choirs dominate the landscape the latter texts are more likely to be set. However, due to financial incentives and re-voicing, texts that could come from any perspective are most likely to be used. As a result, not only are some powerful texts far less likely to be used, but the same few texts, by the same composers, are being sung by a vast majority of choirs in the country.

The incorporation of new literature is beneficial in many ways. New repertoire can infuse energy into performing ensembles and capture audiences’ attention. As a conductor, one of the hardest balances is between programming beloved standards and new pieces. Choral music has a rich tradition that deserves to be celebrated. However, if we lean too much towards beloved standards, we are simply saying the same thing over and over again. Like any repetition, the danger is that the audience will become numb to the message. At a time when audience size is a great concern for most choral ensembles, this is a particularly alarming prospect.

New commissions enhance each of these benefits and add several more. The first is that the conductor and ensemble become part of the creative process. Composers want their works to be successful and well received. By and large, they are open and communicative with the musicians who bring their pieces to life and value the performers’ opinions. The collaboration enhances the excitement for the ensemble



members as well as their investment throughout the rehearsal and performance process. It often creates a positive sense of ownership of the work.

The second contribution that commissions offer is perhaps more important; it is a personal connection that is inherent in the process. It is unlikely that your most prized possession is a mass-produced object for which you feel no personal connection. This is just as true for music. The use of local composers, writers, or a subject matter that is meaningful to the ensemble and community can all be powerful. The more personal the connection that is established between the ensemble and the music, the more focused the ensemble and the more rewarding the experience. Similarly, greater connection between the music, ensemble, and audience allows for greater success of the ensemble and greater enrichment of the community. Commissions allow an excellent opportunity to say something both new and meaningful. Additional benefits include maximizing the ensembles resources, contributing to choral literature, and giving voice to a deserving composer.

Finally, there is a responsibility for the conductor beyond the first performance. We must champion the works. In order for a piece to gain a place among standard choral literature it cannot be performed once and put away. It must be programmed multiple times in order to make an impact. A commission is a partnership between the composer, the conductor, and the ensemble. It is an important partnership that is central to our art.

On a more personal note, one of the most meaningful things I have ever experienced was the rehearsal and premiere of a commission by Stephen Hatfield. “As She Goes” was written in memoriam of my predecessor at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, Eileen Hower. Not only had the Women’s Choir sung for and deeply loved Professor Hower; she and Hatfield had also been friends prior to her passing. It was an uncanny experience. The emotional connection between composer, ensemble, conductor, piece, and the love for Professor Hower was palpable. The choir sang with more depth and nuance on that piece than any other. They were engaged in a way that was mature beyond their level of development as eighteen- to twenty-one year old musicians. It was the type of experience that shaped not only the singers’ musicianship, but also helped them heal and grow, and it was the commission process that was central to the experience.



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**Desiree Bondley**

NC-ACDA Repertoire & Standards Committee Chair  
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Desiree Bondley

## Connecting Students to Music

Last school year I introduced a new piece to my students: “Morning” by Janet Gardner, based on the poem “Will There Really Be a Morning?” by Emily Dickinson. We listened to a recording, then sight-read through it (roughly, anyway!). The choir was not at all interested in even learning about it. There were a lot of comments, “What are they even saying?” “This song makes no sense.” “What?!?!?”

I was prepared for their responses. You see, I had done this particular piece a few years earlier with the same original responses. At that time, I didn’t really think through what to do in order to make it more meaningful for them. Ignorance, I guess. So we plugged along, never really making any connection to the song. Disappointing. Especially now after I’ve seen what could have been. Middle school students are fully capable of making a deeper connection to the world around them. They may just need a little more encouragement and guidance to lead them to the meaning.

Back to last year. After re-focusing, I had them put the octavo down. Then, I read the poem to them, line by line and we discussed as a class what Emily Dickinson was trying to say. I let them talk about it, argue their reasoning, never telling them what I thought was right or wrong. We talked about what morning looks like: there is a freshness to the day and it is calm and great possibilities await. Then I asked what possibilities could happen in the remainder of the day. The class began to see that different things, both positive and challenging, can happen in their day that could affect the perfect morning they had started with.

We listened to a recording again and put the music back in the folder. (Don’t worry, it wasn’t “to never be seen again.” There was a plan this time!) I gave the choir an assignment that night: “In your words, what do you think this poem means?” I encouraged them by saying that no answer they had would be incorrect as long as they put thought into their answers.

Will there really be a “Morning”?  
Is there such a thing as “Day”?  
Could I see it from the mountains  
If I were as tall as they?

Has it feet like Water lilies?  
Has it feathers like a Bird?  
Is it brought from famous countries  
Of which I have never heard?

Oh some Scholar! Oh some Sailor!  
Oh some Wise Men from the skies!  
Please to tell a little Pilgrim  
Where the place called “Morning” lies!

*“I had done this particular piece a few years previous with the same original responses. At that time, I didn’t really think through what to do in order to make it more meaningful for them.”*

*“...we discussed as a class what Emily Dickinson was trying to say. I let them talk about it, argue their reasoning, never telling them what I thought was ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.”*



The next morning, I read through their explanations before sharing them with the class. I was astonished at their responses. They were so insightful! “I think the song means that the days are gonna get better.” “Tomorrow is a new day and anything can happen!” “Someone is deciding to make a new decision and isn’t sure.” “I think the song ‘Morning’ is about waiting for a new day. Will there be morning? When will morning come? Waiting for a new day to come.”

Not all students have the same challenges in their home lives, but for each student, they do face their own unique-to-them challenges. Maybe it’s a fight with a friend. Maybe they forgot their assignment at home. Maybe they go home after school wondering if they will have a meal that evening. So many differences, but yet each student could relate to the meaning of the poem.

Now the students had ownership of the piece. They could relate to the message. They performed from the heart, even as we picked through their notes and worked on phrasing. “Morning” became one of their favorites.

I know I may come across many more obstacles in helping my students connect to the music that is put before them. But I also know it is totally worth the effort and time to find a way. After all, as this quote by Billy Joel states, “I think music in itself is healing. It’s an explosive expression of humanity. It’s something we are all touched by...” ■

*“Now the students had ownership in the piece. They could relate to the message. They performed from the heart...”*

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Sarah Van Waardhuizen

*“What are the most important aspects in building a show choir team that will lay the foundation for lifelong music makers?”*

*“The fundamental aspect of show choir is the singing involved.”*

## Show Choir: *Learning from the Pros*

Conceptualizing, planning, organizing, and executing a show choir show is a daunting task for many new music educators. Reinventing the wheel or trying to be avant garde with costumes, props, song “mash-ups,” and the like can create many questions for the novice teacher. How can you get started on the right foot in the show choir realm as a novice music educator? What are the most important aspects in building a show choir team that will lay the foundation for lifelong music makers? Experience in putting together a show and cultivating a healthy environment takes just that—experience. These experiences begin as a music student in the K–12 system and continue into college. Finally, as the tables turn, the new music educator finds him/herself ready to put that experience to work.

Many times it is learning from research to practice, from one’s own experiences, and from the experiences of others to gain the largest impact for new teachers. Teachers, as lifelong learners, strive to learn each year how to teach a concept more effectively or how to reach a student who has been struggling with many life-changing events. Interview correspondence with show choir directors from different backgrounds helps to illustrate similar threads involving overall success in the show choir classroom.

### Where to begin...

- Worry about doing the basics well (singing and dancing in a large ensemble).
- Put singing first.
- Do quality musical selections.
- **Singing** is the foundation of show choir, and should be the foundation of each show. The glitz is the cherry on top!

### Learn from other’s mistakes...

- Don’t get caught up in themes or emulating/imitating the “radio version.”
- Be careful to map out the show to see what the whole picture is going to paint.
- Don’t copy recently successful groups: i.e. doing their literature, mimicking their choreography, and/or borrowing costume ideas.
- Work with your choreographer; talk through the whole vision together.
- Don’t give students a show that is too difficult for them.

### The biggest lessons to learn...

- Ask for help. Do not hesitate to call/email/visit with a past or current show choir director about the small and large details.
- Asking for help is not a sign of weakness...it illustrates the drive for excellence and the acknowledgement that excellence is attained by a team of people working for the same goal.

*Continued*



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## Show Choir: *Learning from the Pros*, Continued

*“... In my forty-plus years in the profession, I constantly sought advice from the experts and I don’t ever remember being turned away.”*

—Allen Chapman

### Call for action...

- There need to be more show choir-specific classes taught at the collegiate level.
- New directors need their own show choir-specific mentor.

Within these four categories lies an abundance of useful information for the beginning show choir director. Many times it’s about learning creative ways to execute the same idea. The fundamental aspect of show choir is the singing involved. At times, this can be lost, but as experienced directors, it is important to instill in future directors the necessity of healthy singing within the show choir realm.

Overwhelmingly, the most valuable piece of advice was summed up well by Allen Chapman, a beloved show choir director for over four decades in Iowa: “Young directors should never hesitate to ask for help! In my forty-plus years in the profession, I constantly sought advice from the experts and I don’t ever remember being turned away. Geniuses want to share their genius. Don’t be an island; reach out!”

*Thank you to the following directors for their insight and guidance in the writing of this article: Allen Chapman, Matt Huth, Jorie O’Leary, Samantha Robilliard and Hannah Ryan.* ■

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