

Choral Cues

The official publication of the
New York Chapter of the
American Choral Directors Association

December, 2014



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President's Message

Penelope Cruz

Congratulations, NY-ACDA! We were one of the top 5 states in the nation in terms of percentage of membership growth in 2014—23.5%! That comes out as just over 100 new members—maybe you're one of them. To me, it feels like we're growing and becoming more vibrant. I see it in the energy, singing, and curiosity of the 'habitual' and new participants in our summer conference; and in the learning community of veteran and newbie conductors who made up our largest fall conference yet; and in the increasing numbers of teachers who have students in the honor choirs at the state, division, and national conferences.

I hope to meet and see more of you at any of our events. You can't really understand how interesting, exciting, and helpful these conferences can be unless you're there! Please let us know if there's anything you'd like to see (or DO!) at any of our upcoming conferences.

Visit the NY-ACDA website at
www.nyacda.org

NY-ACDA

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President's Message Continued from Page 1



I hope to see many of you at our National Conference in Salt Lake City! Here are some NY presenters and participants.

ACDA Eastern Division RECEPTION: Eat, Drink, Mingle!

Hosted by New Yorker David Fryling, ACDA Eastern Division President
Thursday, February 26 from 10 pm-midnight
Salt Palace Convention Center Room 150 G

SESSION PRESENTERS from NEW YORK

Francisco J. Núñez and Elizabeth Núñez

“Musicianship Through Repertoire”

Wednesday 2/25, at 9:30 in the Salt Palace Convention Ctr Ballroom A, C, and E.

Philip Silvey, Eastman School of Music

“Coordinating Vocal Colors in Women’s Choruses”

Thursday 2/26, at 11:00 in the Salt Palace Convention Ctr Ballroom A, C, and E.

Derrick Fox, Ithaca College

“Fifty Shades of Grading: Implementing Assessment in the Choral Rehearsal”

Thursday 2/26, at 11:00 in the Salt Palace Convention Ctr Room 355 B, C, E and F

Justin Glodich, Eldred Central Schools

“Vocal Percussion in Contemporary Choral Music”

Thursday 2/26, at 11:00 in the Salt Palace Convention Ctr Room 251 A & D.

SPONSORING TEACHERS of HONOR CHOIR PARTICIPANTS

Nina Allbert, Tuxedo Park School

John Banks, Briarcliff Manor School District

Anthony DAgostino, Dansville Central School

Doreen Fryling, South Side High School (Rockville Center)

Janet Galvan, Ithaca Children's Choir, Ithaca College

Timothy Ho, Horace Mann School

Charlotte Johnson, Comsewogue High School

Melanie Mesiano, East Hampton UFSD

Brian Messemer, North Shore Schools

Wilma Messenger, Briarcliff Manor School District

Edward Reisert, Fox Lane High School (Bedford)

Amy Story, Canandaigua Academy

Cynthia Towler, Avon Central Schools

Kristin Zaryski, Ithaca High School

Elizabeth Woodhouse
Children Choirs
Brooklyn Youth Chorus

Christine Howlett
College/University
Vassar College

John Warren
Community Choirs
Syracuse University

Derrick Fox
Ethnic & Multi-cultural Perspectives
Ithaca College

Norman Zogaib
High School Choirs
Hamburg High School

James Ludwig
Jazz Choirs
Selden MS

Don Schuessler
Middle School Choirs
Camillus MS

Jared Berry
Male Choirs
St. John the Baptist
Diocesan High School

Malcolm Merriweather
Music & Worship
Cathedral of St. John
the Divine

Rollo Fisher
2-Year College Choirs
Monroe Community College

Philip Silvey
Women's Choirs
Eastman School of
Music, URochester

College and University Repertoire

Christine Howlett chhowlett@vassar.edu

Laudate Dominum (2014) by Thomas Juneau; SATB a cappella; Carl Fisher CM9305 (approximately 4 min.)

From the Carl Fisher site: A jubilant setting in ABA form, the first section is buoyant and joyful through use of mixed meter (a great challenge for any choir). The middle section ("Quoniam confirmata") is more subdued and legato, and the music offers great contrasts in dynamics as well. For those singers who need extra help practicing on their own, Carl Fisher has set up free rehearsal parts on their website.

Seek Him that maketh the Seven Stars (1998) by Jonathan Dove, published by Faber Music; Texts - Amos 5:8; Psalm 139 (7 min.)

"The theme of light, and star-light in particular, is an endless source of inspiration for composers. I came across these words about light and stars while looking for a text to set as an anthem for the Royal Academy of Arts' annual Service for Artists: I thought these images would have a special meaning for visual artists. The anthem begins with a musical image of the night sky, a repeated organ motif of twinkling stars that sets the choir wondering who made them. The refrain 'Seek him' starts in devotional longing but is eventually released into a joyful dance, finally coming to rest in serenity. Seek Him was commissioned by the Royal Academy of Arts and first performed at St. James' Piccadilly in May 1995." - Jonathan Dove - See more at:

<http://www.fabermusic.com/repertoire/seek-him-that-maketh-the-seven-stars-3136#sthash.5uL4SsMy.dpuf>

This piece is minimalistic in style with some tricky rhythmic passages and requires a good organist. I've met a number of choral singers who have expressed how much they loved singing this piece, and it was on these multiple recommendations that I finally programmed it this past year. Listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3GIkeJReYk>

Hymn to the Virgin (1930, published 1934) by Benjamin Britten; SATB & SATB semi-chorus or soloists; Boosey & Hawkes

This is the earliest surviving piece of church music by Britten, perfect for a concert or advent service. This work can be done with either large or small forces; with a smaller choir, the semi-chorus can be done with soloists. English and Latin texts. It is simply set with gorgeous harmonies. This was one of two pieces by Britten sung at his funeral in 1976. Listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQfBbBCmVqE>

John the Revelator (SSAATTBB) – Caldwell & Ivory.

This is a terrific, high-energy spiritual. There is enough repetition that the music comes fairly quickly to the singers. However, there are a few challenging divisi sections, and the clapping sections always require a little more rehearsal time than one might expect.

Listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLup8g2OGZo>

Vicky Furby
Region 1
(Western)
SUNY-Buffalo

Jason Holmes
Region 2
(Central)
Brighton City Schools

Jeff Francom
Region 3
(Northland)
Crane School of Music
SUNY-Potsdam

Michael Lister
Region 4
(Albany)
College of St. Rose

Jason Thoms
Region 5
(South-Westchester)
Concordia College

Mary Clementi
Region 6
(Metropolitan)
Highbridge Voices

Craig Knapp
Region 7
(Long Island)
Joseph Edgar School

Becoming a Divergent Conductor **Strategies to Rehearsing Better – Dr. Jason Thoms**

Step One – What “faction” or Choral School best fits you?

There are generally 4 “factions” or Choral Schools. Each is known for its general focus during rehearsal which effect their music performances.

- Intonation and Choral Blend (F. Melius Christiansen/ St. Olaf)
- Emotion and Meaning (John Finley Williamson/ Westminster)
- Text and Diction (Fred Waring)
- Rhythm and Articulation (Robert Shaw)

Based on my experiences as a conductor and a pro-chorister, I have noticed that almost every conductor rehearses almost solely from their area of strength. I was very surprised when I finally realized that even conductors at the highest level of our profession rehearse generally from just one “faction”.

When you introduce a piece of music for the first time to your ensemble, what do you do to get things started?

Do you have them listen to a recording?

Do you have them start by removing the text and just singing on “do” or “ah”

Do you tell them about the history and context of the piece?

Do you have them speak through the text in rhythm?

Do you prepare the scores for your singers with markings?

Do you have them count sing?

Step Two – What are the strengths and weaknesses of your “faction”?

Each “faction” has its own distinct set of inherent strengths and weaknesses, which need to be understood and addressed or the final product will be found lacking. I have created a list based on personal experience and observation of the strengths and weaknesses. Going through these strengths and weaknesses do you find yourself?

Intonation and Choral Blend (F. Melius Christiansen/ St. Olaf) **Strengths**

- Well Balanced Chords
- Well Balanced Sections
- Pure vocal sounds
- Pure vowel formations
- Clarity of individual parts especially in polyphony
- Consistent and beautiful sounds
- Great for unaccompanied singing
- Great for recordings

Weaknesses

- Limited dynamic range
- Limited vocal timbre
- Lack consonant articulation
- Lack precision in cut-offs and breaths
- Repertoire choice maybe limited
- Music may rule language
- Lack emotional content (sometime a sterile sound)

Emotion and Meaning (John Finley Williamson/ Westminster)

Strengths

- Wide Range of Dynamic and Tempo, and Vocal Timbre
- Helps singers understand the music through story, allegory, emotion, or images
- Allows conductors to add personal dimensions to the music to add understanding
- Great for accompanied singing
- Exciting Performances

Weaknesses

- Vowels may lose purity to create different timbres
- Inconsistent text stress and declamation.
- Inconsistent choral blend
- Inconsistent intonation
- Dynamics lost or altered
- Lack precision of cut-offs and breathes
- (Lacking the trees for the forest)

Text and Diction (Fred Waring)

Strengths

- Pure Vowels
- Unified consonant articulation
- Precise breaths, cut-offs
- Careful attention to rhythm
- Authentic approach to language
- Syllabic stress
- Understanding of rhetoric and its impact on musical line.
- IPA knowledge

Weaknesses

- Inconsistent choral blend
- Inconsistent intonation
- Dynamics may be lost or altered
- Music may take back seat to language
- Language diversity may rule repertoire choice
- Lack emotional content (lacking the

Rhythm and Articulation (Robert Shaw)

Strengths

- Unified consonant articulation
- Precise breaths, cut-offs
- Authentic approach to style
- Clarity of individual parts especially in polyphony
- Great for music accompanied by large ensembles
- Great for recordings

Weaknesses

- Instrumental Approach
- Inconsistent choral blend
- Inconsistent intonation
- Music and style may rule over language
- Requires singers to be strong musicians
- Lack emotional content

Step Three – How do you become a Divergent Conductor?

1. *Change your rehearsal approaches to accentuate the strengths of the different factions and so create the best performance product possible.*
- Sing under the direction of as many choir directors as possible.
 - The Directors Chorus at the ACDA Summer Conference in Albany
 - Sing in the choir of a colleague for a set of rehearsals and performance
 - Have your choir sing in a Festival Choir, and you also sing.
- Observe “great” conductors in rehearsal at workshops, master classes or festival choirs.
 - ACDA Conferences have master classes or open rehearsals to watch.
 - Contact conductors and ask if you can observe their rehearsal (maybe it is even a continuing education opportunity)
- Ask a colleague or college choral director to come to your rehearsal to watch you.
 - Ask colleagues to give you feedback, critiques and ideas for improvement or change.
 - We can only grow through understanding what we really do.
- Bring a guest conductor/ clinician in to work with your ensemble.
 - An outside person who may or may not know your ensemble is an invaluable resource.
 - Bring a local college choral director in and have them work with the choir on a piece for a class, or have them observe you teaching.
- Critically listen to recordings of your ensemble and recordings of others
 - Recording can be wonderfully harsh ways of pointing out your ensembles weaknesses.
- Read articles, books and have discussions with colleagues about rehearsal techniques
- Contact your college professors and have a discussion about what you are doing in rehearsals

2. Be diligent about your score study, repertoire choice, and rehearsal methods

- I have heard conductors (including myself) say, “Well, my singers are not good at...”
 - This is a great excuse for weaknesses in the choir but who is at fault?
 - Did Picasso go through his *Blue Period* because he ran out of the other colors?
 - When you identify your weakness explore for which faction your weakness is a strength and try to take on that mindset.
- Repertoire choice and the “factions”.
 - Do your current repertoire choices reflect your “faction” more than another one?
 - Has your repertoire selection changed as you have grown as a musician and conductor?
 - When choosing repertoire for your choir consider the question, what “faction” would handle this piece best?
 - Does your repertoire choice set-up your students for weakness and “failure”.
 - Is your repertoire too difficult for your students? Can you only focus on the intonation and rhythm before a performance?
 - Maybe choose a piece simply because it lies in your weak areas so you and your singers can work on that issue together.
- How do you rehearse, and how would a conductor from another “faction” rehearse?
 - Do you rehearse the same way for every piece?
 - What are your “go to” rehearsal methods and what strengths do they create?
 - Is there a person in your choir that always asks about a specific items in rehearsal? (They are showing you a weakness)
 - “I noticed that we are not all cutting off...”
 - “What vowels should we use for this word?”
 - “It seems like we are not tuning this chord.”
 - “The dynamics here say...we don’t seem to be doing that.”
 - Consider changing your “faction” mindset for each pieces specifically.
 - This piece by Whitacre requires an *Intonation and Choral Blend* mindset
 - This piece by Aguiar requires a *Text and Diction* mindset
 - This piece by Bach requires a *Rhythm and Articulation* mindset
 - This piece by Brahms requires an *Emotion and Meaning* mindset
 - When lesson planning decide to use one “faction” mindset for an entire rehearsal
 - Today, I will rehearse pieces 1,2, and 3 from a *Intonation and Choral Blend* mindset
 - Tomorrow, I will rehearse the same pieces from a *Rhythm and Articulation* mindset.
 - Day 3, I will rehearse from a *Text and Diction* mindset.
 - The last week before the concert I will focus on the *Emotion and Meaning* mindset.
- If you had your ideal choir, what would be different about how you rehearse, what you expect, and the product on stage?
 - Arnold Schwarzenegger (before becoming Mr. Universe) imagined the way he would live, workout, and eat when he reached his “ideal” self. He took that model and decided to start living that way from the beginning. This ultimately resulted in him becoming what he envisioned.

NY-ACDA Summer Conference

NYSSMC in Albany, August 9-12, 2014



The NY-American Choral Directors Association Directors' Chorus participants stepped out of their traditional, comfortable music-making practices in order to learn from and make some terrific music with the ever-engaging, enthusiastic and internationally-known expert in vocal jazz, Dr. Stephen Zegree of Indiana University. Dr. Zegree challenged the chorus members to improvise, hear different harmonies, and to perform with a different rhythmic sense than they might normally be used to and to enjoy themselves and share that with the audience. It was wonderful to hear the chorus and the remarkable improvising & scatting soloists in some standards of American Popular Music.



Conference attendees of the NY-ACDA sessions were recipients some wonderful repertoire where they could focus on helping students through their changing voices or learn to sing independently in parts, or build their own warm-ups from the repertoire.

A terrific Tuesday morning session was a roundtable, interactive discussion of how to implement assessment and evaluation of choral students both for the betterment of their education, the ensemble, and as part of teacher evaluation. *Pictured: NY ACDA Directors' Chorus and Steve Zegree, Annie Pasqua, and Lee Wright credits: Howard Rockwin*



The Elementary School Children's and Middle School Honor Choirs continue to be a thriving and vital part of the summer conference. Watching Lynn Gackle and Susan Brumfield work with the young singers and hearing the progress and beautiful final performances by the participants is always a terrific reminder to all of us of why we do what we do. Isn't that one of the best outcomes of going to a conference? *Some of our Elementary School Children's Honor Choir members reminded us: "When I sing, I feel special. I feel powerful, like I have a voice. When I sing, I feel confident; like I can do anything! I feel joyful, optimistic and inspired! I feel peaceful and relaxed; relieved from stress and jealousy. I can be free with what I say, and it doesn't matter who's listening. I feel free."*

Middle School Honor Choir Sponsoring Teachers: Sarah Fay, *Bedford Central*; Nancy S. Petrie, *Canandaigua City Schools*; Valerie Ransbottom, *Cornwall*; Aimee DeBerjeois, *East Syracuse-Minoa*; Nancy Casellini and Terri Mewhorter, *Guilderland*; Mary Clementi, *Highbridge Voices*; Ryan Wade, *Hyde Park*; Alexis Bresnahan, *Milbrook*; David Salyers, *New York City*; Jake Purington, *Niskayuna*; Kelly Jordan, *Pittsford*; Richard Butler, *Salem Central*; Kathy Payne, *Salem Central*; Christina Gibney, *Schodack Central*; Don Schuessler, *West Genesee*

Elementary Children's Honor Choir Sponsoring Teachers

Diana Ackner, *Altamont Elementary*; Star Sanderson-Smith, *Amber Charter School (NYC)*; Don Schuessler, *Camillus MS*; Christina Gibney, *Castleton Elementary School*; Shannon DeFrancqueville, *Farnsworth Middle School (Guilderland)*; Sarah Fay, *Fox Lane MS (Bedford)*; Nancy Casellini & Deborah DiGrado, *Guilderland ES*; Eileen Scheffer, *Jefferson ES (Schenectady)*; Craig Knapp, *Joseph A. Edgar IS (Rocky Point)*; Christina Gibney, *Maple Hill (Castleton)*; David Salyers, *NEST+m Youth (NYC)*; Aimee deBerjeois & David Cotter, *Pine Grove MS (East Syracuse)*; Lindsay Gunn, *Portville ES*; Rachel Goodman, *PS 150 (Queens)*; Madeleine Calhoun, *Putnam Valley ES*; Jeanmarie Craane, *Putnam Valley MS*; Sandra Babb, *Queens Youth Choir*; Kathy Payne & Rich Butler, *Salem Central School*; Eileen Scheffer, *Schalmont MS (Schenectady)*; Paul Lomax, *Schoharie Elementary*; Wilma Messenger, *Todd School (Briarcliff)*; Starr Norman & Judy Russo, *Westmere*

Fall Conference

Vassar College, Oct 1-Nov. 1, 2014



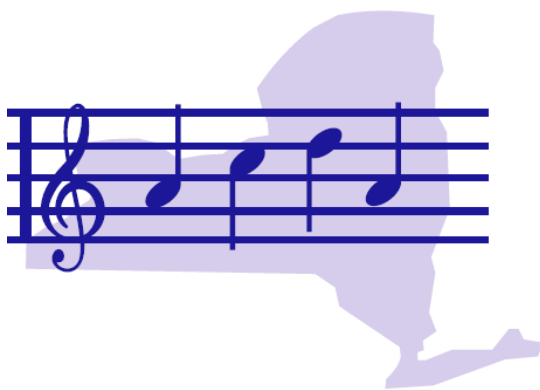
The 2014 Fall Conference at Vassar College was a huge success, thanks to the efforts of co-chairs, NYACDA President Penelope Cruz and R&S Chair for College/University Choirs and site host, Christine Howlett. Christine was also kind enough to host a reception at her house for conference attendees...a great evening of laughs and bonding was had by all. Thank you, Christine!

Our conference attendees, the largest in number since the inception of the fall conference, were treated to two days of insightful workshops on conducting and rehearsal techniques by headliner, Jeffrey Douma, of Yale University. Dr. Douma's insightful and concise analysis was extremely valuable for both master class participants and observers. Our master class conductors were both undergrads, graduate students, and recent college grads who conducted sections of Brahms' *Warum ist das Licht Gegeben* and Victoria's *O Magnum Mysterium*. It was also no coincidence that the "demonstration choir," comprised of conference participants served as a wonderfully responsive and musical group for the young conductors to work with! Both the Brahms and the Victoria were beautifully performed and provided a fine vehicle for the student conductors to convey their interpretations through.

Craig Knapp, Penelope Cruz, and Christine Howlett led wonderful reading sessions on high quality, eclectic repertoire for treble and mixed choirs of all levels of advancement. There is little doubt that everybody walked away with a number of pieces to use with their own choirs. Jason Thoms of Concordia College offered a closer look in to the most commonly used choral rehearsal technique styles and challenged directors to step out of their own comfort zone to become "Divergent Conductors". Eastern Division President, David Fryling, delivered an inspirational and thought provoking workshop on ensemble techniques that create a collaborative choral environment with his fabulous choir, eVoco.

No ACDA conference would be complete without terrific performances by terrific choirs. It is safe to say that choral music is alive and well in New York State! Many congratulations go out to the following conductors and ensembles for their terrific performances at the 2014 NYACDA Fall Conference, some of who are pictured on the previous page: Highbridge Voices Chamber Choir, Mary Clementi, conductor; Vassar College Choir & Women's Chorus, Christine Howlett, conductor; and eVoco, David Fryling, conductor.

Interested in bringing YOUR choir to perform next year? Keep an eye out for the NYACDA "call for choirs" in the spring of 2015!



NY/ACDA
"New York Sings"

Vocal Improvisation Games: for Singers and Choral Groups

by Jeffrey Agrell and Patrice Madura Ward-Steinman

Reviewed by James Ludwig, NY-ACDA R&S Chair for Jazz Choirs

There is an old joke that goes: “How do you get a jazz musician to play quieter? Put music in front of her.” It’s safe to say that most folks in the jazz world scoff at humor like that, but I often hear from musicians who are trained in the classical tradition, that the opposite of that joke is almost always true: “How do you get a classical musician to play quieter? Tell him to improvise.” When we think of improvisation, many of choral conductors immediately think of jazz, and for good reason. It is the genre of music we deal with most frequently that is associated with improvisation. Teaching a jazz choir is often intimidating to musicians from a traditional classical background because of their lack of experience in improvisation. Luckily, the path to becoming a skilled improviser is simple: practice. The question then becomes, how? What should be practiced? The games in this book are a great place to start.

Vocal Improvisation Games is a collection of activities to help singers and ensembles develop improvisational skills. Rather than saturating the reader with pages of II-V-I licks and blues lines to be practiced in multiple keys, this book provides over one hundred activities that set up novice singers (and their conductors) to succeed in improvisation. In fact, there’s not a scrap of notation in the book. The authors defend this decision admirably and extensively – from their position that an aural approach to practicing improvisation closely parallels the way humans learn to speak and read, to their statement about how “complexity that is nearly impossible to record in notation can be effortlessly created by an improviser practiced in the nuances of personal expression.” (xiii)

The activities in this book have multiple applications across different ensemble types, sizes, and experience levels. There are games appropriate first graders as well as activities that would be beneficial to professional ensembles. In addition to teaching improvisation, these activities also give singers the opportunity to explore and experience how specific expressive changes in the voice affect the perceived meaning of a text, and the musical effects achieved by matching or intentionally mismatching vowels in a choral texture. Also included are activities that develop aural and music theory skills creatively (singer one chooses a chord quality, singer one chooses a root, both take turns “hocketing” the notes in an ascending arpeggio of that chord quality).

Other more advanced activities in the book help build a foundation for improvisation in a jazz context. Because much of jazz improvisation is grounded in variations on the “head” or melody of the song being performed, the games provided which prompt singers to create theme and variation performances based on familiar tunes, or to perform familiar tunes in different modes or meters, help singers to practice this technique of varying or ornamenting an established melody. Another tenet of jazz improvisation is the close relationship between harmonic progression and melodic line, known as “playing the changes”. Several games in this book will help singers to develop their knowledge of harmonic progression by singing bass lines and guide tone lines to familiar melodies and blues progressions. Jazz instrumentalists have been practicing exercises like this for years in order to “get inside” of a tune, to develop harmonic audiation skills, and to improvise melodies that fit in (or that intentionally do not fit in, when playing “out”) with those harmonies.

Vocal Improvisation Games is a unique, concise, and eminently useful resource for all musicians looking to develop their skills as improvisers (or teachers of improvisation). The activities in this book are fun, practically useful, and enriching for choirs, instrumental ensembles, and general music classes at all levels. Highly recommended.

NY-ACDA 2015

7th Annual Middle School Honor Choir *13th Annual Elementary Children's Honor*



Middle School Children's Honor Choir

Guest Conductor

Dr. Philip Silvey

Conductor, composer, educator

Eastman School of Music



Elementary Children's Honor Choir

Guest Conductor

Judy Dubose

Frederick (MD) Children's Chorus

ACDA and NYSSMA members may nominate students currently in 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8th grade.

Each ensemble includes over 100 students from across New York State!

Nomination Deadline, April 10, 2015

For more information visit www.nyacda.org or contact

Mary Clementi, Middle School Honor Choir Chair – nymiddleschoolhonorchoir@gmail.com

Eric Williamson, Elementary Children's Honor Choir Chair- ewilliamsonACDA@gmail.com