

## From Your President

### *Upcoming OCDA Summer Conference Highlights*

THE NATIONAL ACDA CONFERENCE in Cincinnati was amazing! In addition to the many Ohio conductors attending, it was incredible to show off our state and resources to a national audience. Ohio choral musicians presented heartfelt and spirited performances as well as imparted some incredible knowledge through interest sessions. We plan to build on that excitement this June as OCDA presents our annual Summer Conference.

The 2023 Conference, “Tune your Toolbox,” is just around the corner, and with the move to Capital University, it promises to be a must-attend event for choral conductors and music educators alike! This year, the conference features an exceptional lineup of renowned choral directors and educators, including Joe Miller, Jessica Nápoles, and Stacey Gibbs. In addition, we are thrilled that Richard Schnipke and Robyn Lana will be leading the High School Honors Choir and Treble Honors Choir, respectively.

Joe Miller, the Director of Choral Studies at the University of Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, will lead sessions on “TLC” and conducting technique, and he’ll lead a director’s chorus providing tools and insights for preparing outstanding performances. He has conducted renowned ensembles such as the Westminster Choir and the Spoleto Festival Choir. With a wealth of experience, he is sure to offer valuable insights and techniques to attendees.

Jessica Nápoles is an Associate Professor of Choral Music Education and Director of Choral Activities at the University of North Texas. Her sessions will cover the topics: building independence, developing critical thinking, and fostering student engagement. Nápoles has been praised for her own work as a public-school teacher and for her work training choral music educators, and I’m sure she’ll provide attendees with an enlightening and inspiring experience.

Stacey Gibbs is a celebrated arranger and composer, and his arrangements have been performed by choirs all over the world. He will share his music in a reading session format, and he’ll present a session on authenticity in gospel, spiritual, and hymn singing for schools and churches.

In addition to these amazing choral musicians, Richard Schnipke will



*OCDA President  
Doug O’Neal*

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lead the High School Honors Choir and Robyn Lana will lead the Treble Honors Choir. These choirs comprise of some of the best student vocalists in the state and offer a unique opportunity for students to work with outstanding conductors and learn new skills.

We are also excited to welcome some incredible choirs to perform at the conference! All performances will be held in Mees Hall.

Appearing this summer are: Baldwin Wallace Women's Chorus (Lisa Miragliotta), Perrysburg High School A Cappella Choir (Shelvin Burns), Little Miami Chorale (Sarah Baker), and Olentangy Shanahan Choir (Katie Silcott). A special *thank-you* to these fine conductors and musicians for joining us this summer!

The Ohio Choral Directors Association Summer Conference will

take place June 26–28, 2023, at Capital University in Bexley (Columbus), Ohio. We invite you to join us for three days of learning, networking, and inspiration. Don't miss your chance to learn from some of the most accomplished choral directors in the country and be a part of an amazing musical experience. Register now at [ohiocda.org](http://ohiocda.org) to secure your spot. The pre-registration discount ends May 26, 2023. ♦

## Semi-Occluded Vocal Tract Exercises and Straw Phonation

*Jeanne Wohlgamuth, President-Elect*

IN FEBRUARY, I had the pleasure of attending the American Choral Directors National Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio. One of the sessions I attended offered me the opportunity to learn about the benefits of using straw phonation and semi-occluded vocal tract exercises (SOVT) in my choral rehearsals.

Since then, I have had great success incorporating these exercises into my choral rehearsal and the rehearsal of several honor choirs I have conducted. The reaction from my singers has been very positive. They can hear and feel the difference in their sound and their ability to sing with a more relaxed, focused, and supported tone.

Straw phonation and semi-occluded vocal tract exercises have now become a standard of the warm-up routine and a tool to address specific vocal issues within

my choral rehearsal. Straw phonation and SOVT are also used as a “reset” button if the singers have been rehearsing for an extended period.

The premise of straw phonation is that by singing through a straw or narrow tube, singers can create a semi-occluded vocal tract, which can help to reduce vocal strain and promote healthy vocal production. As the clinicians stated, it is like doing stretches in the pool—less impact and stress on your muscles. Vocal therapists have used these exercises for years to help people recover from vocal injuries.

When we sing or speak, air flows from the lungs through the vocal cords and into the vocal tract, which includes the mouth, nose, and throat. This airflow causes the vocal cords to vibrate, producing sound. However, if too

much air is allowed to escape, the sound can become weak or breathy. Semi-occlusion limits the flow of air by partially closing the mouth, which causes the air pressure to increase behind the lips. This increased back pressure can help align the vocal folds in a more balanced position and help them vibrate more easily. This causes less impact on the vocal folds, resulting in clearer and more powerful sounds with greater efficiency and less fatigue.

One of the benefits experienced by my singers when using straw phonation is the reduction of vocal strain and tension. This has been very apparent with my basses and tenors as they sing in the area of their passagio and above, and with my first sopranos as they soar above the staff. After a warm-up





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**Dr. Marla Butke**

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period utilizing straw phonation and semi-occluded vocal exercises, my singers have produced a clear, steady tone without oversinging or overexerting their vocal cords.

Another benefit of straw phonation is that it can help singers develop greater control over their breath support. When singing through a straw, singers must use their breath support more effectively to create a steady and controlled tone. This can help singers develop greater breath control, which can be applied to their singing. Also considered a benefit of straw phonation and SOVT exercises is improved resonance and placement. You can experience improved resonance and placement if your singers alternate straw phonation and SOVT exercises with open-mouth singing. The goal is to transfer the same sensa-

tions of free, light, and forward buzzing in their sound.

Straw phonation is just one way to achieve the benefits of a semi-occluded vocal tract, but there are other ways. Below are very effective SOVT exercises without using a straw, followed by SOVT exercises using a straw.

### SOVT Exercises Without the Use of a Straw

**1) Lip Trills:** This exercise involves placing your lips together and blowing air through them to create a vibrating sound. It can help improve breath control and coordination between the airflow and the vocal folds.

**2) Tongue trills:** This exercise involves placing the tip of your tongue behind your upper teeth

and blowing air through it to create a vibrating sound. It can help improve coordination between your tongue and airflow, and reduce tension in your jaw and throat.

**3) Humming:** Hum a tune or scale with your mouth slightly open and lips lightly touching. This can help improve vocal resonance and control.

**4) Semi-occluded vowels:** Sing through partially closed or narrowed vowels, such as “oo” or “uh.” It can help to improve vocal control and resonance.

**5) “Ng” consonant:** Sing your repertoire on the “ng” consonant. This will help improve resonance and projection.

**6) “Z” sound:** Sing your repertoire or any exercises through the “z”

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sound. This will help improve resonance.

**7) “M” and “N” consonant sounds:** Produce the “m” and “n” sound by partially closing the lips and allowing the sound to resonate in your mouth.

**8) Sing while holding a finger in front of your mouth.**

**9) Card Kazoo:** Sing while holding a credit card sideways in front of your mouth, resting lightly on your lips. You should feel the vibration on your lips.

### SOVT Exercises Through the Use of a Straw

It is essential to ensure that no air is escaping around the straw between your lips or nose. If you pinch your nose, the sound should not change.

- 1) Inhale and exhale through a straw.
- 2) Slides and glides, any pitch, low to high and high to low.
- 3) Make progressive “hills” experimenting with different pitches and intensities of sound (almost like revving a car engine).
- 4) Sing short, sharp notes on one pitch while blowing air through the straw.

5) Sing a sustained vowel sound, such as “oo,” “ah,” or “ee,” for as long as you can while putting air through the straw. Focus on maintaining a steady, even sound and feel the vibrations in your face and chest.

6) Start at a soft volume, gradually crescendo while blowing air through the straw, and then gradually decrescendo. This exercise can help improve your dynamic control and breath control.

7) Octave leaps

8) Arpeggios

9) Scales

10) Sing the following pitch patterns on “oo”:

- s f m r d
- s - d
- d - d' - d
- d r m f s f m r d
- d m s l s m d
- s m f r m d r t, d
- d s d' s m d

11) Sing your repertoire through the straw.

12) Alternate between singing through the straw and removing the straw (singing with an open vocal tract). When the straw is re-

moved, singers should be encouraged to maintain the same feeling.

When using straw phonation, the amount of back pressure created can change depending on the size of the straw opening. The smaller the opening, the more backpressure is produced, making the exercises harder. I purchased 500 individually wrapped straws at Gordon Food Service for \$11.99. These have the perfect-sized opening for first-time users. I also supplied my singers with a plastic baggie to store their straws once opened. After two or three uses, I encourage them to wash their straws in soapy water.

In closing, while I am not an expert on straw phonation and semi-occluded vocal tract exercises, I encourage those working with choirs to consider incorporating this technique into their daily warm-ups and choir rehearsal routines. Straw phonation and semi-occluded vocal tract exercises improve vocal health, reduce tension in the voice, and establish better breath control, to name a few of the benefits. These are all the things that we, as choral directors, try to achieve during every rehearsal. ♦

## Upcoming Events

### OCDA Summer Conference

June 26–28, 2023, Capital University, Columbus, OH

[ohiocda.org/conferenceparent/SummerConference](http://ohiocda.org/conferenceparent/SummerConference)

# Positive Changes Prompted by the Pandemic



*Beth Vaughn, Secretary*

ALTHOUGH MANY THINGS have gotten back to “normal” after the pandemic, I note that there are some activities, procedures, and routines that have been permanently altered because they turned out to be positive changes. For me, one of those changes was the use of technology in my classroom.

In my earlier days of teaching when I was in a parochial and a small public school, we still did grades by hand and had just started using platforms such as Google Classroom, PowerSchool, and ProgressBook. Assessments, evaluations, and surveys were given with paper and pencil. Many students

did not have online access or computers at home. At the time, it seemed easier to assess rhythm counting, drawing notes and rests, and labeling solfège with a written assessment. I was decent with technology, but I usually defaulted to paper and pencil.

Then came remote teaching. I didn’t have a choice but to find ways to do what I normally would in an online format. It was a long learning curve, but I came to realize this: not only was I able to assess the same concepts, but it became easier to maintain records, organize lessons and assessments for the future, and make fewer copies.

During my remote learning stint (almost 10 months!), I was forced to play around with technology to find what worked for me and my classroom, and my lifeline was the large group of people who were willing to share ideas, templates, lessons, and platforms that helped them with their online instruction.

Like those who helped me during remote learning, I want to share with you some platforms, sites, and supplemental items that I still utilize today, with the hope that you’ll find something you can use. Most of these have a fee asso-

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ciated with them. I have been fortunate to receive grants to cover most of these costs. Maybe you have a budget, a booster group, or a grant system to help you cover them as well.

**Teacher Made** (<https://teacher-made.com>)

This site allows you to take Google Slides, Docs, and other PDFs and turn them into interactive activities. It will auto-grade for you and the scores will flow right into your online grade book. There are 20+ question types and students can get instant feedback.

**Flat and Flat for Education** (<https://flat.io>)

Flat is a music notation site that allows you to create, edit, listen,

print, and share without having to download or install anything.

Flat for Education allows you to teach music theory and composition. Students can work collaboratively on a composition in real time. You can also create worksheets and quizzes on pitch, keys, intervals, chords, scales, and rhythm. You can connect Flat to your online grading platform and the assignments are automatically graded. Students can also record a performance and send it to you.

**Music Snippet**

Music Snippet is an extension in Google Slides. It allows you to insert music notation, tablatures, and rhythms into any doc or slide. You can also use it to create your own worksheet with music notation by

creating it in a Google Doc, copying it, and then pasting in a worksheet.

**Gimkit** (<https://www.gimkit.com>)

Gimkit is a mashup of Kahoot and Quizlet but with some added features. It's live gameplay where students are answering questions on an electronic device. You can create sets of questions or search for sets that are already made and copy or modify them. Games can be played live or assigned individually for review/homework. Student reports can be downloaded after each game.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. I hope that you'll find at least one of these to be helpful! ♦

## Important Considerations When Choosing Repertoire

*Laurel Labbe, Junior High/Middle School Choirs R&R Chair*

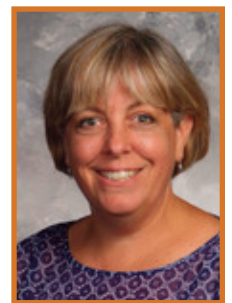
IT HAS BEEN MY PLEASURE to serve as the Junior High/Middle School R&R Chair for the past few years. During that time, I have had the opportunity to reflect on what makes a piece more likely to be successful with my middle school singers. I am confident that many of you use the same or similar thought processes when choosing repertoire, but sometimes a quick reflection can help us get back to the basics. Especially since I have been teaching for many years now,

occasionally I realize I have moved away from doing something that helped build my program in the first place, and that my students are now missing a building block I used to take for granted.

First and foremost, I try to carefully consider the text of the song. I want to be sure that the text is meaningful, uplifting, or thought provoking for my students. There are songs I might have considered at the beginning of my career that I no longer feel comfortable singing.

Our students are dealing with different issues post-pandemic and in general than they were before. Above all, the students will not "buy in" to a piece of music if the text doesn't resonate with them.

Secondly, I look at the way harmony is handled. With my beginning middle school singers, which for me are 6th graders with no choral experience, I look for harmonies that are relatively easier for them to have success with. Partner





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songs or counter melodies versus homophonic harmonies seem to work better for them when they are first learning. When my part three is beginning to learn their own part for the first time, they do better when their part has its own rhythm. In my experience, they are often successful holding their part when it's a sixth below the melody (which seems to be very common in 3 part mixed repertoire) when they are singing on solfège. However, when we switch to the text, they seem to gravitate toward the melody down the octave instead of singing their own part. They have a much greater rate of success if their part has its own rhythmic or melodic pattern.

With middle school singers, it is also vital to consider the range. Be-

ginning changing voices obviously make the range an even bigger issue than with other choirs. However, if we are looking at limited range for the baritone voices, sometimes it seems the soprano and alto voices are limited too. Part one should have an opportunity to sing at least a little bit in their upper range and part two shouldn't be stuck singing just a few notes the whole song. It is also always a high point for singers when sections, other than part one, have a chance to sing the melody. With the limited range requirements for three-part mixed music, it can also be a challenge to find music in a variety of keys. Despite that challenge, I think it's important for young singers to see different key signatures as much as possible.

Finally, I look at repertoire to see what skills or music theory I can draw out from the music to teach my singers. For instance, I am doing a piece with a double suspension in the alto and baritone part for our upcoming concert. I have not had occasion to teach that concept before to this class. Finding something theory-related can often provide stretch for those of our students who are ready for more.

Our repertoire choices are so critical to our ensembles since they are our curriculum. There never seems to be enough time to choose music, but there is no greater feeling than programming a piece that really connects with our students and that they thoroughly enjoy singing. ♦



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# The Case for the Middle School Singer



*Kelsey Burkett, South Central Region Chair*

“YOU TEACH MIDDLE SCHOOL? Oh my gosh, I could *never*. You’re so brave.” But am I brave? Are middle schoolers really *so terrifying*? For some, perhaps, but for me, middle school is my happy place. I was once asked in an interview to describe the middle school student. My answer was this: They are a little stuck in the middle. They are no longer a small child, needing to be guided at every step. But they are certainly not ready for responsibilities like driving or making major life decisions, even if their brains tell them they are. They are stuck. And they need us to help them out and into the next chapter. Would I go back to being a student myself? Absolutely not. But am I in it with these kids to see them across life’s most perilous threshold? Definitely.

I often think back to my own middle school years as pivotal to where I am today. My family moved between my 7th and 8th grade years, from a small, rural town in West Virginia to a large, upper-middle class suburb of Cleveland. I should also mention that this small town in West Virginia is where my father, aunt, and uncles grew up, my grandmother was a beloved and popular teacher at the only elementary school in town, my grandparents lived one street over from us, and everyone knew everybody. Each year, veteran teachers would say “oh, another Burkett” as I followed in the footsteps of my highly successful dad, uncles, and aunt. They were athletes. I was not. I give you this information so you can understand

the very protected bubble that was quickly burst once we moved to Solon, Ohio. My parents had no choice in the matter, as the move was due to my father’s job, but middle school is the absolute worst time for a kid to have to change schools. I faced the many issues that compound themselves within that age, but also faced new experiences of racial discrimination, body shame, and exposure to way more than my mother was ready for me to experience. I quickly fell into a deep depression that year.

My schedule had 8th-grade choir on it, simply because my schedule from the previous year had choir on it too. I did like performing and music. Up to that point, I had been in several local musicals but the choir program at my previous school was lacking. Ann Usher was my teacher that year, and she quickly recognized I had a talent. She tried to push me to audition for the chamber choir (“Kelsey, you should really audition for Chamber Choir”), but my insecurities and nervousness prevented me from doing so. Later in the year, several of her singers were selected to audition for the ACDA Jr. High Honor Choir in Detroit, Michigan. I was lucky enough to be accepted. I can mark this as setting my path for the arts throughout high school and college. Looking back on it now, I realize that choir is what

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Nominations Due March 17, 2023



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saved my life that year. It gave me friends, purpose, and belonging, something this new kid desperately needed.

Which now brings me to the present. Here I am, a successful middle school choir director. My student teaching experience at Olentangy Liberty Middle School gave me additional perspective as to what middle schoolers were capable of. I have learned over these last 17 years that middle school students are desperate for challenges and to be treated as if they were older than they are. I believe the choral classroom is the perfect place to begin laying these foundations they will need in their adulthood. Humility, empathy, critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork can all happen in the

middle school if the teacher is willing to set these expectations for their singers. I see that scared, sad thirteen year old girl I once was in a lot of my singers now, and it motivates me to be the person and space they need to have light in their day.

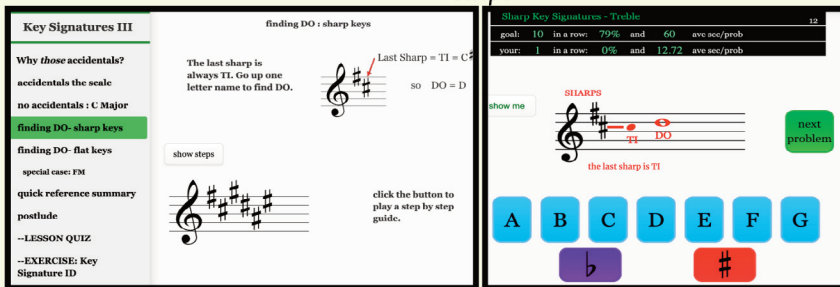
*Meet them where they are.* We all know kids have more to deal with these days than any generation prior to them. With the addition of cell phones and social media, our kids are dealing with impossible amounts of noise in their lives. The short time they spend with us during the day could be some of the only highlights they experience during their school week. That is a huge responsibility. So, meet them where they are. Whether it's a

Question of the Day, weekly check in, or some other way, make sure you are connecting with each kid so they know you care. If they are giving you low energy, be ready to give them three times what you normally do. It is exhausting, but in the end, knowing they have someone in their corner is vital to a middle school program's success.

*Give them literature that means something.* We've all heard the horror stories of middle school choirs that stand and sing only to pop music tracks, sing in unison, exhibit terrible behaviors, etc. Let's just be honest. Those things did not happen because the kids were not capable of doing something more. It was because the person in front of them chose not to invest in

*MyMusicianship.com* program to develop sight-singing skills

Lessons  $\longleftrightarrow$  Exercise  
swipe



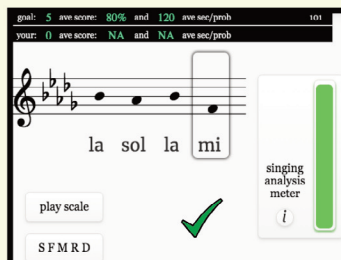
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score reports

practice logs



benchmark	score	speed
Bass Clef Line Notes-for accuracy	85%	3 s/p
Bass Clef Line and Space Notes	100%	6 s/p
Scale Degree ET: DO SOL	100%	8 s/p
Scale Degree Singing: DO SOL	100%	8 s/p
Scale Degree ET: DO RE SOL	90%	9 s/p
Scale Degree Singing: DO RE SOL	100%	15 s/p
Scale Degree ET: DO SOL LA	100%	9 s/p
Scale Degree Singing: DO SOL LA	inc	inc
Lesson Quiz: Note Values		

Weekly Logs					
week	1	2	3	4	total
due	10	10	10	10	20
done	2	7	--	--	8/25

1 - due: 7/22/21, 10min (1:43)

- 0:21 Line Notes and Space Notes 2: 100% 10s/p
- 0:20 Scale Degree Singing: DO SOL LA 1: 0% 20s/p
- 0:20 Scale Degree Singing: DO SOL LA 1: 100% 20s/p
- 0:09 Scale Degree Singing: DO SOL LA 1: 0% 9s/p
- ✓ 0:15 Line Notes and Space Notes 4: 100% 5s/p
- ✓ 0:18 Treble Clef Space Notes-for accuracy 11: 100% 1s/p

2 - due: 7/29/21, 10min (7:02)

- 1:59 Scale Degree Singing: DO SOL LA 1: 100% 11s/p
- 0:21 Mark beats and perform rhythm 1: 0% 21s/p
- 1:09 Bass Clef Line and Space Notes 3: 100% 23s/p

them through repertoire. With that “middle phase” these singers are stuck in, challenging repertoire can be an amazing way to giving them the challenges and adult responsibility they crave. Clinton Hardy, Director of the Trinity Springs Middle School Choral Department in Texas, told us at ACDA 2023 to “Program the pieces we are afraid of.” The ones that challenge us as musicians can often be the ones our singers find the most satisfaction and buy into once we have guided them through the difficult parts. They are eager to connect emotionally and intellectually in new and advanced ways. Choir is the perfect space for them to do this!

*Teach their ears and eyes...and hearts.* The beginning of my school year starts with Choir Boot Camp, where we spend several weeks going back to the basics. Unison folk songs that split into canons and quodlibets are the perfect tools to get them singing with

resonance and supported tone. Drilling scales and chord progressions get their ears used to hearing intervals. Tie those intervals to songs they know already. Make sure the bar is set high. When they have reached that level, raise the bar again.

Nothing will humble you more than a roast from a middle schooler. I am not afraid to embarrass myself in front of my students, and with that, they see I am willing to be vulnerable with them, and in turn, they will be vulnerable with me. I always say singing is the scariest thing you can do in front of a person—you are sharing a piece of yourself...your voice is part of your human soul.

*Don't take yourself—or them—too seriously.* “No cap bruh...on GOD I tell you. Let's goooooo.” I keep a close ear to the slang they use so I can turn it around and use it on them to make them both laugh and cringe. I have embraced

my mom role in front of them and am not afraid to be silly with them. At this age, because of this middle space, they are in this perfect area of still willing to be goofy, even if they pretend they don't want to be. On the flipside, they can be mean, and it's our job to call them out when they are exhibiting these behaviors. Empathy and kindness are deeply lacking in our society, and we must teach them these skills by modeling it for them. How I treat them in the classroom always needs to be a reflection of how I want them to treat each other.

So, whether you're a college student about to take your first job, or maybe you've decided to switch to middle school from a different age, I say welcome! The world needs the warriors like us who aren't afraid of these awkward creatures of the middle age. The world will be better because we invested in them and saw exactly who they are destined to be. No Cap ON GOD. ♦

## Retired, or Rewired?

*Hilary Apfelstadt, Retired Members Representative*

THIS PAST WINTER, I messaged a friend who had just announced his retirement as senior minister from the church my husband and I attended in Toronto. He had served there about 20 years, and prior to that had spent another 20 years in ministry, so his career spans decades, and he has lived a full life as a servant leader. He is a remark-

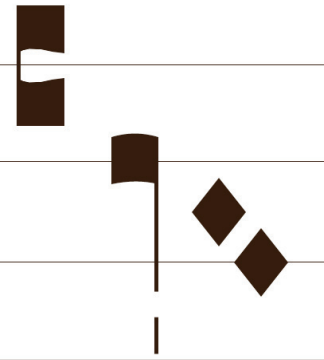
able speaker, an efficient administrator, a skilled mediator, and a caring pastor. He is knowledgeable, yet accessible and personable, always meeting people where they are in their understanding of their faith. His retirement will leave a huge gap in that congregation and in many people's lives. But like all of us, after years of commitment to

his career, particularly a career in a service profession, he deserves time to pursue personal passions and to just be, rather than be defined by his work. The question is, as is true for most of us at retirement, “what's next?”

When he wrote to thank me for



# Musical Resources



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the good wishes, he said, “You are a great model for rewirement,” a word coined by a local friend of his. What a good term that is. For some of us, retirement is about getting away from old routines, perhaps moving to part-time work in our field (because what musician ever truly gives it all up?), spending time traveling or at least dreaming about it, pursuing new hobbies, and reinventing ourselves if we choose to do so. I retired from full-time teaching in 2018, but then spent two years following up in person and online with doctoral students who still had dissertations to complete. By 2021, everyone on my list had completed their degrees. In the meantime, Covid took over our lives, taught us a new meaning for the word “Zoom,” and forced all of us, retired or not, to re-think our lives to some degree. I spent a year from September 2020 to September 2021 working full-time remotely for national ACDA as their interim executive director. This role challenged me, but, as someone not used to a life without the old schedules and structures, it also fulfilled me. It brought together many skills learned during years of teaching and service as an

ACDA officer, and taught me some new ones. I was grateful for the return of structure and purpose, both of which were affected by the pandemic.

As the pandemic went on and eventually waned, in-person activity resumed and I was able to engage in music-making activity again by doing some consulting, guest teaching, and conducting. The best part of post-pandemic life, however, was reconnecting with family and friends in person. Then retirement could begin in earnest! Ideally, for me, this meant a good balance between unscheduled time and productivity, with freedom to make choices. As a long-time academic, I spent many hours in committee meetings, seemingly reliving discussions about curriculum and performance standards and other minutia. It was not unimportant, but over the years, it became more tedious and redundant. No more meetings! Especially at first, I really missed the energy of the students, whose presence is often inspiring and motivating, but sometimes challenging and concerning. I realized that they were feeding my energy level and now it was my responsibility to fill

that gap. How to do that is an individual decision. If one is healthy, there is a good element of choice. Sadly, not everyone has that, but my situation is very fortunate.

Musicians, in my experience, tend to define themselves by their careers. When those are gone, the empty space remaining can be overwhelming and even depressing. I have some former colleagues for whom that seems to be the case and it makes me sad for them. Without their jobs, they feel useless. For me, it is a relief not to have to be responsible for so much. It is relaxing to go to a concert that someone else prepared, and it is a pleasure to see so many former students doing well in the profession, inspiring another generation of students. Being able to see my grandchildren grow up, to read books that are not professionally related (who knew that “psychological fiction” could be so fascinating?), to volunteer for a charity in the community, to do some traveling, to help younger professionals by providing references or advice or encouragement when they seek it: all of these are things that I cherish in retirement.

By re-defining ourselves as



# Tune Your Toolbox

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more than musicians, we can indeed rewire, and each of us will find unique paths for that. In my case, it is a balance between making music and taking interesting opportunities as they arise, and it's having time to explore non-musical interests. Recently, I completed a sabbatical replacement at McGill University in Montreal, and thoroughly enjoyed the interactions with conducting students and a fine chamber choir. It felt good to be back in the routine again but would I want to be doing that all the time with no end in sight, year after year? Not anymore; it's time for more balance in life. For those of you still deeply imbedded in full-time work, consider inviting your retired colleagues to come and serve as an extra set of ears sometime, to visit you in your rehearsal spaces, to get together for coffee and just chat about anything on your mind. We have experience be-

hind us that, although different from yours, might relate enough to your current situation that you would have an empathic colleague in your corner.

If you are contemplating retirement, think about making some plans ahead of time for how you will spend your time. Be prepared. Allow for downtime, but also prepare for things that will support your need to be useful and productive, whether music related or not. It's not necessary to be in charge anymore and that can be very freeing. The hours I spend occasionally in the church office doing small tasks that help the staff are hours well spent, taking things off people's hands to free them for more important work. Listening to my grandson practice violin or helping my granddaughter figure out a challenge in her piano music is privileged time. Taking the one-year-old to the park in the spring is

a gift to me as much as it is to him. You may find that transitioning into retirement is preferable to quitting "cold turkey." Perhaps keeping a church choir job or leading a community choir once a week is enough to satisfy your need to stay involved. Perhaps you want to set up a small studio in your home. But perhaps you are like Henry Leck, the former artistic director of the Indianapolis Children's Choir and professor emeritus at Butler University, who took up painting and discovered another remarkable talent!

In any event, I hope you will stay involved in your professional organizations because your wisdom and expertise can serve a good purpose, and your presence can be an inspiration to younger colleagues who can benefit from that. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do for choral music. Each of us can be a model for "reirement" in retirement. ♦

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