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Leadership**

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Pasadena Preview

Over 140 applications to perform or present were submitted for the 2016 Western Division ACDA Conference in Pasadena: **How can I keep from Singing?** It was a stunning number, requiring the energies of numerous committees devoting many hours over the past two months.

The WD Board has become increasingly excited as it has developed the framework for a remarkable conference. Those submitting applications will be contacted before the July 1 notification deadline.

The board anticipates performances by over 30 choral groups, including divisional choirs of all ages, honor choirs, professional choirs, and two traveling international ensembles.

Kicking off the headliner ensembles will be Grammy-winning **Conspirare**, with artistic director Craig Hella Johnson also delivering the keynote address.

Friday will feature the choral singing sensation **Roomful of**

Anna Hamre

President



Teeth, recently propelled to international acclaim, and the incomparable jazz group **M-Pact**.

Closing the conference will be noted composer Ola Gjeilo performing with the renowned **Voces8**, and the esteemed **Pacific Chorale**, conducted by John Alexander.

An exciting new development will be an evening session entirely devoted to

exploring the **a cappella movement** currently sweeping the collegiate scene. Participants will be able to learn music and techniques from successful ensembles and directors.

A **collegiate strand**, "Hit the Ground Running," will give future choir directors a boost as they launch their careers. They will have a chance to attend concerts and workshops, consult with veterans, and network with choral colleagues.

Attendees can look forward to

reading sessions of recommended literature while round tables will create informal opportunities to network with other directors. Interest sessions will offer information on performance practice, organizational techniques, choral literature, and much more. The facilities hosting all concerts and workshops are within easy walking distance.

Make plans now to be in Pasadena February 24-27, 2016!

Make plans now to be in Pasadena February 24-27!



Craig Hella Johnson, onstage with Conspirare bass Robert Harlan, thanks the Academy for Conspirare's first Grammy award.

Announcing Congratulating Welcoming Travis Rogers, President-Elect

Travis Rogers has been a member of the California ACDA Board of Directors for the past 18 years having served the organization in various capacities as an R&S Chair, Regional Conference Host, Summer Conference (ECCO) Chair, and President. He has also served ACDA as a conference presenter and accompanist for many years. During his tenure as California ACDA President, the organization established the High School Men's Honor Choir and further developed the Regional Conferences begun by his predecessor, Ken Abrams.

Travis has been the choral music instructor at Napa High School in Napa, California since 1980, directing a program that annually involves over 350 students in seven different ensembles. His NHS Choirs perform nearly a hundred times a year and have traveled the world performing in ten different countries while earning many international, national, regional, and local awards including twelve first-place honors at the Northern California Golden State Invitational High School Choral Festival.

Long active in choral circles as a result of nearly forty years of service as a choral conductor, Travis earned a Bachelor of Music degree in piano performance and music education at Biola College (1978) and a Master of Music degree in choral conducting at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff (1987). He studied choral music with Andrew Cottle, Jo-Michael Scheibe, Wesley B. Reed, and Loren Wiebe.

In demand throughout northern and central California as a choral festival adjudicator, clinician, honor choir conductor, accompanist, and conference presenter, Travis also serves, part-time, as the music director and service organist at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Napa.

Along with being married to his wife of 33 years, Sharon, and the proud father of two adult children, Tara and Jay, Travis enjoys traveling and attending collegiate and professional sporting events. He has seen at least one major league baseball game in 45 different ballparks!



ACDA

Western Division Leadership

Repertoire & Standards Chairs

Boys

Jason Raetz, Phoenix Boys Choir
jwraetz@gmail.com

Children

Herbert Washington, Gilbert Christian HS
herbertwashington@pcchorus.org

College & University

Cory Evans, Utah State U.
cory.evans@usu.edu

Community Choirs

Michael Short
Orange HS, Orange Community Master Chorale
mshort@ocmchorale.org

Ethnic and Multicultural

Cristian Grases
Thornton School of Music, USC
grases@usc.edu

High School, Interest Session Chair

Ken Abrams
Choral Director, San Ramon Valley HS
Artistic Director, Danville Girls Chorus
kena@pacbell.net

Junior High/Middle School

Laurel Farmer
General Music and Choir, Andalucia Middle School
Assistant Director, Alhambra Choral Institute
twobsmom@gmail.com

Men

Zach Halop, Northwood High School
ZHalop@iusd.org

Music in Worship

Nick Strimple
Music Director, Los Angeles Zimriyah Chorale
Associate Professor, USC Thornton School of Music
strimple@usc.edu

2-Year College

Vacant

Show Choir

Vacant

Vocal Jazz

Greg Amerind
Assistant Artistic Director
Phoenix Boys Choir
gwa@gregoryamerind.com

Women, Reading Session Chair

Jennifer Tibben
Director of Choirs, Damonte Ranch HS
Bella Voce/Reno Phil Chorus
jennifertibben@gmail.com

Youth & Students

David Weiller, U. of Nevada-Las Vegas
Musical Director/Conductor,
College Light Opera Co., Falmouth, MA
david.weiller@unlv.edu

Executive Board: p. 2



Editor's Note

Nina Gilbert

Welcome to your spring-into-summer TACTUS! Your summer reading includes something urgent, something exciting, something reflective, and something festive.

Urgent: HONOR CHOIRS are upon us! Auditions are in August. Information is on pages 6, 7, and 8 of this issue. Also online: acdawestern.org/honor.html

Exciting: Division President Anna Hamre shares plans for our February 2016 division convention in Pasadena. Page 2.

Exciting: America Cantat will be in Bermuda in August 2016! Travel yourself, or invite some or all of your choir members. Page 5.

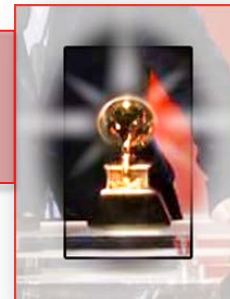
Reflective: High School R&S Chair Ken Abrams shares his rescue of a difficult year. Page 13.

Festive: Kirke Mechem turns 90 on August 16! Eliza Rubenstein's exclusive interview starts on page 9.

Festive: Announcing our President-elect Travis Rogers. Page 3.

Festive: OK, it's a state president's report, but it's from Hawai'i, it's Miguel Felipe's first, and it includes a glorious photo we found on a *National Geographic* website. Page 12.

Festive: Did we mention that about two weeks after Conspirare committed to headlining our conference, they won their first Grammy?



REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: are you running a 2016 summer workshop for singers or conductors?

Please [email me](#) with information about it. We'd like to run a list of summer educational opportunities within our division.

CALL FOR ARTICLES: do you have a Western Division take on a choral issue? Repertoire? Regional composer? Choose something that affects choirs worldwide, and interview Western Division colleagues about it. CD/iTunes/YouTube production? Wardrobe? Social or gender issues? Want to write an article and need some help brainstorming a topic?

You can reach me via email with suggestions, requests, or ideas-in-progress: ninagilbert@yahoo.com. And you can help TACTUS by taking our Reader Survey. Click "Reader Survey" or paste this link into your browser: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1H-qAufdMhJVy_4wO7Kp0fEZs_LisQI3oEFfGJqmz0z8/viewform

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AMERICA CANTAT 8

WHAT TO EXPECT:

Each chorister elects a workshop for the length of the festival, learning music from 8 countries with leading international clinicians culminating in a concert

Participants attend evening concerts by some of the best choirs in the Americas.

Choirs who travel together can sing solo afternoon concerts throughout Nassau.

Enjoy the beach, the resort—including rock climbing and swimming with dolphins—and the islands!

ACDA invites you to immerse yourself in the music of the Americas!

This ten-day international festival allows choirs to come together in a non-competitive festival setting to learn and perform the music of Argentina, The Bahamas, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, the US, and Venezuela from the best choral clinicians in the world.

WHAT: America Cantat 8, an international cultural immersion choir festival

WHO: Anyone with a passion for choral music

WHEN: August 21 - 31, 2016

WHERE: Atlantis Paradise Island, Nassau, Bahamas

Register now at america-cantat.org.

HOW MUCH:

\$230* includes:

Your choice of workshop plus three 1-day ateliers

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Transportation to and from airport and Festival venues

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Opening and Closing Ceremonies

***\$50 discount for first 500 registrants!**





☆☆☆ ANNOUNCING ☆☆☆

2016 ACDA Western Division Honor Choirs February 24-27, 2016 • Pasadena Civic Auditorium

Junior High School SATB Honor Choir

Conductor: Francisco J. Núñez, a MacArthur “genius” fellow, is a composer, conductor, visionary, leading figure in music education and the artistic director/founder of the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award-winning Young People’s Chorus of New York City (YPC), renowned worldwide for its diversity and artistic excellence. Since its founding, Mr. Núñez has changed the perception of the capabilities of a children’s chorus, dramatically heightening an awareness of the unlimited potential of children to rise to unforeseen levels of artistry. He also leads New York City’s University Glee Club as its fifth conductor since the all-men’s chorus was established in 1894, and is sought after nationwide as a guest conductor by professional orchestras and choirs. Mr. Núñez is a master teacher and advisor, and frequent keynote speaker as a leading authority on the role of music in achieving equality and diversity among children in today’s society. He composes countless compositions and arrangements in all musical formats and styles for choirs, orchestras and solo instruments, and his works are published by Boosey & Hawkes. Mr. Núñez has received an ASCAP Victor Herbert Award, the New York Choral Society’s Choral Excellence Award, and ABC-TV honored him as its “Person of the Week.” His writings are published by Cambridge University Press.



Youth Treble Honor Choir

Conductor: Judith Herrington is the Founder and Artistic Director of the highly acclaimed Tacoma Youth Chorus, a choral education program of seven select choirs, grades 1 through 12, serving more than 240 young people in the south Puget Sound area of Washington. The chorus is known for performance of outstanding music literature, superb musicianship and collaborations with professional performing organizations. In addition, Ms. Herrington brings more than 35 years of teaching and conducting experience to her work at Charles Wright Academy in Tacoma, Washington, where she received the Inspirational Faculty Award and the Murray Foundation Chair for Teaching Excellence. A graduate of the University of Oregon, she earned her Master of Education degree from Lewis and Clark College in Portland and has furthered her conducting studies through master classes with Rodney Eichenberger and Henry Leck. Ms. Herrington is highly regarded as a guest conductor, workshop and choral clinician, currently serves as Past President of the Washington state chapter of the American Choral Directors Association, and conducted the Junior High School Honor Choir at the 2008 ACDA Western Division conference in Anaheim. She has published choral compositions and arrangements and co-authored choral teaching texts through Colla Voce Publishing and Pavane Publishing, the latter for whom she also edits a choral series.



High School SATB Honor Choir

Conductor: Maria Guinand is an internationally renowned Venezuelan choral conductor and specialist in Latin-American Choral Music of the 20th and 21st centuries. She received her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in music from the University of Bristol, England, then earned a Choral Conductor Diploma from the Youth Orchestra Academy in Caracas. Ms. Guinand’s leadership positions have included being dean of the Jose Angel Lamas Music School and of the University Simón Bolívar in Caracas, where she has worked as a professor of music and conductor for 28 years. In Venezuela, she conducts the Cantoría Alberto Grau, the Orfeón Universitario Simón Bolívar, and the Schola Cantorum de Venezuela, with whom she has toured extensively and recorded many times. Ms. Guinand served as the conductor of the Festivalensemble Choir for The European Music Festival from 2001 to 2004. She has been a member of the Executive Committee of the International Music Council of UNESCO, and has served as Vice President for Latin America and First Vice-President in the International Federation for Choral Music. Ms. Guinand was the principal organizer of the Americas Cantat III held in Caracas in 2000, and is widely known from her association with Osvaldo Golijov’s *La Pasión según San Marcos*.



Polly Vasché, Honor Choirs Coordinator • pollyvasche@pacbell.net

2016 ACDA Western Division Honor Choirs

February 24-27, 2016

Pasadena CA

The ultimate goal of the ACDA Western Division Honor Choirs is to bring deserving and talented singers to a “mountaintop” experience with great choral literature and world-class conductors. Make plans now to bring your singers to Pasadena in February of 2016!

I. General Information

CHOIRS

Youth Treble Honor Choir Grades 6-9 SSA, Unchanged voices
Judith Herrington, Tacoma Children’s Chorus, *Conductor*
Peggy Spool (San Jose CA), *Manager*

Junior High Honor Choir Grades 7-9 SATB
Francisco Nuñez, Young People’s Chorus of New York City, *Conductor*
Laurel Farmer (Phoenix AZ), *Manager*

High School Honor Choir Grades 10-12 SATB
Maria Guinand, Caracas Venezuela, *Conductor*
Curtis Mannah (Fremont CA), *Manager*

Polly Vasché (Modesto CA), *Honor Choirs Coordinator*

TIMELINE

August 2015 Online audition site opens
October 9, 2015 Online auditions close at midnight
October 30, 2015 Sponsors notified of audition results
November 20, 2015 US Mail postmark deadline for participation forms and fee
fee may also be paid online via Sponsor
December 2015 Music sent to singers upon receipt of materials;
Singers access rehearsal voice files online
February 24, 2016 Honor Choir Registration, 3-5pm, Pasadena CA
February 24-27, 2016 Rehearsals
February 27, 2016 Honor Choirs Concert, afternoon, Pasadena Civic Auditorium

ELIGIBILITY All applicants must sing under the direction of, and be recommended by, a current member of the American Choral Directors Association, who is herein referred to as Sponsor.

FINANCIAL COMMITMENT Fees do not include housing, meals, or travel.

Audition fee: \$10 (*non-refundable*)

Participation fee: \$130 (*non-refundable*) includes expenses for Honor Choir conductor, accompanist, rehearsal and performance facilities, music packet and rehearsal voice files, concert program, office materials, and miscellaneous costs.

HOUSING The designated Honor Choir hotels are the Hilton and the Sheraton, both a short walk to prime dining and shopping areas as well as to the Pasadena Convention Center. The Sheraton is also adjacent to the Pasadena Civic Auditorium.

CHAPERONES Each Honor Choir participant must be accompanied to Pasadena by a parent or other designated chaperone, age 21 or older. One chaperone may be responsible for more than one singer.

MEALS Singers and chaperones are responsible for all meal costs in Pasadena. A list of local eateries from markets to fast food to restaurants of all types will be issued. Many are within a short walk of the Hilton Pasadena.

TRAVEL Honor Choir participants and chaperones arrange and pay for their own travel.

REHEARSALS Two Honor Choirs rehearse in ballrooms at the Hilton Pasadena, and one Honor Choir rehearses in the Gold Room of the Civic Auditorium.

CONCERT The Honor Choirs Concert is in the beautiful and historically significant 3,000-seat Pasadena Civic Auditorium.

II. Online Application Information

Up to 200 singers for each Honor Choir will be selected by audition. All applicants must be sponsored by a current member of ACDA, and may be members of school, church, or community choral organizations.

Auditionees will select one of the following:

Youth Treble	Grades 6-9	SSA
Junior High	Grades 7-9	SATB
High School	Grades 10-12	SATB

Note: While we will make every effort to assign auditionees to the choir of their choice, Sopranos and Altos grades 7-9 may be placed in either the Youth Treble or the Junior High Honor Choirs. The purpose of this is to balance the sections in each of the ensembles. The choir assignment will be independent of audition ranking, so that voices of equal ability will sing in both choirs.

Details on instructions for Sponsors to access the OpusEvent website and complete the online auditions will be posted later this summer. It is basically the same technical process as for the Santa Barbara '14 and Salt Lake City '15 auditions.

REQUIRED VOCAL AUDITION ELEMENTS (*detailed instructions will follow*)

Element 1

Upper Range Vocalization

Element 2

Lower Range Vocalization

Element 3

"My Country, 'Tis of Thee" (America): Sing the first verse unaccompanied, beginning on the pitch designated for your chosen voice part. *Pitch designations will follow in later postings on our website.*

Element 4

Prepared Solo: Sing one minute of a Folk Song, Art Song, or Aria in English or other language. Limit the introduction to 5 seconds. Pop music of any type will not be accepted. The solo should demonstrate the best quality and range of the voice. The solo may be sung with or without accompaniment.

We are looking forward to having your singers audition!

Polly Vasché, Coordinator, and Honor Choirs Staff

Kirke Mechem turning 90

Exclusive TACTUS Interview!

Eliza Rubenstein

California R&S Chair, Women's Choirs (until June 30)

Editor, California Cantate (from July 1)

Kirke Mechem celebrates his 90th birthday this summer with the publication of his autobiography, Believe Your Ears: Life of a Lyric Composer, available in July from Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Co. Click this paragraph to visit the book's website.

ER You refer to your musical career as "unorthodox." What do you mean by that?

KM How many other composers never saw a harmony book, never took a music course, never participated in any musical ensemble until they were twenty-two? After serving in World War II, I was a creative writing major at Stanford, which I attended mainly to play on its highly ranked tennis team. Music was a passionate hobby from my teen years on; I played almost everything by ear and wrote stacks of dreadful songs.

ER What guidance or caution would you offer to an aspiring composer today?

KM My advice is a quotation attributed to Oscar Wilde: "Be yourself; everyone else is already taken." Learn by studying the music you love, especially by listening to it. Don't be afraid of imitating; that's how every composer has learned. I don't mean that students shouldn't also study other kinds of music to broaden their horizon, but they should never take anyone else's word for what is good and what is bad. Your own personality, character and taste are your most important attributes.

ER How have you found a balance in your own career between self-assurance and openness to critique from others?

KM If I thought my music could be written by anyone else, why would I bother composing it? But for a young artist, I admit that you have a valid point. A composer does have to learn the craft. That's why I say it's okay at first to imitate. As for being open to criticism but balancing that with self-assurance, I hope to achieve that some day. After all, I'm not yet ninety; one can't learn impossible tricks quickly. **We composers never get over wanting to have reviews of our music written by our mothers.**

ER What music have you been listening to lately? How have your own musical tastes

changed over the years?

KM Unfortunately, I don't listen to as much music as I used to. I have to wear a hearing aid now, and it changes the experience somewhat. I can still hear music in my head as well as ever, so I read scores a lot. When I go to concerts or operas, it's usually to hear new works. I suppose it's a sin that I shouldn't admit, but my taste hasn't changed all that much. If you look at my opus 1 (*Three Madrigals*: "Impromptu," "Deny It As She Will" and "Moral Precept," 1953), you won't find it radically different from my most recent choral works.

What I listen to now is quite different from early in my career. As a child I listened mostly to piano music that my mother played. Then lots of popular songs, which I tried to copy with little success. When I got the choral bug, then of course I listened to and sang much of that repertoire. When I received my MA from Harvard, I knew I had to work hard at the piano to be a better musician, so I practiced four to five hours a day and listened to and wrote all kinds of music. When I began writing for orchestra, my listening and score reading became almost exclusively of great and modern orchestral works. The biggest shift, however,

was when I decided to write my first opera. I never saw a single opera growing up, and not until I lived in Vienna in my early thirties did I begin to understand how marvelous operas can be. But it was many years later, after attending more and more opera performances and studying opera scores, that I developed into an opera composer.

I have naturally written in a great variety of styles throughout my own career. These vary according to the texts, just as the musical style of my opera *John Brown* is widely different from that of the comic *Tartuffe*. My chamber and piano works show more evolution in harmonic complexity than do the choral works (though *In the Land of Morgenstern*—SATB, piano—is just as complex in a humorous way). My Piano Sonata and String Quartet are more adventurous than any of my choral or operatic works, but that doesn't mean I like them better. My symphonic music probably falls somewhere between the choral and chamber styles in terms of harmonic complexity. On the other hand, maybe composers have no business trying to



Mechem and his wife, Donata-Doe Mechem, with Julie Fischer, Eliza Rubenstein, Lou De La Rosa—and Willie Mays—summer 2014.

describe or evaluate their own music.

ER You've heard a lot of choruses in your life. What, in your mind, separates the truly memorable ones from the rest?

KM The same thing that separates any great singer from the others—the ability to make the character and drama of a musical setting come alive in every phrase. A singer—and a chorus—must understand the significance of the words and how the composer has translated them into music. Verdi wrote that he much preferred a singer who sang with great dramatic truth to those with more beautiful voices who sang everything with the same beautiful tone. We all know that intonation, balance, phrasing, and other technical aspects of choral singing are of great importance. But it is sometimes overlooked that a chorus must treat each piece differently and make its audience experience the unique quality of each. If they all sound alike, the conductor either has not taught the singers correctly, or else the conductor is choosing works that are too similar or too bland. That's why choral cycles, suites, cantatas are so useful; they have built-in stories, contrast, variety that carry an audience from piece to piece with more intensity than does a program of unconnected three-minute pieces.

ER You've remained very active in the choral world, so you stay up-to-date on trends in our profession. Which ones have excited and intrigued you, and which ones have left you unimpressed?

KM I am not a fan of show-choirs when the visual becomes an enemy of the musical. I don't mind discreet uses of the visual (I've seen effective, limited use of the boy-vs.-girl concept in such pieces as "The Lighthearted Lovers," but TV-inspired show-choirs usually represent a deterioration of musical standards). I also am discouraged at choral conventions when novelty for its own sake displaces classics that the younger conductors may not know. I am happy that there has been a trend toward music from other cultures, but we must be careful also to nurture our own roots.

ER TACTUS readers know you best as a choral composer, but you're also a prolific and well-known operatic composer. Tell us about the differences between creating choral works and creating operatic ones, and how each genre has informed and influenced the other in your own career.

ER How can choral conductors craft programs that feel cohesive, while still holding the interest of an increasingly distractible audience?

KM Okay, I'll risk alienating some conductors by sounding off about some of the poorly attended choral programs I have heard. Conductors in universities have it relatively easy in this respect; they don't have to depend on the box office to keep their choral ensembles alive. But think of the many smaller community choruses and chamber choirs—both professional and amateur—who have to get money somewhere to continue to exist. (The very large symphonic and community choruses survive because their audiences—spouses, friends, relatives—are proportionately much larger than those of a 20-member chamber chorus, and because they usually sing the great old chestnuts.) I feel great sympathy with the conductors of smaller, private ensembles, but that doesn't keep me from noticing some programming that could be changed. Here is a short list:

- **Don't make audiences read translations for more than a small part of your program.** Most of your pieces should have been composed to good texts in the language of your audience.
- **Don't go overboard on arrangements, whether of folk songs, spirituals, or Christmas carols.** The skill of the arranger will of course mitigate this somewhat, but I for one like to hear original music on interesting poems.
- **Before you program a new piece, make sure it is good music.** Even in major cities, only a tiny audience will put up with mediocre music just to hear what is new. You can't afford the luxury of supporting local composers who are not moving or engaging your listeners. Look for better local composers. I have attended too many concerts where there were more people on stage than listeners, who may have previously learned that this chorus exists mostly to try out new pieces.
- **A corollary of the foregoing is that you must make up programs that appeal to your audience, not just to your colleagues and critics or for your own résumé.** If your taste is primarily for ancient music or for atonal modern music, and your purpose is to "educate" your audience, then you must resign yourself to very limited attendance. I'm not saying that that is not a worthwhile endeavor; I simply want you to know the facts of concert life.
- **Balance is the key to all of the above.** There *are* chamber choruses with relatively large, devoted audiences. They will accept almost any novelty or offbeat piece if they have the confidence that the conductor always tries to give them a varied program of satisfying, engrossing musical experiences.

KM I have already referred to the importance of understanding the dramatic element in choral music. Everyone loves a story; to tell it in music is the essence of opera and often of choral music as well. Not in such beautiful choral pieces as Thompson's *Alleluia* or Lauridsen's *O Magnum Mysterium*, but even in these and other sacred works there is drama in the music; they are more than sheer beauty. They encompass emotion, and many other human feelings that should not be glossed over with a uniformly reverent sheen. That is more evident, of course, in cantatas and passions, which often are quite close to opera. As long ago as 1960, several critics wrote that my unaccompanied cantata *Songs of Wisdom*

was so operatic that I should be writing for the stage. It was nearly twenty years before that occurred to me.

Writing an opera takes me a good three years, whereas choral pieces rarely require more than three weeks. Because of this huge investment of time, I am much more careful about choosing the subject of an opera. I turn down all commissions for operas because I want to choose and write the libretto myself. (But I'm delighted when a company commissions an opera I have *already* composed.)

The half-dozen or so choral works I have written recently—since finishing what is probably my last opera, *Pride and Prejudice*—show a curious progression in



Mechem playing tennis at Stanford, 1949.

my approach to choral composition. As a young choral composer I gradually moved from setting texts verbatim to seeking larger forms by combining and adapting them into cycles, cantatas and suites, until finally I decided it was time to write operas. And now that I am once again writing choral music, I can't stop acting like a librettist. All of these recent works, one way or another, are about singing (several also involve laughing), and I either wrote the texts myself or translated, edited, adapted or juxtaposed parts of public-domain texts by Martin Luther, Hildegard von Bingen and other poets. I can't judge the quality of these pieces, of course, but each one is unique. It seems that my experience with opera has changed my way of writing choral music.

ER I've always especially appreciated your approach to words; you take care to choose—or write!—intelligent, nuanced texts, and you write music that is always responsive to the words without being manipulative or heavy-handed. What makes a text appropriate for setting to music, and how would you describe your own philosophy of text-setting?

KM That is a huge subject, about which I wrote an article for the *Choral Journal* called "The Text Trap." (It is included in my book as an appendix.) Briefly, I like common Anglo-Saxon words rather than learned ones. Philosophical or political concepts don't interest me as much as human emotions. Short texts give the

composer more of a chance to write a unified piece of music, rather than forcing the music to chase a multitude of words around.

Among my favorite sources for choral music are Sara Teasdale and the King James version of the Bible (not the more accurate, less poetic modern translations).

ER How has the practical part of your craft evolved? Has your creative process changed over the years? You're fairly techno-savvy, but I think you still compose longhand, yes? Do you use the new technologies available to composers?

KM I have a son who taught me to use computers, but I still write music with a pencil. As we all know, computers can cause a lot of grief when they go wrong. When I'm composing, the last thing I need is to be confronted with technical problems I am not equipped to deal with. It's habit and convenience, too. I sit in my comfortable chair at the window in my studio, a clipboard large enough to hold two orchestral-size manuscript pages in my lap, with a piano close by to use when I want to. It's what I've been used to for sixty years; why change?

ER You'll be 90 years old in August and you're sharper and more spry than I am. Is

that because or in spite of your career as a musician?

KM You flatter me. Maybe the best answer I can give is something I saw in a cartoon on Facebook recently. A youngster says to his mother, "I want to be a musician when I grow up." She answers, "Well, you'll have to make up your mind. You can't do both." There are scientific studies that show that playing music is the most thorough workout you can give to your brain. And music is endlessly fascinating.

I also have this advantage: I was an athlete all my life; that has kept me in good physical condition. It has not been willpower or virtue that has kept me in shape during my middle and old age. It is simply that when you are accustomed to constant aerobic exercise, you can't just stop. If you do, within two weeks you feel fifteen years older. So I swim half a mile three times a week and walk at least a half-hour on the other days. It has become a necessity, but one that I usually enjoy.

But longevity and good health are also the products of good genes, which is just another word for good luck, which I have had all my life. My parents were musical, creative, healthy and active. So is my wife. What more could anyone ask?

ER This is an impudently broad question, but can you give us an idea of what you think distinguishes a successful text-setting from an unsuccessful one?

KM Yes, it is too complicated and broad to answer in a simple way. Here are some obvious points to consider:

- **Do the melodies chosen for the principal motifs of the poem fit the words so well that they seem perfectly, inevitably made for each other?** Or does one seem to force the other to bend to its will?
- **Imagine a great actor reciting the poem.** Does the music have the same kinds of tempo flexibility, suspense, climaxes, repetitions of mood as the actor's sensitive reading does? This is called pacing; it is just as important in music as in drama.
- **Does the form of the musical work seem to evolve from the drama or psychological development of the poem, or has the composer tried to stuff the poem into a pre-determined musical form, such as ABA, sonata, or strophic form?** Or, just as bad, has the composer slavishly followed the outward form of the poem (sonnet, ballad, etc.) and ignored the poem's inner life?
- **Has the composer taken care so that the audience will understand the words, or is the contrapuntal texture always so dense that there is no possibility of understanding them?** There are reasons why classical composers used short texts and a good deal of repetition of the text in choral pieces. Often the listener has a chance at the beginning of a piece to hear the text sung by all parts in the same rhythm, or by one part alone as the subject of fugue-like imitation. When the composer takes this kind of care, the audience is more likely to respond emotionally to both words and music as they develop.

Postcard from



Aloha Mai Kākou! Hello to All!

Greetings from Honolulu! The choral art is alive and well on our islands. Like the national organization, we work to “inspire choral music through **education, performance, composition,** and **advocacy.**” We are led by a vigorous board of thirteen members who represent the range of choral activity and experience in Hawai‘i and a big slice of the history of choral music in our islands.

Education

HI-ACDA supports members and the wider community through events that educate and develop. Hearing from our members that more opportunities would be helpful, we’re planning our first Professional Development Day on September 5. We hope this new event—a single, focused day in western O‘ahu, with offerings for those teaching elementary and middle school and those in sacred music—will provide our community with a chance to learn from leading choral figures in the islands plus such visitors as **Albert Tay**, founder and director of the Kodály Academy of Music, Singapore.

Performance

We celebrated 50 years of Hawai‘i choral history in October 2014 with The BIG SING: 800 participants, dodging Hurricane Ana. In addition, we produce a high school choral festival called Ho‘olōkahi (Hawaiian for “to come together as one”), led in recent years by **Cristian Grases**, 2015; **Ron Kean**, 2014; and **Edith Copley**, 2013. For college singers, HI-ACDA organizes E Hīmeni Kākou (Hawaiian for “Let’s sing together”) welcoming such clinicians as **Gabriel Crouch**, 2015; **Pearl Shangkuan**, 2014; and **Katherine FitzGibbon**, 2013. Looking forward, we will combine forces with the Hawai‘i Youth Opera Chorus

(HYOC) to form a larger, more inclusive festival for high school students in 2016. Our 41st E Hīmeni Kākou is in the works with **Tesfa Wondemagegnehu** as clinician for both festivals.

Miguel Ángel Felipe
HI-ACDA President



E Hīmeni Kākou 2015: **Gabriel Crouch** leads singers from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, University of Hawai‘i at West O‘ahu, Kapi‘olani Community College, and Leeward Community College at Central Union Church, Honolulu. Photo by John Ewalt, doctoral student and teaching assistant in chemistry, U. of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Used by permission. yourshot.nationalgeographic.com/photos/5606006/

Composition

HI-ACDA continues to lift up local sounds and has recently passed a formal policy to ensure that we “promote existing Hawaiian choral repertoire and foster the growth of new repertoire from our islands.” At the same time, composers like **Herb Mahelona** on Hawai‘i Island and **Jon Magnussen** on O‘ahu continue to pen new works and fresh arrangements of traditional tunes. The Hawaiian tradition is alive, rooted, and growing.

Advocacy

HI-ACDA continues to work intentionally in support of our choral community, especially in the area of advocacy. In 2014-15, a program called Conductor Connections welcomed **Rod Eichenberger** (FSU), **Cristian Grases** (USC), **Jason Bishop** (Drew U.), **Gabriel Crouch** (Princeton), **Erik Westberg** (Sweden), **J.D. Burnett** (UGA), and **Jonathan Velasco** (Philippines). We also developed strong inroads in social media and email communications. Armed with our first email list, we now reach 340+ musicians in Hawai‘i with each news

blast. Plus, we’ve started ArtsHawaii.org, the first comprehensive arts calendar for our islands.

On behalf of your friends in Hawai‘i,
A hui hou! Until we meet again!

Turning Things Around

AKA fixing a bad year

Ken Abrams

R&S Chair, High School



When I saw colleagues at the 2015 Salt Lake City ACDA National Conference and they asked how my year was going, I had very few positive things to say. My students this year seemed to be more entitled than ever and less hard-working, focused, dedicated and committed than any time in the past.

So when I returned to my high school classroom, I was determined to shake things up and salvage this bad year. That took a lot of effort on my part and from my students.

First, we actually took two class days, split into small groups and made several lists: 1) General Class Rules (no cell phones, come prepared, etc.). 2) Daily Necessities (respect, dedication, love for music, etc.) 3) Stuff we like, but don't need daily (tours, shows, community events, etc.) and 4) Items Necessary for Positive Change (maturity, humility, focus, etc.).

Next, after all of this self-evaluation with my choir and with the reward of some positive changes actually taking place in the classroom, I decided that I too needed to dig a little deeper and reflect on things that I should be bringing to class.

Here are the ideas I came up with. I'm sure most of you already have a similar list, but just like the drought, when these tough years manifest themselves, it's nice to have some tried and true tools!

1. **High standards of excellence.** Yes, we all strive for perfection in every way, but let me tell you – a bad group of kids can really zap you and lower every expectation you ever had. Maintain your classroom ethics and personal standards at all costs.
2. **First-Rate Repertoire.** Give them the best music for their appropriate level. I was taking the easy way out this year because it seemed that they were less than average, but when I finally did spring a really difficult and meaty piece on them—Eric Whitacre's *Cloudburst*—they ate it up.
3. **Create and Maintain Traditions.** A sense of the past gives a better picture for the future. Remind them of your personal history and your journey in the choir room. Hold them to the rigors and standards that others helped to create.
4. **Trips/Festivals/Competitions.** These are some of the biggest carrots you can throw at a bunch of high school students. It also strokes their egos and gets them more committed and involved.
5. **A Mixture of Work and Fun.** When I'm having a bad class, it's easy to cut out the fun stuff because we're so focused on fixing the bad stuff (music and behavior). Throw in a helping handful of FUN (new warm-ups, YouTube videos, more solo opportunities, etc.).
6. **Consistency.** In spite of an uproar or utter chaos, remain calm and be the person you always strive to be. Show them your best side!
7. **Respect/Understanding/Caring.** How do you respect or care for those who have no respect for others or for leadership or for you as a teacher? Not easy. Mutual respect is earned, it doesn't just happen—much like trust. A bad crop of kids can whittle this away. Showing your humility and support in spite of the way they behave not only makes you the bigger person, but it gives them a model for improved behavior and citizenship.
8. **Organizing and Planning.** When in the dregs of chaos, it is more important than ever to be well-organized and prepared. Have multiple strategies and game plans at your fingertips. Rally the help of parents, student leaders and the greater community.
9. **Recruit.** With the thought that “next year will be better,” don't let a possibility slip by in regards to recruitment. Do everything you can to ensure the membership you seek. Elicit support and input from your current students as well as other faculty members, especially at the middle school level.
10. **Reach Out—No Man Is An Island.** Call your colleagues and share your problems and dilemmas. Maybe it's not just you, maybe it really IS global! Whatever the situation, unload your burdens, get some of it off your chest and find some kind of peace.

May certainly felt better than January did in my classroom environment. Things have really improved for me and I'm extremely happy for that—but, truth be told, I'm ecstatic that summer vacation is finally here!

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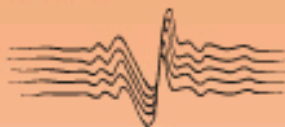
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