



SOUTH CAROLINA  
MUSIC EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION

# South Carolina MUSICIAN

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## THIS ISSUE FEATURES:

Spring Review

Preventing Injury at the  
Height of Technical Demand

2024 SCMEA  
Conference Highlights

By Susan Wines

By Julie Derges Kastner  
& Saleel Menon



# Lander University

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## Call for Articles

The SC Musician is looking for original articles regarding music education from teachers, researchers, or administrators for the 2024-2025 school year. Please submit your articles to Jake Henjes at [jake.henjes@scmea.net](mailto:jake.henjes@scmea.net)

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# President's Message

Dear SCMEA Members,



Colleen Marcou  
*SCMEA President*

As we embrace the vibrant energy of the spring season, I am delighted to share with you the successes and reflections of our association over the 2023-2024 school year. It is hard to believe that we are moving so close to the closing of yet another academic year.

The 2024 SCMEA Professional Development Conference stands as a testament to our collective dedication and passion for music education. The resounding success of this event underscores our commitment to excellence and innovation in our field. Along with the amazing clinicians, presenters, and speakers, I want to thank each division for the fantastic performances we were able to attend during the conference as well. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all who contributed their time, expertise, and enthusiasm, making the conference a truly enriching experience for all attendees. Your unwavering support continues to inspire and move our mission of Music Education for All forward.

As we bid farewell to another academic year, we reflect on the milestones achieved and the challenges overcome. Our collective efforts have undoubtedly made a profound impact on the lives of countless students, enriching their musical journey, and fostering a lifelong appreciation for the arts. Let us take pride in our accomplishments and reaffirm our commitment to nurturing the next generation of musicians and scholars. Congratulations to you and your students for all the successes your programs have obtained over the year! We look forward to many more in the years to come.

Amidst these reflections, we also acknowledge the evolving landscape of education, marked by the transition of several districts to a year-round calendar. While change brings its own set of opportunities and adjustments, I am confident that our community will rise to the occasion, leveraging our adaptability and creativity to ensure continuity and excellence in music education. Our new SCMEA calendars for the 24-25 and 25-26 school years will be challenging to balance but will also open new possibilities for performance and education opportunities throughout the year.

Looking ahead, I am pleased to announce that the National Assembly will convene in June, providing an invaluable opportunity for collaboration, learning, and networking on a national scale. This assembly promises to further enrich our collective knowledge and strengthen our bonds as music educators. I encourage all members to participate actively and seize the opportunity to contribute to our shared vision for the future of music education. Please send your ideas and concerns to me for discussion at this wonderful national forum. This gathering allows us to brainstorm with other music educators across the country to help conquer the challenges as well as discuss our concerns and celebrations with our representatives in Washington DC.

As we embrace the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead, let us remain steadfast in our dedication to advancing the cause of music education. Together, we will continue to inspire, innovate, and empower the next generation of musicians and leaders.

# ORCHESTRA

Wow, what a fantastic year this has been! It was exciting to see so many people at the SCMEA Professional Development Conference. Many thanks to Jeanette Kuhn and those that helped her behind the scenes to create an outstanding conference. There were so many wonderful sessions and performances that I hope you left feeling energized and ready to push through to the end of the year.

All-State Orchestra was phenomenal this year. We had extraordinary clinicians, talented young musicians, and our first ever duck hunt! Thank you to Ginger Greer and the All-State committee for making this a truly remarkable event.

Our orchestra division is stacked with incredible music educators that work hard year after year to create inspiring events for our students and your efforts have not gone unnoticed. Without your dedication to your students and your passion for music education these experiences would not be possible. Thank you for motivating your students and striving for excellence as you push them to new musical heights.

As you set your baton down and approach the well-deserved summer break, I want to wish you all a wonderful and relaxing time away from the podium. Celebrate your success and achievements of the year and leave the challenges behind you. Find opportunities to relax but also indulge in activities that bring you joy.

Wishing you all a happy summer. See you in the fall!



Allison Key, *President*

# BAND

Dear Friends,

As we bring the 2023-2024 year to a close, remember to use this and every year as a springboard to your future! Celebrate the successes, learn from times you may have stumbled, and look to the horizon. There is always an opportunity for learning even in the most difficult experiences, and my wish is that you end up a stronger person, a better teacher, and a more devoted member of this fantastic music community.



Remember that even the most ardent workhorse needs REST. You are never going to be at the top of your game when you are exhausted, and people depend on us all to be at the top of our games. Our profession is often impossibly demanding, and we owe ourselves and those in our care moments of relaxation and fulfillment that recharge us and allow us and our programs to thrive. Allow yourselves grace and cultivate the generosity toward yourselves that you show others on a daily basis. Always know that you have a community of SCBDA family members who are willing to support and advise, help and nurture, and give you a hand when you need it.

Congratulations to so many of you who achieved firsts this year, who reached goals that seemed impossible, and who might have had career-defining moments along the way. We all celebrate your accomplishments and encourage you to cherish each and every one of those moments.

Most importantly, cherish the people in your lives. Make and take time to reach out to people you love and to those who make a difference in your life or for whom YOU make a difference. The connections we make are the conduit to the next chapters of our lives and the fuel that allows us to burn candles at every end possible.

Have a great rest of the year, enjoy the showcases that allow you and your students a stage on which to shine, and LOVE LIFE. I look forward to celebrating with all of you in the coming years!

Leslie Gilreath, *President*

# HIGHER EDUCATION

Dear Fellow Music Educators,

During the annual 2024 SCMEA Conference, presenters and researchers of the Higher Education Division exemplified the teaching of music as a powerful profession. With teaching music as the basic core of what we do, presenters shared teaching-learning techniques and strategies that may further improve the profession. Tyler-Goodwin Souffront presented linguistics in music education comprising the use of five languages (German, French, Italian, Russian/Ukrainian, and a personal choice) with band during a semester. Molly Blair discussed the importance of empowering collegiate pre-service music teachers by fostering self-talk, music teacher identity, and effective curriculum development.

Susana Lalama shared common pitfalls that beginning music teachers should avoid. Similarly, David Cudd and others presented future music educators with information on (1) being a music major, (2) student teaching, and (3) music teaching as a career. Matthew Arau presented Upbeat! strategies that come from within. He demonstrated how to use such information in becoming mindful performers of excellence. Alex Swire-Clark presented keys to increased engagement and communication. Roger Simpson presented a SC Arts Enrollment Dashboard that will permit arts constituents and other interested persons to view arts program offerings, per SC school districts, at the K-12 level.

Amanda Schlegel hosted the research program of three selected graduate research projects and the research poster exhibits. Ashley Cobbs, Charles Patterson, and Brady Moffett presented thought-provoking topics and findings that are relevant, practical, and needed in the music education arena. Additionally, other researchers also exhibited such topics via posters.

Teaching music is a powerful profession. As demonstrated from the SCMEA 2024 higher education division presentations, music teaching and learning benefits may emerge. For instance, a new band method materialized comprising music vocabulary of other languages, and strategies of self-talk and identity. Therefore, we will continue to prepare music educators, practice music education, mentor future music educators, and share effective music education methods, techniques, and strategies.

*Rosetta Dingle, President*



# ELEMENTARY

Happy Spring Elementary Music Division,

WOW hard to believe that it has been over a year since I joined the leadership team for this division. I can say that it is an honor and privilege that I do not take for granted. I just wanted to say Thank You once again to all of the teachers who came to the conference. It was an amazing conference and the Honor Choir Performance was marvelous this year. Thank you to Denise Thomas and Kristin Rutledge for everything that they did as well as our Honor Choir Committee. For those of you who like to plan early just be aware that our 2024 Fall Workshop will be on Saturday September 7th 2024 the time and location will be announced at a later date. Also our honor Choir auditions will run on the same timeline as this past year. So the audition window will open up on Monday September 9th and run through Friday October 4th. Judging will take place starting on Monday October 7th and run through Monday October 21st and then we will have the roster out on or by November 1st.

As we begin to wind down the 2023-2024 school year. Ask yourself "Why did I get into teaching in the first place?" Sometimes we forget why we do what we do and we get frustrated and forget the real reason why we do what we do. As I stated at the Honor Choir Performance in the end when we are at the end of our rope sometimes with the childrens and all of the things that we have to go through the end result always makes it worth it. When I saw my one student on the stage smiling and singing the songs all of those days I had to stay with him after school and practice with him made that all worth it. We are the first time that a student gets exposed to music before they move up to middle and high school. That's what makes our job so important we get to impact them first before the other divisions do. It starts with us.

Have a Great Summer and know that your Elementary Division Board is here to support you in any way we can.



Seth Phillips, *President*

# CHORAL

Greetings!

What a great year of events for the SCMEA Choral Division. It has been a pleasure to see each of you and your students shine in all of our various events across the state. We have had record participation in most events and not by a small margin. Be on the lookout for some pictures from our events! We are in the process of finalizing our Choral Arts details as well as our SCMEA 2025 headliner. Choral Arts is always the weekend after Labor Day! So, our dates are September 6-7, 2024 starting that Friday evening.

Session proposals and performance applications for our 2025 SCMEA Conference are active from April 1, 2024 until June 1, 2024. We would love to see record numbers of submissions at all levels for both performances and sessions.

A reminder that we are in the process of adjusting our Outstanding Performance Award requirements to meet the needs of our middle school choral program. In addition to this, we will be examining our bylaws as they are in need of some updates!

Thank you for all that each of you does for the students in South Carolina that are impacted by choral music. You each make a tremendous difference in lives and that is what it is truly about. Music can change the world and you are a world changer!

With sincere gratitude,



Maurice Burgess, *President*

# PIANO

Greetings, SC musicians! I hope you enjoyed our 2024 SCMEA Conference and are taking many new ideas, inspirational performances, music, and sessions back to your classrooms with you. It always goes by so fast but it's always wonderful seeing colleagues that do what we do, day in and day out while learning something new.

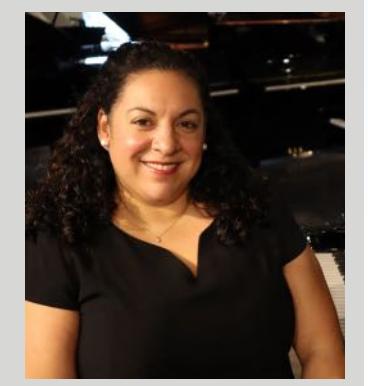
It was particularly great to connect with a growing number of teachers around the state who offer group piano at their magnet and non-magnet schools. Congratulations to the students who performed at the Masterclass and Honors Piano Recital on Saturday and their teacher, Dr. Robert Kelley from Lander University was highly skilled with the students and got some beautiful dynamics and phrasing from each student. It was a privilege to have the JICHS Advanced Piano students perform and be the first group piano ensemble to ever play at our conference. We look forward to many more groups bringing their groups! Finally, it was great to sit down and collaborate on some upcoming decisions with our directors at our February business meeting on Saturday. I think some of the changes we will pilot in the Fall of 2024 will give our programs some more opportunities to get great feedback and support their growth.

Our Fall was no less productive. We had comparable participants in our Fall Festival as we did a year ago. We were able to collaborate with SCMTA to host the January Piano Workshop, student master class and several sessions with nationally recognized Alfred composer.

We are actively seeking some talented colleagues at the K-12 or collegiate levels to give piano-specific sessions at the 2025 SCMEA Conference. More specifically, we are looking for sessions for the non-pianist, the group piano novice, a best practices and repertoire session for more experienced programs, and a grant writing session to fund new and existing piano programs across the state. Lastly, we are looking for the 2nd piano group to come perform at our 2025 conference! The due date for these is June 1, 2024, and applications can be found on the SCMEA general website under Conferences.

We are gearing up for a great 2024 Spring Piano Festival which will have Midland and Lowcountry sites. We are hoping for a large turnout again. Our Spring Honors Recital will feature Charleston Southern University faculty pianist and composer, Carol Comune as our Masterclass Clinician. Please note our new locations found on our website and in our newsletters.

If you're interested in learning more about the SCMEA Piano Division, check out our up-to-date SCMEA Piano Division website or contact me.



Andrea Quinn, *President*

# String Review

Organized By:  
Susan Wines  
Byrnes High School  
Freshman Academy  
Greenville, SC



## Sharp Attack Tyler Arcari

The key is perfect for grade 1, but I find that having the sharps written out instead of having a key signature adds unnecessary clutter. The reason the composer gives for having sharps written out - using it as an accidental teaching tool, is unnecessary. Students that are advanced enough to perform this piece, should have a basic understanding of accidentals like F# and C#. One thing I think that is great about the piece is that with the exception of measure 57 for the 2nd violins and violas, all eighth notes passages move in steps or repeat. Measure 57 for 2nd violin and viola is a great teaching tool for either string crossings - depending on what is needed. I do not agree with the grading of this piece as the rhythms alone make this a grade 1.5. A 1st year orchestra will have a tough time lining up the rhythms so I think this would be a great 2nd year/7th grade October concert piece.

**E. Kirkpatrick**  
**Stone Academy**

## Knight Racers By Sean O'Loughlin

Great 1.5 grade piece. It presents a *Religioso* theme in E minor, that repeats throughout the piece on different sections of the orchestra. This theme at measure 13 continues but now with the pulsing 8th notes accompanying it. At measure 27, the theme is developed, imitating and alternating between different sections. The work ends with a climactic *Allegro con spirito* in the relative Major key, G major.

Excellent selection to teach tempo changes, independence of lines, melodies vs accompaniment, key signatures and relative minors.

**Dr. Alvaro Angulo**  
**J.L. Mann High School**

# Awards



SCMEA Hall of Fame  
Lisa Rayner



SCMEA Outstanding  
Young Educator Award  
Courtney Vance



SCMEA Outstanding  
Young Educator Award  
Hunter Cox



SCMEA Memorial  
Scholarship Award  
Greysen Aldredge



Deborah Smith  
Hoffman Mentor Award  
Randy Grantham



Honor Administrator Award  
Dr. Faye Sprouse



Honor Administrator Award  
Dr. Richard O'Malley



SCMEA Friend of Music  
Education Business Award  
Sabrina Caruana Crissey

# Opening Sessions



# Sessions



# Performances



# Exhibits



# Jazz Social



# Friends



# Receptions



# Popular Music in Choir: Helping Students “Find Their Voices”

*Julie Derges Kastner and Saleel Menon*

*This article originally appeared in the September 2019 *Music Educators Journal*. It is reprinted with permission of the National Association for Music Education ([www.nafme.org](http://www.nafme.org)).*

In recent years, numerous a cappella ensembles have re-emerged in popular culture through groups, like Pentatonix; television shows, such as *The Sing-Off* and America’s Got Talent; and movies, like *Pitch Perfect*. Despite this renewed interest, few opportunities exist for students to participate in this style of singing or in singing popular music in school-based choral programs except for the occasional show choir, talent show, or end-of-the-year concert. However, in our combined experience teaching choir and general music in elementary school, high school, and college, we have found that there are many opportunities to expand the use of popular music singing in school using processes similar to those used by real-world popular musicians.<sup>1</sup> In this article, we discuss how teachers might (1) reconsider concerns about using popular music in choir, (2) incorporate popular music in their classes using student-led creative projects, (3) set project parameters and facilitate group work, and (4) provide scaffolding to facilitate students’ learning. We end by describing how our own use of these strategies in our teaching practice has resulted in numerous benefits for our students and helped them find their voices, both literally and figuratively.

## Reconsidering Concerns about Popular Music in Choir Vocal Technique

In our experience, we have known some choir teachers who expressed concerns about having students sing popular music in school because of the belief that it could lead to poor vocal techniques, like the use of vocal fry or belting, that could potentially lead to injuries in some singers. This concern is perhaps unsurprising, considering popular singers, like Adele and Justin Timberlake, have had highly publicized vocal injuries that have resulted in canceled performances and intense medical treatments. Although singers in any genre can develop bad singing habits, we have most often heard about this in correlation with singing popular music. However, since most choral teachers have had many years of voice lessons to develop healthy vocal techniques, they are in a unique position to teach their students how to sing in a safe way and apply this knowledge to a variety of genres, including popular music. Since vocal students are probably singing popular music outside the classroom anyway, bringing this kind of music into the classroom offers valuable opportunities to discuss how and why some popular singers have injured their voices, address unhealthy practices students might try to emulate, and help apply healthy vocal techniques to their popular music singing.

## Music Literacy

Although not always notated using traditional staff notation, popular music can still be used in a music curriculum to support literacy development. In subjects like linguistics and education, scholars have begun to define literacy beyond basic skills in reading and writing to include the multifaceted ways that people communicate and interact in society through both sounds and symbols.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) acknowledges this broad conception of music literacy, stating that it is the “knowledge and understanding required to participate authentically in the discipline of music by independently carrying out the artistic processes of creating, performing, and responding.”<sup>3</sup> Although some popular musicians might not use traditional staff music notation, many use notation in the form of lead sheets, Nashville notation, or tablature. Thus, by bringing popular music into the classroom, choir teachers can help their students develop a broader sense of music literacy as well as encourage lifelong music-making.<sup>4</sup>

## Choral Repertoire Exposure

Some choir teachers we have known have stated misgivings about using popular music in choir because they feel that, since students probably listen to popular music on their own, there is not a need to teach it in school. We, too, previously felt this way in our teaching, as we are both classically trained music teachers. One of us avoided using popular music with students for many years in order to focus on teaching so-called serious music, and the other prefers listening to and performing classical music in his personal life. Although there is a rich tradition of choral singing and a plethora of fantastic works to share with students, we changed our perspectives and began to incorporate popular music with students because we found that it provided unique opportunities to enrich students’ musical experiences. For example, including popular music in choir has provided an entry point for culturally responsive pedagogy, which has been defined as pedagogy that uses “the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively.”<sup>5</sup> In applying culturally responsive pedagogy to choir, Julia Shaw described how choir teachers can become more culturally responsive in their teaching by selecting repertoire that considers students’ backgrounds and interests, using rehearsal strategies that connect to their learning styles, and engaging them in discussions to critically examine cultural, social, and political issues related to the music they are learning.<sup>6</sup> Because popular



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music is often embedded with messages corresponding to contemporary issues, including this music in the choral classroom can help students develop knowledge and opinions about the music they listen to, perform, and create. At the same time, choir teachers who use popular music will need to be sensitive as to what artists, lyrics, and music are appropriate to be brought into the classroom and set clear expectations about what is considered school appropriate where they teach.

### **Student-Led Popular Music Projects**

Popular music can benefit vocal students in many ways, including bridging inside- and outside-of-school music-making, developing musical skills, and increasing musical engagement. There are many ways that choir teachers can incorporate popular music into the classroom to engage students in creative and culturally responsive learning. In the following section, we share three types of experiences: focused listening activities, cover songs, and mash-ups. Additionally, sample lesson plans for each type of experience are included in the Supplemental Materials for this article.

### **Focused Listening Projects**

With our students, we have found that when many of them listen to popular music, they tend to focus on the melody and lyrics, paying little attention to other components of the piece. Therefore, providing experiences with focused listening not only helps students to become more conscious and critical listeners; it can also provide foundational understandings that aid in creating cover songs and mash-ups. Focused listening experiences can be especially beneficial if used as an initial learning experience with popular music in choir. Focused listening could emphasize several different aspects of a piece, like identifying multiple parts and understanding form. In a focused listening experience, choir teachers can use a popular song that is culturally relevant to their students, or they can even allow students to pick a piece for listening (see Lesson A in the Supplemental Materials). Teachers can then play the recording and ask students to listen for a specific part, such as the bass line.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, to help students develop an understanding of form, teachers can have students listen to a piece multiple times in order to identify various parts of the form, like verse, chorus, and bridge.

In addition to focusing on the musical components of the piece, teachers can engage students in discussions about its historical and/or cultural significance.<sup>8</sup> An example using an older piece is the Beatles' touching song "Blackbird," which was written in

response to the Little Rock Nine, the nine African American students who were the first to integrate a high school in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957.<sup>9</sup> Teachers could invite students to search for possible meanings in the song's words in relation to what was happening during this event of the civil rights movement in the United States and what it might have meant for activists to have a song of support from this famous British band. To connect "Blackbird" to more contemporary music, teachers could compare it to how artists today are championing other causes through music. For example, the song "Glory" by the American rapper Common and singer John Legend, which was featured in the 2014 movie Selma about the marches for voting rights led by Martin Luther King Jr., includes lyrics connecting the civil rights movement of the 1960s to the Black Lives Matter movement of today.<sup>10</sup> Teachers could facilitate discussions about the role that music plays in social and cultural movements and encourage students to explore how they can use music to find encouragement, express themselves in powerful ways, or call for social change.

### **Cover Songs**

Choir teachers can have students make their own cover song arrangements in which students recreate songs using their voices. Because few popular songs are a cappella, students are challenged not only to identify multiple parts while listening but also to figure out ways they can recreate instrumental sounds using their voices. Projects involving cover songs can work in a variety of configurations, such as within the whole choir, in small groups, or with individuals using looping technology. Creating a cover song as a whole choir can be a beneficial first step to ease students into the process of developing an a cappella arrangement. Teachers could use a song like "Best Day of My Life" to invite students to listen to each individual part and sing along in their own range.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, students can listen to the song and perform the drum ostinato, followed by repeated listenings in which they identify and sing the background vocals, lead vocals, banjo, and guitar. Then, teachers can divide students into groups according to one of the identified parts of the song so the class can collectively perform the song. Finally, teachers might want to have students switch parts so that they end up singing multiple parts of the piece. This can prevent some students from always selecting the melody and challenge them to try singing a different part.

Similarly, students could create cover songs in small groups (see Lesson B in the Supplemental Materials). We have found that allowing students to choose their own groups is often the

most successful method, because it allows them some autonomy and helps them feel invested in the project. However, some teachers may find it beneficial to require students to form groups based on voice parts. For example, a small group may be required to have two sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses per group. Finally, teachers could even assign a project in which students use looping technologies to create their own individual cover song. While there are several recording and looping technologies available, one accessible option is the Acapella app, which allows users to record themselves performing multiple parts and then turn them into a video featuring an in-sync collage.<sup>12</sup> Each of these project configurations, whether completed as a whole class, a small group, or an individual, changes the amount of contributions students add to the creative project and allows the choir teacher to repeat this project multiple times with varying amounts of teacher support.

### **Mash-Ups**

Moving beyond cover songs, mash-ups provide an additional creative challenge for vocal students. Mash-up describes an arrangement of two or more songs blended together. For example, a mash-up might include an ostinato and chorus of one piece arranged with the verse from another. Many examples of mash-ups can be found online on sites like YouTube and are commonly used on singing-focused television shows. When students create mash-ups, choir teachers can also consider whether to configure the project for individuals, for small groups, or as a whole class. Because mash-up projects require more creative decisions than cover song projects, teachers may need to be prepared to provide additional time and scaffolding to help students be successful (see Lesson C in the Supplemental Materials).

In our experience facilitating mash-ups, the students' biggest challenge is not figuring out the chord progression but, rather, putting two songs together into one arrangement. Because many popular songs use some combination of I, V, vi, and IV, students can fairly easily find songs that will fit together. However, students may struggle when two songs use the same chords but have different harmonic rhythms, resulting in having to make decisions about slowing down or speeding up the progression of one song so that it fits with another. To help with this, teachers can provide scaffolding experiences with harmonic rhythm (see the Scaffolding Learning section). Additionally, mash-ups work best when each song is clearly recognizable, so teachers may need to help students identify riffs or loops that can be interspersed throughout the arrangement, like the bass line from "Don't Stop Believin'" by Journey or the horn riff in Beyoncé's "Crazy in Love."<sup>13</sup>

### **Setting Project Parameters**

Choir teachers can prepare to lead student-led popular music projects by thinking through what parameters would be appropriate for their students' skill level and amount of experience with creative music-making. They can also plan ahead to ad-

dress many of the logistics involved in these projects that differ from a typical choir rehearsal. In this section, we include questions that teachers might ask themselves and offer strategies that could help in designing a meaningful learning experience. Having acute knowledge of students' abilities prior to beginning a project can be beneficial in establishing appropriate and differentiated expectations for each group and/or student. In some instances, it can be beneficial to throw students "into the deep end" by providing few parameters and lots of freedom because doing so can provide a motivating, creative challenge, but others may benefit from having a clear structure.<sup>14</sup> When determining parameters for a popular music project, choir teachers can prepare by answering the following questions according to their students' needs.

#### **How Many Parts Should Students Include in Their Arrangement?**

Popular songs can vary in complexity according to the number of parts, layers, and timbres. More advanced students, particularly those in high school, might be able to create a cover of a song that includes the melody, multiple harmonies, a bass line, and one or more percussion parts. It might be more appropriate to expect younger singers, such as those in elementary or middle school, to include fewer parts.

#### **How Much of the Song Should Students Cover?**

While many popular songs follow a traditional form that includes repeated parts, students might feel overwhelmed with the task of covering an entire three-minute song. Choir teachers might consider having students create an arrangement of one or a few sections of the song, such as the first verse and chorus. Then, if students finish the project early, they can be encouraged to complete the rest of the song.

#### **How Much Class Time Will They Have to Complete the Project?**

Depending on the size and scope of the project, students will likely need many class periods to complete a project. Also, because these projects are student-led, they can take considerably more time than many teachers expect. Choir teachers may want to consider whether students will work exclusively on these cover song arrangements for a few weeks or alternate days spent on the project between full choir rehearsals, or they might want to encourage students to work on these projects outside of the school day.

#### **What Songs Can Students Use?**

There are many factors to consider when determining which songs students can use for a cover song and how much control they are given over this choice.<sup>15</sup> In some cases, choir teachers might allow students to select songs themselves. In other cases, choir teachers might develop a list of popular music songs from which students can choose. This allows the teacher to prescreen songs to determine whether they have appropriate lyrics and match students' skill level while also considering students' personal musical preferences. Saleel has found suc-



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cess with high school students by compiling a list of approved songs following the common chord progressions I–V–vi–IV or vi–IV–I–V.<sup>16</sup> However, he also permits students to choose a song that is not on the list as long as he reviews the song and determines that it has appropriate lyrics and is not too difficult for the students. Regardless of how much autonomy students have in selecting songs, we acknowledge that each school community may have varying expectations for what lyrics would be considered appropriate. Thus, we recommend that teachers listen to every song and review the lyrics in advance to ensure that it is appropriate to be used at their school or use recordings that have altered the lyrics so that they are clean.

### What Other Performance Considerations Are Required?

Popular musicians make numerous creative decisions about their performance beyond the music itself. They consider things such as their group name, staging, attire, beat boxing, and choreography, just to name a few. Choir teachers may want to determine whether any of these performance aspects will be required for the project. In our experience, many students add things like choreography and beat boxing to their performances on their own. However, requiring some of these nonmusical components can add to the real-world quality of the projects.<sup>17</sup>

### Facilitating Group Work

Once choir teachers have determined the parameters for the project, they can help students get started. At this point, teachers become facilitators of the students' learning, and they can monitor students, provide support, and offer feedback. The following questions could be useful for teachers to consider as they facilitate popular music projects.

### How Can I Best Make Use of Space for Groups to Work Separately?

Since some choir classes have large student enrollments, finding space for all the groups to work on their projects can be tricky. Depending on its size, students may be able to spread out into groups in the choir room. In this situation, it can be helpful to have visual or auditory cues to get students' attention when needed, such as flipping the lights on and off or playing chords on the piano. Saleel works at a large high school and is able to use five practice rooms located in the music wing of the school in addition to his choir room. He then floats between these spaces to check on the groups' progress.

### What Devices Do Students Need to Be Able to Listen to Recorded Music?

It is helpful for students to have devices through which they can listen to recordings, as this is an important part of creating arrangements and composing songs. To provide access, choir teachers could create a rotation schedule to allow groups to

have scheduled times during class to listen to their recordings on a class computer. If their school has a set of tablets or laptops that could be checked out from the computer lab or library, teachers could then give each group its own device for listening. Depending on your school's policy, it may even be possible for students to listen through their cell phones. For these, it is beneficial to purchase headphone splitters so that multiple students can be plugged into the same device. Ultimately, listening through headphones often provides a better sound quality than the small speakers in the devices themselves.

### How Can I Ensure That My Students Stay on Task?

In our experience, students usually exhibit high levels of motivation and engagement when working on these types of projects. However, to help ensure that students take their popular music projects seriously and stay focused, teachers can set regular goals for them to accomplish. For example, at the beginning of class, teachers could tell students, "By the end of class today, your group must have selected your two songs for your mash-up," and then have students report back at the end. Teachers can also set up midpoint goals that are assessed using a rubric. Or teachers could set up feedback days, in which two groups are paired and then sing for and give feedback to each other. Having to sing a "work in progress" for another group can provide an additional incentive for groups to continue working.

### How Can I Encourage My Students to Collaborate Effectively and Respectfully?

To prevent disagreements, teachers can establish guidelines for how students are expected to work together, share feedback, and contribute meaningfully. Teachers may benefit from explaining that there are ways to express opinions in constructive ways, rather than in ways that could be hurtful, and by modeling examples of this in their own teaching practice. We have also found it useful to let students know that they can always talk to us individually if they are having issues working with their group.

### How Can I Assess Students' Musical Growth?

Finally, choir teachers can assess students' musical projects through the use of a rubric or rating scale (see the Mash-Up Rubric in the Supplemental Materials). A rubric or rating scale can include several dimensions for assessment that correspond to the NAfME 2014 Music Standards, such as developing an arrangement, singing with appropriate technique, or connecting with the audience through staging, expression, and/or choreography.<sup>18</sup>

#### Scaffolding Learning

In addition to setting parameters, choir teachers can also provide scaffolding learning by determining which skills students will need to be successful and assessing their level of proficiency with each skill prior to beginning a popular music project.<sup>19</sup> A cover song project, for example, might result in an a cappella

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performance where each student group demonstrates a melody, choral harmony, and a bass line. To prepare students for this, choir teachers can isolate those specific elements, assess students' knowledge and skills, and teach them in digestible chunks prior to having students begin work on the cover song project. This section outlines some specific activities teachers can use to build skills needed for student-led popular music arrangements, including rhythmic and tonal loops, chord progressions, and harmonic rhythm.

### Tonal and Rhythmic Loops

Loops (also called riffs or ostinati) are frequently used in popular music and are a reason why these songs are so catchy. To teach this, vocal teachers can have students get into small groups and create an eight-beat rhythmic loop. This short exercise is enjoyable for the students; Saleel's students now continuously create loops both in and outside of class. Continuing with this skill, students can be taught to create a tonal loop using a pentatonic scale or other pitch set over eight beats. To make this relevant to popular music projects, choir teachers can then have students identify and copy a loop found in a recording. Two examples that could work are "Survivor" by Destiny's Child, which has a melodic loop, and "Billie Jean" by Michael Jackson, which features a distinctive bass riff.<sup>20</sup>

### Chord Progressions

Another way that teachers can provide scaffolding is by teaching students about chords and chord progressions. Thankfully, popular music does not follow strict rules as to chord changes and voice leading, as opposed to traditional counterpoint. For popular music projects, it can be beneficial to help students discern chord changes by ear. Every day, choir teachers can spend a short amount of time having students practice singing broken chords using solfège syllables, starting with a I chord and adding V7, IV, and vi chords over time. Because many popular songs are in minor keys, it is also beneficial to teach i, V7, iv, and VI. Once students have a mastery of these four common chords, choir teachers can start stacking the pitches to create homophonic chord progressions, like I-IV-V-vi-IV-I-V-I. Students can be divided into three groups, with each group assigned a chord member. Teachers can then lead students through the progression, changing the chord every four beats. Exercises with chord progressions can not only orient students' ears to these chords but also encourage development of balance, blend, intonation, and ensemble singing. Each time the exercise is repeated, teachers can have each group change to a different part in the chord. For example, if one group sang the top part one day, the group might sing the bottom part the next. Choir teachers should not underestimate how much time this process takes—it is the bread and butter of the final project. Finally, choir teachers can coalesce all this chord work by teaching students a familiar song taught by rote, like a vocal arrangement of "Hello" by Adele.<sup>21</sup>

### Harmonic Rhythm

A final skill that choir teachers can introduce to provide scaffolding for student-led projects is the use of harmonic rhythm. The progression used in "Hello" by Adele (vi-IV-I-V) is used in hundreds of pop songs, but these songs sound different because of their varying harmonic rhythms. This concept is relatively easy to teach once students can hear the differences between chords. Through a focused listening activity, choir teachers can ask students to listen to the rate at which the chords change in two popular songs that use the same progression, like "Hello" by Adele and "All of Me" by John Legend.<sup>22</sup> Teachers can have students keep a steady beat and explain in musical terms when chords change in the progression. For example, "All of Me" changes every four beats, while "Hello" changes on beat 1 and the end of beat 2.

### Finding Their Voices

Including vocal projects with popular music has been a transformative experience for both us and our students. Making the change to include more creativity and student-led activities has been challenging at times, as it has required us to rethink what music classes and choir rehearsals can look like, how we teach and interact with students, and how we can help students pursue their own musical goals and interests. One of our biggest challenges has been to become more familiar with current popular music, but our students have been happy to help us with this task. Over time, we have found numerous benefits for students' musical growth in that those in our classes seemed to find their voices as they made creative decisions, learned from and with their peers, and made connections to their musical environments outside school.

In a few cases, students quite literally found their voices by singing along to one of their favorite popular music songs. In Saleel's class, for example, one group of students had three boys who were new to choir and could not match pitch consistently, making it difficult for them to participate in their assigned cover song. However, because of the constructivist nature of this project, Saleel had the unique advantage of working independently with struggling students. In this case, he worked with these students on pitch matching while their group worked on other aspects of the project. With this extra help and scaffolding, each student developed an ability to sing independently and in tune by the group's final performance. The complexity of their arrangement was simple compared to those of other groups, but the obstacles these students overcame were still very impressive and showed musical growth.

We have also discovered students with incredible musicianship that we had simply been unable to notice in the context of other musical activities. For example, one student in Julie's classes had a singing voice that was perfectly suited for popular music, but the student did not view herself as a good singer. In creating a mash-up, the other members of her group encouraged her to sing the lead, and although she was nervous, she agreed. During the final performance of the mash-ups, she sang for

the class and received overwhelming amounts of praise and encouragement on her voice, which ultimately changed her perception of herself as a singer.<sup>23</sup> This support not only was meaningful to this particular student but also strengthened the sense of community within the whole class.

As vocal students gain familiarity with popular music vocal projects, they are able to create more complex arrangements. This alone makes it a good idea, as well as sound pedagogical practice, for students to have multiple attempts with these kinds of projects. Overall, we have found that participating in these projects helps students—even those with minimal choral experience—develop their aural skills, understanding of harmony and chords, and ability to think creatively. At the same time, the skills they develop can transfer to their choral singing and also aid in improving student engagement and the sense of community in the choir. Ultimately, popular music no longer needs to be left out of the choir classroom. Instead, it can be included in multiple ways that will help students find new voices for expressing themselves as musicians—and it just might change your own voice as a choir teacher, too.

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