

**Visual and Vocal Expression in Traditional Choirs:
An Explanatory-Sequential, Mixed-Methods Design**

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine choir director perceptions of vocal and visual expression, determine what constitutes visual and vocal expression, and more concretely define what vocal and visual expression are in a 21st century choral world. I chose a two-part, explanatory-sequential mixed-methods design because it provided multiple levels of data, seeking to further operationalize vocal and visual expression. I gathered data using an online survey and semi-structured interviews. Survey participants, $N = 30$, were current or former school or community choir directors. I selected interview participants, $N = 12$, based on their professional renown as accomplished choral directors. In both the survey and semi-structured interviews, participants watched choral performances and discussed elements of vocal and visual expression displayed in both. Survey data yielded three themes for vocal expression and four themes for visual expression. Emergent themes for vocal expression were lyrically driven, musically driven, and intent, whereas themes for visual expression were authentic communication, visual/vocal congruence, purposeful physicality, and storytelling. Interview data revealed four themes for vocal and visual expression. Vocal expression themes were elements of vocal expression; unity, development, and contrast; intent; and quality music. Visual expression themes were body language, purposeful communication, context driven, and supporting visual expression. Implications include greater understanding of specific elements of vocal and visual expression, need for inclusion of vocal and visual expression in state rubrics, and greater understanding about evaluating and coaching expression.

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In 2006, doctors diagnosed me with a perforated vocal fold, just months prior to my student teaching. They told me I should consider a different career where I did not have to speak or sing. Through significant vocal silence and rehab and encouragement from my friends and family, my life changed forever. I had an even greater reason to sing: for those who cannot. One person who always had my back was my girlfriend, now wife, MK. I watched her go through the Ph.D. journey, and she always said she wanted me to pursue my dream of also getting a Ph.D. She and our amazing cat, Leo, always encourage me, support me, and love me. Thank you, MK and Leo, for bringing so much light into my life and for always sticking with me, no matter what. Our journey continues post-graduation, and I am excited to see the next steps.

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Definitions and Abbreviations

- **ACDA:** American Choral Directors Association
- **BRECVEMA:** Framework of musical responses (Juslin, 2010; 2013; 2019)
- **ITPRA:** Framework of music expectancy (Huron, 2006)
- **LGPA:** Large Group choral Performance Assessment
- **NAfME:** National Association for Music Education
- **NCCO:** National Collegiate Choral Organization
- **OAKE:** Organization of American Kodaly Educators
- **Visual Engagement Assessment Criterion from Literature Review:** An action performed by students, that visually enhances or detracts from a performance, and is observable, and therefore assessable, by a reasonable person (Beery, 2012; Jost, 2011; Molnar-Szakacs & Overy, 2006; Morrison & Selvey, 2014; Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004; Seighman, 2015; Silvey, 2011)
- **Vocal Expression from Literature Review:** Authentically driven emotional phonations that provide insight into a performer's intent (Akbarova et al., 2017; Bachorowski, 1999; Bachorowski & Owren, 1995; Cowen et al., 2019; Hakanpaa et al., 2021; Juslin, 2010; 2013; LoVetri, 2007; Patel et al., 2011; Scherer et al., 2017; and Simon-Thomas et al., 2009)
- **Visual Expression Definition Post-Study:** Authentically driven, purposeful actions that physically convey the song's lyrical, musical, emotional, and contextual message
- **Vocal Expression Definition Post-Study:** Authentically driven phonations that provide insight into a performer's intent to convey a song's lyrical, musical, emotional, and contextual message.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Music has the power to change lives through emotional responses to songs performed (Juslin, 2013). In the choral music performance setting, there is a connection between the conductor, the ensemble, and the audience. Vocal and visual stimuli presented by these three entities directly impact the other two (Nagoski, 2010). Loftin (2022) found participants said everything which occurs within the confines of the concert or contest venue, visually, vocally, or serendipitously, directly impacts the overall chorus presentation. Further, scholars posited life experiences filter emotional responses to music and the visual and vocal stimuli presented in a choral performance (Juslin, 2019; Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008; Sloboda, 2010).

Operationalizing expression is a challenging feat because art is subjective (Hungerford, 1878). This may be why vocal or visual expression does not appear in every large group performance assessment rubric (Loftin, 2020). However, nearly 25% of the 2014 NAfME ensemble strain standards involve expression (NAfME, 2014). Therefore, it is important to determine how choir directors perceive vocal and visual expression. Additionally, it may be valuable to discover innovative ways to implement expression into rehearsals. Scholars noted that being aware of expressive performances and practicing them in rehearsals may lead to more expressive concert and contest performances (Beery, 2012; Jost, 2011; Seighman, 2015). The following vignettes represent the author's positionality as it relates to the purpose of studying vocal and visual expression in traditional choirs. These stories illustrate instances of the potential for life-changing performances through attention and practice of vocal and visual expression techniques.

Ferguson, Missouri

In 2014, tragedy and subsequent riots struck Ferguson, Missouri. Political and racial divides expanded. The Ferguson and St. Louis metropolitan area struggled to rebuild a community that was wounded physically and emotionally. In 2019, my barbershop chorus, the Ambassadors of Harmony, performed a joint concert with several Black church choirs in Ferguson to promote unity. About one minute into “Go Down, Moses,” the power went out in the entire church. However, the chorus fed off the excitement and the audience’s cheers, shouts of “Amen,” and phone camera lights. Before the final words, “Let my people go,” the lights illuminated the church, showing sad faces, jubilant smiles, and grateful hearts. Afterward, the pastor said, “While I know things aren’t good yet, God just showed us that they will be.” This concert, this one song, brought unity to this community, surpassing failed political efforts. The power of music, lyrics, visual and vocal expression, and genuine communication brought the group together in ways humans cannot duplicate with political reform. Moreover, those in the congregation only needed to be present, to hear the music in the dark, experience its visceral effects, and have a deeply emotional response.

Tuscaloosa, Alabama

In 2006, my girlfriend and I attended an honor choir at the University of Alabama. I was a shy senior in high school while she was a junior. We both gravitated toward Rene Clausen's stunning setting of the Robert Burns poem, “Oh my Luve's Like a Red, Rose,” because of its lyrical message of loving someone no matter how rough life may be. Additionally, in the piece's middle section, there is a four-part tenor-bass section, followed by a three-part treble section, which ends in an eight-part mixed-voice conclusion. My girlfriend has ancestors from Ireland and Scotland, so Robert Burns is our favorite poet.

Years passed, my girlfriend and I graduated from high school, and we had a long-distance relationship as I started teaching. However, the Burns poem, the Clausen cello, violin, and piano instrumentation, the lush chords, and the unification of treble and lower voices continuously resonated with us. A few years later, in a practice room at the University of Alabama, just a few feet away from where we sang Clausen's enchanting work, I proposed marriage by playing the piano and singing this song to her. As Burns' 1794 poem says, "so deep in love am I. I will love thee still, my dear, 'til all the seas gang dry." Additionally, René proposed marriage to his wife with this song as well.

What These Stories Say

These two stories illustrate some of my motivation for this study. Both stories highlight the power of vocal and visual expression and their impact on audiences. The audience in story one was the congregation, and the audience in story two was my girlfriend, now wife. However, I would posit that in both scenarios, every person left a better person, changed by the music and genuine performance. As choral directors, we have the music, arrangements, lyrics, and real-world scenarios to help us reach our audiences. It is our responsibility to express songs visually and vocally congruently to give audiences a clear, meaningful message.

Need for Study

I completed three studies (Loftin, 2020; 2021; 2022) focusing on choirs' emotional, visual, and vocal expression. First, I studied the available choral large group performance assessment rubrics and conducted a content analysis to determine the relative weight of visual expression in those rubrics. I studied the 25 readily available rubrics that were not behind a login or paywall and found the average weight of visual embodiment was approximately 9%. Conversely, 24% of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) ensemble strand

standards related to lyrical or musical meaning communication. Additionally, each state's rubric had unique qualifiers for assessing visual expression, such as “musicality,” “student deportment,” “student behavior,” “physical engagement,” and “body language” (Loftin, 2020). Many judges cross state lines to adjudicate contests. Often, there are no systems in place for adjudicator training, certification, or recertification (Hash, 2012; Springer & Bradley, 2018).

Next, I built on the preliminary data from the previous study, determining if practicing directors:

1. Knew the NAFME emotional embodiment standards about vocal and visual expression.
2. If they felt value teaching these standards.
3. If they felt comfortable teaching their students how to bring a song to life.

This study found that choir directors had mixed reactions about whether they believed that their state's large group performance assessment rubric valued emotional embodiment. Data supported my first study showing discrepancies between the standards and assessment practices. Furthermore, this study also showed choir directors had exceedingly high value for teaching emotional embodiment strategies to their students but wanted more professional development and support to feel entirely comfortable teaching these standards (Loftin, 2021). Therefore, operationalizing vocal and visual expression, how to assess them, and how to teach expression is a value of choir directors, providing a need for this dissertation study.

Finally, I conducted a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) of twelve active Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS) judges about their experiences as a judge (Loftin, 2022). The main goals were to determine strategies for increasing objectivity of adjudication score and to discover what visual or vocal stimuli affects them as a judge. The overarching themes from this study were:

1. Performers, audience members, and judges are all interconnected.
2. Authentic, believable emotional communication profoundly impacts judges.
3. Every vocal or visual stimulus impacts the performance.
4. Awareness, education, and training are the best ways to ensure judging consistency.

(Loftin, 2022).

These three studies highlight the need for this current study. This study aims to clarify what vocal and visual expression are, how directors and judges can assess expression, strategies choral directors use to implement vocal and visual expression in their rehearsals, and strategies adjudicators use to assess expression.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine choir directors' perceptions of vocal and visual expression, determine what constitutes visual and vocal expression, and more concretely define what vocal and visual expression are in a 21st-century choral world. The guiding research questions for this study were:

1. What do choir directors identify as elements of visual expression, and how do they identify those elements in a recorded choral performance video?
2. What do choir directors identify as elements of vocal expression, and how do they identify those elements in a recorded choral performance video?
3. Given the literature review's operational definition for visual and vocal expression, is there a significant difference between participant's visual and vocal expression scores in choral performances?

4. What strategies and structures do choir directors believe should be used to enhance the ensemble's vocal and visual expression experiences in rehearsals, concerts, and contests?

Delimitations

I invited all American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), National Collegiate Choral Organization (NCCO), the Organization of American Kodály Educators (OAKE), and Chorus America members to participate in the first portion of the study unless they are a participant for part two of my study. Since this was not a dependent mixed-methods study, nor did I want to influence participants, I did not want participants in part two of the study to participate in part one. I chose choral contest videos composed and sung completely in English, videos that panned over the entire ensemble to show individual faces and body language, and videos with quality audio and video components that the participant could assess the individual modalities separately. Part two of this study included semi-structured interviews. I purposefully chose participants of varying gender, experience levels, teaching levels taught, and ethnicities.

Limitations

I limited this study by time and scope. It was not possible to know how many participants would respond and fully complete the study in the given timeframe. While I cannot generalize the results and findings, this study potentially fills some of the literature gaps, provides NAFME and LGPA rubric creators with guidance about vocal and visual expression, and gives choral music educators specific philosophies and tools for encouraging vocal and visual expression in rehearsals, concerts, and contests.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to examine choir directors' perceptions of vocal and visual expression, determine what constitutes visual and vocal expression, and more concretely define what vocal and visual expression are in a 21st-century choral world. There are five main sections in this review: a) Causes of Emotional Response to Music, b) Visual Expression, c) Vocal Expression, d) Role of the Conductor, and e) Judging.

Causes of Emotional Response to Music

Researchers have extensively studied emotion and emotional responses. In music education, names like Bennett Reimer (2003) and Patrik Juslin (2010) come to mind. Juslin (2010; 2013) defined *emotion* as "...a quite brief but intense affective reaction that usually involves several sub-components—subjective feeling, physiological arousal, expression, action tendency—that are more or less “synchronized” (2013, p. 236). Further, it is possible for one moment in a musical performance to cause an emotional response, or a combination of contributors may cause an emotional response. Cotter et al. (2019) discussed the power of previous experiences and the emotional effects of some pieces on the audience's emotional reaction. However, other scholars suggest an emotional response is more likely to occur when the auditory, lyrical, and visual stimuli are in congruence (Jessen & Kotz, 2011; Kreifelts et al., 2007; Pan et al., 2019).

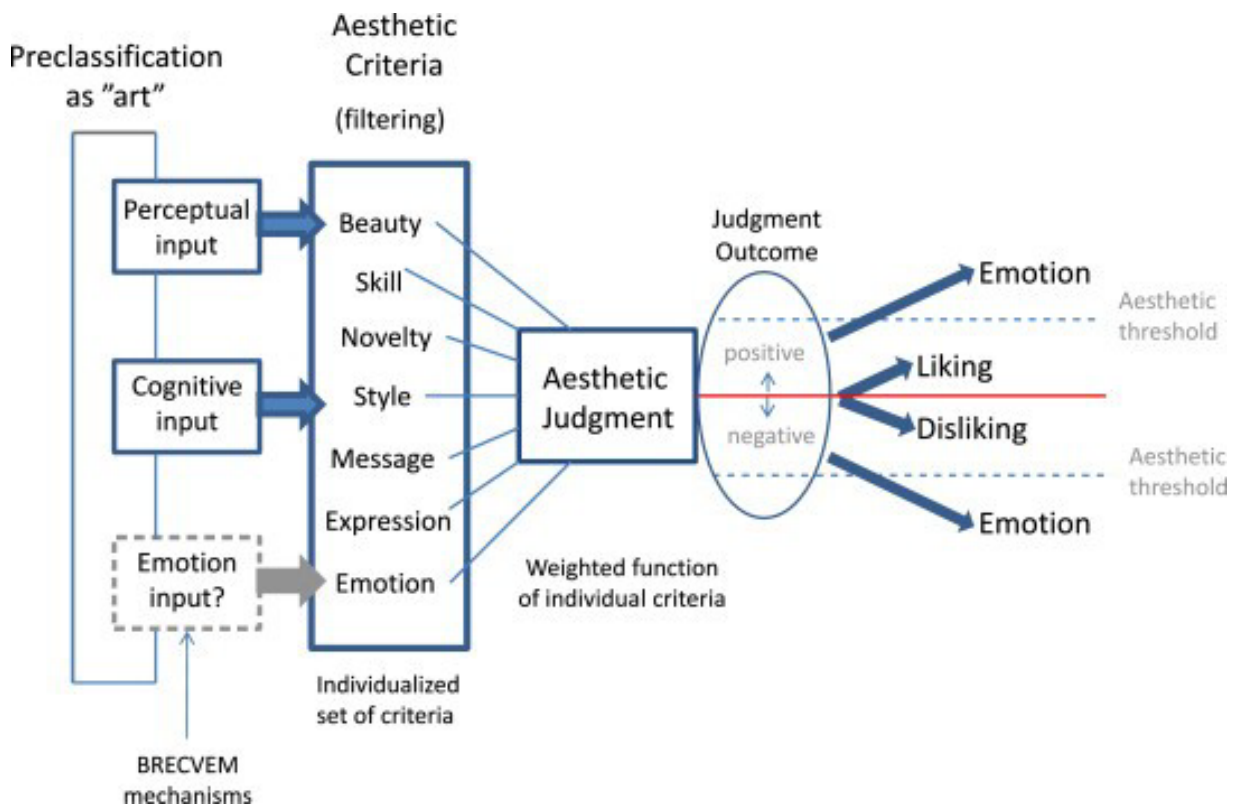
Framework

Juslin and Västfjäll (2008) attempted to codify a theoretical framework describing the psychological mechanisms that can induce an emotional response to music. This framework, BRECVEM, included the following mechanisms: Brain stem reflexes, Rhythmic entrainment,

Evaluative conditioning, Contagion, Visual imagery, Episodic imagery, and Musical expectancy, as conduits of data processing that different portions of the brain. These mechanisms consider distinct aspects of a person’s environment, potentially leading to mixed signals based on stimuli (Juslin, 2010). In 2013, Juslin added Aesthetic judgment to his framework, creating the BRECVEMA framework (Juslin, 2013). See Figure 1 for Juslin’s 2013 model explaining human response to music.

Figure 1

Juslin’s Framework (2013) Filtering Human Response to Music



Though this framework provides for emotional responses to music, processing and organization of the emotions still occurs. The stimulus presents itself through musical performance, but each audience member filters it through a lens of their previous experiences, expectations, and values. In addition, this processing may potentially lead to mixed signals or varied emotional responses among audience members. The rest of the literature in this section explores the eight parts of Juslin's framework and discusses how each of the mechanisms causes an emotional response to music.

Brain Research

Juslin's framework (2010) discussed the role of *Brainstem reflexes*, where one or more of the acoustical properties of music activate the brainstem to elicit an emotional response. Researchers do not entirely understand the exact bodily response, but the thalamus and brainstem activate during this phenomenon, which may lead to changes in heart rate, breathing, or chills. Based on this framework, body imaging and skin tests may fill more of the puzzle.

Johnstone et al. (2006) conducted fMRIs on forty healthy individuals to determine which brain region activated when stimulated by happy and angry faces and speech. The researchers found participants' brains activated more for happy faces and speech than angry faces and speech. They also found the extent of activation with congruent faces and speech versus incongruent faces and speech. Additionally, Johnstone et al. found that participants' brains significantly activated more with congruent and incongruent stimuli. These findings are consistent with Zarate (2013).

Additionally, Fruhholz et al. (2016) suggested the brain naturally decodes vocal and visual stimuli. So, when audiences see and hear a chorus perform, they naturally determine if there is a genuine emotion behind what the ensemble is singing and if it connects the same

stimuli from the lyrics and the music. The implication for the choral world is singers' desire to have a vocal and visual agreement, combined with the appropriate lyrical message, to produce the highest level of audience brain activation.

Scholars discussed the concept of *mirror neurons*, where humans naturally mimic or respond in a way congruent to the stimuli received (Molnar-Szakacs & Overy, 2006; Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004; Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, 2010). Juslin (2010) and Sloboda (2010) further expanded upon this concept and labeled it *emotional contagion*. Mirror neurons activate in the auditory cortex when stimulated by physical performance. Mirror Neurons change their activity in the brain when a person performs a specific act or when someone observes an action by another person. Mirror neurons, or emotional contagion, tie into conductor expression to the chorus. Then, the mirror neurons transmit from the choir to the audience. Overy and Molnar-Szakacs (2009) further expanded on the concept of mirror neurons and proposed the connection of musical, emotional, verbal, and non-verbal communication.

Emotional inflection is vital because humans naturally respond to vocal and visual stimuli (Morris et al., 1999). In the choral world, this pertains to word stress, *messa di voce*, and other musical expressions. Morris et al. further emphasized the need for visually, vocally, lyrically, and emotionally congruent performances. There is miscommunication when one of these stimuli is not congruent with the others (Fruhholz et al., 2016; Overy & Molnar-Szakacs, 2009). Hence, when people hear conflicting viewpoints, it is easy to have misunderstandings. If singers distract audiences with items such as shoe colors not matching, over or underperforming, or intonation issues, the overall mirror neuron connection breaks, and the audience's reception of the message diminishes.

Congruence

Humans subconsciously and innately mimic what they see. This phenomenon is a form of learned behavior (Pietilainen-Caffrey, 2005). Consequently, the conductor must demonstrate emotional expression and musicality in their conducting and demeanor to inspire the choral ensemble to reciprocate a similar visual presentation. Communication of the lyrical message starts with the conductor, travels to the choir, then travels to the audience. When the messages unify, the response increases and clarifies.

Another reason the unification of auditory, visual, and lyrical stimuli is vital is the notion that humans create mental pictures while listening to music. Juslin's framework (2010) for what causes the emotional response to music cites *visual imagery* as a key. When people listen to music, they take all the input and combine the stimuli into a mental image. It is salient for choirs to create a mental image that is unified and intended. While singers cannot control how an audience member will react, if we can produce a unified message based on the composer's and performer's intent, the odds are better that the audience will respond the way we intend.

The toe-tapping or strong backbeat of swing employs Juslin's concept (2010) of *rhythmic entrainment*, where the piece's metrical pulse aligns with a human's internal rhythm and elicits an emotional response. Humans hear an external consistent rhythmic pattern, which activates the brain stem and aligns with a body rhythm, such as a heartbeat. Work songs use this form of motor coordination for people to naturally align their body rhythms with the pulse of the music. This alignment or *entrainment* encapsulates the body's natural circadian rhythms with an external source, thereby eliciting an emotional response.

Several authors also found that when the choir performs the emotion of the piece with minimal distractions, the chorus provides the optimal setting, the brain activates and helps

audiences connect with the emotional message of the ensemble and further helps form a human connection with others (Day & Thompson, 2019; Gabriel et al., 2016; Phan et al., 2001). Based on the data, when singers combine the vocal and visual embodiment of the story with the composer's intent and musical directions, the audience response can increase. This suggestion is congruent with earlier work by Grewe et al. (2009), who found physical and visceral emotional responses to congruent vocal and visual stimuli in choruses.

No Musical Expectancy

Seeing a new musical artist or production can be exciting since there is no expectation (Huron, 2006). There is no knowledge of the plot and no expectations as to the quality or song selection of the artist. While there may be a slight learning curve to understand the artist, plot, or backstory, the audience member has a blank slate to have an emotional response without any filter through a lens of musical expectation. The power of no expectations lies in the scariness of the unknown and the emotional responses elicited during the performance. Often, an audience member hears a piece of music that reminds them of a specific moment. Juslin (2010) referred to this as *episodic memory* because the emotion elicited reflects a memory in that person's life. Due to the nature of no expectations, this memory can be extremely raw and intense. These musical moments can cause audience members to relive happy memories such as falling in love or overcoming adversity or sad memories such as loss or heartbreak.

Another phenomenon for audience members with no expectations of the music or preconceived notion is *evaluative conditioning*, an elicited response to a piece that arises due to a separate positive or negative stimulus. After hearing a song that draws out an episodic memory, or emotional response that relates to a specific event multiple times, the same emotion will arise even in the absence of the episodic memory (Juslin, 2010). The audience member may not be

aware of the original stimulus, song, or scenario yet still have an emotional response.

Additionally, jingles and other situations where the main activity is not actively listening to music employ evaluative conditioning. Jingles that cause people to relive fond memories are examples of evaluative conditioning, where there is no expectation of having an emotional response, yet there is still a reliving of a fond memory by hearing the jingle.

Musical Expectancy

Musical expectancy is another tenet of Juslin's framework (2010) of what mechanisms elicit an emotional response to music. The mechanism of musical expectancy directly impacts how humans perceive and process emotions in music. Occasionally, people expect what the music will sound like, what the performer will do, or what emotions will occur because of the performance. When audiences see their favorite artist in concert or when families go to a holiday concert, there may be expectations about what songs may take place. These expectations can alter or shade the emotion since it gets filtered based on previous expectations. On a structural level, *musical expectancy* can also apply to how music functions. When trained audiences hear an unusual chord structure, an awkward contrast in dynamics, or incorrect pitches, the audience member may focus on the negative aspects.

Huron's theory of musical expectancy (2006) uses the model *ITPRA*, which stands for imagination response, tension response, prediction response, reaction response, and appraisal response. See Table 1 and Figure 2. The imagination response allows the audience member to imagine the various musical or emotional outcomes before the music occurs. Then, the tension response builds suspense leading to the emotional event's occurrence. Finally, the prediction response tries to reconcile whether the emotional event met the audience member's expectations. Immediately, the reactive response elicits automatic feedback, and the appraisal response allows

the audience member to process the emotional response. The *ITPRA* model is a comprehensive model that describes the audience's entire process before, during, and after a musical event and the emotional processing.

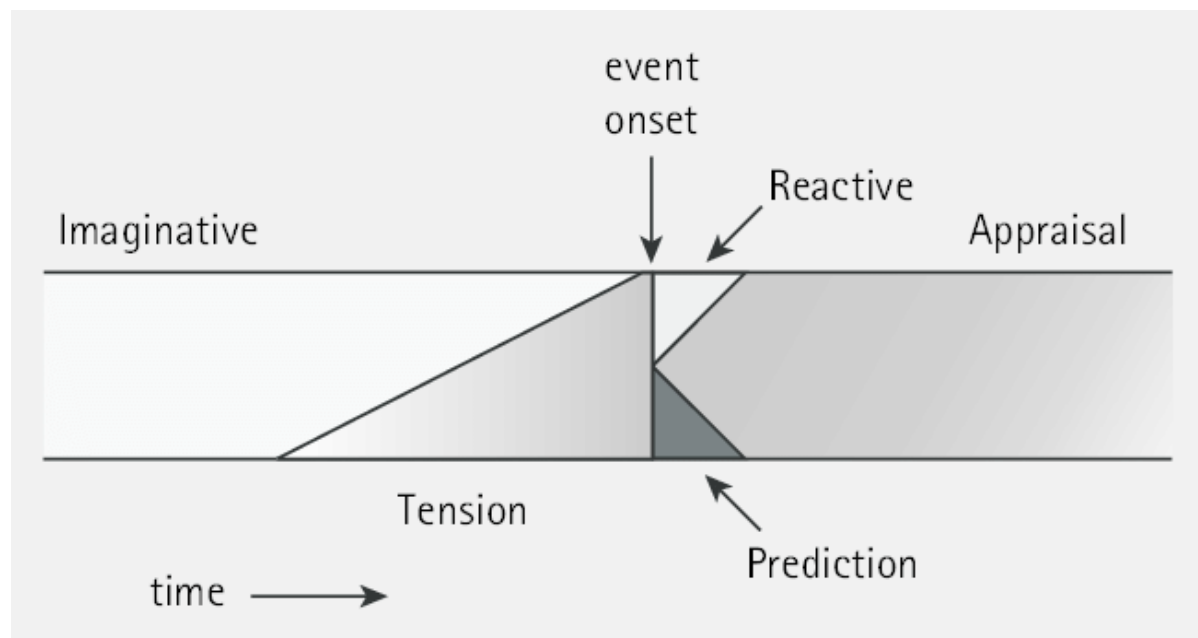
Table 1

Huron's ITPRA Model of Musical Expectancy (2006)

Response System	Epoch	Biological Function
(1) Imagination response	Pre-outcome	Future-Oriented behavioural motivation; enables deferred gratification
(2) Tension response	Pre-outcome	Optimum arousal and attention in preparation for anticipated events
(3) Prediction response	Post-outcome	Negative/positive reinforcement to encourage the formation of accurate expectations
(4) Reaction response	Post-outcome	Neurologically fast responses that assume worst-case scenario
(5) Appraisal response	Post-outcome	Neurologically complex assessment of the outcome that results in negative/positive reinforcements

Figure 2

Huron's ITPRA Model of Musical Expectancy Over Time (2006)



The power of previous experiences and the emotional effects of pieces on the audience's emotional reaction are unique factors of human response to music (Cotter et al., 2019). The researchers asked participants what previous experiences were challenging or exciting for them and then asked the participants if specific themes encouraged them to cry or be in awe of performances. Cotter et al. found a positive correlation between positive experiences and themes that produced an awe-inspired reaction. Conversely, the researchers also found a positive correlation between difficult experiences such as loss, complex themes, and crying as a reaction to the piece. Their data support the notion that previous experiences can directly impact how people react to music.

Certain musical elements such as tempo, key, modality, and genre can have an impact on audience response to a piece (Cotter et al., 2019). Juslin (2013) called automatic reactions to specific auditory stimuli as *brainstem reflexes*. Cotter et al. noted that classical, religious, and gospel music more likely produced awe than crying. In instances where participants wanted to cry, the researchers mentioned that it was due more to the beauty or message of the specific piece than the genre itself. Cotter et al. further noted crying to a specific genre or selection was more an artifact of extra-musical concepts such as loss or sorrow rather than a reaction to the song or genre itself. Juslin classifies this as *episodic memory* if the emotion results from a specific memory or as *brainstem reflexes* if the response is solely about more generalized previous experiences resulting from acoustical properties of the music.

Musical imagery is involuntary, where the brain fills in gaps of missing or misheard lyrics (Gabriel et al., 2016). They found that participants had more familiarity with songs than they thought they did, and their brains could fill in more gaps of unfamiliarity. Hence, while

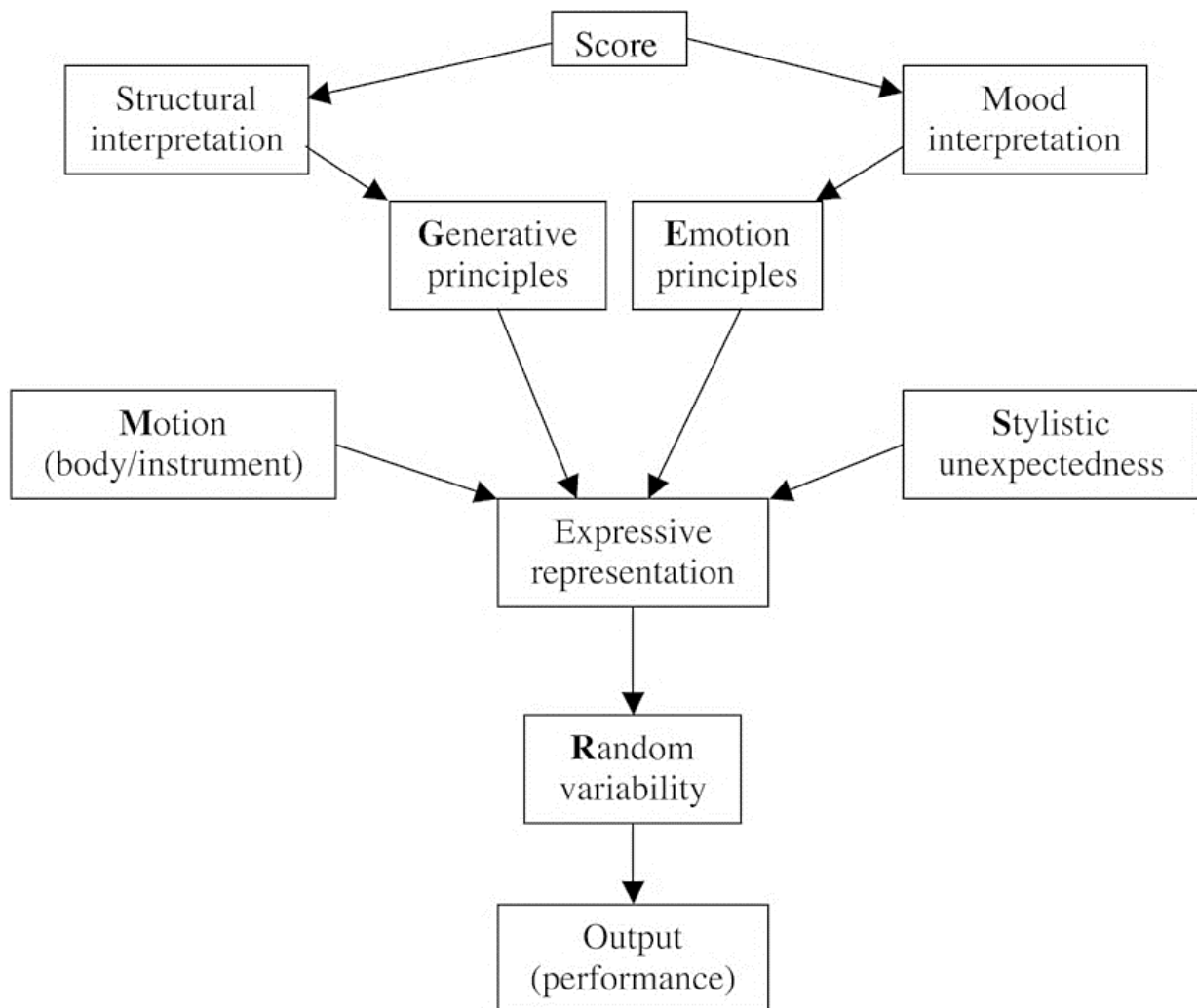
audiences may enjoy more familiar music, having students play or sing music like what they know will still produce an emotional response.

Perceiving, organizing, and processing emotions elicited by music is a unique and intricate system. No one mechanism elicits an emotional response alone, as it bases its impact on previous experiences, life journeys, values, societal norms, and the musical product presented (Juslin, 2010; 2013; 2019). In 2013, Juslin added *aesthetic judgment* as an eighth mechanism that elicits an emotional response to music. *Aesthetic judgment* filters the emotion felt by the audience member through a lens of societal norms of beauty, culture, acceptance, and tonality. For example, when a Western classically trained musician hears a gamelan for the first time, there is an adjustment period before having the ability to have a purely emotional response to the performance itself. Additionally, if the listener determines that the song performed is in poor taste, the listener will have to first filter their disapproval before determining the emotional value of the performance itself.

In 2013, Juslin created the GERMS model to illustrate how the score's music, lyrics, and emotion combined with the performance itself and the audience member's expectations and background create one set of emotional responses (see Figure 3 for the GERMS model). Finally, Juslin shows how random variability can alter the audience member's response through no activity by the performer or audience member. These factors could be lights going out in the concert hall, lightning in outdoor performances, or a baby randomly crying during a performance. This model further illustrates that many factors contribute to an emotional response or lack thereof; sometimes, these mechanisms aid each other, and sometimes, it competes with one another.

Figure 3

GERMS Model (Juslin, 2013)



I compiled and organized the literature on what causes emotional responses to music. Juslin's framework, BRECVEMA (2010; 2013; 2019), provides a unified approach to determining the mechanisms that elicit these emotional responses. However, because every person brings their unique backgrounds, experiences, values, and preferences when listening to music, this is no “one size fits all” model. The idea of expectations or no expectations shades how people feel about a performance (Huron, 2006). Additionally, active listening versus

passing listening affects what mechanisms may elicit responses. The emotion presented by the conductor transmits stimuli to the ensemble and then goes to the audience. Due to mirror neurons and emotional contagion principles, the highest level of emotional engagement occurs when the musical performers and audience members are actively engaged in the process. Through auditory, visual, lyrical, and musical congruence, the overall emotional experience increases (Day & Thompson, 2019; Gabriel et al., 2016; Grewe et al., 2009; Phan et al., 2001). By creating emotional connections and fostering heightened audience rapport, musical ensembles may receive more outstanding monetary and promotional support. Further, by making genuine, human connections with our students, audiences, and communities, it may be possible for a greater reach of the power of music.

Visual Expression

“People do not go to a concert to hear a choir sing. They go to a concert to have a life-changing experience” (E. Ehly, personal communication). Dr. Ehly, the world-renowned choral music educator, said this during an honor choir in 2002. Some choirs stand entirely still in performances, providing little visual stimulation. However, if the visual body language and story communication are lacking, the best feedback that most choirs may hear is “You sounded great.” The audience in this scenario did not experience a life-changing moment, a value of many choral music educators.

In the 21st-century world of choral music, many choral directors want music to be more accessible to the general population, and audiences expect entertainment. The two most widely attended choral concerts are typically holiday and year-end concerts. People often associate cherished memories with these concerts. Parents, friends, and community members love

attending year-end concerts to experience music and all that end-of-year concerts provide, from honoring graduating students to hearing familiar popular music (Huron, 2006).

Further, our audiences bring their backgrounds and lifetimes of expertise (Juslin, 2013). While audience engagement may often be part of these holiday and year-end concerts, choral educators may not consistently consider this for assessment concerts, sometimes called state or national contest concerts (Pan et al., 2019; Seighman, 2015). Many contest songs speak of love, hope, despair, and overcoming obstacles. It is vital as educators to teach our students to convey this lyrical message visually and musically (Pan et al., 2019). By not doing so, we diminish the audience rapport, and emotional experience had by all (Seighman, 2015). By teaching students to become singer-actors and to communicate the lyrical message of all songs visually and musically, we can heighten our experience as an ensemble and provide a gift of art and an emotional experience to our audiences (Beery, 2012; Jost, 2011; Seighman, 2015).

Facial Expression

Scholars found that natural freedom of movement positively impacted the chorus's pitch accuracy, intonation, freedom of expression, singer enjoyment, and audience enjoyment (Grady & Gilliam, 2020). According to Kilpatrick (2020), "Movement and music both illustrate abstract emotional concepts and can aid in the formation of concrete relationships between them" (p. 29). The caveat to this principle is movement must be a natural response to lyrical and musical direction from the piece. Conversely, performing with no movement or moving the body for the sake of moving produced negative effects on pitch accuracy, intonation, freedom of expression, singer enjoyment, and audience enjoyment. This concept further echoes previously mentioned stances on congruence of visual and vocal delivery. According to Grady and Gilliam (2020), singers should have the freedom to naturally express themselves based on the lyric and music.

However, teachers should encourage singers to study these aspects before the performance, so they know exactly what the song is trying to convey.

VEAC Operational Definition

Visual expression is an authentically driven, emotional action performed by students that visually enhances or detracts from a performance and is observable, and therefore assessable, by a reasonable person (Beery, 2012; Jost, 2011; Molnar-Szakacs & Overy, 2006; Morrison & Selvey, 2014; Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004; Seighman, 2015; Silvey, 2011). These Visual Expression Assessment Criteria (VEAC) provide vitality to choral performances. Singing, while implementing these standards, is more enjoyable because there is another goal besides mere technique (Beery, 2012; Jost, 2011). The goal of story communication is also present. Additionally, by bringing the emotional delivery to the rehearsal, concert, and contest stages every time, we free the singer's body up, encouraging a free tone and still focusing the singer's mindset for a lyrical delivery.

Good technique must marry good emotional delivery to create a life-changing performance potentially (Pan et al., 2019). Every member must bring these performance skills daily (Beery, 2012; Jost, 2011; Seighman, 2015). Pan et al. (2019, pp. 13-15) showed when the visual storytelling matches the aural message and musicality conveyed, the audience's experience and emotional satisfaction increase. They further mentioned, “an interference effect was found on the music-induced emotion when the auditory and visual emotional information were incongruent” (p.16). So, we need to explore what we know about visual engagement, how to teach it, and how to get students to communicate their personal stories through music.

Embodiment

Musicians of expressive conductors, as determined by participants, were more expressive themselves, felt like they had more freedom to be musical, and took more ownership of their musicality (Morrison & Selvey, 2014; Silvey, 2011). The authors also found that when participants listened to an audio-only version of performances, they rated low-expressive performances even lower than lower expressive audio-visual performances. This data further echoes the findings by Pan et al. (2019), stating when a vocal-visual agreement of a piece occurs, the audience response heightens, even at a low-expressive conductor level.

Emotional Synchrony is a phenomenon where the preparatory breath indicates the emotion the ensemble is about to sing; that way, the conductor and ensemble are in unity (Seighman, 2015). So, taking a breath is less about needing air but a chance for the singer to reset and recharge the emotional intent of the piece. He advocates that the emotional intent must start with the conductor before it transfers to the singers. Then, it is the singer's responsibility to convey the emotion of the piece to the audience. This shared communication is a vital portion of the human experience of singing. Silvey and Fisher (2015) found when a choral conductor gestured in the low to middle portion of the conducting plane; the singers reported higher expression and greater permission to express themselves. Conversely, when the conductor gestured in the high portion of the conducting plane, the singers reported lower expression and vocal tension issues. This data shows that conducting direction goes to the ensemble, no matter if the intent was different.

Performers can have planned emotional delivery techniques, but the authentic emotional response comes from being in the moment as a performer. Facial expressions of emotions are involuntary, innate tasks in response to stimuli and therefore are a more reliable measure of

emotional response (Kayser, 2017). Additionally, the audience's facial reactions are more dependable and valid, based on the findings by Kayser. Consequently, a singer's goal might be to give the audience a gift of an emotional experience. This goal requires the chorus and the director to set the mood appropriately to achieve the innate, natural, subconscious reaction to the music.

Humans naturally mimic or respond in a way congruent to the stimuli received. This phenomenon ties into the conductor's expression to the chorus and then ties into the message or story conveyed by the ensemble. This phenomenon is a subconscious, neurological response by *mirror neurons* (Molnar-Szakacs & Overy, 2006; Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004). Overy and Molnar-Szakacs (2009) further expanded on the concept of mirror neurons and proposed the connection of musical, emotional, verbal, and non-verbal communication. Morris et al. (1999) advocated that emotional inflection is vital since humans respond to these stimuli naturally. In the choral world, this pertains to word stress, *messa di voce*, and other musical expressions. All the mentioned authors in this paragraph further emphasized the need for visually, vocally, lyrically, and emotionally congruent performances. There is miscommunication when one of these stimuli is not congruent with the others. For example, when people hear conflicting viewpoints, it is easy to have misunderstandings. If choruses distract audiences with items such as shoe color not matching, people over or underperforming, or intonation issues, then the overall mirror neuron connection breaks, and the audience reception of the message diminishes.

Vocal Expression

Vocal expression is a newer concept in choral adjudication. Bryant (2021) defined “vocal emotions” as “...the modulation of acoustic properties of vocalizations associated with affective communication, including emotional utterances and affective prosody” (p.25). Hence, a good

working definition of vocal expression is an acoustical production of an emotional desire. These include laughter, pitch change, crying, tonal shifts, dynamics, or inflection (Bachorowski, 1999; Bachorowski & Owren, 1995). Furthermore, studying the purpose of vocal expression and the act of expressing itself is imperative. Bryant further discussed the importance of the context of vocal expression and the receiver's ability to understand the message.

Scholars have studied vocal expression less than visual expression and emotional embodiment (Scherer et al., 2011; 2017). Several researchers question what vocal expression is and what it is not (Bänziger et al., 2015; Jessen & Kotz, 2011; Johnstone et al., 2006). Scherer et al. further advocate that all vocal expression comes from context, is much less impactful than facial expression and body language and is more recognizable than visual stimuli. Finally, these researchers promoted the need for more research about the role of vocal expression and its acoustical output.

Vocal Bursts

Vocal bursts are short, nonlinguistic sounds that provide insight into a person's emotional state (Cowen et al., 2019). Cowen et al. found vocal bursts produced 24 identifiable and interpretable emotions. These vocal affectations and utterances were highly effective forms of emotional communication. The researchers found the specific emotions conveyed with nonlinguistic utterances mimicked the results of Juslin (2010; 2013). Juslin's BRECVEMA framework of musical emotions found the vocal and visual stimuli combine to form and shape the listener's emotional response. The contribution from Cowen et al. echoed previous research, showing crying, laughing, and other vocal bursts still produce the same emotional stimuli (Bachorowski & Owren, 1995; Simon-Thomas et al., 2009). Based on these contributions, these

vocal bursts can be handy for vocal effects in choral pieces but could also be a building block for future research on vocal expression.

Acoustical Correlates

Listening to a song or vocal burst and identifying the emotional context is a newer phenomenon for aesthetics researchers (Scherer et al., 2017). Scherer et al. examined the effects of singer interpretation of emotion on several acoustical measures. Scherer et al. used unedited audio recordings of world-class opera singers singing scales with certain emotions and asked participants to discern the intended emotion. Further, they looked to see if participants could discern statistically significant emotional intent and execution from an audio recording. Scherer et al. found significant data supporting the hypothesis that audiences can determine specific emotional intent based solely on auditory stimuli such as dynamics, frequency energy, and formant amplitude.

Scherer et al. (2017) completed a stepwise discriminant analysis to check for the reliability of their data, which found the same three predictors to be significant and meaningful. By taking out lyrics and having the singers sing scales, the focus shifted to only the vocal expression and its effect on acoustical parameters (Scherer et al., 2017). This further highlights the impact that vocal expression can have on a full choral performance by itself. When singers produce vocal expression congruent to the lyrics, mirror neurons fire, and a unified message goes to the audience.

Whether acoustical artifacts of emotional expression vary from contemporary commercial music (CCM) to classical genres is another avenue worth exploring (LoVetri, 2007). Hakanpaa et al. (2021) researched the acoustical correlates of the vocal expression of emotions in CCM and classical singing genres. Their goal was to compare the two genres and their vocal

quality differences, as evidenced by auditory stimuli. The participants sang the same vowels on three pitches while expressing five unique emotions. The researchers found vocal sound pressure level was the only repeated independent parameter that indicated emotional expression in both styles. Hakanpaa et al. found more in the CCM style for expression-related changes in vocal quality. Based on these results, more research is critical to determine what directors and judges think constitutes vocal expression and whether they value it.

The cause of acoustical expression is a relatively new concept (Patel et al., 2011). Patel et al. found three main auditory parameters of vocal expression of emotions: tension, perturbation, and phonatory frequency, which echoed Cowen et al. (2019) but conflicted with the 2021 study by Hakanpaa et al., who only found sound pressure level to be a significant acoustical correlate of vocal expression of emotions. We need more since vocal expression and its acoustic properties are new concepts. The contradiction of results and conclusions from previous studies further illustrates a need for more research.

Researchers have conducted studies to determine what acoustical characteristics of vocal performances produce emotional responses in audiences (Jurgens et al., 2011). Jurgens et al. found authentic vocal expression and communication produced lower fundamental frequencies, higher tonality, and less pitch variability of pitch than play-acted expressions. Play-acted performances had a much higher range of spoken pitches and frequencies. This concept is analogous to when adults speak to babies, where their pitch frequencies are more random and higher on average.

Authenticity is a salient tenet in music, from staying true to the stylistic intent to performing with genuine, believable vocal expression (Beery, 2012; Jost, 2011; Seighman, 2015). Jurgens et al. (2001) found participants easily decoded authentic versus play-acted, or

inauthentic, vocal performances. Participants consistently detected higher frequencies, lighter tone, and more inconsistent vocal production in those play-acted performances. This notion implies choirs, where audiences can detect inauthentic vocal performances. If choirs use lyrically based dynamics, word stress, and vocal inflection, the audience will perceive this as more authentic than performances where the vocal presentation does not match the lyrical message.

With more knowledge about the causes of acoustical correlates, the path from produced vocal emotions to perceived emotions is critical (Bänziger et al., 2015). In other words, choir directors can use knowledge of how humans produce emotional sounds to create musical interest. Bänziger et al. used a path analysis model to show the effect patterns of vocally expressed emotions on perceived emotions. The researchers found a significantly strong path from expressed to perceived emotions, consistent with previous scholars (Cowen et al., 2019; Juslin, 2010; 2013; Scherer et al., 2017). However, due to conflicting data from the individual factors, Bänziger et al. proposed the need for more objective measures of a subjective emotional construct. This conflict helps provide the need for the study. Many assessment rubrics in barbershop singing and choral music have expression or artistry, but Bänziger et al. found no clear consensus on vocal expression or artistry. This study will hopefully start to address this lack of clarity.

Role of the Conductor

The choral conductor wears many hats. They are music creators, storytellers, unifiers, counselors, translators, and mentors (Akbarova et al., 2017). Akbarova et al. referred to the choir as the conductor's instrument. It is the conductor's responsibility to unify the singers' voices into harmony. Choir directors are facilitators and creators. Their interpretation and musical decisions directly influence how the choir presents the song. The conductor conveys non-verbal cues and

direct instruction in pursuit of musical and emotional excellence. Through their words and deeds, conductors show what they intend for the choral ensemble to produce. However, choir directors may inadvertently give mixed or confusing signals which can lead to ensemble error or hesitation. Therefore, everything that the conductor does verbally and non-verbally makes a difference in the musical product.

Verbal Communication

During the initial phases of music learning, the conductor must often convey the intent, interpretation, musical and emotional plans, and other pertinent details (Akbarova et al., 2017). It is vital, according to the researchers, that the conductor thoroughly study as many aspects of the piece as possible before the initial rehearsals. Since the initial practices set the tone for the entire learning process, it is vital for the auditory, visual, modeling, and lyrical congruence to occur from the beginning. Skadsem (1997) found that the director's verbal requests for dynamics and dynamic contrasts were more effective than non-verbal or written cues. She found that singers responded better to sudden changes in softer dynamics than sudden changes to louder dynamics through the verbal medium.

A deeper level of lyrical score study is prudent (Neuen, 2020). By encouraging singers to emphasize meaningful text, not through technique but emotion, the singers can further bring the dramatic story to life. It is salient, according to Neuen, for directors to verbally model the lyrical pronunciation and dynamic contrasts, which aligns with Skadsem (1997). Further, encouraging students to produce emotionally charged consonants and syllabic stress will provide a model for students to go deeper into the lyrical and musical intent of the composer. Additionally, the conductor must utilize their pattern and facial expressions to mirror the desired emotional stresses and releases. Otherwise, if the non-verbal communication and cues do not mimic the verbal

instructions presented, the impact of the previous learning diminishes. This miscommunication will cause the conductor to speak new directions, which may or may not be congruent with previous learning. This phenomenon highlights the conductor's responsibility as a unifier of the verbal and non-verbal stimuli.

Non-Verbal Communication

In his “93/7 Rule”, John Stoker mentioned, “93% of communication occurs through nonverbal behavior and tone; only seven percent of communication takes place through the use of words” (2013, p. 32). Humans are good at mimicking. We naturally imitate what we see or hear, even as children (Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, 2010). Seighman referenced a concept introduced by Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia (2010) called *mirror neurons*, where doing an action and watching the same action activates a congruent brain response (Seighman, 2015). For this reason, seeing a small conducting pattern subconsciously tells a chorus to sing softer. Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson (1993) applied the concept of mirror neurons and coined the term “emotional contagion,” which is “the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and, consequently, to converge emotionally” (p. 97). Jacobsen and Höfel (2003) used behavioral and electrophysiological data to determine the importance of symmetry of visual and vocal stimuli. Based on the emotional contagion concept, the conductor must model the desired emotional, technical, and musical delivery for the chorus to take ownership of delivering a congruent message.

The preparatory conducting beat is an extension of the emotional contagion principle (Nagoski, 2010; Seighman, 2015). The prep beat shows the following phrase's tempo, dynamic, style, and emotion. By further applying the mirror neuron and emotional contagion principles to the prep breath, the conductor and ensemble can breathe together not for the sake of needing air

but for the proper technique, the unity of the message, and the song's musicality (Seighman, 2015). Seighman called this *emotional synchrony*. Çoşkunsoy and Güdek (2019) found that simply beating a conducting pattern was influential in getting musical results but had limitations. The researchers recommended congruent body language with patterns and left-hand nuances or cues. Çoşkunsoy and Güdek determined this method to be the most effective method of creating musical and emotional moments while still having a clear, unified pattern. By forming an agreement as to the lyrical, emotional, and musical intent of the piece, the choir and its director can visually unify their visual presentation with the musical interpretation.

Pattern

The conductor's pattern indicates tempo, dynamics, character, phrasing, and other nuances (Akbarova et al., 2017). The western choral conducting pattern developed over centuries and focused on clarity and musical expression. Çoşkunsoy and Güdek (2019) found that only beating a conducting pattern was influential in getting musical results but had limitations. The researchers recommended congruent body language with patterns and left-hand nuances or cues. Çoşkunsoy and Güdek discovered this method to be the most effective method of creating musical and emotional moments while still having a clear, unified pattern. This aligned with Van Weelden and McGee (2007), where perceptions of conducting effectiveness increased when the conductor's bodily expressions were stylistically appropriate and congruent to the lyrical and musical message presented. However, Luck et al. (2010) found heightened perceptions of musical expressions correlated with increased pattern variance, pattern amplitude, and speed of movement. Despite a lack of consensus about specifics, these scholars all concurred the pattern sets the tone for non-verbal communication and unification of the chorus. The pattern combines

data from the conductor's face, body language, and alignment to create a heightened level of communication from the conductor to the ensemble.

Conductors can learn from the world of mimes (Luck et al., 2010; Mackay, 2008). Both conductors and mimes use nonverbal techniques that convey specific meaning, and every gesture should have intent and purpose. There should be times of great energy and powerful stillness, where the eyes and faces show the world the conductor or mime's emotions, strengths, and vulnerabilities. The entire body should remain engaged, intentional, and purposeful from head to toe (Mackay, 2008). The breath serves as a unifier for the conductor yet also shows the character and passion behind the next musical moment (Mackay, 2008). These moments provide clarity, contrast, and power behind each movement. Based on Mackay's research, it may be useful for conductors to study the basic principle of mime so that we can continue to focus on our nonverbal gestures and body language.

Body Language

The conductor's facial expression, body language, and alignment give specific instructions, impressions, and directives (Napoles et al., 2020). Napoles et al. found the conductor's facial expression led to greater participant feelings of musical expression and ensemble expression. The participants in this study noted that the conductor's facial and body expressivity lead to great feelings of conductor expression that the character of the gesture. Conductors need to mimic the song's character and emotional intent as a complete body engagement exercise (Carnelia, 2021). The eyes and the body language produce non-verbal signals and cues that provide feedback to the chorus.

Eye contact, specifically the conductor's gaze, may be one of the best conductors' tools in conveying the message, direction, and intent (Poggi et al., 2020). The authors argued that the

conductor could, without any hand gesture, start and stop a chorus, convey emotion, and provide musical feedback, all with basic eye movement. The purpose of their research was to determine the extent to which singers respond to basic eye movements such as raising eyebrows, halfway closing eyes, looking at one specific focal point, or scanning the ensemble.

Poggi et al. (2020) utilized Leonard Bernstein's conducting of Haydn's Symphony No. 88, where Leonard conducted the entire symphony with only his face and gaze. After separating the participants into groups based on their musical abilities, the researchers posed background questions about the importance of conducting gestures and eye contact. Afterward, the participants watched a video-only clip of Bernstein's performance and an audio-visual clip of the same performance. The participants finally answered questions as to specific meanings conveyed.

Poggi et al. (2020) found a statistically significant interaction between experts and amateur musicians and the degree to which they understood the conductor's facial expression and hand movements. Additionally, the researchers found the audio-visual congruence of the conductor's facial expressions matched what the ensemble did; the participants understood the message even more. This data aligned with the findings of other scholars; when the auditory and visual stimuli agree, the audience is more likely to understand the intended message (Frassinetti et al., 2002; Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2002; Molnar-Szakacs & Overy, 2006; Overy & Molnar-Szakacs, 2009). This phenomenon is the mirror neuron principle, where humans naturally respond in kind to stimuli presented (Jessen & Kotz, 2011).

In EEG brain scans, participants reacted significantly more easily and naturally to the emotional and physical presentation than neutral, stagnant presentation (Jessen & Kotz, 2011). Since we respond more dramatically to emotional and physical presence, humans naturally

mimic the stimuli presented (Pietilanen-Caffrey, 2015). Thus, when conductors present an emotional delivery that matches the song's lyrical message, the chorus is more likely to present a similar message, hopefully reaching the audience in a unified, cohesive story. These brain research findings further echo the mirror neuron phenomenon and provide a directive for conductors and choirs.

The extension of the mirror neuron principle, as Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson (1993) and Juslin (2010) referred to as *emotional contagion*. The choir processes and interprets everything visually, vocally, or musically from the conductor. Then, everything the ensemble does by emotionally embodying the piece, singing with lyrically and stylistically appropriate musicality, and connecting with the audience through rapport, transmits a message. The audience responds in the same way. Audiences may applaud, give a standing ovation, or experience a deeper level of emotion. Audiences also show response by supporting the choir financially or through word of mouth. Finally, the audience's response influences what the chorus and conductor do in the performance and throughout the year. This communal relationship between the conductor, ensemble, and the audience is part of Nagoski's model (2019) and suggests that everything the conductor and ensemble do verbally and non-verbally directly impacts the relationship and reaction of all three parties.

Communal Relationship

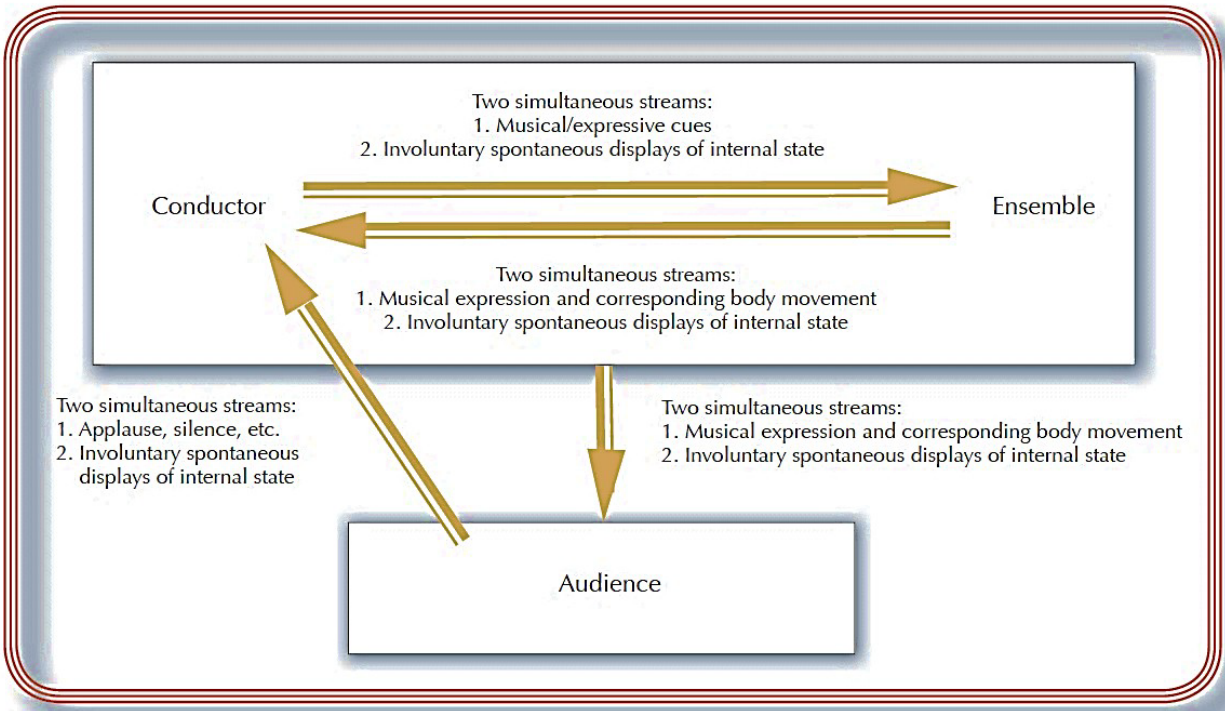
Nagoski created a physical model representing the symbiotic nature of singing, performing, and communicating (2019, p.22). Nagoski sought to create a visual model that encapsulated previous brain research on conducting gestures, director mannerisms, singer expression, and audience response. Everything performed in front of the audience affects the audience's reaction, from how performers take the stage, how engaging the conductor is while not being distracting,

and how well the story comes to life through authentic, believable communication. This aligned with Loftin's non-published data (2022), where barbershop singing judges noted every vocal or visual stimulus impacts the overall outcome of a performance because the stimulus enhances or detracts from the presentation.

Nagoski's (2010) three-fold approach to the flow of communication starts with the conductor's gestures, alignment, musical and lyrical embodiment, and general mannerisms. See Figure 4 for the model. Verbal and non-verbal communication transmits to the ensemble, which simultaneously responds with verbal and non-verbal feedback. This transmission could be in the form of a musical decision or emotional delivery, intentional or unintentional, coming from the conductor's gestures. Therefore, the conductor changes his or her technique based on ensemble feedback. Then, the audience processes, codes, and organizes the data presented by the ensemble and the conductor. Finally, the audience responds or does not respond to the stimuli. Audience response could be clapping, crying, being overwhelmed, or mere silence. The audience's response transmits back to the ensemble and conductor, which then starts the flow of communication again. So, everything the audience, conductor, or ensemble does visually or vocally directly impacts the entire performance. This aligned with Loftin's non-published 2022 research, where participants mentioned every vocal or visual stimulus impacts the overall performance because it either enhances or detracts from the presentation itself.

Figure 4

The flow of communication in a conducted ensemble in performance (Nagoski, 2010)



There are implications of this model which apply to the relationship between the conductor, ensemble, and the audience. First, the clarity of the visual model may be a straightforward way for choral directors to reinforce the communal aspect of singing, performing, and communicating. One challenge for directors with the model is finding the balance between technical gestures and emotional delivery. Younger choirs may need more help with technical cueing and gestures, but more experienced choirs may benefit from a more trusting approach, where the director is there for the pillars of the piece but allow the ensemble to drive the musical lyrical, and emotional communication. Another challenge, although something that Nagoski (2010) mentioned might be valuable is to focus on how the performers want the audience to respond. If the performers remember that, while we may sing toward a conductor, we

are trying to make a human connection between the ensemble, director, and the audience, we need to meet all parties where they are. This cognitive thought may include repertoire choices, reflecting on societal and cultural norms, and being aware of our surroundings. The flow of communication constantly occurs. Based on Nagoski's findings and model, being aware of the constant flow of communication may promote reflection on what we do on stage and how it impacts everyone around us.

One of the essential roles of a conductor is to prepare the choir to sing accurately, stylistically, musically, and expressively (Silvey, 2011). This portion of the literature focused on aspects of a conductor's role: verbal communication, non-verbal communication, and the unification of stimuli. This review further examined the relationship between the conductor, the chorus, and the audience and focused. Further, it discusses how a unified message between all parties heightens the experience for all. This unification can potentially lead to higher satisfaction levels and promotion of the choral ensemble within the community.

While having a degree in conducting or music, in general, may help achieve competency. However, Jansson et al. (2021) found that experience, study, and persistence outweighed the effectiveness in competency-building than just having a degree. Based on their data, conductors should pursue greater personal excellence levels in the conducting pattern and consistently strive to eliminate potential distractions. Another implication is the need for conductors to continuously reflect on what is working and not working during the initial score study phase, during the rehearsal, and during the concert. Since everything a conductor does matters and directly impacts the overall product, as presented in this literature review, the conductor's role as facilitator and creator is to seek higher levels of musical excellence. Seeking out the highest levels of musical

and artistic excellence is a goal many conductors have for their ensembles. This pursuit is just another form of congruence.

Judging

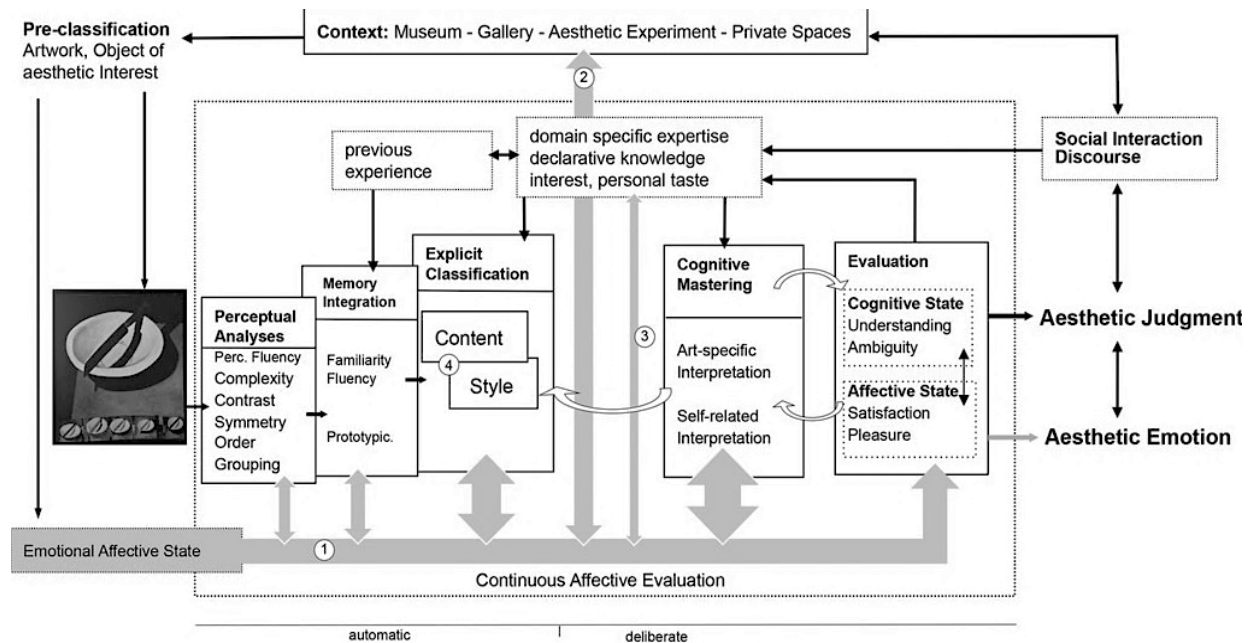
Almost 150 years ago, Hungerford wrote, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” (1878, chap 12). Musicians strive to create art, yet contests require rankings, ratings, and placements (Fiske Jr., 1975). This dichotomy forces music adjudicators not only to see the technical aspects of the performance but also to experience the beauty and aesthetics of the performance as well. Judging systems and performers ideally expect adjudicators to arrive at the most appropriate rating or score for the performance based on the prescribed rubric (Hash, 2012; Springer & Bradley, 2018). Therefore, the adjudicator must find a way to become aware of their preferences and biases to increase consistency.

Evaluating the effectiveness and enjoyment of art and music is a challenging topic in the confines of an adjudication process because art is subjective, whereas adjudicators need to be objective (Fiske Jr., 1975; Hash, 2012). Administrators hire and fire choir directors based on the outcome of their adjudication score, and the stakes are high (Springer & Bradley, 2018). Many choir directors value the need for students to express themselves. However, they often do not feel equipped with best practices or training to feel comfortable teaching their students how to be visually and vocally expressive singers (Loftin, 2022). Additionally, surveying components of vocal and visual expression across state large group performance assessment rubrics, there are discrepancies in language and value of expression (Loftin, 2021). According to Fiske Jr. (1975), this language discrepancy was a factor in interrater reliability and judge inconsistency. So, it is salient to explore how vocally and visually expressive performances impact them and what elements make up those performances.

Judges are another part of the audience because they have all been to performances, have taste opinions, and have preferences of excellent performances (Larrouy-Maestri et al., 2015). The audience has similar life experiences as the people in charge of adjudicating the contest but without the same formal training. However, judges and the audience have all been to concerts, have musical preferences, and have had emotional journeys which shape their response to music (Larrouy-Maestri et al., 2015). As a result, the relationship between the audience and the judge is one in and of itself, as the judging panel is an extension of the audience. Just like the audience, the judging panel filters their emotional response to a song through various channels. Leder et al. (2004) created a model showing these various channels. See Figure 5 for the model. This model differs from the previously presented models because it also introduces concepts such as personal taste and judge's mental state, which is a key portion of the self-awareness needed to be an effective judge (Leder et al., 2014; Wiest, 2002).

Figure 5

Model of Aesthetic Appreciation and Aesthetic Judgments (Leder et al., 2014)



Model of Aesthetic Experiences (adapted from Leder, Belke, Oeberst & Augustin, 2004). Painting by HL.

Barbershop Judging

The Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS), formerly known as the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America, is the largest barbershop singing organization in the world. Founded in 1938, BHS restricted its membership and contests to men only until 2014. Now all genders and all combinations of voices can compete (Society for Contest and Judging Committee, 2020).

The Barbershop Harmony Society solicits applications for potential judges every three years (SCJC, 2020). An interested judge applicant must complete an application, have two judges vet them plus five other current BHS members, and have their district's chairperson recommend them. As a judge applicant, they must complete multiple scoring tests, practice videos, content knowledge tests, and evaluation tests. If successful, they transition to candidate judge status, where they spend two years of practice scoring and evaluating contests. If successful, the candidate receives an invitation to a seminal candidate school, where the candidate can earn the right to be a certified scoring judge. The Society for Contest and Judging Committee (SCJC), overseeing body for judging in BHS, expects judges to compete regularly as a performer, adjudicate two to three contests every year, and recertify every three years (SCJC, 2020). This rigor is extensive in any level of musical adjudication, thereby increasing consistency.

Traditional Music Adjudication

The choral adjudicator's role is to take the rubric, evaluate the choirs based on the prescribed rubric, and provide helpful comments for growth (Wiest, 2002). Further, they must recognize their preferences, values, and biases and be familiar with the latest trends in vocal pedagogy and teaching methods.

First impressions set the stage for what is to come (Carnelia, 2021). These impressions give judges an idea of the confidence level, the experience level, and the quality of the group. Additionally, these first impressions can give insight into song meanings (Todorov & Porter, 2014; Vernon et al., 2014). Also, with singers on the risers, choirs give several first impressions at once, which provides judges with first impressions. Toderov et al. (2009) found people can make judgments of trustworthiness or authenticity within one hundred milliseconds of exposure to a new person's face. For this reason, it may benefit choir directors to reinforce the importance of first impressions when taking the stage and how singers want the audience to perceive them.

Scholars have studied interrater reliability and subsequent adjudicator bias in music contests previously (Álvarez-Díaz et al., 2021; Hash, 2012; Larrouy-Maestri et al., 2015). In their 2018 article, Springer and Bradley found multiple adjudicator bias instances attributed to several factors: lack of adjudicator training, minimal training in the specific rubric right before the contest, and unfamiliarity with the standards and objectives assessed (Springer & Bradley, 2018). This system contrasts starkly with the Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS) model, which requires a minimum of three years of training, constant watching and scoring of practice contests and other playlists, and actively collaborating with competitors (SCJC, 2020). In three years, BHS judges will have viewed and scored several hundred contest videos, whereas Springer and Bradley noted that their participants had 30 minutes of training prior to the contest. Broughton and Stevens (2012) also noted a lack of adjudicator training as a critical cause of interrater reliability. These are two ends of the spectrum, but it is worth investigating training procedures for choral music adjudicators to continue to provide the highest level of objective assessment for students.

Summary and Purpose of the Study

Choosing to be creative and choosing to be vocally and visually expressive are conscious choices (Bishop et al., 2013). However, what it means to be vocally and visually expressive is still debatable. Livingstone et al. (2009) divided the action of emotional expression into four *epochs*: perception, planning, production, and post-production, which implies conscious thought before, during, and after the expression, and others support his process (Brunetti, 2006; Carlson, 2015; Carnelia, 2021; Donnellan, 2018; Esper & DiMarco, 2014). Bishop et al. (2013) advocated for the active preparation of all vocal and visual expressive elements in daily rehearsal to achieve a more confident, authentic performance which echoes Juslin (2010; 2013; 2019). The actor and scholar Sanford Meisner described this confident, authentic, emotional performance as “real living within a set of imaginary circumstances” (1987, p. 87). Esper and DiMarco (2014) took Brunetti's quote even further, stating, “acting is *doing* things truthfully under imaginary circumstances” (p. 3). Thus, judges look mostly for students and teachers to be their most authentic selves possible on stage while conveying the lyrical and emotional message of the piece with good vocal technique. However, before choirs can practice visual and vocal expression and judges can evaluate vocal and visual expression, there needs to be more study on how vocal and visual expression look and sound.

Choral performances include numerous details, and every person plays a direct role in that balance (Nagoski, 2010). There are opportunities for choir directors and singers to look at all aspects of their performance and see what can be more effective, which reflects Carnelia (2021) and Jost (2011), who mentioned the importance of the emotional goals of music being more important than only singing notes and words. Carlson (2015) advocated the importance of quality vocal technique and expression. Carlson said good visual expression without proper technique is

distracting, as is an excellent vocal technique with inadequate or incongruent visual expression. Only when quality, authentic, believable expression partners with good technique can audiences profoundly change lives (Carlson, 2015).

Strait et al. (2009) found increased musical training yielded higher levels of detection of vocal expression of emotion. For this reason, by clarifying what vocal expression of emotion is and training choir teachers, students, and judges, Strait et al. believe that all choristers can be more vocally expressive once a more concrete definition or value set is determined. Additionally, by normalizing and clarifying what vocal and visual expression are and the value they bring, any perceived discomfort or insecurity that may arise from stepping out of one's comfort zone will hopefully diminish (Broomhead, 2005; Broomhead & Skidmore, 2014), encouraging a creative performance mindset.

Humans respond to music in a variety of ways (Juslin, 2010;2013; Reimer, 2003; Sloboda, 2010). Therefore, it is vital to know what ways singers internalize a song's lyrical, musical, and contextual message. Translating this emotion to expression has yet to be discussed within extant literature. Additionally, I discussed the conductor's role in communicating expressive elements and how it influenced ensemble's performance. Then, the ensemble's performance influences how the audience perceives the performance (Nagoski, 2010). Therefore, it may be of importance for choir directors and singers to understand the impact that every action in the concert or contest venue may have an impact on the overall performance. Next, I illustrated differences between multiple types of music adjudication training, where some adjudicators trained for three years to be certified, some for three hours, and some had no training at all. This may lead to discrepancies in validity and reliability of contest results (Fiske Jr., 1975; Hash, 2012; Springer & Bradley, 2018). Finally, due to the subjective nature of

musical emotion, adjudicating vocal and visual expression may be difficult. This could be a reason for it not being included in LGPA rubrics, but the extant literature did not discuss this.

Gaps in literature related to what exactly vocal and visual expression are, especially in a 21st-century choral world. Additionally, a gap exists as to what elements comprise vocal and visual expression, if we can observe these elements, and if we can adjudicate these elements alongside tone, diction, and blend. Finally, a gap exists between how to get singers to internalize the emotion of a piece and how to get singers to express the song's meaning in a manner that is understandable to audiences.

Chapter 3

Method

The purpose of this study was to examine choir director perceptions of vocal and visual expression, determine what constitutes visual and vocal expression, and more concretely define what vocal and visual expression are in a 21st century choral world.

Design

I employed an explanatory, sequential mixed methods design to utilize multiple data sets in succession to explain a phenomenon (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). More specifically, an explanatory, sequential design uses qualitative design and data to explain quantitative data about a phenomenon (Creswell & Clark, 2011). I conducted an online survey with quantitative and qualitative data, which informed the interview protocol for an exploratory qualitative design (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2019) aimed at clarifying and highlighting components of vocal and visual expression in traditional choirs.

Surveys

Based on review of literature and my research questions, I created an online survey. See Appendix A. I asked participants to rate and describe vocal and visual expression in three different video and audio recordings. I piloted the survey with choir directors and non-choir directors to check for construct, face, internal, and external validity, promoting and increasing the validity and credibility of the study. My goal for the pilot was to determine if the study measures what I intend, followed a logical sequence, and made sense to the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Peer auditors who completed the pilot study made a few minor typographical, logistical, and organizational enhancements.

I invited participants for part one of the study from the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), the National Collegiate Choral Organization (NCCO), the Organization of American Kodály Educators (OAKE), and Chorus America. I first sent an initial contact via choir director Facebook pages. In posts to those pages, I included the purpose, participant types requested, IRB approval, and approximate required time. If participants decided to participate, they clicked the link in the post which opened the consent page in an online Qualtrics survey. If participants agreed to participate, they indicated their consent and then clicked the next button to begin the survey.

The first part of the survey asked demographic questions. Question one asked about their choir teaching experience, specifically if they were currently teaching, or had ever taught choral music. If they had no experience, the survey ended, and I deleted their responses. Since this study focuses on choral directors' views, participants without choral experience were not included. The next question asked about their choral adjudication experience. The remaining questions in this section were about their gender identity, race, years of choral teaching experience, and current teaching level.

The second part of the survey asked participants to rate and describe three different choral performances. Participants used a 0 to 100 slider scale to rate performance characteristics. I used a slider scale instead of the traditional Likert scale to minimize bias and increase reliability (Imbault et al., 2018). Participants experienced two choral contest videos, the first performance being video only and the second video being audio only. They typed in their descriptions of elements in each performance that contributed to or detracted from visual expression and vocal expression. After this, participants viewed definitions of visual expression and vocal expression. Based on upon extant literature presented previously, I created the "Visual

Expression Assessment Criterion” or “VEAC” operational definition. Visual expression was defined as “an action performed by students, that visually enhances or detracts from a performance, and is observable, and therefore assessable, by a reasonable person.” Vocal expression was defined as “authentically driven emotional phonations that provide insight into a performer’s intent.”

Next, participants watched a third new video two times. Based on the given definitions, they used the online slider and rated, from 0-100, the extent to which the performance was visually and vocally expressive. The first time I asked solely to evaluate how visually expressive the performance was while only watching the video from the performance without audio. The second time, I asked participants to solely evaluate the extent to which the performance was vocally expressive while only listening to the audio from the performance without video. The final question asked participants to write any comments they wished to make about the topic/project.

Survey Data Analysis

Part one included both quantitative and qualitative data. I analyzed quantitative data with descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, standard deviation, frequencies, etc.) and paired *t*-tests. I used an iterative and recursive data coding and analysis process to analyze the survey’s qualitative data. I also used this data to inform the interview protocol for part two of this study. I used participants’ answers in the survey. Specifically, I completed an initial pre-coding exercise to help shape my interview protocol. As suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2016), I collected and coded the responses. See Appendix C for coding. The survey responses were anonymous, so member checking was not possible. However, I completed four peer audits, where two musicians and two non-musicians looked at my transcripts, codes, and themes to check for

interpretation accuracy. This study was an explanatory, sequential design, and some of the implications from part one transferred to my part two interview protocol. It was vital to maintain trustworthiness and authenticity through piloting, peer audits, coding paper trail, and research triangulation (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

I used SPSS version 27 and the methods outlined in Cronk (2020) and Strunk and Mwavita (2020) to analyze data from part one. I then used descriptive statistics and paired *t*-tests to show any potential significance between the two modalities to gain insight into participant responses to what extent a performance was visually or vocally expressive. Since there were few participants, I was unable to organize or filter the data by subgroups such as ethnicity, gender, or years of teaching experience.

Semi-structured Interviews

Based on the literature and data from part one of this study, I created a semi-structured interview protocol (See Appendix B) and conducted a series of exploratory, qualitative interviews to determine what participants believe creates vocal expression and visual expression in traditional choirs. I invited participants for this study based on their professional renown in the choral music education field. For the study's purpose, “professionally renowned” choir directors have conducted choirs, upon invitation, at the state, regional, or international levels, such as an MEA, ACDA, or NAFME conference. This accomplishment demonstrated directors’ expertise and excellence within the choral community. After receiving a participant’s consent, I emailed participants the interview questions (so they could think through the content) and set up Zoom interviews to discuss the protocol questions.

I asked participants what constitutes vocal and visual expression in traditional choirs. Next, the participant and researcher watched a different choral festival video. At the video's

conclusion, I prompted the participant to discuss the extent to which the performance was visually and vocally expressive, citing specific moments in the song. Additionally, the participants discussed the impact of these vocally and visually expressive moments and how the choir or conductor could improve. This semi-structured interview format allowed for richer discussion, spontaneous conversation, and consistency among participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2019). Each participant was assigned a particular song to discuss based on their background, including race, gender, and teaching level. Songs used during interviews were “Isn’t it Amazing” by Amy Bernon, “True Colors” by arranged by Matthew Brown, “Soon-ah Will be Done” by William Dawson, “Hallelujah” by Shawn Kircher, and “I Want to Die While You Love Me” by Rosephanye Powell. All songs were in English, and all videos provided close performer panning to provide ease of understanding for participants.

Interview Data Analysis

I used purposive and criteria sampling (Tracy, 2019) across several demographic groups including gender, sexuality, years of teaching, and level of teaching. Additionally, I did not allow participants in part two to be participants in part one. The rationale for this is two-fold: I did not want this study to be a dependent mixed-methods study, and I did not want to potentially sway or influence the participants by any videos or definitions presented in part one of the study.

After receiving consent from the participant, I emailed potential participants the interview questions. I then gave the questions to the participants before the interview, so they would have time to prepare for the interview and provide additional comments if they desired. Some participants preferred to look at the questions ahead of time, yet others chose to remain “off the cuff.” I conducted and video recorded the interview via Zoom since participants were from around the country. Upon interview completion, I started an iterative and recursive data coding

and analysis process. I transcribed the interview, some by hand and some using www.rev.com's "artificial intelligence" (AI) transcription service. I edited the AI transcriptions to reflect what was said verbatim. Next, I sent transcriptions and potential quotes to participants for initial member checking. After member checking, I proceeded with open and axial coding, then creating themes using Atlas TI 9. After coding and theme creation, I asked participants to check my work for accuracy and interpretation. These methods of triangulation helped establish researcher trustworthiness and authenticity of the findings and interpretations (Tracy, 2019). Based on the protocol in Miles and Scott (2017), I created a table for clarity, which helped align my research questions with the methodology, data analysis procedures, and expected outcomes. See Table 2 for data analysis procedures.

Table 2*Data Analysis Procedures*

Research Question	Collection Method (s)	Level of Data	Data Analysis Method	Expected Outcome
RQ 1: What do choir directors identify as elements of visual expression, and how do they identify those elements in a recorded choral performance video?	Survey, Semi-Structured Interviews	Qualitative	Member Checking, Memoing, Audit Trail, Peer Audit, Open Coding, Axial Coding, Theme Creation using Hand Coding	Technically driven skills (Face, Body Language, Alignment). Not much discussion of the purpose of why we emote, or story tell.
RQ 2: What do choir directors identify as elements of vocal expression, and how do they identify those elements in a recorded choral performance video?	Survey, Semi-Structured Interviews	Qualitative	Member Checking, Memoing, Audit Trail, Peer Audit, Open Coding, Axial Coding, Theme Creation using Hand Coding	Technically driven skills (Dynamics, Style, Tempo changes). Not much discussion of the purpose of why we emote, or story tell.
RQ 3: Given a specific definition from the literature, is there a significant difference between participant visual and vocal expression scores in choral performance videos?	Survey	Scale	Descriptive Statistics, Paired <i>t</i> -tests	There is no difference between participants' visual and vocal choral performance video scores.
RQ 4: What strategies or structures do choir directors believe should be used to enhance the ensemble's vocal and visual expression experience in rehearsals, concerts, and contests?	Semi-Structured Interviews	Qualitative	Member Checking, Memoing, Audit Trail, Peer Audit, Open Coding, Axial Coding, Theme Creation	More professional development; Judge training; Reevaluate aesthetic standards

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine choir director perceptions of vocal and visual expression, determine what constitutes visual and vocal expression, and more concretely define what vocal and visual expression are in a 21st century choral world. It included two parts: (a) an online survey, and (b) qualitative interviews. These results, while valuable, are not generalizable beyond the participants in this study. However, the findings in this study may help LGPA and NAFME rubric developers incorporate vocal and visual expression.

While it is common for most qualitative research to only have three to five themes (Tracy, 2019), this project is divided into four themes: vocal expression survey data, vocal expression interview data, visual expression survey data, and visual expression interview data. Therefore there are between three and five themes for each of the four domains.

Surveys

Part One included an online survey where participants rated performances and provided qualitative answers to questions about vocal and visual expression. Participants in part one of this study consisted of current and former elementary or secondary choir directors. Participants were recruited, posting to 25 different choir director social media groups. I included the IRB-approved social media survey promotion in the Facebook post and a link to the information letter. Anyone interested in participating clicked a link at the end of Qualtrics noting their consent, which sent them to the Qualtrics survey. I posted the information letter link and social media promotion twice on each group's page, once at the beginning of the survey window and again two to three weeks later.

Demographics

There were 79 responses to the online survey, however only 30 respondents completed the entire survey, with four more completing only the demographics section of the survey. I used the 30 complete responses ($n = 30$) along with the qualitative responses ($n = 2$) for analysis ($N = 32$). Twenty-four (75%) of the respondents were currently teaching choir and eight (25%) were former choir teachers. Sixteen participants (50%) identified as female, 15 (47%) as male, and one (3%) as non-binary. Twenty-eight participants (88%) identified as white, 3 (9%) as black or African American, and one (3%) as Native American. Fifteen participants (47%) primarily taught high school choir, five participants (15%) primarily taught middle school choir, three participants (9%) primarily elementary school choir, and nine participants (28%) primarily taught community choir.

Five participants (15%) had between zero and seven years of teaching experience, eight participants (25%) had between eight and 14 years of teaching experience, four participants (13%) had between 15 and 21 years of teaching experience, six participants had between 22 and 28 years of teaching experience, three participants (9%) had between 29 and 35 years of teaching experience, and six participants (19%) had over 35 years of teaching experience. Twenty-five participants (78%) were members of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), 2 participants (6%) were members of the National Collegiate Choral Association (NCCO), 2 participants (6%) were members of Chorus America, and seven participants (22%) were not a member of ACDA, NCCO, or Chorus America.

Quantitative Results

Participants watched a choir performance on silent and used a slider scale, out of 100 points, to indicate the degree to which the performance was “Visually Expressive.” Then,

participants listened to the audio-only version of the same song and used a slider scale, out of 100 points, to indicate the degree to which the performance was “Vocally Expressive.” See Table 3 for descriptive statistics. Data met the assumption of normality, based on the Shapiro-Wilk test ($W = .301, p = .195$). I used a paired t -test to compare visual and vocal expression ratings. Vocal expression was significantly different from visual expression ($t_{29} = 3.01, p = .005$) with a moderate effect size ($d = .559$). Table 3 shows that vocal expression scores were higher than visual expression scores for the same performance. While there is a significant difference, this is a small sample using a single performance and cannot be generalized to any other performance by the same group or different groups. However, the wide range of scores and high standard deviation may provide insight as to choir director perception of the elements of vocal and visual expression.

Table 3

Vocal and Visual Expression Statistics

<u>Statistic</u>	<u>Vocal</u>	<u>Visual</u>
<i>N</i>	30	30
<i>Mean</i>	75.8	60.3
<i>Median</i>	80	65
<i>SD</i>	15.0	22.3
<i>Minimum</i>	45	12
<i>Maximum</i>	100	100

Table 4*Individual Participant Vocal and Visual Ratings*

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Vocal</i>	<i>Visual</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Vocal</i>	<i>Visual</i>
1	82	20	16	47	72
2	89	12	17	45	55
3	81	73	18	72	75
4	90	40	19	80	75
5	95	85	20	78	100
6	88	28	21	50	60
7	82	65	22	65	70
8	75	91	23	95	80
9	95	95	24	60	80
10	90	50	25	100	45
11	60	24	26	80	60
12	86	70	27	81	36
13	75	40	28	74	58
14	75	70	29	60	50
15	53	70	30	71	61

Qualitative Findings

Additionally, I asked participants to watch two other choral performances, one with only the visual stimulus and another with only the audio. I asked participants to write what elements of vocal expression they heard in the audio-only performance and what elements of visual expression they noticed in the visual-only performance. I hand-coded the data, per Ravitch and Carl (2016), then created themes based on the data. See Tables 4 and 5 for themes and supporting codes. For vocal expression, three themes emerged. For visual expression, four themes emerged. Due to the anonymity of participants, I could not contact them for member checking.

Table 5*Survey Vocal Expression Themes and Supporting Codes*

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Lyrically Driven Vocal Expression</i>	<i>Musically Driven Vocal Expression</i>	<i>Intent</i>
Supporting Code 1	Text	Mood	Stylistically Faithful
Supporting Code 2	Diction	Tone	Performer Authenticity
Supporting Code 3	Articulation	Dynamics	Unity
Supporting Code 4	Text Meaning	Articulation	Contrast

Table 6*Survey Visual Expression Themes and Supporting Codes*

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Authentic Communication</i>	<i>Vocal and Visual Congruence</i>	<i>Purposeful Physicality</i>	<i>Storytelling</i>
Supporting Code 1	Movement for Movement's Sake	Physical Evidence of Vocal Expression	Body Freedom	Mood
Supporting Code 2	Movement for Expression's Sake	Mood	Body Language	Ensemble Staging
Supporting Code 3	Conductor	Unity and Contrast of Face and Body	Alignment	Movement for Expression's Sake
Supporting Code 4		Alignment	Unity and Contrast of Face and Body	Conductor

Vocal Expression Theme 1: Lyrically Driven Vocal Expression

Participants viewed vocal expression through a lens of being lyrically driven. They consistently noted the importance of textual clarity, articulation, and word stress, not just to a technical end but used to convey the lyrical, contextual, and stylistic meaning of the song. Statements such as “Consonants draw me in,” “Dialect stands out and initiates many thoughts,” “The choir had really nice nuance throughout to pain the text,” and “Good use of text to dictate

dynamics” are examples of how vocal expression can be achieved through lyrically driven performances. Conversely, another participant noted of the same performance, “Clear diction and dynamic contrast are notable, but I would not describe this performance as vocally expressive because the lack of syllabic word stress sounds too rigid, which is out of the style.” Other participants agreed that performances which are truly vocally expressive use lyrical and stylistic considerations to enhance the vocal product.

Vocal Expression Theme 2: Musically Driven Vocal Expression

Participants next viewed vocal expression through the lens of being musically driven, taking advantage of the mood of the piece, appropriate tone, dynamic contrast, and musical articulation to enhance the expressiveness of the song. One participant noted some of the technical aspects of the vocal product, “Very relaxed, free, open sound...Onsets and releases were coordinated. Very enjoyable performance.” Another participant the performers’ use of mood and tone to convey the message, “The choir is singing with a ‘spooky’ or *mysterioso* mood. They also completely shifted their tone from the first half to the second to show the mystery into hope, as outlined by the music.” Other participant mentioned, “The basses’ ‘no more weepin’, we could feel the pain of the singers in the sound.” This participant further mentioned this choir used the musical elements of the composition to express the song’s meaning.

Vocal Expression Theme 3: Intent

Finally, participants noted the importance of intent and purposeful vocal expression, employing the use of stylistic fidelity to inform authentic performance behavior, especially using elements of unity and contrast to enhance the vocal product. One participant the performer’s intentional use of musical elements, “There was deliberate diction, a broad dynamic range, and

use of sforzando.” Another participant noted the “variety of dynamics was coupled with a change of emotion.” A third participant noted that while the performer attempted to convey a purposeful message through vocal expression, they were not always successful. “The choir was balanced with a strong dynamic contrast. It seemed a little too technical with not enough freedom in capturing the spirit of the piece.” Another participant echoed the same sentiment, “Great unification of intent expressed through matching vowels, dynamics, and general diction. However, the performance is a little sterile. There’s no variation in the repeats, which offer more opportunity to change things up and make the performance less predictable.” The participants consistently noted the importance of using the musical, lyrical, and stylistic elements of the song to vocally express the composer’s intent to provide an authentic, believable story.

Visual Expression Theme 1: Authentic Communication

Participants viewed visual expression as a form of authentic communication, as a physical embodiment of the text. One participant noticed of the performance, “I noticed natural movement in the bodies, as if the singers were ‘moved by the music’.” Participants commented on the elements of visual expression through authentic communication such as the difference between movement for the sake of music versus movement for the sake of expression. “Singers are aware of what they are singing. Their expressions indicate the seriousness of the artistry.” Another participant noted a different opinion, “The conductor seemed to have more visual expression than the singers. There was lots of swaying by the choir but not many with the same visual expression as the conductor.”

Visual Expression Theme 2: Vocal and Visual Congruence

Participants consistently noted the importance of a congruent message between vocal and visual expression. Several participants mentioned being distracted by individuals who seemed to

be overperforming or not performing. “I was going to complement the chorus on freedom of body movement, but their facial expressions were so neutral (with some exceptions), that it cancelled it out.” Another participant stated, “Singers seem engaged for the most part. Energy and facial expressions seem high for about 50% of singers.” Another common thread of vocal and visual congruence was visual evidence of vocal expression. Several participants mentioned the role that alignment can play in singing. “A few students looked like they were straining in the neck area, which can cause tension in the sound.” Another participant noted, “I noticed that some of what seemed like extraneous movement was hiding possible alignment issues.” Multiple participants noted the importance of alignment, especially when singers get excited to share their story through song. “We want the visual product to enhance the vocal product, not hinder it.”

Visual Expression Theme 3: Purposeful Physicality

Several participants viewed visual expression through a lens of purposeful physicality, where any visual movement, whether planned or unplanned, echoes the song’s musical, lyrical, or stylistic context. One participant stated, “A free body is more likely to produce a free tone than a tense body.” Several participants noted, “freedom of body movement,” “swaying with the music and feeling the meter with their bodies,” and “good facial expressions with the eyebrows and cheeks listed.” However, one participant viewing the same performance noted there was “too much movement that did not make sense with the music. This made them look unprepared.” Another participant mentioned a critique of this performance, “Swaying back and forth does not enhance the visual or vocal product if it is not unified among singers.” Hence, within the same performance, participants concurred that movement is needed to convey the music or message, if there is intent or purpose behind the movement.

Visual Expression Theme 4: Storytelling

Finally, participants view visual expression as a form of storytelling. They noted the conductor transmits visual stimuli to the ensemble, which translates to the audience. One participant noted, “The singers pay great attention to the conductor.” Another said, “Choir members were visually engaged with the director and responded to the music with facial expressions and body movement.” Some participants mentioned storytelling was a key element of what they said or what they wanted to see as an audience member. “Some singers were actively engaged in storytelling, but some were passive.” Another noted “full body commitment to storytelling.” Finally, several participants expressed how ensemble staging or riser positioning can enhance the storytelling. “I like it when directors and singers get creative about using the risers or stage position to convey the lyrical message, whether it is a serious or comedic song.” Another participant conveyed their confusion as to why singers just stand and sing “in formation.” This same participant asked directors to let the fluid, organic nature of music foster creativity as to the most effective way to convey the song’s message.

Semi-structured Interviews

Part two in this study involved interviewing “professionally renowned” choral directors who conducted choirs at state, regional, or national professional conferences. These choir directors did not participate in part one of the study, making this a sequential design. The themes and implications gleaned from part one informed participant selection and interview design. I created a spreadsheet of desired participant attributes based on data from part one. I endeavored to select participants across multiple genders, ethnicities, experience levels, and teaching level to provide multiple vantage points about the same topic.

Demographics

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 participants, all “professionally renowned” choir directors. Of the 12 participants, 10 were current choirs and two were retired. Nine identified as male and three as female. Elementary school, middle school, high school, college, and community choir programs had representation in this study to potentially achieve the widest range of opinions. Ten participants identified as white and two as black with participants spanning most of the United States. Some participants chose to use their real names, whereas some participants chose to have a pseudonym created. I created pseudonyms for those participants, in accordance with IRB guidelines. See Table 7 for participant information.

Table 7

Interview Participant Backgrounds

<i>Participant*</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Choir Level(s)</i>	<i>Pronoun</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>
Lori L.	Retired Choir Director	High School	She/Her	Southwest US	White
Stevie H.	Graduate Student	High School Community	She/Her	West US	White
Maria E.	Conductor Lecturer	Community	She/Her	Midwest US	Black
Christine L.	Graduate Student	High School	She/Her	South US	White
Dr. Jerry M.	College Choir Director	College Community Children	He/Him	Midwest US	White
Deanna B.	Elementary Music Teacher	Elementary Children	She/Her	South US	White
Dr. Kay D.	Choir Director	High School College Community	She/Her	South US	White
Dr. Brittny K.	Music Education Professor	College	She/Her	Midwest US	White
Dr. Henry T.	High School Choir Director	High School Community	He/Him	South US	Black
Dr. Eve P.	College Choir Director	College Community	She/Her	South US	White
Dan W.	DMA Student	College Community	He/Him	Midwest US	White
Peggy L.	Retired Choir Director	Middle School Community	She/Her	Midwest US	White

Note: If participants wished to remain anonymous, I assigned pseudonyms.

Vocal Expression Theme 1: Elements of Vocal Expression

The first emerging theme helps answer research question two about what elements make up vocal expression, according to choir directors. Consistently, participants noted tone, texture, dynamics, diction, tension and release, melodic contour, tempo, articulation, text weight, inflection, mood, language production, and vibrancy as elements of vocal expression. Christine noted a question she uses with her singers, “How can we use our voice to convey the message without relying on external features? That’s vocal expression.” Lori added a challenge regarding prosody in singing, “We have to fight against the vertical structure of written notation, so that whatever the language is we are singing, you need to find out the prosody of the word. Where’s the weight? Where is the important syllable?” Lori echoed a sentiment expressed by several participants, that music is lyrical with natural tension and release. Thus, it is important to enhance the lyrics through various expressive elements.

Vocal Expression Theme 2: Unity, Development, and Contrast

Participants also discussed musicality and its role in vocally expressive performances. Deanna likened singing musically to “watching the beginning part of a flower that’s about to bloom.” Most participants noted that, like Deanna’s flower analogy, music starts in one place, develops, and emerges into something different, whether that is a key change, lyrical development, or tessitura change. Eve gave an example about dynamics.

Dynamics inherently are contrasting. In order to have a *forte*, there has to be a relative piano. Therefore, vocal expression is the continuum of dynamics, which to me, I’ve always labeled as dynamic contrast. In order for something to be something, there has to be something that it is not. So, in order to have a *fortissimo*, there has to be *pianissimo*.

Deanna proposed the demonstration of contrast in order to assess mastery of concepts such as soft and loud or unison and parts. She noted she felt that students had a greater understanding of these skills by demonstrating contrasting skills.

Stevie noted the role of the conductor regarding vocal expression. “I think it’s the job of the conductor to interpret and package a piece in such a way that it becomes relatable to everyone, so they are all singing from their own emotional experiences instead of what has been prescribed.” She believed this an example of unity and contrast together, where each person brings their experiences yet channels it into a cohesive, unified vocal presentation. Brittny echoed a similar sentiment, “That’s the whole beauty of being human. You take individual humans and their individual experiences and expertise, and you put us all together and try to make than an ensemble.”

Several participants provided techniques for unity, development, and contrast. Eve mentioned bringing out melody lines especially when different voice parts sing melody, increased text meaning through articulation, emphasizing important words, de-emphasizing non-important words, and dynamic contrast that echoes the musical and lyrical message. Peggy stated, “When your part has an interesting melody or line, bring it out so we can notice it. Let your body naturally show the interesting melody as well.” As Deanna mentioned, “Contrast is where the music is.”

Vocal Expression Theme 3: Intent

Dan noted, “Intent is the opposite of complacency. Art is made through intent.” All participants mentioned expression is an intentional, purposeful display made through a conscious choice and action. Henry noted, “I think vocal expression is when you interpret what you’re singing, and you display what your interpretations are vocally.” Several participants discussed a

need for discussions of a song's text, style, origin, purpose, and connection to the singers' personal experiences and emotions. Maria further commented, "I think if we talk about what each song means to our singers and how we want to vocally express the song, we wouldn't have to spend time teaching what vocal expression is. It would just come naturally."

Brittney, Maria, and Henry discussed the importance of researching the original songwriter's and arranger's intent. They all mentioned the importance of remaining faithful to the song's style and incorporating social and genre-specific norms into the vocal presentation. After researching the piece, they all have discussions with their singers about how to bring their individual stories to marry the composer's intent. Once a decision has been made about how the ensemble wants to vocally express a song, "Commit to what you're trying to convey" (Maria).

Dan noted, "If a choir is truly invested in the music with their voice and with their soul, the audience will see and feel it." Lori asked the question, "Is this a spectacle of beauty or a display of real feelings?" Maria summarized her ideal situation from the audience's perspective, "How do I, as an audience member connect with your heart so I'm in tune with what you're doing, so our hearts are now beating as one? As an audience member, I want to be part of that."

Vocal Expression Theme 4: Quality Music

Dan mentioned, "In order for choirs to create life-changing performances, both vocally and visually, they need to sing good music. If it's a good sound expression of poetry, then vocal expression is right there in the music." Participants explained good music that contains poetic interest, development, contrast, and pleasing sonorities, offers more room for individual connection and vocal expression. Dan believed, "You can connect to a song or a piece of music in so many different ways, depending on how your brain is wired, whether it is the cool chords, the poetry, or the musical elements." Dan further elaborated,

Vocal expression of a piece really has to do with understanding what's happening in the music and highlighting it with the sounds you're making. Look at the music. What's happening? Where are the arrival points? What's the character of the music?

Christine challenged singers and directors regarding musicality. "It's up to us to really challenge ourselves as to how much musicality we can pull from the score." Several participants noted quality music helps directors and singers personally connect to a piece and be able to convey that message to an audience.

Visual Expression Theme 1: Body Language

The first emerging visual expression theme helps answer research questions one as to what elements make up visual expression, according to choir directors. Participants noted the following elements that may make up visual elements: eyes, eyebrows, facial expression, alignment, changing facial expression to echo the song's lyrical or musical development, visual congruence, singer's focal point, enthusiasm, and outward expression. Several participants noted that visual expression could be evaluated because these elements are observable (Christine, Eve, Henry, Brittny). Kay mentioned, "Your eyes have to show what you're singing." Christine posited, "What does your facial expression show? What are your eyebrows doing? What does your posture look like? Are you moving to the music in a way that complements the music or are you just waiting to move?" Christine further noted, "Does the expression on your face match the emotional content of the pieces or parts of the piece? Visual expression should enhance the musicality within you and the emotion evoked outward."

Another subtheme of body language is the audience's response. Jerry noted, "I'm always talking to my singers about the audience listening with their eyes first. So, if you see an excited choir visually, you expect an excited sound. If you see a blank face, you may not know what you're expecting, but you're not expecting an excited sound." Kay discussed an audience's first impressions, "When a choir walks out to perform, in the first nine seconds, the audience is going to make up their minds whether they're going to listen." Brittny and Dan discussed body language in the performance itself. According to Dan, "We talk about the transcendent power of music. So, when a singer feels the music, they can't help but express it vocally or visually." Brittny noted deadpan faces as being distractions because it breaks from the unity of the message. Brittny further discussed the role of visual distractions, "As an audience member, I'm confused. I have a hard time because I'm not exactly sure what they're trying to convey." Finally, regarding solos or features, Peggy and Kay noted the importance of background singers channeling the soloist's emotions so that everyone is unified.

Visual Expression Theme 2: Purposeful

The second emerging theme of visual expression is purposeful communication. Eve noted about 21st-century performances, "We're heading, especially post-COVID, into an era where visual expression is becoming so much more important as we're thinking about the 21st-century singer and audience member." Kay approached this paradigm,

Our performances can't be boring. I tell my students, "Don't be boring! Make it fun." By "fun," I mean that each singer must be fully engaged in each song, finding personal meaning, and portraying the message of the song so that the audience can engage.

Brittney approached purposeful visual expression as, “What are we trying to portray here, as far as feelings and emotions? What’s the big picture of the song?” So, this is a shift from a “what-focused” performance to a “why-focused” performance.

Other key elements of purposeful visual expression are staging, soloist placement, and performance attire. Eve, Peggy, Jerry, and Brittney all noted that how the visual comes across to the audience directly impacts their ability to understand the message. According to Jerry, “Sometimes the biggest challenge is we can understand a piece to a great detail, but sometimes getting that message to the audience is a big challenge.” Peggy advocated for performance attire unity. This could be a uniform look or a situation where the director provides a theme or color scheme and allows the ensemble to dress within those parameters. She promoted visual expression and unity, like vocal expression where each singer may have a slightly different interpretation of the song but channeled through a unified presentation. Kay echoed, “One of the things with visual expression is working together as a team, being unified as an ensemble, but allowing individual personalities to shine. This allows singers to grow as performers.” Brittney concluded. “It’s me as the director to the choir to the audience, all connected, which is why we need a visual plan.”

Visual Expression Theme 3: Context Driven

According to all twelve participants, before a performer can truly express a song, the directors and singers must understand the origins of the song, including the composer’s intent, the arranger’s intent, the stylistic norms, and source material. Henry advised,

Peruse your music. Study your music and know what you’re singing about. If there’s a story behind what you are singing, know it. Research the composer. Why did he or she write this? What was happening when they composed this? What led the composer to

write this piece? Only then can singers and directors internalize the music and be able to express it.

Henry further elaborated, “Once singers have read about the composer, what they were probably going through, what they were thinking, and how they were feeling, then singers can learn from it and be able to express themselves through the composer’s experiences.” Kay added,

If you, as a performer, if each individual as a performer, and then me as the conductor, have really studied the text together, and we've really talked through it, and we've worked through it, and we've performed through it in rehearsal, it becomes a part of us. We embody it. We make it sing, we make the text sing.

According to participants, one place to look for the music’s intent is the score markings.

Jerry noted,

It can be simply the markings in the score, the idea of the story, and the syllable you’re stressing in that phrase. The score may say *mezzo forte*, and then we’re stressing that syllable here. So, should the entire phrase be the same dynamic level? We’re creating a story arc with rising and falling lines, which depends on style and music.

Jerry further noted the goal of looking at the songwriter’s intent.

Why is a dotted half note written here, and what are you gonna do with it? There’s dynamics written, but it’s a dotted half note. What are you gonna do? Through rehearsal and purposeful attention to the message, it becomes instinctive where I don’t have to tell them what to do. They just make music.

Jerry concluded, “There isn’t a choral composer alive or dead, where the same markings should be interpreted and performed the same way every time. It’s just not a thing, so we can’t interpret that strict meaning on our side.” Therefore, the students and director have musical freedom to

make interpretative decisions, within the framework of cultural, societal, and genre-specific norms. Additionally, directors and singers can apply the composer's intent to their personal lives, so singers can express their personal stories through the music.

Maria challenged directors and singers to express their stories through the song's message. For example, with William Dawson's "Soon-ah will be done," which discusses the composer's longing and hope for a happier life and ridding themselves of the "troubles of de worl'," Maria noted,

Let's just put it in a modern-day context. Yeah, I'm tired of COVID, right? How are we singing this if we were really tired of dealing with Covid? We are tired of masks. We are tired of social distancing. We want to get back to life as normal. So how does that look?

Maria expanded on the song's context, "Asking my choirs what we're singing about is something I do with every choir I stand before because if don't mean nothing to you, it won't mean nothing to me as an audience member." Stevie added her opinion about the purpose of singing in a contextually driven song, "Sometimes we overly focus on how to be perfect rather than focusing on the communication aspect. Music is communication. If you're not saying something, it's not worth doing."

Visual Expression Theme 4: Supporting Visual Expression

The final emerging theme of visual expression was how to support singer and conductor visual expression. According to Stevie, "Singing is such a human thing to do. In the same token, it's an extremely vulnerable instrument to play." Jerry noted a lot of his students lost a lot of the direct repetition, connection from rehearsal to rehearsal, and community building during the pandemic, so it is important to focus on building the safe space where singers feel able to express

themselves through the music. Kay echoed the importance of the rehearsal in building a safe space to have discussions and practice of expression,

Expression has to begin in the rehearsal. You can't just be non-expressive, singing everything correctly. You can't do that and expect a huge leap in the performance. You must begin at the beginning of singing together so that students integrate the technical elements and expression. That's the process of taking musical notation (what's on the page) to making music (what happens within and between singers).

Eve agreed with Kay and expanded by stating, "If visual expression is incorporated in the learning process throughout, it becomes organic with the music so that any movement is completely organic and intertwined with the musical decisions that you're making, rather than being superficial." Dan concluded that once singers and directors continuously practice visual expression each rehearsal, "Trust your training; now sing because you love it."

Another set of subthemes within supporting visual expression is how to get students comfortable expressing themselves. All participants noted this challenge and the worthwhile investment of time and resources to supporting visual expression, but their recommendations utilized different strategies. Brittny starts the conversation about context with her singers and how they about the song's message, whether it is a song about longing, hope, joy, or sorrow. Stevie advocated for the difficult conversations of message and storytelling,

I think teenagers are well-equipped with the capacity to talk about serious things, and I think there is a hesitancy in our field to address potentially weighted or significant content. However, in my experience, kids thrive on that; they embrace that. If we teach vulnerability and healthy forms of expression early, it is easier for singers to emote and express with intent on stage.

Christine approached finding a song's meaning, "Find a personal connection in your own life to connect to the music. It doesn't have to be human. It can be a pet. It can be that cute boy in the K-Pop band that you like."

Other participant recommendations for supporting visual expression involved a knowledge of singer's personality styles and expression styles. Dan noted,

When we're working with choirs in the classical arena, I do think it's important when you're the choir director, you need to know you have so many different types of learners. You might have a lot of music-focused people; you might have a lot of people who need to harness the poetry to express it. You need to understand you have all those different approaches in the room.

Peggy and Kay talked about the importance of students watching expressive performances to gain confidence and expression ideas. Peggy, as a former middle school choir director noted,

I think it would be very worthwhile for adults or high school students to see videos of kids singing because when you talk about what it means to fully express yourself visually, that's it. Kids have no fear. They just show their love for singing.

As a musical elements-focused director, Dan mentioned,

Oftentimes, if you need singers to be a little more visually expressive, get them to be more vocally expressive, and they'll both happen. If you need singers to be more vocally expressive work on something visual, and that'll feed in there.

Finally, Christine advocates to her ensembles, "Stand in your own power. Take up space. Don't be afraid."

The last subtheme of supporting visual expression related to the gift of communication with the audience. Brittny explained,

It is our job as vocalists, choirs, directors to engage the audience. So just like we want to engage our student in learning, we want to engage our audience in that process as well, and we do that visually through again through our faces and through our body. It can get distracting if someone's moving around too much, but I don't want a choir of robots.

Stevie mentioned the following questions as a reflection, "How would I say this if I were just having this as a conversation? How would I communicate this, and how can I put that into my singing without compromising the vocal instrument?" Christine, Lori, and Henry noted the process of researching the song's origins, internalizing the meaning in combination with the singer's personal story, and then outwardly expressing it in a manner that invites the audience to join. According to Henry, "So if vocal and visual expression match each other, I think the message would become that much more effective to the audience and also to the performer because you are performing the way you intended." Christine noted, "The singer's connection with the music is what is going to connect them with whoever is hearing it." Finally, Lori elaborated, "I would encourage our institutions of higher learning to teach our choral conductors not just to beat patterns but to conduct and inspire musicality and artistry."

The data collection process throughout this explanatory-sequential, mixed-methods design started to fill literature gaps regarding what vocal and visual expression are in a 21st-century choral world, what elements make up vocal and visual expression, and the potential for adjudicating and evaluating vocal and visual expression. According to participants in both the online survey and interview process, vocal and visual expression takes an internal emotion, informed by the song's lyrical, musical, or contextual message, and makes that emotion external through expression. Additionally, the data collected in this dissertation study illuminated the role of purposeful attention to the musical and lyrical nuances of songs and purposeful attention to

outwardly conveying these nuances. This mindset transitions the ensemble and director from a “what-driven” performance, where the focus is on notes, rhythms, and dynamics for dynamics sake to a “why-driven” performance, where the focus is on making a human connection with the audience using expressive elements in the song.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this explanatory, sequential mixed-methods study was to examine choir director perceptions of vocal and visual expression, determine what constitutes visual and vocal expression, and more concretely define what vocal and visual expression are in a 21st century choral world. Previously, there was minimal extent literature as to what vocal and visual expression were, especially in a post-COVID world. The findings in both part one and part two of this study start the process of more concretely defining vocal and visual expression, how to adjudicate it, and how to give directors and students strategies to implement vocal and visual expression in their rehearsals, concerts, and contest performances.

Role of Emotion

All participants in this mixed-methods study agreed that singer's emotions and feelings about songs can impact how they express the song, vocally and visually. Some participants favored a more lyrically driven thought process, some a musically driven thought process, and others a contextually driven thought process. This echoes Reimer (2003) and Juslin (2010; 2013) that each person perceives emotional responses to music in different manners. Additionally, the data in this study noted the importance of intentional practice and reinforcement of vocal and visual expression within the rehearsal so students feel comfortable conveying the song's message. For this reason, it may be of value to choir directors to purposefully incorporate elements of both vocal and visual expression to help convey the song's message, allowing students the opportunity to discuss and process the song's message, integrating their personal stories.

Vocal and Visual Connection

Many participants discussed the interconnection of vocal and visual expression. Most participants believed that the visual and vocal components help each other create a clearer message, which agrees with Nagoski's (2010) three-fold approach to the flow of communication, where vocal and visual input transmits from the audience to the conductor to the chorus in a continuous motion. When vocal and visual expression echoes the song's lyrical, musical, and contextual message, the audience receives a more unified, concrete message, allowing the audience to experience the performance, rather than only hearing it. This congruence echoes previous scholarly work (Jessen & Kotz, 2011; Kreifelts et al., 2007; Pan et al., 2019; Loftin, 2022). However, when there is a lack of congruence, according to participants and the literature, the message becomes muddled, leaving the audience confused or focusing on the incongruence, as evidenced by the findings in this study and in previous literature (Jessen & Kotz, 2011; Kreifelts et al., 2007; Pan et al., 2019; Loftin, 2022).

Judging Intent

Based on data in the current study and previous extant literature, for a performance to be vocally or visually expressive, the performer must intend to create vocal and visual expression, and the audience must receive the performance as being vocally and visually expressive. Vocal and visual expression can be observed and evaluated just like tone, diction, and balance. Since the data in this study support the notion that vocal and visual expression are intentional, purposeful acts that transcend accuracy, we may be able to assess it as its own separate criterion that distinguishes good performances from life-changing performances. This allows opportunities for directors to receive judge feedback on how to continuously engage audiences through lyrical, musical, and emotional storytelling. Additionally, if an ensemble is attempting to

connect with the audience through an expressive performance yet still has some technical distractions, the ensemble can still be rewarded for creating emotional moments.

Researching Context

Prior to being able to produce a vocally and visually performance, participants noted the importance of researching the song's musical, lyrical, and contextual message (Beery, 2012; Jost, 2011). According to participants in this study, a song's context can include the original composer, the circumstances around the creation of the text, what the text meant at the time of creation and what the text currently means, and the musical nuances and elements. According to participants, an intentional score study of every piece should occur prior to the first rehearsal. That way, the director knows how they want the piece to be performed. Previous literature discussed the importance of researching the message of a song (Beery, 2012; Jost, 2011; Molnar-Szakacs & Overy, 2006; Morrison & Selvey, 2014; Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004; Seighman, 2015; Silvey, 2011), but this study added more specific elements that may be of importance to choir directors and singers.

Social, Genre, and Stylistic Norms

Choir directors should consider social, genre-specific, and social norms when researching a song's context. Several participants noted the importance of creating a safe space, where each person brings their background, knowledge, and expertise to the ensemble. When singers feel they are in a safe space in the rehearsal, concert, and contest, they may be more likely to express themselves, which echoes Juslin (2010; 2013). Additionally, when singers perform music that they connect to, they may be more likely to perform. Juslin's *aesthetic judgment* (2018) echoed participants' views about the importance of being aware of societal, genre-specific, and stylistic norms. Finally, when singers perform a piece, they have researched and perform it in a manner

that is congruent with the composer's intent and stylistic norms, the audience may receive a clear message that is rooted in authenticity and believability.

Storytelling and Audience Response

Even though singers may have an emotional response to a song, they must convey the message to the audience for the audience to receive it (Day & Thompson, 2019; Gabriel et al., 2016; Huron, 2006; Phan et al., 2001). Participants noted the most vocally and visually expressive performers research the context, determine the song's meaning, and purposefully create strategies to tell the composer and singer's story. Through clear communication, outlining the song's unity, development, and contrast, the audience may receive the clearest possible message. Additionally, this clarity may enhance the audience's experience, as echoed by Huron (2006). Thus, choir directors and singers may benefit from more impactful performances by adopting a purposeful vocally and visually expressive mindset. Finally, state large group performance assessment rubric creators may find benefits of adding a specific category for vocal and visual expression in their rubrics, complete with specific indicators outlined in this study.

Vocal Expression Definition

Based on extant literature, the operational definition for vocal expression used in this study was, "Vocal expression is authentically driven phonations that provide insight into a performer's intent" (Akbarova et al., 2017; Bachorowski, 1999; Bachorowski & Owren, 1995; Cowen et al., 2019; Hakanpaa et al., 2021; Juslin, 2010; 2013; LoVetri, 2007; Patel et al., 2011; Scherer et al., 2017; Simon-Thomas et al., 2009). Incorporating findings, themes, and implications from this study with previous literature, vocal expression may be better defined as the authentically driven phonations that provide insight into a performer's intent to convey a song's lyrical, musical, emotional, and contextual message.

Visual Expression Definition

Based on extant literature, the operational definition for visual expression used in this study was, “Visual expression is an authentically driven, emotional action performed by students that visually enhances or detracts from a performance and is observable, and therefore assessable, by a reasonable person” (Beery, 2012; Jost, 2011; Molnar-Szakacs & Overy, 2006; Morrison & Selvey, 2014; Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004; Seighman, 2015; Silvey, 2011). Incorporating findings, themes, and implications from this study with previous literature, visual expression may be better defined as authentically driven, purposeful actions that physically convey the song’s lyrical, musical, emotional, and contextual message.

Implications and Future Directions

Emotion is an input, whereas expression is an output. In other words, vocal and visual expression are conscious acts, mindsets, and choices that convey the musical, lyrical, or contextual message to the audience in a way that is clear and easy for them to understand. The data and implications in this study could potentially inform large group performance assessment rubrics. By adding vocal and visual expression into adjudication rubrics, those ensembles who present life-changing performances can potentially be rewarded for transcending a technical performance. Additionally, the data in this study may provide insight as to how to recognize, adjudicate, and coach vocal and visual expression. Finally, adding vocal and visual expression into adjudication rubrics, judges can provide specific feedback and coaching to help directors and choirs enhance their expression in the rehearsal room, concert setting, and contest stage.

Future study should include replication of the current study to include more survey participants and interview participants. The explanatory-sequential, mixed-methods design provided opportunities for crosschecking data and implications and provided multiple levels of

data, which was essential for enhancing trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability. This echoes previous work by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011). Additionally, future endeavors should study choral vocal and visual expression in a post-COVID world to determine if data and implications in this study transfer to a generation of choral directors and singers with a unique perspective of social-emotional learning and trauma-informed education. Several participants noted the implications COVID-19 had on choral expression, so future researchers may pursue this line of inquiry.

Finally, professional development creation should be explored about how to research and present it authentically. Additionally, professional development should discuss how to foster an environment of vocal and visual expression in the choral program, how to look at and interpret the lyrical and musical context of songs, and how to unify vocal and visual presentation to better enhance the audience's experience. Loftin's (2022) research supports directors seeking more opportunities to learn about how to implement expression with their ensembles. This study affirms a desire from directors to create life-changing experiences with their ensembles. Hopefully, this study provides some of the road map to assist adjudicators and teachers in this endeavor.

With this dissertation study, I sought to better define vocal and visual expression in a 21st-century choral world. Previous literature discussed the philosophy of musical expression but stopped short of detailing what elements make up vocal and visual expression. The findings in this dissertation highlighted three main steps to translate emotion to expression: *research* the historical context of the song, *internalize* the song's musical, lyrical, and contextual message, and *express* the internalized message in a manner that is understandable by the audience. Additionally, since vocal and visual expression are observable, it can be evaluated alongside

traditionally evaluated criteria such as diction, tone, and blend. Ultimately, vocal and visual expression changes a performer's mindset from a "what-driven" performance to a "why-driven" performance. This provides a differentiation between two performances which may both be scored the highest rating at contests, but one performance transcends technique and potentially creates a greater audience response.

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Appendix A: Online Survey

NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.

INFORMATION LETTER

for a Research Study entitled

"Visual and Vocal Expression in Traditional Choirs:

An Explanatory-Sequential Mixed-Methods Study"

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine visual and vocal expression in traditional choral performances. The study is being conducted by Christopher Loftin, a doctoral student in music education at Auburn University, under the direction of Dr. Jane Kuehne, Associate Professor of Music Education in the Department of Curriculum & Teaching in the College of Education.

You are invited to participate because you are or have been a choral music director in a secondary-level school in the United States, or U.S. Territory, and are age 18 or older.

What will be involved if you participate? If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey that asks your thoughts about visual and vocal expression in choral music, and asks you to view and listen to choral performances to provide ratings based on visual and vocal expression in the performances.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The potential risk or discomfort you may have in this study is completing an online survey asking your specific views about visual and vocal expression in choral music.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? There are no direct benefits to you. However, your answers may help provide information about this subject area to choral music directors and choral educators.

Will you receive compensation and/or are there any costs for participating? There is no compensation for completing this survey. There are no costs associated with this survey.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study as long as your data is identifiable. Once you submit your data, it is anonymous and cannot be withdrawn. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the College of Education, the Department of Curriculum & Teaching, the Music Education Program, nor the Department of Music at Auburn University.

Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by ensuring all collected data is anonymous and encrypted for storage. Information collected through your participation may be used for future research, poster presentation, conference presentation, and/or publication.

If have questions about this study, please contact Christopher Loftin at csl0039@auburn.edu or his advisor, Dr. Jane Kuehne at kuehnjm@auburn.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

The Auburn University IRB has approved this study, Protocol #22-225, from 05-09-2022 to _____.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION ABOVE, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE. YOU MAY PRINT THE INFORMATION LETTER SCREEN FOR THIS SURVEY TO SAVE A COPY OF THIS LETTER FOR YOUR RECORDS.

Do you wish to continue?

- Yes, I wish to participate.
- No, I do not want to participate.

The Auburn University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
Document for use from
05/09/2022 to -----
Protocol # 22-225 EX 2205



<PAGE BREAK>

Have you ever taught or are you currently teaching a performing choir class?

- Yes, I currently teach a performing choir class.
- Yes, I have previously taught a performing choir class but not am currently doing so.
- I have never taught a performing choir class.



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Are you a member of either of these organizations? Check all that apply.

- American Choral Directors Association (ACDA)
- National Collegiate Choral Organization (NCCO)
- Chorus America
- Organization of American Kodaly Educators (OAKE)
- I am not a member of any of these organizations.

What level of choir do you primarily teach? Please select only one (1).

- Elementary School Choir
 - Middle School Choir
 - High School Choir
 - College Choir
 - Community Choir
-

How many years of teaching experience do you have? Please select only one (1).

- 0-7
 - 8-14
 - 15-21
 - 22-28
 - 29-35
 - Over 35
-

Which of the following best describes you? Please select only one (1).

- Asian or Pacific Islander
 - Black or African American
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Native American or Alaskan Native
 - White
 - Multiracial or Biracial
 - A race/ethnicity not listed here
-

Which of the following best describes you? Please select only one (1).

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Transgender
- Intersex
- I identify differently



<PAGE BREAK>

You will watch or listen to four choral performance videos. After each, I will ask you to describe elements of either visual or vocal expression. For the final video, I will also ask you to rate the performance based on visual and vocal expression.

Please watch video one:




****Note: There will be no audio, only video.**

**Embedded video of choral performance hosted on
au college of education Vimeo account.**

Please describe the elements of VISUAL EXPRESSION you observed within the performance video.



<PAGE BREAK>

▶ 0:00 / 4:05   

Please listen to audio two.

Please describe the elements of VOCAL EXPRESSION you observed within the performance audio.

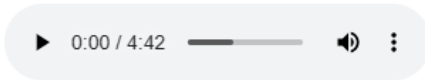
→

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Before listening to audio three, **first read this definition for VOCAL EXPRESSION:**

"Authentically driven emotional phonations that provide insight into a performer's intent."

Please listen to audio three:



With the definition provided above in mind (for visual expression), please rate the extent to which the performance was VOCALLY expressive.

Not all all Vocally Expressive					Somewhat Vocally Expressive						Extremely Vocally Expressive
0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	

Vocal Expression



<PAGE BREAK>

Now you will watch the performance that of which you just listened. Before you do, please first **read this definition for VISUAL EXPRESSION:**

"Visual expression is an authentically driven, emotional action performed by students, that visually enhances or detracts from a performance, and is observable, and therefore assessable, by a reasonable person."

Please watch video three (below):

**Note: There will be no audio, only video.



Embedded video of choral performance hosted on au college of education Vimeo account.

With the definition provided above in mind (for vocal expression), please slide the scale to rate the extent to which this performance was VISUALLY expressive.

Not at all Visually Expressive

Somewhat Visually Expressive

Extremely Visually Expressive

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Visual Expression



<PAGE BREAK>

Thank you for completing this survey. If you have comments about this topic or this survey please feel free to type them below.



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We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.

Initial Communication to Potential Survey Participant

My name is Christopher Loftin (csl0039@auburn.edu), and I am a Ph.D. Candidate in Vocal Music Education at Auburn University completing my dissertation research under the direction of my advisor, Dr. Jane Kuehne (kuehnjm@auburn.edu). The purpose of this study is to examine choir director perceptions of vocal and visual expression, determine what constitutes vocal and visual expression, and more concretely define what vocal and visual expression are in a 21st century choral world. Please consider participating in my dissertation research study by completing my online survey titled, “Vocal and Visual Expression in Traditional Choirs: An Explanatory-Sequential, Mixed-Methods Design.” It should take approximately 15 minutes and your answers will be completely anonymous. More information is in the information letter on the first page of the survey (link below). If you choose to participate select “Yes, I wish to participate in the study.”

Thank you for your consideration!

Christopher Loftin

Recruitment Email to Potential Interview Participant

Dear [Dr. Mr. Ms. Participant Name],

My name is Christopher Loftin (csl0039@auburn.edu), and I am a Ph.D. Candidate in Vocal Music Education at Auburn University completing my dissertation research under the direction of my advisor, Dr. Jane Kuehne (kuehnjm@auburn.edu).

I am conducting a series of interviews aimed to examine choir director perceptions about vocal and visual expression and strategies for implementing vocal and visual expression in contests and rehearsals. I have attached an information letter with detailed information about this study. You were selected to participate because you are an accomplished and impactful choral director, whom I deeply respect. If you are interested in participating, interested, please reply to this email, or send me a separate email, letting me know you consent to participating.

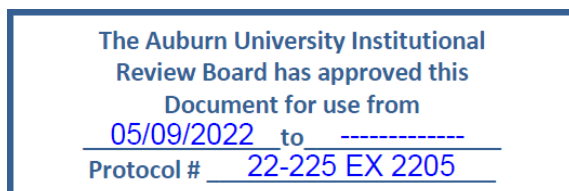
In your email, please also let me know if you consent to me using your real name in this study, or if you would like me to use pseudonyms.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you,

Christopher Loftin

PhD Candidate, Choral Music Education Auburn University, Alabama csl0039@auburn.edu



Appendix B: Consent Document and Interview Script/Protocol



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION CURRICULUM & TEACHING

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMATION LETTER

for a Research Study entitled

“Visual and Vocal Expression in Traditional Choirs: An Explanatory-Sequential Mixed-Methods Design”

You are invited to participate in a research study, examining choir director perceptions of vocal and visual expression, determining what constitutes visual and vocal expression, and more concretely defining what vocal and visual expression are in a 21st century choral world. The study is being conducted by Christopher Loftin, Choral Music Education PhD Candidate at Auburn University under the direction of Dr. Jane Kuehne, Associate Professor in the Auburn University Department of Curriculum and Teaching. You were selected to participate because you are an impactful and well-respected choir director. Participants must be at least 18 years of age.

What will be involved if you participate? Semi-structured interviews will be conducted and audio and video recorded via AU Zoom and should last between 30 minutes to an hour. After transcription, you will be asked to review and verify the accuracy and intent of your interview, and I may conduct a short follow up interview to clarify data. Total time should be approximately two hours.

Are there any risks or discomforts? This research study poses no more than minimal risk, which is defined as “...the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research is not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or test.” 42 CFR 46.102 (i)

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? There is no compensation for participating in this study, though benefits to others may include guidance and future direction about choral music adjudication practices.

Are there costs or compensation for participating? There are no costs nor is there compensation for participating in this study.

Your data will be anonymous unless you consent to revealing your real identity. I will anonymize your data using pseudonyms unless you consent to revealing your real identity using the process outline in the final paragraph below.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time in the process before, during or after your interview(s), by notifying the researcher. If you choose to withdraw, any data you provided can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Once your data is anonymized, and your interview recordings are deleted, it cannot be withdrawn since it will be unidentifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the College of Education, the Department of Curriculum and Teaching, nor the Music Education Program.

Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous unless you consent to have your real name used. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by not collecting any identifiable data, unless you consent. Information collected through your participation may be used for journal submissions, presentations, or dissertation.

If you have questions about this study, please contact Christopher Loftin at csl0039@auburn.edu or his advisor Dr. Jane Kuehne at kuehnjm@auburn.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION ABOVE, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY.

IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE REPLY TO MY INITIAL INVITATION EMAIL OR SEND ME A SEPARATE EMAIL (csl0039@auburn.edu) INDICATING YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE.

IN YOUR EMAIL PLEASE ALSO INDICATE IF YOU CONSENT TO HAVING YOUR NAME/IDENTITY REVEALED OR IF YOU WOULD PREFER I USE PSEUDONYMS TO ANONYMIZE YOUR DATA.

YOU MAY PRINT A COPY OF THIS LETTER TO KEEP FOR YOUR RECORDS.

Christopher Loftin 5/13/2022

Investigator Date

Email: csl0039@auburn.edu

5040 HALEY CENTER
AUBURN, AL 36849-5212

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www.auburn.edu

The Auburn University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
Document for use from
05/09/2022 to _____
Protocol # 22-225 EX 2205

Participant Recruitment and Consent

Once participants are recruited and they have agreed to participate, I will individually email each participant the consent documents (including research consent and the audio/video recording consent document). Once I receive the signed consent documents, I will schedule individual interviews.

Introduction to the Interview

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Christopher Loftin, and I am a PhD student in Choral Music Education at Auburn University. This interview is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my PhD. This interview will ask to watch two videos of choral performances and discuss the elements of visual expression and vocal expression within each performance. You were selected because of your experience as a choral director and helping choirs create emotionally authentic, believable performances.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. Remember that you may withdraw your participation or modify the extent to which you participate at any time, with no repercussions. This interview will be conducting via Zoom and will be audio and video recorded for transparency and researcher ability to create a verbatim transcription. The interview should last about an hour. The interview will consist of about several open-ended questions about your background and philosophy of vocal and visual expression. You will then watch the video in its entirety, provide feedback on the performer's overall visual and vocal expression then watch the video again, indicating specific instances of visual and vocal expression, pausing the recording as needed. You have seen the questions ahead of this interview so that you know what to expect. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? *[I will answer any questions asked.]* With your permission, we will begin the interview.

Interview Questions

[I will ask probing and/or clarification questions, as needed.]

1. Describe your chorus experience as a singer, a chorister, and a choir director.
2. Give an overview of your experience as an honor choir director, state/national Music Educator Association or Choral Director Association conducting performance, or other high level conducting honor.
3. Describe what makes a performance visually expressive.
4. Describe what makes a performance vocally expressive.
5. In your opinion, can a performance be visually expressive but not vocally expressive or vice-versa?

Next, I am going to ask you to watch two complete choral performance videos. Please let me know if you personally know either of the two choral directors in these videos.

Let's start with the first video.

[I will play the video from start to finish, without interrupting, and without talking.]

1. Can you discuss the overall visual and vocal expressiveness of the ensemble?

[I will ask additional probing or clarification questions.]

2. Now, let's watch the video again. This time I'd like you to specifically identify actions and/or missed opportunities for visual and vocal expression. We will pause the recording as needed so you can talk about what you see.

Thank you so much for participating in this study. You have completed everything that I had planned in this interview. Is there anything you'd like to add, or comments from your own background you'd like to talk about regarding this topic?

Thank you again. I really appreciate it.

Christopher Loftin

Transcript Check

After I complete the transcripts for each interview, I will have each participant view their transcript to provide any corrections that need to be made.

The Auburn University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
Document for use from
05/09/2022 to -----
Protocol # 22-225 EX 2205

Appendix C: Part One Vocal Expression Pre-Coding

Vocal Expression	
<p>Had really nice nuissance throughout to paint the text, however diction could have been improvised through the piano/pp sections.</p>	
<p>This performance was chock full of vocal expression. They set the mood of the song with mystery and anticipation in the opening section, but it was difficult to decipher the lyrics in the softer passages. The variety of dynamics was coupled with a change in emotion. It moved from anticipation to declaration and conviction. The change in vocal textures helped to deliver the message. The bass's "no more weepin" - we could feel the pain of the singers in the sound. Unison at the end strengthens and unifies the choir until the joyful ending major chord.</p>	<p>Pronunciation Contrast</p>
<p>Choir is singing a "spooky" or Misterioso mood; A complete shift in the musical expression in the second half of the musical piece</p>	<p>Tone Contrast</p>
<p>Energized initial consonants, stark dynamic contrasts, varied use of vibrato, varied articulation in response to the meaning of the text, attention to syllabic stress, rich and vibrant tone</p>	
<p>There is an intensity that is present in the sound, whether it was expressed softly or loudly.</p>	<p>Dynamics</p>
<p>Dynamic contrast; more emphasis on certain consonant sounds for emphasis, using slight dialect over English text ("de" for "the"; "wid" for "with"; eliding -ing endings)</p>	<p>Text Meaning</p>

Mood

Lots of dynamic contrasts, and text painting. Great diction and articulation.
Very relaxed, free, open sound. Liked the turn on world for the ladies. Onsets and releases were coordinated. Very enjoyable performance.

There was dynamic change, open sound when it was full and loud, in the softer spots they were more controlled and not as free.

Balanced choir didn't really hear any part louder than another....a few voices "stuck out" a bit.

They used the dynamics to convey the story. I think I believed the softer parts more than the loud...more energy in the words. Loud was good but they were singing about being with God and Happy....didn't sound as much like the words.

Clear diction, use of text to dictate dynamics

Balanced - strong dynamic contrast - seems a bit too technical - not enough freedom in capturing the spirit of the piece. The last stanza more excitement. The first soprano obligato part was weak.

The percussive element added via certain pronunciations of the lyrics keep the piece moving forward. The A section and how it is performed brings a sense of soft certainty, while "I want to meet my mother" and the overall B phrase is a stark contrast, being a determined statement (almost a demand).

"No more women" being that same demand but deteriorating to a soft cry or sob.

"I want to live with God" that same demand, but the Picardy third at the same intensity brings hope and emotional resolution.

Consonants draw me in
Dialect stands out and initiates many thoughts
Dynamics keep me interested even though there is repetition
Tone quality changing when the text demands it

Contrast Dynamic

Deliberate diction, a broad dynamic range, use of sforzando

Tone

Distraction

Unity

Articulation

Unity

Text (Lyrics)
 Story-telling

Authenticity

Stylistic Interp
 Contrast

Intent

Stylistic
 Tone
 Shifts - Contrast
 Text

clear diction and dynamic contrast are notable. But overall I would not describe this performance as expressive because the lack of syllabic stress sounds too rigid and the spread vowels ("leave weeth gad" "dee troubles of dee world") are completely out of style.

Stylistically Appropriate

Text Meaning

Diction
Diction was good. Dynamics were good. Pronunciation is good

Dynamic contrast
Good diction

Clarity
Contrast
Stylistically Faithful

Pronunciation

Great unification of intent expressed through matching vowels, dynamics and general diction. But the performance is a little sterile. The dynamic choices are essentially either loud or soft. There's no variation in the repeats, which offer more opportunity to change things up and make the performance less boring and predictable.

Intent
Authenticity
(Stylistically Faithful)
Contrast

"World" has an [i] behind it/ very bright sound. Healthy tone in bass and treble voices (no pushing). Trebles take a brighter approach than bass voices. Consonants are clear, great dynamic contrast. Flipping between African American dialect and a more Western approach

Tone
Stylistically Faithful

Pronunciation
The attack of the word soon, dynamic differences impact the emotional verbal/ auditory expression. The phrases build intensity.

Pronunciation
Textual Clarity?

Emotion is Output, not Code (or Input)

The lyrics "de troubles of de world" are the vernacular that African-Americans would have probably sung originally and the singers sing them with a hushed sound. The "I want to meet..." sections are significantly louder with a soprano descant in one small section.

Stylistically Faithful

Unity

In "de troubles of de world" sections, the singers use vernacular pronunciations, which is not really appropriate for white American singers. Then, in the "I want to meet..." sections, they sing with a dark hooty vocal sound, like a traditional European choir, which is not appropriate for a spiritual.

Tone

Stylistically Faithful

From a standpoint of just "vocal expression," this performance does not do much expressing. The arrangement is sung well, even excellently, but the expression of the vocal does not add to the meaning of the text. All of the nuts and bolts of choral technique are very good, but the arrangement does all of the expressive work.

Authenticity

Diction was very crisp in the chorus sections which reflected the desired mood. Dynamic variety was used to express text and create interest.

A variety of dynamic expression employed. Fortes and pianos were used to good effect.

The dynamic contrast between sections was significant in expression. In honesty, I wish there had been more. It is as if there are two options rather than a spectrum of volume and expression.

Contrast

Feels very correct. A little vertical. Authenticity

Very expressive in forte section. Dynamics

Diction is perfected and expression is effective with proper dynamics.

Authenticity
Stylistically Faithful

Codes

Lyrics

~~Phonunciation - How we say words~~

Contrast (Shifts)

Mood

Tone

Dynamics

Diction - Clarity of Speech

Articulation (Act of expressing coherently)

Text Meaning (Lyrics)

Stylistic Faithful

Unity

Performs

Authenticity

Intentional Pronunciation (Mood)

- Why and how we sing text

Appendix D: Part One Visual Expression Pre-Coding

Engagement Emotion is an Output.
Expression

Visual Expression	
<p>The conductor was very expressive, and the choir swayed a lot, but I personally didn't feel an emotional connection through their facial expressions.</p>	<p>Conductor Face Authenticity Physical Mot</p>
<p><i>Incredible</i> Physical expression was inconsistent among the singers. Some had a lifted facial countenance, and some looked as though their dog had just died. The body movement was inconsistent as well. Some moved their bodies while other stood completely still. The body movement, however, did not seem attached to the music. Swaying back and forth does not enhance the visual or vocal product if it is not unified among singers AND attached to the message of the song. This body movement felt like it was imposed, like someone told them to move their bodies, but not in a way that enhanced the music.</p> <p><i>* Quote</i></p>	<p>Visual Congruence Face Mot for Physical Mot Mot Authenticity Sake Conductor</p>
<p>Choristers emoting; moving; I see smiles and faces of engagement. Conductor is making circular gestures with his hands;</p>	<p>Face Mot for Mot Sake Conductor Conductor Mot</p>
<p>Bright eyes, engaged faces, gentle and free upper body movements, smiles from some individual singers</p>	<p>Visual = Face Freedom Mot</p>
<p>I noticed natural movement in the bodies, as if "moved by the music". Several faces were also expressive. Seemed to be something joy-filled.</p>	<p>Authenticity Physical Mot = Visual</p>
<p>I saw a choir standing in formation. As they sang many of them moved - some seemed to move much more than others and some not at all. It is difficult to adequately describe if their movement was indeed a visual expression of the music since there wasn't audio included. The video was filmed far enough away from the singers so that judging the expression on their faces was difficult. I noticed that some of the what seemed like extraneous movement (since we could not hear the audio) was hiding possible alignment issues (singers with a forward head posture or even a head tilted to the side; internally rotated shoulders)</p> <p><i>Great Quote</i></p>	<p>Riser Position Visual = Physical Mot Authenticity Alignment Mot for Mot Sake Physical Evidence of Vocal Expression</p>

* Their posture was in alignment. A few students looked like they were straining in the neck area, which may cause tension in the sound. I like when singers feel the freedom to move, or sway as needed to me this releases tension and allows the singer to breathe with ease.

Physical Evidence of Vocal Expression
 Alignment
 Freedom
 Physical Mut
 Mut for Musical Reasons

The conductor seemed to have more than the singers. Lots of swaying by the choir but not many with his expression... they looked to have good vocal technique mouth open, relaxed but when he was joyful and smiling, I did not see that on their faces. Some did have smiles more towards the end.

Visual \approx
 Mut for Mut Sake
 Mood
 Face

I see singers using their eyes and bodies to express the text. There are smiles and joyful spirits throughout the performance.

Mut for Expression
 Face
 Visual \approx

Singers are aware of what they are singing. Their expressions indicate the seriousness of the artistry.

Awareness of message
 Mood
 Intert

Well for one, I can tell there's an organic nature to the piece based on the members shifting individually. As far as the conductor, the fluidity of his pattern with moments of strength make me believe the piece is something with a powerful yet beautiful tone/ message

Authenticity
 Physical Mut
 Visual \approx
 Conductor
 Mood

I found myself watching the most action which was the conducting. I was also drawn to the more expressive faces and noticed the faces that were not as expressive

Conductor
 Face
 Visual \approx

Body movement engaged facial expressions,

Mut
 Face

I was going to say freedom of body movement but their facial expression is so neutral (with some exceptions) that it cancels that out. The conductor is showing a lot, but I do not see the Chorus responding to the same extent physically. Would be interesting to hear how they are responding.

Freedom of Body
Face
Visual
Conductor

Facial expressions and body movement.

Face Mut

Contrast
Optimal

Too much movement from the participants. Makes them seem unprepared and not professional

Natural
Authenticity
Mut

Choir did not reflect directors movement

Visual
Mut

*

There was evidence of some involvement with physical movement and facial expression but I observed the director was more involved in the music than the singers. His hand conducting style of 4/4 was generally static and did encourage a total involvement from 100% of the singers. He could get more involvement with attention to his his gestures and body movement.

Visual
Mut
Face
Conductor
Freedom
Mut for Mut sake

It would be really helpful to be able to enlarge the video to fill the screen. That option isn't available.

Face
Conductor

The singers pay great attention to the conductor. It's nice to see so many eyes, which is why memorization is so helpful to communication. But I don't see much expression on the faces of the singers. I can't tell the general mood of the piece they're singing because they're not communicating much (or any) emotion as they sing.

Visual
Mood
Mut for Mut sake

Singers seem engaged for the most part. Energy and facial expressions seem high for about 50% of singers. Vowel shapes seem mostly unified, some singers aren't dropping their jaw which could affect tone. Diction seems to be implemented.

Visual
Energy
Face
Physical Evidence of Vocal Expression
Unity

Considerable physical movement among the singers. Most facial expressions seemed to fit the piece.

Mut Face Authenticity

Performers were swaying with the music and feeling the meter with their bodies. Good facial expression with the eye brows and cheeks lifted. They were emoting the feeling of the text.

Mut
Mut for Expression
Face
Authenticity

<p>Expressive conducting singers swaying at various speeds and intensities, the excellent singer diction was visible.</p>	<p>Conductor Mut Visual \approx Physical Evidence of Vocal Expression</p>
<p>Visually, the group was engaged with what they were saying. Difficult to pinpoint what that was, but they were nonetheless engaged.</p>	<p>Authenticity Mut</p>
<p>Choir members were visually engaged w/director, and responded to the music with facial expression and body movement.</p>	<p>Mut Conductor Face Visual \approx Physical Evidence of Vocal Exp.</p>
<p>Some singers were actively engaged in expressive storytelling. Some singers were passive. Conductor was actively engaged.</p>	<p>Storytelling Conductor Visual \approx</p>
<p>The singers were engaged in the music and with the conductor. Their bodies were free and moving and it was clear that a healthy sound was being produced. Their faces were all pleasant and while expressive did not draw unnecessary attention.</p>	<p>Conductor Freedom Physical Evidence Face Physical Mut</p>
<p>My first thought is that they aren't moving together. It seems each singer is performing individually rather than sharing an experience. Wingate University choirs give great examples of moving and experiencing the music together. There are lots of YouTube videos!</p>	<p>Visual \approx Authenticity</p>
<p>Full body Movement, Facial engagement Focused expression. Raised eyebrows. Engaged expression. A story teller type face</p>	<p>Storytelling Mut Face Visual \approx Mut-to-Mut Sake</p>
<p>Singers were actively engaged but not very expressive. Expression is limited by students swaying. They should feel head space and allow the head to control body</p>	<p>Mut for Mut Sake Physical Evidence</p>

Freedom of Body

Authentic Communication - There

Visual Expression

Codes

Authenticity

Mut for Mut Sake

Riser Position

Mut for Expression

Alignment

Conductor

Facial Expressions

Body Language (Alignment)

Physical Movement

Physical Evidence of Vocal Expression

Mood

Storytelling



Excellent singer position was visible.
Visually, the group was engaged with what they were doing. Difficult to pinpoint what that was, but they were noticeably engaged.
Choir members were visibly engaged w/ director, and responded to the music with facial expression and body movement.
Some singers were noticeably engaged w/ director, and responded to the music with facial expression and body movement.
The singers were engaged in the music and with the conductor. Their bodies were in a ready position and they were clearly listening. Their facial expressions were clear that a healthy sound was being produced. They were all present and their expressions did not give unnecessary attention.
My first thought is that they aren't moving together. It seems each singer is performing individually rather than sharing an experience. Although University choir give great examples of moving and experiencing the music together. This one lot of YouTube videos.
Full body movement/facial engagement. Focused expression. Hand, eyebrow, forehead expression. A holy father face.
Singers were actively engaged but not very expressive.
Expression is limited by student's singing.
They should feel head space and allow the head to control body.

Appendix E: Part Two Interview Transcripts

Stevie H. Interview – 9/19/22

Christopher Loftin: Okay. Well, then, we'll get started. Um. So first in a nutshell, because this could be one of the largest things. What is your background as a singer, as a chorister as a director?

Stevie H.: So, music was always in my house growing up. My mom played piano, Church music was a big thing in the house growing up, and so I was always intrigued by music, but I never really took it seriously in any way. The summer before my senior year of high school, I had an amazing summer experience with basically what was a six-week Nerd camp for lack of a better description, and I had a really meaningful musical experience there. And in that same summer I decided that I wanted to be a teacher. Prior to that I was thinking about doing architectural engineering or law. So it was a very different direction.

Stevie H.: Yeah, that summer I just pivoted on a dime, and I sang in choir in high school. But again it was like peripheral. It wasn't. I want to be a singer. I want to be a choir director, or whatever. Then I went to Auburn for undergrad. I got into Chamber Spring semester, my freshman year, because coming in as a freshman and I was terrible because I had never really taken music seriously. And um yeah, I learned and grew a lot under the Powells at Auburn, and coming out of Auburn, I had the option to either teach at a position in Huntsville or go get the masters, and So then I went, and I did my master's at the University of Missouri in Choral Conducting because I knew, like the end goal for me, was to get the doctorate, and so, going ahead and getting one more degree out of the way, felt like the wiser choice. But I still had some steam in me from undergrad.

Stevie H.: And then, after learning and growing at the University of Missouri, I taught on the west side of Chicago High School in North Longville. I started a choir program there and built that up for two years, and then I moved to Florida, where I taught for four years, while also serving as the associate conductor for a symphony chorus, and I was also affiliated with a boy choir organization in Fort Lauderdale for my first year down there and then it was the decision to come back to school and start the doctorate and I've been at USC ever since I've led the USC Apollo chorus, which is a tenor base ensemble at the University Chorus, which is a beginner level makes ensemble.

Stevie H.: And then this year I'm teaching choral conducting instead of directing an ensemble. And in addition to that, I am the artistic director for the long Beach.

Christopher Loftin: That's amazing. I didn't know you had the background. I didn't know you went to Missouri.

Christopher Loftin: yes, fascinating. So um, okay. So now we start get to a little bit of the meat potatoes of this. What makes, in your opinion, what makes a performance visually expressive,

Stevie H.: It definitely starts with facial expression, I think in particularly in the classical choral world, choirs have a tendency to look very stale, but it's not like when you're in an orchestra. The audience can't see their faces, anyway, because they're sitting down, and they're all staring at their music stands, and they're here playing their violin or whatever, it's not the same. You know that singing is such a human thing to do. It is the original instrument.

Stevie H.: In the same token it's an extremely vulnerable instrument to quote unquote play. There's that cliché, saying, the eyes are the gateway to the soul, or whatever like, Yeah, that's saying is super catchy and terrible. But there's truth in it, and that if your eyes are not telling the story, and if you're not connected emotionally, that is not going to subconsciously translate, It's not so much like. Oh, if it's happy music, you need to be smiling. If it's sad music, you need to look forlorn with your eyebrows, like whatever there aren't prescribed facial expressions. But facial expressions that are driven behind the emotional intent, and a lot of choirs have a tendency to focus so much in rehearsal on accurate notes and rhythms that the emotional connection to the music is not at the forefront of their minds, particularly with younger ensembles. If you think middle School high school, they're so focused on It's got to be perfect. How to be perfect rather than focusing on that communication aspect. Music is communication. If you're not saying something, it's not worth saying so. Yeah. I mean it starts with facial expression, and then you have to consider the style of the music, the heritage of the music.

Stevie H.: For instance, if you're singing a vocal jazz arrangement of something, and you are stoic like a statue, and your body's not involved at all. It's going to feel stiff, even if you're singing perfectly, allowing the body to relax into the style without compromising alignment and the instrument and things like that. You want to make sure that you're maintaining good vocal technique, never allowing the body to just be stationary. I'm not a fan of choirs that are stationary, and for anyone who has sung under William Powell at Auburn. You know he's not, either, and I am very much in that school. Powell, when it comes to express, requires like. I don't want to see you standing there singing like a robot. I want to see you moving and feeling the music with not just your voice and your Facebook body, and just allowing yourself to the body the character of the music as well, but always with the caveat of, without compromising the vocal instrument.

Stevie H.: So, there's not a specific prescription of this equals visually expressive. But to me expression always comes back to intention, whether it's facial, emotional, physical, Whatever.

Christopher Loftin: What is vocal expression? What does it look like? Sound like?

Stevie H.: Yeah, Again, It's very similar to visual expression. It all comes back to intention. You're singing

Stevie H.: uh, let's see what's something that's like done by everyone, "If you love me" Thomas Tallis

Stevie H.: Yes, if you have accurate notes and rhythms, it's the music. It's what's on the page. But there's no direction. There's no intention. A motive catalyst to the phrase. And if you don't have a

motive, catalyst and like I said earlier, if you're not communicating what's the point? So thinking about that text if you love me and keep my commandments. Ok. So you're singing from the perspective of God. But if you even take that out of a religious context, if you love me, keep my commandments. What are their commandments? There are requests for respect. Right? So, if you love me, if you care about me, be respectful to me, you know, Don't violate my boundaries, be a good human, and so now you can take that, and you can spin that phrase into out of this abstract. I am God, and I'm telling my disciples what to do. And now you're saying, Ok, I'm a human, and I just want someone to respect me, and all of a sudden, if he love me, becomes more pleading.

Stevie H.: If he loves me, keep my commandments and then it's a request. It's not a demand. It's a request, and so it completely changes the intention of the phrase. If you contextualize everything emotionally, humans are naturally vocally expressive when we talk, but so often singers, because now inflection and pitch and rhythm are dictated to them based on what's on paper?

Stevie H.: They forget. How would I say this? If I were not, If I were just having this as a conversation, how would I communicate this? And how can I put that into my singing again without compromising the vocal instrument.

Stevie H.: So, staying true to style, of course, depending on the context. But you don't want to go so far into the expression that you're hurting your voice. And there's a lot of choirs that do that, too.

Christopher Loftin: So, Is it possible? Is it possible for a performance to be visually expressive, yet not vocally, and vice versa. In other words, could something be vocally expressive, but not visually.

Stevie H.: Yeah, a hundred percent Um, I think in terms of vocally expressive, but not visual. There's two ways you can think about it to me if I can close my eyes, still feel the intent you're being vocally expressive. If I take sight out of it completely. I don't need that piece to hear where you're coming from. You're doing your job vocally but adding that visual element you're singing that vocally expressive. I don't think it's truly possible not to be visually expressive because if your intention is appropriately applied to the voice. And you're singing with that emotion because I don't think you can be vocally expressive without actually feeling what you're singing.

Stevie H.: But there are plenty of choirs who like to over emote, and they're becoming too visually expressive, and it's hindering their ability to be vocally expressive. They're so concerned with “Oh, I need to gesture here, and I need to look earnest here, instead of allowing it to be organic”, and things don't have to be choreographed. If you're focusing too much on the visual plan, you might lose some of the intent, and you might lose some of the vocal expression and communication. If you focus too much on the vocal communication. You might lose some of the visual expressiveness because you're so focused on. What do I sound like that? You're not thinking about vocal health, and everything goes out the window, and it's not a good idea.

Stevie H.: so yes, to answer that yes or no question that long little diatribe. There you go. Yes, it is possible to have one over the other, or none, or both, or whatever the case may be. But again for me everything comes back to intent.

Stevie H.: If something you're doing vocally or visually does not provide the ability to communicate the message, there's no point in doing it.

Stevie H.: I think Again, choreography and visual expression comes back to the intention behind the moves. If the choreography serves to communicate the message, it's meaningful and it's visually expressive. But if it's a move for the sake of a move, no one cares, and to me, expression is to get people to care. If you're not connecting into that every time, no one's going to care.

Christopher Loftin: Okay. So, we're going to. Now go into a portion where I want you to actually watch a performance, looking for elements of vocal and visual expression, what worked, and what did not.

Christopher Loftin: So general thoughts about what worked and what didn't work both vocally and visually.

Stevie H.: Um. So, broad statements the choir is unafraid to move, which is good. I think a lot of choirs get too rigid. There were some really nice moments of connection happening, particularly in the sopranos and alto's to the intent of the music. But the thing is, the body's just moving from side to side doesn't exactly equal expression.

Christopher Loftin: Is it movement for movement's sake? Is that what you're saying?

Stevie H.: Because I don't know if that was a prescribed thing, because not everyone was doing it. And so, but that's why I said it's. It's good in my mind. It is good that they clearly have the freedom to move, because that's a hard hurdle to get over and choirs.

Stevie H.: However, the majority of the movement that they were doing, my opinion was not intentioned. There was not a clear motivation behind it, but facial expressions, however, particularly from sopranos and alto's, were way more plugged in.

Stevie H.: I think it could have been just as impactful If you had cut the body swaying down by about fifty percent. Continue with that same level of facial expression. And this is coming from someone I am a singer who moves. I am a conductor who moves. I can't help but move to the music, but I try to keep it intentional. There were definitely times where it was like, ok, we're all just kind of bopping side to side. Beat-ish,

Stevie H.: And I think that tenors and bases who have been socialized as men in life have a tendency to be hesitant or afraid to be expressive, because it's been ingrained in their minds, particularly in American society. That expression and vulnerability with your emotions makes you weak, and so you end up with this like stoic stone taste

Stevie H.: you're singing. "Praise to God", and you know what to this choirs credit, though the text of Alleluia, there's only so many different ways to say that, you know. So There's not being a lot of diversity of expression in that piece. It's understandable, because the message is a little monothematic. There's not a lot of nuances to Alleluia.

Stevie H.: Now, in the sections where there was English text, you could feel the choir's intention to change, and it wasn't just because the music changed. It was that oftentimes their bodies became more stable. They were more connected to the conductor, and particularly at the very end. When they came into that strong ending no one was moving. Everyone was stable at that point, so that just tells me the choir is capable of intentional visual expression.

Stevie H.: But there were lots of times, I think, in that performance that it just kind of became subconscious and unintentional. And the tenors and bases bless them. But every choir of ever sung in tenors and basses struggled to be expressive that is due, and I blame society for that one.

Stevie H.: If we teach vulnerability and healthy forms of expression early, it is easier for singers to emote and express intentfully on stage.

Christopher Loftin: okay, I'm going to do one more quick video; this one is by Rosephanye. Let me pull up this one because I want to give a sacred and a secular example just to get, since it's two different animals.

Stevie H.: Um, I have no idea how they feel about that song. The biggest feedback-I don't know if I'm supposed to feel happy. I don't know if I'm supposed to feel sad. There was no clear intention. It was beautiful. It was sung well, sung accurately for the most part, but I didn't really feel much. I thought for a bit like "Oh, maybe I'm affected by what I'm seeing". So I closed my eyes, and I just listened, and it still felt prescribed. And I think music should be anything but prescribed.

Stevie J. Hirner (she/her/hers): The sheet music-It's more just guidance. So I mean, that's not to say you can change the music. I think we're supposed to use the sheet music to help articulate the meaning that the composer is trying to get across,

Stevie H.: And that text. I don't know the piece at all. It sounded like they were saying, I want to die while you love me.

Christopher Loftin: that it's actually correct.

Stevie H.: That is a powerful sentence. What I was getting. I want to die while you love me. Are you happy about that? Are you using that to communicate I don't want to live without you loving me, which I think is what the text is getting at. I would rather die still feeling your love than have to live without it, and that's powerful. That's not exactly the emotion that we were getting it just felt. This is a pretty song, and we're going to look intense here. And now we're going to smile a little bit. Now it's getting louder, so we're just gonna sway just a little.

Stevie H.: But meanwhile the conductor is being overly expressive, I think, as like a subconscious response to not getting much a sincere expression from their ensemble.

Stevie H.: The ensemble was very dry emotionally, in my opinion.

Christopher Loftin: Do you think that this particular piece was suited suitable to the performer?

Stevie H.: That was what a like the getting high School ensemble, or something?

Christopher Loftin: I'm not sure. But I noticed there were multiple different sets of outfits, some in roads, some interest. I'm wonder if this might be a treble 9/10 honor choir situation sort of thing?

Stevie H.: Yeah, I differ, I think, in opinion on this compared to a lot of my colleagues. I think teenagers are well-equipped with the capacity to talk about serious things, and I think there is a hesitancy in our field to address potentially weighted or significant content. But in my experience, kids thrive on that, they embrace that. So leaning into, I think this piece is perfectly appropriate.

Stevie H.: It's about love. It is a concept we can all understand now, like even parental love, sibling love, anyone can connect with that, and I think it's the job of the conductor to interpret and to package the piece in such a way that it becomes relatable to everyone in the room, so that they are all singing from their own emotional experiences instead of what has been prescribed to them. Because a performance is never going to feel organic if you've been told, this phrase is sad, sing sad. This phrase is happy. Sing happy, and of course not in those words, but helping students find multiple ways to interpret and connect with a piece; that's our job.

Stevie H.: Yes, the notes and rhythms are important. But I say this to my choirs all the time, "If we're not saying something, What's the point?" 99% percent of the people in the audience are never going to catch that one wrong rhythm, or that one wrong note, or whatever that we've been toiling over in rehearsal. What they care about is, what are you making me feel? That's what should drive everything that we do.

Stevie H.: We create music, to feel something. We share music, to feel something. Its purest level. And I think too many people air on the side of accurate notes and rhythms are as more important. They are. They are super important. Is it great to have both accuracy and expression? Yes, but if you're going to air one side or the other, air on the side of being sincere and air on the side of being intentional. Because that's why we do what we do.

Christopher Loftin: So, you've answered everything I had relating to this. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Stevie H.: Um, yeah, and you can leave his name out if he wants it out. But if you end up using this little anecdote. There was something that Dr. Powell said in my conducting class in undergrad. He asked us, "What is the conductor's greatest tool in their toolbox." We're all like, "Clear pattern, clear ictus, really good cues, eye contact." He was like, "Yeah, those are all

important, but the most important tool that you, as a conductor, can have is vulnerability, the ability to put your heart on a plate to say to your choir, ‘This is my experience and what this piece means to me. This is how I feel about this piece. Please come on this journey with me.’ I will never forget that because just by a conductor inviting their ensemble to come on this journey with them, and to show that level of vulnerability with their ensemble, by doing that alone, all of a sudden, everything just kind of falls into place, and the ensemble feels their own liberty to find their own vulnerability, and to share that by creating that space where it’s like, we understand that music is about emotion.

Stevie H.: Yes, we seem to be pretty sometimes. We seem to show off, but if there's not any intention behind it, I don't care personally, and there are some conductors who are fine with that. I've been at many ACDA conventions where the choir sang the doors off the room, and it was perfect. It was beautiful technically. I didn't feel anything. So, it's like that. Okay, here's your obligatory standing ovation. Even professional ensembles I've seen at conventions. They'll pick like the hardest repertoire; they'll sing it perfectly, and everyone's like, ‘Wow! That was really hard, and they nailed it.’ I don’t care. If you didn’t communicate something to me, I don’t care. You can tell when a choir walks on stage, and they’re like, ‘We are the best. You will listen to our beautiful voices.’ You can also tell when a choir walks on stage, and it’s like, ‘We want to tell you something. We want to share something with you.’ It’s not about preaching down to you, it’s not about being better than you. It’s about trying to connect with you.

Maria E. Interview – 9/27/22

Christopher Loftin: So, if I were, to say the phrase visual expression, what makes a performance visually expressive?

Maria: the smile, the lights in their eyes if they're moving their hands, if they're swaying to me that's visually expressive. Um, I guess my definitions will be kind of maybe skewed a little bit, because I come from a place where we have to be visually expressive. Speaking in the Black Church, if we just stand the same like stiff, the audience won't, participate with us, so we have to use our hands and things like that to, you know. Commit to what we're trying to get out.

Christopher Loftin: Why do you think they wouldn't participate with you if you were just standing still?

Maria: Well, because I come from a church that's used to expression, And so, first of all. I don't I as a director, I don't want to watch nobody just standing still and singing like that is so worried to me because you wouldn't go to. I would pay for a Beyonce concert, and she just stood still and just sang, and I said, I need you all dance to work, you know. Do what I paid you to do, you know, perform, Give us a show, and I think once you have a show, no matter what this show is even Sunday morning. It's still, even though we sing it for the Lord.

Christopher Loftin: Of course, it is,

Maria: and they can be a part of that with you. I think that makes the whole entire experience better.

Christopher Loftin: Amen. Absolutely so. Now, on the other side, vocally expressive. What does a vocally expressive performance sound like?

Maria: Look I think probably the most vocally expressive concept I've ever been to be the Aeolians in 2019 at Kansas City. I mean they sure sound like it. It sounded like everybody was invested in the sounds, and you could hear all of these different colors. But the colors were in tune with each other. It was magic; it was absolutely magic. So if they hadn't moved at all, and they just stood there and sang with all their heart and soul, and all those colors they were getting their in their voices, that would have been amazing, but they had the on the way thing that they was doing to. They made, you know, visually express it, as well.

Christopher Loftin: As a funny side note. One of my presentations that I give regularly is about expressive performances, not in the barbershop genre. I always end with the Aeolians, "My lord, what a morning!" That performance because it combines everything that is good about vocal and visual expression into a unified experience for everybody.

Maria: They gave us an experience. That's why that concert was so good it really was an experience. The color of their skin, none of that meant anything. I wanted that experience again.

Christopher Loftin: So, can a performance be vocally expressive, but not visually expressive. So, can you have one without the other?

Maria: Yes, 100%. You get these choirs who they sing every note correctly; they breathe correctly; they sound good, they do. The visual may not be there, but they sound good. I mean, we get that all the time. We watch lots of choirs who are visually expressive with it, with their sounds and colors; they vocally expressed it with their sounds and colors, but not visually. You can close your eyes and you still be like, okay, they sang good, but I don't know. I'm just a visual person. If you are having a good time on stage, even though the sound may not be all that, I can rock with you because you're bringing me in. You brought me into your world, and I can rock with that.

Christopher Loftin: If you're vocally expressive or not visually, it's just a boring performance. Is that what you're saying.

Maria: Yes

Christopher Loftin: Can the visual be distracting, and in what cases could it be distracting?

Maria: Yes, it definitely could be distracting if it's too much and over the top. It's like, "Okay, why is this necessary? What are you doing?" I'm not really watching to really hear you sing. I'm just watching to see what other crazy stuff you are getting ready to do, because right now you're doing so much. It's way too much.

Christopher Loftin: Okay, you're going to watch a video and tell me your thoughts about how vocally or visually expressive they were. (Watches video) Okay, what are your thoughts?

Maria: That's nice. Uh, the chords were all in tune. What kind of thoughts do you really want? What are you looking for?

Christopher Loftin: Vocally, visually expressive? Yes, no. What parts of it were? What parts of it weren't?

Maria: Okay. So, if I was to clinic this choir, one thing when I clinic one of the first things I always ask the choir is, what is this song about? If I was just watching them I would probably assume that they didn't know what the song was about. The passion wasn't there of what the what the song actually means. Maybe because I'm a person of color that I view this song differently, because I know the history of where the song comes from because I'm black. It's a spiritual. They want to get out of slavery, you know.

Maria: So, it sounds like a recording of a choir singing. If you noticed, I closed my eyes while they were singing, and I don't feel like I missed anything but just what was with my eyes.

Christopher Loftin: You talked about, and I don't want to put your words in your mouth because that could potentially bias some things you talked about knowing the heritage and knowing the

background of the piece especially because you're a person of color. Can you talk about the importance of stylistic appropriateness, Why is that a good thing that we need to know the heritage or the history of the piece?

Maria: I think we know that no matter what we sing it, whether it's classical, gospel, spirituals, country, whatever we sing, we need to know what the piece was about, and why that the composer, the original composer felt like this piece needs to be put on a piece of paper, of some sheet music, so we could be saying something gripping, and if you understand then I think you think about it differently when you're singing it, and you look differently when you see it. I should look the same way of singing. "Soon-Ah will be Done" should look and sound different than Mozart because they are different styles and messages. I'm not saying contort your face in a different way, but the feeling, there's a different feeling of this song.

Maria: Let's just put it in like some modern-day context. Yeah, I'm tired of COVID, right? How are we singing this if we were really tired of dealing with Covid? We are tired of masks. We are tired of social distancing. We want to get back to life as normal. So how does that look? How does it look in your face? How does it look in your body. How does it look when you say those words that soon I will be done, every time you say it, because you say it over and over and over again. Why is it different every time you say that? What does it look like visually, so that the audience really understands that you really tired of whatever this is, and as you know that you don't get ready to go home, or in this case your home is like when you die. When I die with all this freedom, How does it look like when you say I'm going home to be with the Lord? There should be a joy in your sound when you say that because that's that freedom that you've been waiting for all this time.

Christopher Loftin: So, I just want to clarify what you're saying. It's all about the intent. It's all about the why. You have to know why you're singing a song and why it's there. Correct?

Maria: Exactly.

Christopher Loftin: I think my favorite part what you just, it was important for us to know why in every song. Then it's something subconscious that when you know the purpose of a song changes who you are, even without having to do anything, you just know. And you just are different. Is that what you're saying?

Maria: Yeah, I say to kids, "Sing your favorite song." When they sing the one that they really like, their overall expression changes, and we as the adults say, "Okay, they get this." Even if it's something they know nothing about. "You don't know nothing about Aretha Franklin respect, you're five." But if you're really like singing it, and you've got some passion behind you, I could get with this. You know what I mean. So, as choral singers, a lot of us don't take the opportunity to really learn and understand what we're singing about. That's something I do with every choir I stand before. I always ask them, "What is this song really about, and what does it mean to you?" Because if don't mean nothing to you, it won't mean nothing to me as an audience member.

Christopher Loftin: You talked about relating something from the 1800s to what's relevant to them right now.

Maria: Because I can't necessarily say I know what it's like to be a slave. I can't. I don't. I can tell you what I feel like. I can tell you what it's like to be stressed and want something to be over with. I can tell you how it feels to go through some type of circumstance where you just like "Um, Jesus I really want to be mad at you." We've all had those days, you know what I mean. Those situations where you just want something to be over because you're tired. I'm tired, and I'm over whatever this trial, tribulation, or whatever. Soon I know it will be done. It's going to be over, and I can go home.

Christopher: And there's some hope there. It's not all doom and gloom as bad as everything is, something better is coming, and I know it.

Maria: And that gives me joy, and I begin to see that joy. I get excited when I go home. There's peace at home. There's a love. So, the heart is there because for us, those who sing Gospel regularly, that's your escape. That's your hope, your lifeline. When I sing "I lift my hands in total praise," and then in at the end, you're saying "And it is so". God's gonna take care of me. I'll be okay. "Set me as a seal upon your heart" for love is stronger than death.

Christopher: Exactly, it's about the lyrics and the emotion behind them. Those lyrics have so much power.

Maria: And I think if we talk that way, the vocal expression, we wouldn't have to spend time. really teaching that because it would come naturally. The visual just comes naturally, and you've got to do that. As an audience member, I want to be a part of that. How do I connect with your heart so I'm in tune with what you're doing that our hearts are now beating as one? That's why I say music is a universal language because our hearts, no matter what language is in our hearts, can beat together. I'm going to church now.

Christopher Loftin: Seriously. I I'm truly blessed to know you. Thank you. This has been wonderful. Um! So, I'm going to start doing the next parts of this. I may get back in touch with you just to make sure any particular thing that I might use that it's got the Maria Ellis stamp of approval.

Christopher Loftin: So, we can get right to it. Visual expression, what does it mean? What does it look like? What does it sound like? What evidence to Lori Lyford is there a visual expression?

Lori L.: Now, I want to ask you. Am I? Shall I keep my brain in the choral world? Because this is a choral thing

Christopher Loftin: I would say, bring your expertise of barbershop as recommendations or thoughts for improving traditional choral performances. That's part of the reason why I asked you because you have expertise in both barbershop and choral directing.

Lori L.: Okay, um, facial expression is key, and that especially when working with teenagers yourself. So, um! If that's what you don't want to have happen necessarily then you should get on board little children and um because we did barbershop, and because it helped us be fearlessly out of there because you just had to. I mean there's nothing worse than an unemotive bad barbershop.

Lori L.: I mean half enthusiastic bad barbershop, and it'll carry you. It'll carry you further along, as you know, from hearing many afterglow performances of the local men's quartet that doesn't ring one chord, except for the last one, and it's stunning, and everybody goes. Oh, cool barbershop! You know what I'm talking about. So, what visual expression in the choral world? I would start with um facial expression with authenticity... Well, how would you feel if you really, if you really meant these words? If you wrote these words. What would you look like if you were saying the words. And also, some physical freedom uh that? Not just standing there with their hands at their sides. Um, nor just, you know, just extraneous unrelated movement, so physical freedom and um facial expression that allows us to enjoy your interpretation of what the lyrics are. I think it is very important.

Christopher Loftin: So you talked about facial, and then you talked about a little bit with body language, And then you added in the word authenticity. What is that so important to you?

Lori L.: Um, let me let me tell you about something that that I learned, and if you don't know this book already, Chris, you should. You should read it. It's called *Choral Charisma* by Tom Carter. You know how a lot of times you'll hear directors say just imitate what I'm doing. You know I will be expressive, and you can imitate that. It's not even authentic because the director is not conveying the message, they are just a billboard for which the student or singer can follow. It at least gave them something to do, but it's not about "what do you feel if you were saying those words." You get to be an actor, and God knows kids, especially high school kids, have not had all the life experiences, Thank God, that are required to be expressed through some of the music.

Lori L.: Be an actor. If you were an actor and you were tasked with this to you. Promote this. How would that be? Let's get into this finding out the story behind this story, making up the story behind the story if you don't know the story of the song and allow them to play. I just think as a listener, we're more captivated when performers are vulnerable, when performers are willing to risk going outside the acceptable norm.

Lori L.: Well, let's not even get started about musicality. And uh down a quarter note. Isn't always a dotted quarter. So, I would say that, uh an authentic presentation of the lyric is going to touch the audience and the performer. I think we should give ourselves a treat as performers that it shouldn't just be judge centric. It shouldn't just be audience centric. The main effect, I think is to have the performer really enjoy every crack and crevice of whatever that lyric, and that music brings forth.

Christopher Loftin: Wow! That's amazing. So now, transitioning, you are talking about. A quarter note is not always a quarter note that leads into bulk vocal expression. Yes, which I mean, there are a lot of elements to unpack there. But what does it look like? What does it sound like?

Lori L.: Well, let me give you an example. I took my um uh chamber choir with the name of the class, and we sang um uh vocal jazz a little bit close harmony modern harmony like "A boy and a girl." Uh, you know things like that. They would do things like that. We were doing a rendition of once upon a time. It was a six-part beautiful, a cappella arrangement, and I have influencing me all of the barbershop renditions of *Once Upon a Time*, and we sang it with kind of that give and take of the lyric flow, and I was complimented on behalf of the group to say thank you so much for making this lyrically centered, instead of note to note, to note whatever the notes on the page say, By God, we're going to do that! And they said it would just so much more expressive.

Lori L.: Arrangers and composers have to write down something. They have to write it some way. It's just like "What'll I do?" is written in $\frac{3}{4}$ waltz time. What will I do when you are far away? Oh, well, they Snores-ville right? So, having the barbershop experience gave me the courage to alter robotic delivery in places that traditionally it's not, and we were rewarded for that. And I just wish, instead of just saying, Oh, that was so great! Let's start teaching that; I'll start teaching that to the educators, instead of and like... Don't give the judges the scores. What's the big deal? That way they aren't worried about "You missed that dotted quarter-eighth note rhythm." I know, but it didn't go with the words very well, so I rounded it out a little. You know what I mean.

Lori L.: When I first started in barbershop, I was teaching band at a large high school in in Washington, and after a while it started to inform my conducting, and it wasn't just, you know, stick patterns. It was like, I tell the kids, you know you see that measure their number whatever forty-two on beat three. I want you to put a fermata over that note, and they'd be like "Why, it's not music", I know, but I feel it that way. Don't you feel it could be like-Oh, right there it's just There's some juice in that that we're not going to get if we just go through it, and it'd be like, Oh, yeah, yeah, you know. We spend so much time teaching the kids teaching quarter note, half note, dotted half note, all the patterns of sixteenth notes, all the patterns of things that are just so, and I'm not going to say that rhythmic precision is an important skill. It's very important. You listen to my groups. We sing some scary stuff. I know you have to know the rules so you can break the rules, and that's how I feel about lyrically driven singing. Not just for barbershop but also jazz pieces and traditional choral literature. I would encourage our institutions of higher learning to teach our choral conductors not just beat patterns but musicality and artistry.

Lori L.: Is it musical? Is it beautiful? Or is it simply accurate?

Christopher Loftin: Wow! Is it beautiful? Is it musical? Or is it simply accurate?

Lori L.: And there are so many things in the music that indicate where the crescendos and decrescendos should be. There are so many things in the music to indicate that it should speed up here, slow down here. One of the worst things that we have available to us is the notation of eighth notes, with stems and boxes and stems and boxes, and they all stand up when in fact, they should be leaning. But lead it, lean them, lean them into the direction that you're supposed to go. I always thought that would be a cool invention for a teacher who's helping singers remember where the plan is or what the important words are. Right now, eighth notes are evenly spaced and vertical, and so the prosody tends to be evenly delivered. We gotta fight against that so that whatever the language is that we are singing, you need to find out the prosody of the word. Where's the weight? Where is the important syllable?

Lori L.: Tim Seelig, I think it was him he talks. I think it was him. He talked about the red pencil or the red, the red dots, and he would put. I think it was him, he suggested, putting a dot above or below where you can see it as the syllable or the part of the phrase that should be elevated, so that they're not all the same. We're either going somewhere or coming from somewhere.

Christopher Loftin: wow! So, what I'm going to do next is, I'm going to actually have a video played for you. It's a choral performance of True Colors. It is a collegiate chorus, but I want you to look and see what elements of vocal and visual expression you see, or hear,

Lori L.: I'm gonna write things down if I need to remember things.

Christopher Loftin: So since I've obviously seen you coach several times. If Lori Lyford is coaching this this ensemble in a local and visual expression, what are you working with them on?

Lori L.: Okay. Okay.

Lori L.: Who was that?

Christopher Loftin: I'm not sure. I'll try to find out later.

Lori L.: As a conductor, I know I had music many times because I'm trying to think of everything that's happening. However, my performances when I didn't use music were always better, especially with connection with the singers.

Lori L.: Okay. So I wrote, Eye contact; look up; Look up? He stands like a little hunched over man, and so all of his singers thankfully paid no attention to that. They stood up beautifully and had that grandeur. So, I said, eye contact. Look up, I said. Let the soloist and the pianist have the emotional freedom. He directed a place where he thought the soloist should have an accent or a

lift. Stay out of their way and let them be musical. All he had to do was bring in the background singers.

Lori L.: There was some word emphasis that I would have brought out like if this world not if this world. I said I'd be more like the pianist. I wish they would perform more like the pianist performs, and he doesn't even have lyrics. He didn't have any lyrics. I felt like there were several important words that were just thrown away. "You taken all you can bear." Bear should be felt emotionally. I would like the director to emote. What do the lyrics say? "Don't be afraid to let it show." Is this a spectacle of beauty rather than real feelings? That's what it was-very beautiful. God was it beautiful, but I think there could have been even more rising and falling of the line through more attention to the lyric. It will help students to connect more if they were just turned loose. They sing the song so well; now turn them free to emotionally and musically connect with the lyric. Let them think of someone that needs to know that it's okay to be just who they are. Everybody knows somebody that is being quiet. Everybody knows somebody that doesn't express themselves the way they really want to. It was very beautiful, but is that all there is?

Christopher Loftin: So you talked a little bit about the conductor and the role he played. Additionally, the pianist. So, is it an all-encompassing event? Everything affects everything; Every person on stage directly impacts the performance? I don't want to put words in your mouth.

Lori L.: Of course, it is. It was this beautiful tapestry of singers. I didn't pay much attention to what they were wearing. They had their folders by their sides. I would have loved to see the conductor walk off stage and let the singers go. If this was in a rehearsal, I might have them standing in a football shape facing each other and convince someone on the other side of the room that they're enough. Convince them too not be afraid. Let them make eye contact with somebody else to get them to open up. The performance was already beautiful, but I think there was an aura missing of believability and real communication.

Christopher Loftin: So you talked about the football thing. I'm assuming you may have tried that with your high school kids at some point.

Lori L.: necessarily feel huge benefits by the entire group. Some people will not want to make eye contact, so that's why the football thing is a little bit better than standing three feet away from each other.

Lori L.: I've used it with my groups and choises I've coached. Maybe use the floor and staggered, and then the riser floor and then upper row, so people can see. You know what I mean. But there's any a million different configurations that you could do that.

Christopher Loftin: That would require trust and having previously built a culture of respect and encouragement.

Lori L.: Exactly. You could also do this with an honor choir as long as you build rapport first. I don't know this ensemble, but as a listener, it left me wanting more. This ensemble is more than capable of that.

Christopher Loftin: Wow! Absolutely. I love it. I love every last minute of it. It's been fun, so you've answered everything you that I have. Is there anything else on this topic that you think needs to be there, or do you think it's basically covered?

Lori L.: Um, I think it's probably covered. But I think, as far as musically expressive, there are many schools of thought and it depends on what university you go to whether you go tone first or lyrically-driven. If it is purely tone-based, you go almost British, and the audience cannot understand the lyrics. However, I am of the school that lyrics provide the story. It's hard to give a compelling message when nobody can understand the words. Oh, it's a beautiful tone. It's lovely, appropriate, and balanced. Who cares? Be an orchestra if all you're worried about is tone. It's about communication.

Dr. Jerry M. Interview – 10/13/22

Christopher Loftin: So, how's everything going up in your neck of the woods?

Dr. Jerry M.: It's good. It's certainly finally getting busy again. Um, you know More students hang it out in the office, and just more students in general, you know it's certainly not back up to where enrollment numbers were. Choir still smaller instrumental group registration is back, but I think for us that's mostly because the majority of the players are community.

Dr. Jerry M.: Yeah, maybe they're pretty close to where they were. But um! The community members just came flooding back. And so you know that's nice to see. They've got their first concert this weekend, and I'm not doing midterm choral concerts anymore. Because I don't know why I ever did them. In the first place, when it's too soon. I just did it, because that's just what we always did, and then we got to the fall of twenty when I was rehearsing in four different locations, with only octets, and like we're not ready. We're not even ready to record, and so in the spring, I said, Let's just try an end of the semester concert and then the following fall, I said, Let's just try later in the semester, you know, just you know. Not necessarily just one at the end. I'll tell you what their skills are way down. My Freshmen, they lost so much music, and it's the retention from one rehearsal to the other is starkly different than it used to be. So, I'm glad we don't have a concert now. I would have picked different music, that's for sure, and the students realize it too. They're aware of how behind they are, which is probably a good thing in the long run.

Christopher Loftin: You've built a culture at the community college, so I know you'll get back. So, before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

Dr. Jerry M.: I don't think so. Okay.

Christopher Loftin: If I were to say the phrase visual expression, what does that mean? What does that look like? What does that sound like in a performance?

Dr. Jerry M.: Uh, I can see that from a couple of angles so visual expression uh what the audience sees, so they see energized faces. I'm always talking to my singers about uh the audience listening with their eyes first, so if you see an excited choir visually, you expect an excited sound. If you see a blank face, you may not know what you're expecting, but you're not expecting an excited sound like it. It doesn't really telegraph anything because I've certainly seen plenty of choirs that have a blank face and an excited sound, you know. But so I don't think I've ever seen a choir with an excited face and a dull sound Is that correlation? It isn't really there for me, you know. So if the face is excited, the sound is almost a guarantee to be excited. I asked my singers to sing with an excited sound. That's always the thing for me to make the vowel excited because for especially young singers, you say a bright vowel and the vowel goes horizontal. The vowel still needs to be forward but excited. Keep it tall and forward.

Dr. Jerry M.: The ensemble being excited makes the audience excited too. Excited, vibrant expression, and that has to do with the physicality, but then there's also the musicianship-the vibrant expression of the music and the phrasing. We were just working on that in the last

rehearsal that it's you know where Where's the important word. Where's the phrase line? Go, you know any and all of that. It was a nice run of the piece. You got the notes and rhythms, but you need to add in vibrancy.

Christopher Loftin: Absolutely We'll dig in a little bit more to the vocal side here in a little bit later.

Christopher Loftin: So you talk about exciting excited faces. What other ways, is there anything else that we can do visually to enhance the meaning of a piece or a connection with the audience?

Dr. Jerry M.: So, I've got a program later, this semester with Steven Leek's *Tunggare*, and so we're already talking about is we're going to be in Concord Trinity United Methodist for that, and there's singing in the aisles in there. It is wonderful- the room resonates when you do that to said folks. We're starting on the sides. Um, that when we get into the B section. We're moving up front, you know, and of course there's panic. For a moment we're moving while we're singing, and I'm like, yes, but you can do that in this section that's fine. So that kind of connection. I like doing that when I can near the beginning of a program because it we get that connection right away with the audience that it just walking up on the risers.

Dr. Jerry M.: So, a little bit more than just expression on the face, but just being a little more intimate with someone in a bigger venue,

Christopher Loftin: Excellent, so staging. What about other body language? How can body language either help or hurt?

Dr. Jerry M.: So, an energized stance. Not slumped down. Tall stance energized, connected. Some conductors do like one foot forward, and the singers leaning forward. I haven't really ever gone to that. Who is it, Anton Armstrong? His groups will always hold hands and sway. I haven't gone to that. But I enjoy watching that, though you know mostly because I love hearing them sing. But, uh, yes, it's it. I think it any kind of tall, energized stance again, Just sort of telegraphing that idea that I want to connect with you

Christopher Loftin: Absolutely. So now let's transition. We talked briefly about it earlier. You talked about a little bit of vocal expression. What can singers do to really get past notes and words, past rhythms, past accuracy. What can they do really bring that story to life?

Dr. Jerry M.: It's got to be talking about the story, digging into the story. And those for me are always fun discussions, seeing where they're gonna go with it uh one piece with my chamber singers that I've done a few times, and they took the story in a completely different direction this time. So for me it's not imposing my idea of the piece. I participate in the conversation, but they get some ownership of the piece. If they discuss the meeting, they come to a group idea of what that's gonna be. So then they can add their expression to it. They can express upon that meeting.

Dr. Jerry M.: Uh instead of me telling them I want that word to be important. I need that we need this dynamic; that's all in the music, right? That's part of the notes and the rhythms. And okay,

follow that dynamic marketing. That's the given. You should be doing that. Now, if we want them to add more. I like them to do that from their angle, and then, if they're not getting enough out of it, I'll jump in, but I always loved it for them to have that ownership, and after doing that with one piece recently that we ran it in the last rehearsal they realized right away what they needed to do like I could come in and say, Hey, you all were talking about this. I didn't hear that. So how are we going to express that? How's the audience going to know that? Because I can put it in program notes? A quarter of the audience is going to read it. Um! But regards to that, how are they going to know when you sing it? They have to get that idea.

Dr. Jerry M.: So, what has to come out of your voice? And sometimes they also it has to come out of their face, too. Right? So what has to be there for them to get that meaning? What is your idea about the piece, the phrase, whatever?

Christopher Loftin: Something that really just struck me that I really love that you said it. Um! It's not enough for them to believe it, and it's not enough for singers to really know the meaning of a song, it has to then translate to the audience. The audience is the ones who have to understand it.

Dr. Jerry M.: Yeah. But sometimes the biggest challenge. I think we can understand a piece to a great detail. But kidding sometimes getting that meaning to the audience is a big challenge.

Christopher Loftin: Completely agree. Wow! So far, you've spent a lot of your time talking about your older choirs. Since you also work with the Kirkwood Children's Choirs, what can kids in their formative years, just starting out-What are the advantages that they've got? What are the challenges for vocal and visual expression with them?

Christopher Loftin: What can they do? What can kid in their formative years just starting out. What! What are the advantages that they've got? What are the challenges? Um for vocal and visual expression with them?

Dr. Jerry M.: I've kind of got a different perspective when it comes to the, to the youth choir, because this is an administrative position for me. So I get to watch them in rehearsal I can serve and observe a couple of great directors working with them and so it's an observation clinic for me, and it is very different. Like last night was family night, an informal kind of a performance but parents could watch a rehearse. Parents never get to watch a rehearsal, so they were beginning to work on expression. So it's certainly different than working with 18-19 year old college students and even a handful of adults in the group. You can have deeper discussions with them because they've had that life experiences. Second and third graders haven't had that same life experience.

Christopher Loftin: Thankfully, they haven't.

Dr. Jerry M.: Yes, thankfully. However, is this piece happy or sad, and what does that mean for this piece? What should our vowels sound like? Our face should like what we said. This works for any age, but there was no attempt to go deeper with the children's choir. It was just a general feeling, overall meaning. It was a more simplistic commitment to storytelling. The students took

it and ran with it. With high school students I work with, you can go a little below surface level, but the conversations aren't the same. It is more about general mood with the younger students.

Christopher Loftin: So, you said that they took it and ran with it. What specifically did they do after the directors talked about mood?

Dr. Jerry M.: So, they just committed to it and sang the song. It was, it was almost, it was more of a reminder. It was obvious to me that had been prepped in a prior rehearsal. So, they knew the answer. Um, so it was. Oh, yes, happy song! Here we go.

Christopher Loftin: Absolutely, that's great. I'm so thrilled to see that. That's so encouraging.

Dr. Jerry M.: Yes, and so helpful. Then, when they are singing in the high School choir, the college choir, any of them down the road, that this, if that's the norm for them to talk about the meeting of a piece, you don't have that situation where I start talking about it, and I look, and you can see clearly. Two or three kids in the group have never done this before They learn the notes. They learn the rhythms. They're told how to express it, and that's it, and takes them a little while to understand why I'm not just giving them everything. It's clear they have not been through that drill at all before.

Christopher Loftin: I love that you're also letting the students really take the discussion and take ownership of it. I don't want to put words in your mouth. Does that help them self-correct or give them some more internalization of it, so that they're driving the performance more?

Dr. Jerry M.: Yeah, they are self-correct, and it makes it easier for me to prompt them to correct. I just need to remind them of what they came up with, and that goes to that ownership. So, they want to get it right. They want to do it that way because it's their idea. It helps with buy-in. I can certainly help guide those discussions so that they're not trying to make a piece some tragic story when it's not. So I can help get them on that path but normally with the ages I work with, they'll get to the general area of what I want them to be. Then, we get into those specific details of specific ideas, and even in the case of one piece right now, they're multiple ideas. They're all in the same general area, but they have their own ideals. Um, and that that makes it so much. Um! That this is more ownership,

Christopher Loftin: Have they performed that piece really off music for you yet. No, okay. Because I'm curious about unity, visual unity. If they've got multiple ideas, it could be fine, but I'm wondering if you might have different visual interpretations that might be a little confusing for the audience it could be, could end up with different visual could end up with different vocal.

Dr. Jerry M.: You know. I mean, they are just how they express a line within a section that if it's two different, then they might start to have some musicality conflict, which would be an interesting thing to work out in rehearsal, like, you know, for them to see that kind of conflict that they've created. So how are we going to take your two ideas and get the same sat so that that'd be a great problem to have in reversal, because that would tell me that they're both, or how many ever are committing fully to their idea of the piece, but it's caused a vocal issue. I mean,

that's solvable but when you've got singers committing that far, that would be terrific. I kind of see that possibility that it's gonna start coming up because that's the focus of the rehearsals. Now

Christopher Loftin: That's such an exciting problem or potential challenge that also shows that there's been a culture being built to where they're feeling comfortable with that connection. I love it.

Christopher Loftin: Okay. So next I'm going to play a video for you of an ensemble singing. As you watch it. I want you to think about if you're coaching them, or you're evaluating them, since you do a lot of judging, visual and vocal expression. What's working and what can be enhanced?

Dr. Jerry M.: Okay.

Christopher Loftin: sharing screen, optimizing sound. Can you see it? Yes? Okay.

Christopher Loftin: So, vocally, visually, what are you hearing? What are you seeing?

Dr. Jerry M.: So, all singers were focused and committed. A few, I would say maybe were physically over focused. In other words, they were coming forward in the head and neck, which would just concern me vocally. Um just physically straining it, but great commitment um in that they were visually focused. There was light movement. They seemed very loose physically, and I think that led to sort of eliciting a good forward sound. They agreed for the most part on phrasing, text stress. I didn't hear that stand out, you know that single voice that had a whole different idea. So really good unity. It was a unified visual as well.

Christopher Loftin: Text clarity?

Dr. Jerry M.: Text clarity was good. I'm a proponent of longer consonants, though we were listening to a recording. So, in the hall, the consonants could have been long and beautiful, and mic position just didn't pick up well um so hard to know if that's a fault of the group or not. Um, so it was good. I did lose some words here, there. Maybe if I could have seen mouths at times a little better it would have been a little easier. Um! And I'm slightly familiar with the piece, so there were probably times where I was knowing the word any way.

Christopher Loftin: When we're talking style or appropriateness for singers, do you think the song was appropriate for them. Do you think they really got into the text?

Dr. Jerry M.: Appropriate for that level of voice? Uh, that would seem to be an auditioned group to me and so probably appropriate to their challenge level musically.

Dr. Jerry M.: I mean with my singers. I've given that to a college choir, I would go deeper into the interpretation, but, like they could do more with phrasing. Um, you know, so I could hear the phrasing happening, but I'd love to hear more of that. More dynamic changes, more differences in the dynamic. That's just kind of a pet peeve of mine like they should all not just be a notch apart, right? They've got to spread this this range out. I don't have any issue with the rep selection for that group.

Christopher Loftin: You talked about dynamic contrast. What drives, what should drive dynamic contrast because we talk about with a lot of singers let's not compressed the dynamics a lot. Let's use the full focal spectrum of everything. What drives that contrast?

Dr. Jerry M.: It can be simply the markings in the score, the idea of the story, and the syllable you're stressing in that phrase. The score may say *mezzo forte*, and then we're stressing that syllable here. So, should the entire phrase be the same dynamic level? We're creating a story arc with rising and falling lines, which depends on style and music. Last rehearsal, we had a bar and a half crescendo, and they kept starting at *forte*. I said, "Where are you going? You're already maxed out, and we have a bar and a half *crescendo*". So, start softer, even though the marking is *forte*. Start softer then crescendo. They were shocked that they were allowed to change the sheet music's marking for the sake of musicality and expression. Dynamics are relative depending on the style and individual singer. I use warm-ups to let singers experience dynamic and emotional contrast so they see the possibilities. Just because a piece of music says something doesn't mean it is 100% the truth. You have to think about the style, composer's intent, and where you are going in the music.

Christopher Loftin: I love that you're also interpreting the score markings as well.

Dr. Jerry M.: There isn't a choral composer alive or dead, where the same markings should be interpreted and performed the same way every time. It's just not a thing, so we can't interpret that strict meaning on our side. When I'm teaching choir or theory, we've got to think about composer's intention. What was their intention? Why did they write a dotted half note instead of just quarter notes? Sometimes, we sing phrases without the rhythms and just sing text as if we were speaking it. You know that's a whole different idea. That changed how we looked at rhythms. So, why is it a dotted half note, and what are you gonna do with it? There's dynamics written, but it's a dotted half note. What are you gonna do? It becomes instinctive where I don't have to tell them what to do. They know that it's longer, so it has to go somewhere. In many cases, we can call the composer to ask for their intention and others we can't.

Christopher Loftin: Absolutely. Well, you've answered everything that I had. Is there anything else in this area of vocal or visual expression that you think needs to go further? Or have we covered it.

Dr. Jerry M.: It's a huge topic. You've also got to look at it from the audience's perspective. What are they gonna see? What are they gonna hear? A machine can be technical you know, so we've got to be more than the machine. That's what we can do that no robot singer will hopefully every be able to do. That's why I like getting into individual expression with my groups. My twelve singers in Chamber do not have to sing it all the same. As long as we blend that they don't have to have the same exact interpretation if they can tweak that idea a little bit, make that unique, and connect it to hopefully to something that actually happened, or somebody that actually exists

Dr. Jerry M.: One of the best contest performances I ever heard was Sherri's choirs at Seckman. They were singing "Even When He is Silent". Her choirs are always technically wonderful, but they're always amazing and expressive. You're probably familiar with the piece, right? So, they

all had a note card, and they got off the risers. They opened up the note cards, laid them down on the floor of the risers, and walked back up. It was a lot of note cards out there, and they sang the heck of the piece. I mean, none of the judges gave comments. You don't need comments from us. The individual expression was glorious, and I caught Sherri afterwards. "What were the note cards?" She said everybody wrote down a story from their past that they had lost. They connected to the text, not only writing it down but having that reminder in front of them. You had that kind of visual. They knew where their card was. They knew the story, and it was a constant reminder of the person. They put it out front so they wouldn't be looking down. So, they're singing this song to their person, but what it added to that performance was life-changing.

Christopher Loftin: Yeah, I think that's a great way to sum this whole thing up. Yeah, wow, Thank you so much. This has been wonderful.

J.C.L. Interview 10/18/22

Christopher Loftin: Um So if I were to say the phrase vocal expression, what does it look like? What does it sound like? How do you know when you experience it?

J.C.L.: Okay, Cool So vocal expression to me is the understanding of the musical concept in the score, and that can manifest in articulation, dynamics, tempi, text delivery and that comes from the singer's understanding of you know where's the focal point in the phrase and where can we use our voice if we did not have anything on our face or body? How can we use our voice to convey the message without external features?

Christopher Loftin: I love it. So, you mentioned articulation, dynamics, tempi, and articulation. So why are these important to you? Why do we need these?

J.C.L.: I would say for variety in the score, of course, but also composer's intent. I think that was something that I talked a lot about with my students about. Hey, look at this the way that this composer put the tenuto on this syllable. Why there and not on the previous work? How are we going to sing that differently? And of course there would be some physical expression in gesture to accompany it, we could really bring it out. I think the composer's intent is the first things that I would draw to, and it gives the students something to look for. I think if we're not careful, from a high school perspective, our students can really go on autopilot. It's up to us to really challenge how much musicality can we pull from the score.

Christopher Loftin: I'm curious what your thoughts on the taking the composer's or editor's marking as 100% gospel or if you alter anything based on musicality or interpretation.

J.C.L.: Yeah, I have been known to alter things, and it is usually inspired by the style or if I have students who are familiar with the culture. The first example that comes to mind in the spiritual. You know I follow what's on the page, but I will bring in clinicians to help with style, and if somebody comes in with a strong background by virtue of their musicianship or their study of the spiritual, sometimes performance practice, we change things. We change things based on the style or interpretation. Sometimes we've even taken those to contest, and I've never received any sort of "You shouldn't have done that", and I'm sometimes nervous about who the judging panel is. However, I think it's about authenticity of the repertoire. Going back to composer's intent, if we are doing an Andrea Ramsey piece, she marks things for a purpose, so that's easy to grab on to. I've had Zoom sessions with other composers, and they are very specific about markings.

Christopher Loftin: Absolutely. That's incredible. It is amazing that there are so many composers or arrangers who are willing to talk about their music and meet with us. So now switching back, you talked a little about facial expression. So, visual expression, what does it look like? What does it sound like?

J.C.L.: Yes. So visual expression, I think, really needs to be taught to the adolescents; some naturally have it, and many naturally don't so. What it looks like is facial expression. What are your eyebrows doing? What does your posture look like? Are you swaying to the music in a way that complements the music, or are you waiting just to move? I'm sure this is a topic that we'll

discuss later. Does the expression on your face match the emotional content of the piece or parts of the piece? It should enhance the musicality within you and the emotion evoked outward.

Christopher Loftin: So, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but you just talked about visual communication outward. Why is that important?

J.C.L.: Well, if I were to put it in a hierarchy, I would say the singer's connection to the music is number one; number two is we're trying to honor the composer's intents. I say this all the time—the singer's connection with the music is what is going to connect them with whoever is hearing it. So, when we performed at Southern ACDA, a song had to do with cancer and a woman who is battling it. I remember that we could barely get through the song without crying. I invited my students to share something in their life that was similar or identical and to think about that or draw on that one. I will go back to your question, which is more important. If I have to give a hierarchy, it would be internal connection to the music and then from there, sharing it outward. The way I feel is that the concert is not the main point—the journey is more important than the destination, but I also understand that teenagers don't understand that. I gave a piece to voice build that we never sang in a concert, and at the end of the year, the students said “We never sang this song in a concert”. I said, “That's not the point”.

J.C.L.: If you're going to invest all this time, and you have a loved one hopefully coming to see you perform this music, let's work on a few techniques to bring them into the process. I think it's really training the singer to think beyond them. I think that is important. When I came into the program at my last school, it was already a lovely program with really solid musicianship, out of this world. They had a motto of “We strive to touch lives”, and I kept that. I really found that it helped them understand how to empathize and be aware, because when a new student comes in and we talk about that motto, “We strive to touch lives”, how do we do that at the concert? Students always say, “We'll make them cry, or we'll get a standing ovation. That's how we know we truly touched their life.” I said, maybe. Also, saying thank you to a person for coming to the concert. What about you helping a younger singer know where to go? It's about the little things. It's about the way you feel the music, it's so beautiful and passionate, let's share that. We want the audience to feel something, but it has to come from an honest place.

Christopher Loftin: I truly love this message. That is so powerful.

J.C.L.: Yes, that's kind of a very long way to answer, but there you go.

Christopher Loftin: I like your thought process, and honestly, I'm that kind of circular kind of thinker. I just need to speak through it a little bit sometimes. So, if you were sitting in the audience, you're now no longer the director. You're no longer the participant. You're an audience member. What are you expecting vocally or visually?

J.C.L.: What do I hope to see? Well, I hope to hear vocally is a healthy sound in all sections, that can also be diverse. So we shouldn't be singing an Eastern European folk song in the same way we would sing a spiritual. We shouldn't be singing different genres the same way. I want to hear a choir that is aware of this, has done research on the ideal style sound. It shows me that the choir has done some work and put in some thought to an appropriate representation of the repertoire. I

think that's so important. I hope to see lots of diversity in composers. I really look at that now. I used to not. I used to think whatever works for my kids, but programming is so important. Women are easy because they're more of them, composers of color are not as deeply defined. Again, they're getting more and more, and I think that every teacher should really be looking for that. So that's something I look for on the program. Performance wise, I look for a natural emoting the music, with vocal color changes for each style. I think your body language should change with each style. I think there are appropriate times where it's like the body should be still and very much like, "I'm laying down this message". Maybe the song is about stillness, so you shouldn't be swaying too much. Then, there could a dance song, so I hope they're moving. If there are complex emotions, I hope to see that on their faces. I hope to see it across everyone. I think the most common thing I see in choirs, is maybe a choir of 30, you have five to six really stellar faces, five or six dead faces, and the rest are giving an appropriate expression. An evenness is something that really moves me.

Christopher Loftin: Absolutely. So we're going to transition now. And I'm actually going to play a video for you. If you were evaluating them or coaching them, what are you going to work with them on vocally and visually?

Christopher Loftin: Can you see it? Okay. Here we go,

J.C.L.: All right. So, I would, I think, start by complementing them, of course, and just saying like you're very like. I can tell that you're watching your conductor. You're very invested. I feel like they like the song. Oh, you have a cat!

Christopher Loftin: Yes, my cat Leopold just got up from his naps. He's like I want to see you. I want to love you.

J.C.L.: Oh, yes, so sorry. It's my when I taught online, my kids went like if they didn't want to do anything, they would just bring their pets, and I would be like. Oh, my God, they have a cat! So, I'm still that person apparently. Anyway, I'm noticing a lot of self-conducting, self-tapping, and I think that is a really great sign of initial ownership. And so now I want them to think phrases, instead of a little bit more up and down, beat by beat. There are some beautiful this way lines, and so you know. How can you put this in your body, so I might have them move around more fluidly as an exercise to feel the phrases.

J.C.L.: The I think the phrase is "the glory of this perfect day". I saw somebody frowning, so I probably would have a humorous way of being like this is the perfect day like you have to smile, and so, you know, when they're like, Okay? Well, how do I smile with a tall vowel like that? It can happen well with first the upper part of your face, the eyebrows. And then, of course, I demonstrate overdoing it. That's a little scary. I'm like, I promise you one of you won't see that you're singing this upper part of your face being lifted, we'll get the impression that you're smiling. I would tell them, so the hunch thing. I'm sure you've heard this before. Um, I'm sure you're showing this to everyone but the hunch thing I would tell them, you know. Put your hand on your chest and open your chest. I'm trying to play to the back of the hall, and I would say, open your chest towards the back of the hall, and imagine that you're like shining a beam of light all the way there. Um, you know this is, then all travel groups, so I'm assuming all of these are

female identifying. So I would say, you know, like I am very passionate about treble groups and saying, standing in your own power like this. Take up space. Don't be afraid, and then I would invite them to think about somebody that they love, and that could be hard for some people.

J.C.L.: It doesn't have to be human. It can be a pet. It can be that cute boy in the K-Pop band that you like. Think of your favorite food and think of spaghetti. Just giving them something that will make them smile and laugh. Maybe imagine that they're really little and hold that memory in your hand, letting them get silly because that's what that groups looks like to me. Once they get silly, they're ready for the next level where they can relax. What are good at what we do. Now let's express with our bodies, move our bodies a little, and explore the left hand conducting more than the right hand.

Christopher Loftin: Wow. That is amazing. I'm actually not showing this exact same video to everybody. I've got four videos approved by the IRB and my committee. Which video I show depends on the participant, their background, and their expertise. For example, you talked about composer diversity, so I showed you a piece by a female person of color.

J.C.L. : Oh wow.

Christopher Loftin: It was great getting to know you all. So, I tailor it to you all.

J.C.L.: So that I think that's great. I don't know the piece very well. I just knew the composer, and I think if I were to teach this piece, I would definitely look into the background of the text, which I assume was also written by a person of color. What was their story? What are they singing to? I think sometimes when people think they can't relate or "Love is hard because I just broke up with my significant other, or my parents are getting divorced." I think that sometimes asking students to go inward is not the right thing, not what they need then. It can be very triggering and a dark place for them. So when you give them the piece, this is what the composer chose for the text, and this is the lyricist's story. Then, allow students to explore if they can resonate with the message. We did a Gwyneth Walker piece and had a discussion about it. It was a discussion where everybody was open to it, but I specifically chose people of color to talk about their experiences and how singing this song gave them pride. I think it was important to have that conversation before performing the song.

Christopher Loftin: When do you have these kinds of conversations?

J.C.L.: Yes, it. You know it. It depends. It is not always immediate. Sometimes it depends on the ensemble, where they need to get past the notes, rhythms, and context beforehand. I'll give a piece, and we'll do the thing where we read the text, and we don't even sing a note before we dive into the ideas. Sometimes we get the song learned then get into the meaning. I always hold myself accountable so that we have to do it before we perform. We have to understand what we're talking about, especially spirituals. One time, I asked my students what this song was about, and they had no idea. So, it was a good learning lesson.

Christopher Loftin: Oh wow. That is an incredible story. Thank you. This has been fascinating, and I'm truly thankful. Is there you've covered everything that um I had. Is there anything else you would like to add?

J.C.L.: I think this is good for now.

Deanna B. Interview
11/14/22

Christopher Loftin: So, in your role as a choir director and as a music teacher, what is vocal expression? What does it look like? What does it sound like? How do you know when you see it?

Deanna B.: I think in the elementary level I feel like for me vocal expression is, can my students sing in different dynamics? Can they project their sound correctly? Can they use correct diction by popping consonants and shaping their mouth for vowels? You know. Are they able to start very softly, and sing with the crescendo? And can they start, let's say, forte, and sing with the decrescendo? Do I feel like I can have my kids sing with dynamics sing through phrasing. And I even teach breath marks. I feel like at the elementary level that that is them performing with expression.

Christopher Loftin: Why, specifically, did you lead with contrast?

Deanna B.: Well, I think if my kids can show different skills and different ways. I feel like they have mastered that skill. So if they can sing softly, I feel like they have a greater understanding of piano. If my kids can sing loudly with a good tone, then they have an understanding of forte. So it will be contrast, because that's where I start to say; this is where the music is. You know fast and slow, long and short, smooth or jerky? Can we make those contrasts because I feel like those elements are the beginnings of musical expression even before you get to phrasing and breathing-even before you project your sound. I think those things are really important, those skill sets, and I think they'll become better music performers.

Christopher Loftin: So when they leave your elementary school program, how do you want them to sound?

Deanna B.: I want them to be able to sing an octave, and I would like them to be able to sing and recognize different keys, including major and minor. I want them to be able to sing with the pure tone with pure vowels, and I expect all of my children to be able to read music from the Treble Clef. We all sightread on recorders. We sightread rhythms, and we sightread melodic cards, because I feel like whether they choose band or whether they choose choir, the basic skills that they need to be able to be successful in those programs, I cover in my program, so I expect them to be able to perform well, and I expect them to be able to sing with correct posture, you know. I expect them to be breathing the right kind of air, and making sure that their sound is projected, and not just all up here in their head voice.

Christopher Loftin: That is fascinating.

Deanna B.: There's things that you can do, you know, with their voices that are not going to harm them, their voices, you know. People suggest that you don't take vocal lessons until after you know the voice change. I've heard that a lot, but there's some things that we can do, some musical skills and elements that help prepare them. So when they get to that age where they are training their vocal cords, they already know short-long, loud-soft. They already are familiar with all the dynamic words and all the expression words, because they practice it in elementary

school, and then they're just adding stuff that they already know, their prior knowledge, to what Brent [feeder middle school choir director] currently is teaching them at the Middle School.

Christopher Loftin: So now, visually, what is visual expression, and what does it look like either at the elementary level or in general? What do you think?

Deanna B.: For me, I like to focus, and I use this format series by [redacted], who, I think, is just fantastic for me. I want to see my students flopping and dropping. I want to see their throat opening up. I want to see that they can take a breath without making a sound. I want to see them push through and tighten their stomach, so that they can sing through a whole phrase. So for me, seeing musicality is more about watching the beginning part of like a flower that's about to like just about to bloom. It's like they're just slowly dropping their jaw, and they're opening up the back of their throat, and they're learning how to get the air correctly from the bottom. Because if the kids are just constantly singing like this (low breathing), it's very shallow, and they're not going to be able to fill up the sound, not an auditorium

Deanna B.: So I believe in my ten warm up series, and I use them every day, especially in my choir, and it really made a huge difference in my program.

Christopher Loftin: So you've talked a little bit about the mechanics with visual expression. Um, do you go into showing the song's message facially with your groups, or do you save that for the middle school?

Deanna B.: I save that for middle school. One thing I do is to tell my kids, and it's part of the Warm-up Series. There's an exercise called 'energized', and that's where you know I really want them to have bright eyes, and I want them to be facing the audience. In early childhood, when you're talking about fires, for me facing the audience is very important because when they are on the risers, there's a tendency to look for a friend. When they do that, they don't realize that their voice travels in a different direction. So, I'm constantly saying, 'Energize your voice to the audience. Show me where your vocal projections is going. We practice a lot standing and just making sure we are looking at the audience. I'll say, 'Show me with your hands; show me with your fingers which way are you looking. Everybody put your hand in front of your mouth and breathe so that you feel the air in front of you.

Deanna B.: I've used little coffee straws and other manipulatives to help them visualize, to understand the direction that their voice goes. That may seem very simple, but for the elementary age, when they're wiggling on the risers, especially during my kindergarten concert. I give them three snaps, and they know that that means to face forward and voice goes out to the audience, so it's kind of like a visual showing where to go, in addition to the vocal. You can help prepare them in a way, so that when they get into another situation, they know.

Deanna B.: Preparing them in elementary helps because when students get to middle school, they already know how to read music. They already know how to audiate, because I'm teaching them how to. For example, 'I'm going to sing these three pitches, and you're going to tell me what they are', so that helps them really. I believe so much in audiation, and I believe that helps my

singers more than anything. It's like a little theory class sometimes, but we have fun doing it. That's important!

Christopher Loftin: I want to make sure I note this and come back to it. You talked several times about vocal health, and how that's really important, and I love that you did, especially at the young age. So, thank you.

Deanna B.: Yes, definitely, and I talk about it with my interns because my schedule is so full. I actually have a really tough schedule. I do not make my interns sing in falsetto because I would not want them singing in falsetto for five hours in a row on Tuesday. That could be damaging. Since I do teach with moveable do in different keys, I feel like my kids do a great job adapting to male interns singing an octave below them. I force my students to listen and find the center of the pitch through audiation. That is for five hours on a Tuesday, because I feel like that would be damaging. So, because I do teach with movable do, and I do teach in different keys, I feel like my kids do a great job adapting to my male interns. They can really do it on their own. So it doesn't matter if you're male or female, or what range of that you sing in. All of my interns sing in their natural voice, and that did not used to be the case as you know. I just don't want to put strain on the students' voices either. They go to recess, and they scream. I don't want them to scream in music. I'm very lucky that my singers don't over sing or scream when they sing. So, that's because they're taught with Kodaly. Thanks, Becky Halliday.

Christopher Loftin: I'm right there with you on that. Thank you, Becky. Okay. So, the next thing I'm going to do is actually play a video for you of a children's choir. What I want you to do is to watch the video, looking for elements of vocal and visual expression-what worked and what could be enhanced.

Deanna B.: The shaping of their vowels is very good.

Deanna B.: I would like for them to sing through the phrase just a little bit more and not give out. I feel like they're giving out just a little bit early.

Deanna B.: The word melody is a little pitchy.

Deanna B.: This section, I think the diction needs to be a little bit clearer just because it is a little bit harder to understand.

Deanna B.: So you know, we've got some students here really into this, and they're moving, and then you have some students that are kind of standing super still, and you can tell their only singing in their head voice. They're not projecting their sound.

Deanna B.: Okay, So I'm not a huge fan of this [Final starburst choreography] Um! I love the plan, but I think it could have been just as effective if it were just straight up and down. I love that some of the kids were really there facially. You could tell that they were comfortable enough in their voice that they were expressing themselves through movement; the kids with the mask, the ones who, I noticed, who you could tell who I felt like were really expressing themselves with their eyes and their shoulders. They were finding alternative ways, you know, but I thought

the shaping of the vowel was very good. I thought the diction in the middle could have been cleaner. I only heard one little pitchy sound with ‘melody’. I would have liked to have had more dynamics. I think it would have made it a little bit more musical, and just they kind of gave out just before the end of the phrase; they almost got there.

Christopher Loftin: So is that a breath support thing?

Deanna B.: I think so. I think that’s a tighten your stomach moment, and they just need to learn how to conserve their air just a little bit better. Right now, they were letting it all out at the beginning of the phrase then running out. You know, that comes with training obviously, but it was a great recording. Vocally wonderful.

Christopher Loftin: Is there anything else besides the pitchiness and contrast? Is there anything else that you noticed or something that could make it even better?

Deanna B.: I definitely feel like as far as the visual expression goes, I just feel like on some of the some of the words like ‘melody,’ they had a bit of a wide smile, and it just makes it a little bit sharp, a little bit pitchy. So, I feel like if they had a more of a relaxed facial muscle on ‘melody’, I think it would have been more in tune. So, I just feel like that kind of shaping of the vowel is so important because sometimes kids that age can get so excited, especially if they see their parents, and they end up singing twenty cents sharp. It’s just excitement. I definitely feel like a way to conserve the air. like if you take a breath in the beginning of the phrase, and you have to go through the phrase, it’s so hard to teach them not to let it all out at the beginning. You gotta keep that stomach tight, tight, tight, because you got to make it all the way to the end. I put timers on my kids, and I’m going to say, ‘Okay, this is going to last for twelve beats. Okay, let’s hold our breath for twelve beats’, and I’ll do a little exercise like that, and then I’ll say, ‘Okay, now, it’s sizzle’, and that sizzling exercise will help determine whether or not they are doing it evenly, or whether they’re all letting it out at the beginning. I think that’s what’s kind of happening here to her phrasing is some of the kids are just not making it to the end of the phrase. Some of them are, but some of them are just not quite there. It’s a great piece.

Christopher Loftin: Thank you so much. You have answered everything that I had. Is there anything else about vocal or visual expression that you would like to add or something we missed?

Deanna B.: I just feel like it’s so important for choirs, probably at any level, to be able to sightread. One of my friends [name redacted for anonymity] writes sight reading examples every day for his kids to sing. I’m doing that now with my choirs because I feel like if they can build their knowledge of sightreading at an early age, then when you get to All-State auditions, they’re not going to be frightened because they’ve been doing it since third or fourth grade choir. The next step in sightreading is reading with expression. So, it’s not just notes and rhythms, it’s being able to sing in *piano* or *andante*. It’s being able to sing this in one breath. How can I add as many musical skills from our standards as possible? That way, we can help students so that they can build their knowledge base before middle school.

Christopher Loftin: Wow. Thank you. You’re amazing!

Kay D. Interview – 12/5/2022

Christopher Loftin: okay. So according to Kay D., what is vocal expression in terms of choirs?

Kay D.: Well, I think it falls into multiple categories. So vocal expression is obviously oral. but I think it's as much, in a choir situation, it can be as much visual as it is oral because I tell my students all the time when you walk out the first time that the audience sees you in the first 9 seconds they're going to make up their mind whether they're going to listen to you or not, whether you're worth it or you're not. So we better get our stuff together, even getting on stage, and the way that they carry themselves and all of that goes into the vocal expression.

Kay D.: Also, I think another thing that goes into vocal expression is the way a choir moves, the way that their facial expressions, obviously the most expressive part of you are eyes. Your eyes have to be there. Your eyes have to show that you know what you're singing, and that all goes to vocal expression. I think the visual side is one thing. But then there is the vocal side. I really have gotten the last several years. I have really excelled and gotten into and been successful with talking about vocal color with students. Even high school level students. I remember that I took [redacted] to Atlanta, and we went to a vocal workshop that was put on by Tesfa. He talked to my students there about vocal color, and that kind of set the course for us to begin to talk about that.

Kay D.: Today I use vocal color, and all of the descriptive words, and the way that we talk about it with my choir, and I also teach voice so, and I have a lot of my choir students. Most of them are in my choir. I mean my voice students. Most of them are in my choir, so it's a double duty thing, and I also have, so I have the Audition Choir Group, which is right now at about 30. We have a few more coming in. It was this my first semester with it, and then I have a vocal pop group, which is 11 singers. We talk about it in there. So, expression. I think we have all the basic things that everyone learns, you know, support all of the different phrasing. You know all the different things that we talk about, but I believe that vocal color is a part of vocal expression that a lot in my experience is a lot of choir directors don't get that far, or they don't know how to take their choir to that. In my job here, I'm required to teach because I'm music education and worship leadership. I also have the vocal pop group, so I'm required to teach in a variety of styles.

Kay D.: I have a crutch that I use, which is great. I keep looking back because I don't know if you can see it, which you can't. But there is right there in the corner with the green, blue, and green. That is a poster that is put out by Tom Blaylock. I don't know if you've ever heard of the Blaylock vocal technique. He's out of Portland, but I started taking lessons from him back in the summer, actually back last spring, and I have incorporated all of that into my teaching now. And so what he teaches has been revolutionary for me. And when I'm looking at that poster, there are, there's a color scheme, and he has light medium, and it's a little bit heavier, and then it's like Wagnerian opera, and he talks about all of the different styles that fall into that.

Kay D.: And so that's how I have been successful in helping my students both in choir, and in the vocal studio, to understand where we're going, and what we're talking about. Vocal expression.

Christopher Loftin: I'm curious because you're talking about different styles, which is fantastic. Does the vocal color change among styles and songs, and if so, why?

Kay D.: It definitely changes within style. I think each singer brings, and I'm trying to keep this. I know your project is more choral, and so I'm trying not to venture off too much into the soloistic

Christopher Loftin: This is still very much within the scope.

Kay D.: Yeah. I definitely think the styles need to be studied. Just, for instance, a simple thing like diphthongs. How do you handle diphthongs in the different styles in the more classical or choral style. You're going to hold the first vowel longer than the second one. You're only going to put the second one on at the very last second in jazz and pop and worship. That's the realm I live in right now is a lot of worship music. You can do a lot of different things, but there is no set rules, but you don't hold the first one like you do in classical or choral music. You're free to chew it a little bit if you want to, or do something different, or hold the second one longer, or go to the second one, you know? And so that's just one example of being expressive between the styles. Now also, within worship music, there is a plethora of styles within worship music. So, if it's a hymn arrangement from the sanctuary hymnist series, then we'll follow the more classical rules of styles, and if it's more on the contemporary side, we'll do more of that. It could be jazz or whatever styles within worship. So, it's been really interesting, and it's been something that I have known about and tried to teach through a series of terms like I will tell a choir, sing this purple. or sing this red, or sing this yellow. Try it different ways, or I will do a vocalise, and I used to do this in my choirs. You know my high school choirs. I'd say, sing it opera style, sing it. Country style, you know. Do the same thing. You know all the different styles, sing it jazz, title, sing it a cowboy style, you know. Sing it just all, whatever words you could conjure up, and that worked really well, but not until I started studying with Tom did it become systematized.

Kay D.: This has been the greatest tool. And so I just refer, you know, to the colors on the chart, and I'll say, 'were you singing that this color, or were you singing it this color', now? Which does it need to be. Now let's sing it this color so and that, and when I say color, it has a list of characteristics under the different colors, so they understand it better. I just have never found anything systematized like that.

Christopher Loftin: Ooh. I like that. So, you approach vocal expression as an integration with visual expression. Is that correct?

Kay D.: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Christopher: Yes. Okay. So for the purposes of this study, let's pretend like they're separate.

Christopher Loftin: So now you've talked a little bit about some of the vocal and some of the visual. Can you talk a little bit more about what makes something visually expressive? Yes, they can still be integrated, but approach it more from the physicality, or how you would perceive it specifically. How can a performance be visually expressive?

Kay D.: Okay, well, there's the individual performer who makes up the choir. So there's that aspect of it, but there's also the conductor which brings expression, and I tell my conducting students you should look like the music. So that is part of it as well. So, if I'm conducting a gospel piece. I'm not going to be very; you know I'm not going to do this. I'm going to use signals to convey my desires, so I think that is a huge part is the conductor themselves. adds to the expression, and actually dictates the expression of the song. I mean, that's something that we work on in rehearsals.

Kay D.: We don't just wait till the performance to do it, but it's in tandem, so it's me telling singers what my vision is to them in rehearsals leading up, because the rehearsals are really the most important part. That's where we do the most growing. I love to even try to go further as the conductor in a performance than we've ever gone before. I call my students here and in my previous schools the 'heart attack kids' because it seemed like they were waiting to the last minute to learn all the technical things: the notes, rhythms, and getting it all together. That's not what I want where the performance is the highlight. That's what I've been trying to help my students understand is that they have to start adding the expression in the rehearsal. Expression has to begin in the rehearsal. You can't just be non-expressive, singing everything correctly. You can't do that and expect the huge leap in the performance and have all of the technical elements remain intact.

Kay D.: I prefer that students are loose. I don't want singers to be still. We talk about swaying and even do choreography at times. We do different formations. For our Fall concert, I had 4 songs, and we had 3 different formations. I had them down in the audience. One of them was in SATB formation up on the risers, and another was spread all across the stage and mixed. I like using the electronic screens and projectors because I think these days, with our entertainment prone world, and everyone is entertained all the time. So, we have to make it entertaining-don't be boring. Make it fun, or let's go home. If we cannot perform and engage an audience, then we might as well go home.

Kay D.: One of the things with visual expression is working together as a team, being unified as an ensemble but allowing the individual personalities to shine, allowing them to grow as performers. There's been maybe one time in my whole career when I had to tell someone, 'You're moving too much up there. It's distracting.' Many times there are individuals who were just so involved that the music was just oozing out of them, and just you could just tell that the joy of singing was all over them, and I would say, 'Y'all need to get a sneak peek, because I don't want to embarrass them. But you all need to get a sneak peek at so and so, and right now they're standing out. They're sticking out of the performance. Like people are, their eyes are drawn to that person, but I do not want to bring them down. I want you guys to come up to their level.' You should be performing at that level, even if it feels contrived at first, and I think that way it will eventually come, and so I say, 'Fake it till you make it. Just do it, and then, all of a sudden, you're going to feel it, and it's going to be there.'

Kay D.: I think for me in particular, text is primo, like the text is most important, and I think everything else comes out of the text that we're singing. So if you, as a performer, if each individual as a performer, and then me as the conductor, have really studied the text together, and we've really talked through it, and we've worked through it, and we've performed through it

in rehearsal, it becomes a part of us. We embody it. We make it sing, we make the text sing, and so that for me that's the first place I think of where it all starts is you've got to understand what you're singing about, and you've got to be fully engaged yourself. And then think about how do I engage those that are going to be listening and watching?

Christopher Loftin: Okay, we're having church today. I'm thrilled. So, you talked about staging a lot with, you said there were 3 different formations in 4 songs, what specifically were you hoping to gain out of those different stagings?

Kay D.: So, I am building community within my group, I'm. Building community within, and then we are building community and connecting without, you know, going out. And so part of the and this these were our goals that we sat down, and I sat down with the student officers, and we talked about that. We want to grow from within as a family, and they we want when we share that, we want to engage people outside of our group. And so I think it's so important that when students are thinking about. Well, let me just say it this way that you challenge them to think about, 'How does this affect me? How am I growing through this rehearsal experience?'

Kay D.: Sometimes I feel like we have really dissed rehearsals because we always think we're thinking about the end product, and it is so upside down from that it should be about the process, and then the product should just be the joy of all of that that's going on before. And so it just the joy in singing. I challenge my students all the time. 'Are you happy about singing this? And it doesn't have to be a happy song? But does it enlarge your soul to sing? Is your soul touched by this, then why are we seeing this?'

Kay D.: If this is a real spiritual thing, and I think it's singing any song we're singing, 'It's a wonderful world' right now. That's just as spiritual as some of the church things that we've done so bringing that to them, bringing that to their attention because they don't typically think about those things they don't think about? What if I wasn't up here singing? Would the world be any different? Would I be any different? And you know, trying to make a difference for them, and help them to understand this transcends the singing thing we do; it transcends it to a soul-to-soul connection with those who you are performing for, and also with the Lord. You know we're performing, to quote Kirkegaard, 'God is the ultimate audience.' We think about the audience being the people, but Kirkegaard said God is the ultimate audience.

Kay D.: I've thought about this. I'm going to have the Lord's supper, and we're going to actually take communion, and we're going to search our hearts, and see if we are ready, you know, if there be any wicked way in us, and see if we're ready to present this to the Lord, that's what we're doing. That's where I come in and say y'all missed class, or you came in and you didn't know your music. You didn't have your stuff learned, or whatever I mean. It's not me as the Lord. And are you proud of what you're bringing to him? You know. I mean I can do that. It's really awesome, but I'm in a private school where I can do that. I don't know if I answered your question at all.

Christopher Loftin: The fun thing about this whole thing is that it's so personal, and it's so exploratory right now. I'm at the stage where I just want to get feedback, and then go see what

happens from there, and everyone is saying so much of the same thing just from different sides of the coin.

Kay D.: Well, I would say, you know I try to hold students accountable. Personal responsibility as a performer comes first. Are you doing all you can. Are you showing it? Yes, your voice is there. The technique is there, the everything is there, but are you showing it, you know? And are we really expressing the music as it was intended to be expressed.

Christopher Loftin: Who or what determines how it should be performed?

Kay D.: Depends on the style, I think. I mean here, this is what I do, right or wrong, but if it's a classical piece or something that's more standard repertoire, I will go, listen, and watch a lot of choirs do it. I might call a friend and get some input. You know how I know you perform this. How did you do it? What are some of the things that I need to implement? But I think well, now that I'm saying that that really goes across the board for everything, every style, I mean. I just think we have so much technology at our fingertips now. So why, you know, used to, I'm old, and we set to go to the library, and, you know, go to the listening room, and try to find recordings of things. But now it's at our fingertips. So why don't you take, you know, bits and pieces from every performance we're doing, *Precious Lord*, a beautiful Acapella arrangement, and I went and just listened to a ton of different choirs do it. I didn't do it like anyone else, but I just found where it meets my needs and where I feel like it's being expressive. You're talking about expression, vocal expression. It's really up to me. It's my job as the conductor, to give the vision of what it needs to be, to give the vision. I show my students recordings. They are posted on our canvas. They can go, watch them or look at them or listen to them, and I really encourage them to do that. So they'll have a lot of different things in their arsenal of choices to make, you know, and it's a choice. But that to me is one of our greatest resources. And why shouldn't we use it?

Christopher Loftin: Absolutely. I remember those days in the listening rooms myself. Yeah.

Kay D.: And we didn't have videos of watching people do it. Nope. Now we can watch what I do. And this is another thing. I let them watch other people, but I also record them. I video them, and then I show it. I love their self-assessments. You know I had one student who said, wow, I did not know that I was Elvis impersonated. You know or incarnate right there on the stage. I'm doing all kinds of Elvis moves. He's actually from Memphis, too. It's funny, but he's like I'm doing all kind of Elvis things, and I didn't even realize I was doing it.

Kay D.: I said, see, I told you that you were moving like Elvis. Do you remember this, and he said, yeah, but it just went in one ear and out the other. But when I see it I'm like, oh, my gosh! And it's not appropriate, so that changed his whole outlook about what he looks like. I think we should just use the tools that we have at hand. Video them and let them talk about, 'Are you being expressive?'

Kay D.: Does this look like you really want to be there? What are you saying?' Here's another thing I've done is turned off the sound, and just let them watch and then ask them questions, you know, like, 'what you got from that. What are you singing? Do you even know what you're

singing there?' It's interesting to get their feedback, but I think, and you can tell them all day long till you're blue in the face, but if they see it, they are confronted with their lack of expression, or they might see someone else who's doing something really awesome. And they go. Wow! I didn't realize because I stand beside him. I didn't see all that that's really cool, and I'm inspired to do more.

Kay D.: So anyway, that's not air on the side of too much versus too little. I would rather them be moving too much like, I said. I've never had but one time when I've had to tell somebody you need to calm down a little bit, you know it's too much.

Christopher Loftin: But even you are talking about Mr. Elvis impersonator, and that's like this is not stylistically appropriate. Now if he's doing an Elvis song, that's perfect, but you're singing Bach...

Kay D.: He's our beat boxer, too. He's got a great voice, but he's our vocal pop beat Boxer.

Christopher Loftin: Oh, that's amazing. So Next thing I've got. I'm actually going to have you watch a performance. Okay?

Kay D.: It was really lovely. I love that performance, but I also love that. It gives a lot of close ups on everybody. Well, I think the first thing that I would say is if I were clinicing them, I would ask them. I probably walk up to the whole group and say, someone, tell me how you personally connect with this text? What does this mean in your life? What does it mean to you? And I would ask several people to just share things that they felt, you know, comfortable sharing, and then I would move them towards. Okay. So this is how you feel. These are your stories. Now this becomes our story together, you know. And so, let's talk about all right. How do we all feel about the true colors thing? You know how and what does that mean? It means, be you, you know it means, let yourself shine, be vulnerable.

Kay D.: And so that's what we're doing here is, you know, as being vulnerable with one another, and then I would say, and everything that happens here stays here. It's just like Vegas, you know. So, we don't go out talking about people's stuff outside of this room, because this is family time. This is. This is a time when we become closer. So, I think that would be. The first thing is, I didn't really feel like the group was that connected emotionally. So, I would work on emotional connection with one another. The next thing I would do in that realm would be, I would mix them up. I would, instead of having them sections, I would have them in mixed formations, you know octets, or whatever quartets, octets, whatever works out because I think that there was some real great male energy, and I think there was some great female energy. And if you get some of those people standing next to each other. Man, it becomes electric. You know it again with the emotional connection.

Kay D.: I would also tell them to sing with the soloist, because what it looked like was, and of course it's hard to see on a Youtube video because the camera was, you know. The shot was on the soloist, but I could see the few girls that were standing around her. Their faces were bland, and so she is expressing what you are feeling. This is you. So, she's the solo voice, but this is the choir's expression, so I would probably put her in a more prominent position, and tell everyone

to look at her, to reach out to her emotionally, to, you know. Encourage her to Vibe with her, whatever you know, while she's singing the solo, and that takes care of a lot of the face things you know, because everybody's vibing with her. Everybody's feeling what she's singing.

Kay D.: And just because she has a soloist doesn't mean it's separate from what we are singing. It's all integrated. So, it's all our expression, and just because you're singing an 'oo' does not mean that you should not be thinking about the text that is being sung. I would also tell them to watch the Stellenbach choir from South Africa because oh my gosh, do they have expression?! That's one of my favorite choirs in the world, and they're actually touted as one of the top choirs in the world because they've won all those choir competitions in Europe, and all that stuff, but they are amazing. And so I would bring up, and I would show something you know, from them, and they do all kinds of pop songs and all kinds of things, and they do it so well.

Kay D.: So I would model again like I said, use a model and say, this is what we're going for. I would also have them drop their folders and get their hands involved. They were standing there, you know, like this. I'm afraid to move, because it's a collegiate choir, and that's the tradition, or whatever. Forget it, you know. Let's we don't have to go by those rules anymore. So, let's get into it. So, drop the folders and add some body and hands. Each person should be able to express themselves in a way that is outwardly expressive, that I can tell. Yes, you're feeling, and you're feeling what you're singing, but yet it should all still be part of the collective as well. We're still a group. We're still one there's no second string in choir. There's only first string. If you're not here, and you're not singing the song. It's not the same group. You know it's just we're all to get. We're all in this together.

Kay D.: I would probably work with the conductor just a little bit. I think he's fantastic. He gets a lot of really great sounds out of them. And that shined vowel that he did at the end on the word beautiful was awesome. I was like, Yes, that's what I'm talking about with vocal color, the way the color changed on the vowel. Oh, it was gorgeous, but I would just if you want more out of them. Then you have to give more as well. You're the model as well. Remember, you're the one given the vision. So, you have to look like the music. That's what I would say to him.

Kay D.: The piano was kind of in the way, but I might try to position the piano in a place that the choir could move off of the risers and come down depending on where it is in the concert in the order. if it works logistically great, if it doesn't, just stay up there, which is what I did on this last concert we had a gospel piece, and I wanted them to throw down. I just wanted them to go all over the stage and down the stairs, and just throw down. But logistically, we couldn't do it because we sing in a sucky sound place. I can say that it sucks the sound. It just sucks it all up. There's no reverberation there's nothing. It doesn't help us whatsoever. So, we depend heavily on mics, and we couldn't figure out a way to mic them in other places, you know. So we were logistically tied to that space.

Christopher Loftin: So, if you had the opportunity with unlimited space so that's not an issue. What would you have done in terms of staging for this performance?

Kay D.: Wow. That's a great question. Wow! I've never been in that position. That's why I'm like oh, that's I know it's my directors never get unluck. Never get full access to what we want.

Exactly, because it's all we always have to work within the parameters. So, I'm so used to. You know, knowing what my limitations are. Wow! I might group them together in small clusters. you know, like, and maybe it...Mmm, I don't know.

Christopher Loftin: Well, would you go with or without a director?

Kay D.: I definitely think I would do it without a director, and you and I know this is possible because you know. Gosh! How many ballads did our show choirs ever do where they don't really need you? I would bring them out to get that. That's what I was saying like. I would just bring them out. The piano would not be that prominent in the set. And yeah, I think they could definitely do it.

Christopher Loftin: So would you almost treat it? I mean, even kind of like with show choirs. You have the combo in the back? Yeah. And then the singers out front. Would you almost go that route?

Kay D.: I think so, or if I had, you know, a big enough stage or a big enough area, even right over here in the pit area, so that I might put the band there, you know, so that they're not distracting. They're really not the deal. So, there's no reason for them to be seen. You know it's really about that the song and the text. And you know, Cindy Lauper, you know it's really about that. It's really about that soloist starting out, I mean. I would just give her free reign. She could just be free, you know, and out I don't know why they put her behind the piano right there, and just a little mic. That just seemed like a weird spot for me.

Christopher Loftin: I guess that's where she normally stands.

Kay D.: Possibly, but then, why are we so afraid to change up the formation for that, you know? Maybe put the soloist in the front, and then maybe put everybody in a V, or you know, an upside down V?. Even, you know, or some kind of visual something that gives it some interest. That's what I've been really toying with and working with and like I said, working within constraints, but like so because my fall concert had 4 songs with my choir, and of course we had the vocal Pop group had some songs, and the Gospel choir had some, and the worship choir had some. You know I wanted to do my first piece in the round. It would have been great in the round, and then we had an interlude where I could have had everybody go up on stage, and you know it was just perfect. I had it all played out in my mind. But then as I was thinking, through the space, it just would not work, you know, and I'd rather do something that is going to work vocally, even if we are constrained.

Christopher Loftin: Well, you've covered everything I had. Is there anything else about this topic that you think needs to be explored?

Kay D.: I might be wrong. I've been wrong before, but I just think the vocals have got to be there. The vocals have got to be solid. The prosody's got to be there. You gotta be able to understand the text. You know all of the technical aspects of that. But if you don't have the visuals both from the choir and the conductor, it just falls flat. I liken it to great gospel choir directors, and they are always into it. They're singers are always with them emotionally and

musically. They have to be because they've got all these kickbacks in different places. They can go in the music and different things they can do, and all the symbols and all that stuff that they're doing. They have to be with them. But if we could just get that kind of engagement across the board, whether it's Mozart, Bach, or Cindy Lauper, that's what we want. That's what we try to teach here. It's done in excellence. First of all because we're doing everything unto the Lord.

Kay D.: And then, secondly, we're going to do it authentically. So if I'm going to sing an African piece, I'm going to sound like Africans, and I've been to Africa, and I've got videos on my phone that I show them and say, this is what they sound like it's super bright, smiley sound. It's way, you know. It's not far back. It's forward. You know all those things, and this is how we're going to sing it. So just be authentic.

Christopher Loftin: I love it. Thank you so much.

Kay D.: You're welcome, and I hope that you'll share with me, you know. Keep me posted.

Brittney K. Interview – 12/6/22

Christopher Loftin: So according to Brittney, what is vocal expression?

Brittney: While performing as singing or while conducting?

Christopher Loftin: anything.

Brittney: Okay.

Brittney: So vocal expression to me is more than just the sound and the music that comes out of your mouth, or us as conductors, that Ha! It's more than just what we do with our hands. For me the biggest thing about voice compared to instruments is, yes, we have the words, but we have our faces, and our faces are seen. A lot more than instrumentalist faces are seen. or paid attention to maybe is a better way to put that. So, I think faces do a lot now, from my conducting standpoint my face portrays almost everything. I'm thinking to my choir. If they don't sound great or something sounds out of tune, I make a face, and they know, and that kind of tunes them into what's going on. Also, I try to show them through my face what I want them to show through their face, so I try to be a mirror. That's my hope is to be a mirror. So my face, if I want them to show more happiness, I'll smile at them and be like it's okay. Let's go. If I want them to show more seriousness than my face will get more serious because I believe that as directors we are, we should be a direct reflection of what is going on. If we're not showing it with our face and with our body, then our singers probably aren't either. So I think vocal expression comes in in both forms the actual sound, and then the visual.

Christopher Loftin: Okay. So you said the face should be a direct reflection of what?

Brittney: Oh, Just the feeling of the piece, and what we're trying to get the audience to feel from it because even if it's in English, and we have great diction sometimes, you know you get stuck in the music. I had a professor in call in my undergrad. Call it tone bathing, he said. Don't, sit here and tone bath. You have to pay attention, and it makes sense, because if it's really good. You're sitting there, and you're just. You're just letting it wash over you as an audience member. So that means sometimes you might miss exactly what you're supposed to be, or what you hopefully should be feeling. So that's where our expression comes in, and that's where, as the director, our expression comes in. So it's me to the choir to the audience, all connected.

Christopher Loftin: So you are basing some of your inspiration, obviously from the music. I'm assuming the text. I'm not trying to put words in your mouth. I'm trying to make sure I understand. the music. The text is that what I'm hearing?

Brittney: Yes, so you know, through score study hopefully, you get a good idea of what it's about. But then I also like to have conversations with my choir about the feelings involved, or just the general idea of the song, so that we can kind of have an understanding as a group. So yes, I come in with what I believe is the composer or the arranger's intent. And then I have those discussions with the choir. Usually sometime we'll have a discussion with the choir of like, hey! What are we

trying to portray here? As far as feelings and emotions? And what's the big picture of the song? And then that comes from the mirror, again.

Christopher Loftin: I love it. So, visually what can a chorus do visually to either enhance or detract from that performance?

Brittney: So, the biggest thing, in my opinion, that detracts from a performance is being dead pan with no movement in your body. You just look like robots. I think that that is the biggest thing that kind of shuts an audience off from what you're doing. I actually had a conversation just last night with my small concert choir, and one of the things that they were talking about was the audience's response to their concert. It is our job as vocalists, choirs, directors to engage the audience. So just like we want to engage our student in learning, we want to engage our audience in that process as well, and we do that visually through again through our faces and through our body. It can get distracting if someone's moving around too much, but I don't want a choir of robots.

Christopher Loftin: Why?

Brittney: One? Because it's boring and it lacks musicianship and expression. That's the whole beauty of being human is, you take individual humans and their individual experiences and their individual expertise, maybe, or those kinds of things, and you put us all together and try to make that that ensemble. And those individuals are what makes the group so much better. That's why every semester, every year, you have a different kind of feel a different culture to your group, because you have different individuals in there, and that really comes through. So I don't want a choir of robots, even though they would listen, and they would do exactly what I asked for, it just wouldn't feel the same. It wouldn't have that, I guess for lack of better word, expression.

Christopher Loftin: I think you kind of alluded to it, and I wanted to just ask for clarification. It was very brief, but it's like, but do you think the visual could impact the vocal?

Brittney: I definitely do. It's not very often, but it is possible to be, have a very good vocal performance, and a very bad visual performance. It's possible. But that's the exception that is not in my experiences. That is not the rule. If the visual and in, and the body isn't feeling that expression even just slightly, then there's a good chance that vocally it's not coming out. It can still be musically very beautiful, but I'm sure there's some research out there about just engaging the whole body into the singing experience really turns up the enjoyment three notches.

Christopher Loftin: And there is obviously literature, otherwise I wouldn't be doing this study., but there's mixed reviews as to whether or not physicality affects enjoyment.

Brittney: I'm not always necessarily aware of it if I but if I'm really feeling a piece, I can't help but my body just be into it and then, and vice versa, if I get my body into it, and I can feel that organically, then it helps the rest of it. It could be subconscious, which may speak to the mixed reviews. We don't understand the connection yet, but I think we've all experienced it at some point.

Christopher Loftin: Exactly. So I'm going to play a video for you. this is actually of a high school honor choir singing a piece by Dr. Mrs. Powell, I figured you would appreciate this as well. It's called, *I Want to Die While You Love Me*.

Brittney: Okay.

Christopher Loftin: It's one of her newer arrangements. But, as you watch, notice if you are clinicing this group, what are you talking about in terms of the vocal and the visual expression?

Brittney: Okay.

Christopher Loftin: So, let me go ahead and do all the fancy sharing screen things. Before we go, can you see it?

Brittney: Yes. You said visual and vocal expressions? Okay.

Brittney: So, at first glance, I really like it. It seemed like they were really feeling it, right I could see a lot of it wasn't distracting it wasn't crazy movement, but just a lot of the choir singing. They look like they are almost conducting with their bodies. I had a hard time understanding the words which isn't a big deal, but when I looked at their faces what they were trying to convey. They kind of had a generic expression. I know that it is supposed to be a deep song, but I couldn't tell from their body language.

Brittney: The title say, *I Want to Die While You Love Me*. Are you happy about that? Are we longing? Are we sad? What are we saying? I want to die while you love me, because I feel like you don't love me, or I love you so much, and you make me feel so amazing that I could die. So, these are all questions that I would ask this choir, because in so many other ways I'm getting a lot of really good feeling from it, but as an audience member, I'm confused, having a hard time because I'm not exactly sure what they're singing. so I need to see it on their faces, and I was kind of missing that. I need to see something, even if it's in the eyebrows are really important. Your eyebrows can show happiness. They can show anguish, they can show surprise. They can show so much stuff which is the eyebrows that we're not messing with the vocal mechanism, and in the mouth shapes and all of that. So that's probably the biggest thing that I would say to them musically. It did feel like it was a little up [loud dynamically] for too long. I would have liked to hear a little down [quiet energy and dynamics], so a little more contrast. Yes, a little more contrast, because, the climax at the end was good, but it could have been a lot better if there was more of the of the piano contrast, so the less on the lesser end. Otherwise, musically, I felt like they, they were doing a really good job

Brittney: I would really need to see the lyrics the poem cause, like I said, I couldn't really understand it. It sounded pretty mushy on my end.

Christopher Loftin: Absolutely, and that's completely fair. So well, you've covered everything that I have. so is there anything else that you think needs to be talked about in regards to vocal or visual expression.

Brittney: Oh. I don't think so.

Christopher Loftin: Well, thank you. I truly appreciate this.

Eve P. Interview – 12/7/2022

Christopher:

Okay, so according to Eve P, what is vocal expression in the choral realm?

Eve P.:

So, thinking on vocal expression, I would say that it's primarily in an auditory experience. So vocal expression is heard rather than seen. So this could be anything from dynamic contrast to modification of vowels to inflection, all of these types of elements of expression. Yes. That's,

Christopher:

So, is there any way where the physicality could potentially impact the vocal?

Eve P.:

Sure, but I don't necessarily think it would be, I don't know if you could see vocal expression without the auditory component necessarily. Okay. I think the physical component would play a part in it because think about someone's vocal mechanism, think about the shape of the face and the cavities, the vocal cavity. That's all gonna affect vocal expression and just vocal timbre, which I think could be an element of vocal expression, but I don't think you can necessarily see, see vocal expression without the visual.

Christopher:

As well. Absolutely. That makes perfect sense. What I was really fascinated with, and I'd love for you to go in more, the first thing you said was dynamic contrast. Why not just dynamics?

Eve P.:

Oh, well, let think, that's great question. Dynamics inherently are contrasting you. In order to have a forte, there has to be a relative piano. And so the vocal expression is the continuum of dynamics, which to me, I've always labeled a dynamic contrast. But I think you could consider it a continuum throughout. I mean, it's the idea of in order for something to be something it, there's something, it's not. So in to have the fortissimo, there has to be pianissimo.

Christopher:

Wow! That makes perfect sense. So, besides dynamics, you talked about vowel modification. Sure. What else could a performer do to be vocally expressive? Sure.

Eve P.:

Just trying to think of the wide variety of things. There are so many things you could do there. Any sort of articulation that you incorporate any sort of the vowel modification that relates to language production and that could have to do with resonance space, whether you're having a more forward resonance space or a darker resonance space. So you could have height as well as, and that could affect the expression of the, you can have, I mean, just thinking generally across a multitude of voices, you have the variety of timbres of sopranos to bass singers, in a choir

setting, your vocal expression is going to vary depending on the you. And then of course if you're accurately placed within, whether your vocal extract will change whether you were tenor singing bass or a bass singing bass, if that makes sense.

Christopher: So do you do riser stacking or something else to try to enhance your core, your particular forest's production?

Eve P.:

Very much so. In terms of orientation, you mean. Yes,

Christopher:

Yes. Not just you are an alto, bass, etc. but also placement within the section.

Eve P.:

Yes. So in our choirs we have the Sopranos, the first rows on the left side of the risers, it's facing them, the sopranos on the first two rows, left side altos on the first two roads on the right side, and then directly behind the sopranos are on the bases and directly behind the altos of the tens. And then I actually do something that, from what I have seen is a little bit rarer, where I place the outer extremities of each voice in the, so I have soprano two, the left, then so soprano ones then alto two, then alto ones. I know many of my colleagues will reverse that and have the extremities on the outside, but I love having those outer average range feel supported by the

Christopher:

So you don't just have that random alto too just sticking out over there.

Eve P.:

Exactly.

Christopher:

He or she or they have been over there their entire lives and it's like, Ooh, I get to actually hear.

Eve P.:

Something. Exactly. Exactly. And then you really, I found that to create a balanced sound and in all of my choirs.

Christopher:

That's fascinating. My wife's an Alto too, so she would be thrilled about that.

Eve P.:

Not being on the last person on the riser and exactly. Sing that, but also float it.

Christopher:

That's fascinating. Sorry, that was maybe slightly out the scope of the course, but I also, I don't think it necessarily is, I think it's all related potentially. So now transitioning to the visual, how can a chorus or an ensemble express the music? Something that is visually entertaining or reaches the audience?

Eve P.:

So this can happen, I believe, on both a micro and a macro level. On the micro level. Each individual singer involving facial expressions involving body movement in a choreographed form is helps to assist in visual expression from an audience perspective. So this is just thinking very behaviorally thinking, the raising of the eyebrows, the engaged eyes the just ever natural movement of the body that I believe personally it should happen as a singer, rather than having with the rigidity standing straight. Mm-hmm. Yours when we're young. So, the micro level I, that's kinda of realm I'm thinking of. But then on the level as a choral ensemble, you can utilize staging within a performance. That's just something I'm very passionate about where you have choir standing in different formations based on the piece. You can also change formations within a piece. You can change formations as transition. This is something that I think is visually to an audience just from feedback I've received on my concerts. So, it doesn't necessarily have to be, as we think of it, it doesn't have to be out, just having a purposeful staging experience to tell the story of the performance that you're for,

Christopher:

That you the word purposeful, I think that implies that you are intending to convey something. Is that what I'm hearing?

Eve P.:

Very much. Okay.

Christopher:

Yeah. So you said not choreography and also you talked about you want the body to be fluid or at least not rigid. Right. Can you go a little bit more into what you would prefer?

Eve P.:

So, I've seen a variety of choirs over the years, and so you get everything from the constant movement in every which direction. That can almost be visually overstimulating for an audience number to truly standing in a rigid formation and something in the middle. And so it has to natural to the voice sort of movement that I've encouraged my singers to it. Not necessarily with full tch arm the limbs, but in some way that their body is, they're allowing the breath to enter their body in a way that is natural. So this can be a slight fluctuation of the arms each time they breathe to allow for expansion. It can be just general movement to the meter. If we're trying to keep together on a particular piece thinking through mixed meter pieces that we've done, we often dance to them within the context of the rehearsal. And so, then there is a modified movement visually on stage just to maintain that sense that we've worked on within the rehearsal.

Christopher:

That's interesting. I like that. So you talk mentioned just there at the end about how you practice some in the rehearsal and then that hopefully it'll translate to the concert. Is that correct?

Eve P.:

Yes, visual expression is something we work on very purposefully. Within how we talk about the effect that we sing. We have sat down and we have a discussion about what are we trying to convey with this piece. And then we make exaggerated facial expressions, exaggerated body expressions within the context of the safe, the brave space, the rehearsal space that we've created. And then by the time we get to the concert, we have practiced this so much that it is ingrained in our storytelling. And then we're able to have a much more natural sense of it in the concert setting. A seen myself try to just say, oh, now smile when you get to the concert or Now don't be afraid to move ingrained within the heart process, not my own, in including visual expression and rehearsed.

Christopher:

I'm right there with you because then I've found whenever I do try to add something else in there at the end, technique or something else goes out the window.

Eve P.:

Exactly. Exactly. But if it in the learning process throughout it's, it becomes organic with the music so that all of any sort of movement that you do is completely organic and intertwined with the musical decisions that you're making as a moss rather than being superficial.

Christopher:

Wow. Absolutely. So next we're gonna transition. I'm gonna have you watch a video. This is a high school honor choir. Right, there is singing a piece by Dr. Rosephanye Powell called I want to Die You Love.

Eve P.:

Well, that was very well done. I'm not familiar with that piece.

Christopher:

That's one of our newer ones, from the last few years.

Eve P.:

Ok. I was gonna say I'm not familiar that, so they did a phenomenal job. There is some natural movement and a clear capture for what they do and you can see it in their faces and their engagement with the conductor. So I think if I were clinic them, it's, I'd want to think about the expression of not only the musical ideas of Dr. Powell, but also text within it. So especially within that B section where there's so much more text than just the title really diving into phrasing some of those moments in a way that brings out the meaning of the text. I think that was the first thing that stuck out to me was that it really, they had a clear, I let me think about the word. They had a very clear, I guess just aural image for the beginning and the end where you have the title text. I think that B sections, the B sections always but just giving that a vision that

is related to the text I think that would be really, really helpful for them. So bringing out some of those melody lines, bringing out the just overall text, meaning through articulation, through a little bit of dynamic contrast in their through balancing the voices and bringing out some of those moving lines that could help with the expression.

Christopher:

So, you talked about the B section being challenging just in general. Yes. Why do you think that might be?

Eve P.:

Well, I'm thinking through a large portion of repertoire that we sing and we often think about the beginning and the end being the A section or a coda section, whatever happens being not. But often we start there and we end there and then the can sometimes get translation or it's more complicated than the opening and closing. And so we learn it, we get through it, but we don't always really just need into it in the same way that we do with a section.

Christopher:

Sure. That makes sense. Yeah. I'm wondering, and I don't know, I'd love to get your thoughts on this. Would that be appropriate time where the music is contrasting... If you were planning this piece, I know you just heard for the first time. Would you intentionally, since you mentioned that word or purpose, would you do something different either vocally or visually in that middle section to bring it out? And if so, what?

Eve P.:

Yes. Let me think for this. So, I don't know what the text is in the B section and that was part of the reason I thought it would be helpful to bring out what that text is. It kinda, it got lost as someone who doesn't know the piece already. I could very clearly hear the articulation of the text at the beginning but it was not quite as clear in that B section. So diction being a strong point, but so I think crisper diction in that B section would be something I would add in there. I'm trying to think of what else. Visually, there's so much that you could do, you don't wanna necessarily overdo it, but seeing a little bit of a contract that they, that's when they split from being a unified ensemble and very cord based to a little bit more polyphonic. Seeing that within the singer, seeing that movement, seeing when I have the melody line visually, I think would be helpful. So as an audience member who you're following, who has the main melody? Any given one that might help just visually a little bit.

Christopher: So do you purposefully keep the audience in mind in terms of wanting to lead them. You mentioned that you want them to follow along. Is that something that you plan?

Eve P.:

I do, but that's just one way to do it.

Christopher: No, no, that's curious and that's not everyone is saying the same thing, so I want to hear both sides. Sure. So that's been fascinating. Well, you've covered everything that I had. Is

there anything about vocal and visual expression that you think needs to be covered? Or do you think we pretty much have covered it?

Eve P.:

It's such a broad topic, I know, I feel like we could talk about it for days. I think often in our art visual expression or vocal expression is our primary goal to implement vocal expression in the most effective and authentic way we can. And that visual expression is come second because if you think about music and many ways the art form that we've created has been completely oral thinking about a CD or listening to the radio or whatever it happens to be. But I think now that we're heading, especially post covid and all of this, we're heading into an era where that visual expression is becoming so much more important as we're thinking about the 21st century listener and the audience member, why wouldn't they just listen to it on the cd? So what is the purpose of a live concert? And so I think that visual element is key to moving forward and being a successful entity in the to come. I surely, this is a passion project of mine as well. So, I'm grateful to see your research. Yeah, I'd love to collaborate. I'd love to keep this conversation going.

Christopher: Thank you so much. This has been truly fascinating.

Dan W. Interview – 12/16/2022

Christopher: Easy enough. Okay. So according to Dan, what is vocal expression in the choral setting. We are gonna steer a little bit towards the traditional side for the most part, but another reason because of your heavy barbershop background, that's part that does influence how you teach as well.

Dan: Yeah, sure. And I and you're kind of also talking about this in terms of like delineating vocal expression and visual expression?

Christopher: You're kind of, yes. I'm obvious. So, I am gonna intentionally separate it, but yeah. If you feel like they are interrelated, feel free to go into that as well.

Dan: Got it. Well, because I, funny you should mention it, I think they're very interrelated, but I mean, what, we can talk about them separately, but yeah, I do think visual and vocal expression are for sure related to each other. I mean, when I work with choirs, whether it's barbershop or classical, usually comes down to expression is expression. And that's just the way it is. Usually you'll find a choir that is either, you know, really, really good at both of them or really, really not good at both of them. It's, it's really hard to truly find a choir that does one of those well, and one really not well, but which whichever one is, is which, because you know, music is just that, you know, it's just kind of, we talk about just the transcendent power of music and it's, it's, it's something that you, either you feel it in your soul or you don't.

And if you feel it in your soul, it comes out visually and orally. So, and that, that's what's great about working with choirs. You know, oftentimes, you know, if you need them to be a little more visually expressive, get them to be more vocally expressive and they'll both happen if you need them to be more vocally expressive work on something visual and that'll feed in there. So yeah, they definitely are interrelated. But if we're talking in terms of vocal expression you know, to me the vocal expression of a piece of music really has to do with just understanding what's happening in the music and highlighting it with the sounds that you're making. You know, look, look at the music, what's happening, what's the direction of the music, what are the arrival points? What's the character of the music?

You know, just, just in terms of the song, in terms of the composer's intention. What is all this thing? What is, what's all this stuff that is musically happening? Identifying that, okay, now how do we take a high layer pen and really just bring it out like that? And it can be, you know, and, and this is, this is something that I've tried to, to preach recently in, in the barbershop world for sure. It can have to do with a lot of connection to the text. You know, the more acquired feels true connection to the poetry, the more expressive they may be. But it, it doesn't, I don't think it needs to be that, you know, that that comes from my perspective is, you know, here in, in the music category. And I've spent years, you know, I talk about the, you know, just the journey of after hours, my quartet, you know, we had so many performance judges talk to us about, you know, in our journey of, you know, going from, you know, singing low seventies up to, to winning.

It's, you know, how do you, how do you express You have to, you have to understand the subtext of every phrase. You have to know who you're singing to, and you have to do this and this and this. And it just, it just really wasn't connecting with us. You know, all, all, all this stuff about, about harnessing the poetry and understanding the subtext. And they say, imagine who you're

singing to and imagine the color of the paint in the room and what's on the table next to you. You have to know. And they're like, you have to know all this if you're gonna express it. And we're just looking at each other like this. We're not, we're not buying any of this. And we just realized, you know, you can connect to a song or a piece of music in so many different ways, you know, depending upon how your brain is wired.

And what I found out from myself is that I'm a music person and I confess that as a musician sometimes when I'm working with piece, whether it's barbershop, whether it's Morton Lauridsen, whatever, you know, sometimes the last thing that I think about is the words that I'm actually singing because I'm just so connected to the tension and release of the chords and, and the melodic contour and the texture of what's happening. And, and so, you know, and, and, and that's, I found out that's how I really connect to music now. Is it wise to completely ignore the poetry and not what you're singing about, not know what you're singing about? No. I mean, you should understand what's happening just at, at least on a, on a level. But it, it's my opinion that if the arrangement is good, if the choral work is good, if it's a good sound expression of poetry, because that's the thing.

It needs to be good music. If it's a good sound expression of the poetry, then it's right there in the music. It's right there. And, you know, knowing what you're singing about is helpful. But in the end, if, if it's a good expression of the poetry and you're doing all those things in the music and just really harnessing all of that, then it's gonna come out as vocally expressive of, of what's in there. See, I'm kind of, I don't know if I'm rambling or digressing there, but that's, that's kind of something that I've tried to really preach because especially in the barbershop world, there's, I think there's a lot of people like me who feel like, oh, I need to, I need to be more performance guy. I need to be more about the poetry. And I've, I've tried to like to preach the gospel.

It's okay if you're a music person, it's okay to harness in this way. It's possible to do very, very, very, very well in this field without being the person who has to really harness the poetry in that way. So yeah, I would say just, just understanding, you know, and, and when we're working with choirs in the classical arena, I do think it's important because when you're the choir director, you need to know, you have so many different, you might have a lot of music people, you might have a lot of people who need to harness the poetry to express it. You need to understand you have all those different approaches in the room. So yeah, as the choir director, we need to talk about the poetry. We need to get it out there. Because you need to, to honor all the people who, who learn in their own different ways and who connect to music in their own ways.

But yeah, in the end it just comes down to what's happening musically and how do you highlight it, how do you exploit it in that way. So when it comes down, just like mechanical things, it's, you know, tone, color, you know, don't be afraid to you know, alter your tone color. You know, you're, you're, we're singing nice and healthy and classically, but you know, for expression, maybe you need to just take some risks and, and do something with your tone color and, and try to throw some personality in there with, with the sound of your voice. And then just other mechanical things. I mean, consonants, we all talk about consonants, you know, just, just they, they can do so much for the energy of the sound is having the consonants in there and just energy in the sound, the breath, continuing to activate energy and the breaths and everything. So, there's, there's all those mechanical things that, that we do to highlight those moments in the music. But that's what it comes down to me is understanding what's happening musically, what's the direction, what are the arrival points, and how do we highlight all of those points mm-hmm. So yeah.

Christopher: I was literally just about to ask you what were some more of those elements in addition to the arrival points, the tension release that you mentioned, and right there at the end, you just gave me that.

Dan: Sure. Well, yeah. You know, that's the, the concept is highlighting those, those moments in the music and mechanically you do it with, with your tone color, with your consonants, with your energy with. Yeah. So, yeah.

Christopher: And were you talking consonants with a ts at the end or a ce at the end?

Dan: Good question. I was talking about ts consonants in terms of, you know, because I mean, you know, if you ever worked with a choir just getting a choir to spit out their consonants, ultimately that just, it raises the energy of the sound by 200%. But yes, you do want in tune singing as well. Yes, for sure.

Christopher: Yeah. Quick aside gave a test a couple of years ago with our five rules that we have of how we teach expression slash articulation. And our second rule was every consonant should be observed. And I had 60 different spellings in a chorus of 150 of that word

Dan: Really? Yeah.

Christopher: So that, that became a running joke. Nice. Of can we spell consonant? And then which form are we talking about? CE or ts? So

Dan: That's funny. Yeah.

Christopher: So, you've talked a lot about the mechanics. What can a chorus do visually to enhance that vocal, especially if they're looking in the music at the tension release, the arrival points, how can they echo that with body language?

Dan: Yeah, that's, and that's where, hmm, I, I mean I think it does, this does kind of depend upon, upon the arena or the choral genre. Yes, I do think it does. I mean, obviously, you know, barbershop contest the chorus, you know, there's, there's, you're expecting lots of it depend, it just like the level of theatricality, you know, I mean, obviously there's a difference between a barbershop chorus and a classical choir. But e even with, even within the classical realm, I mean, if you're, you know, if you're singing a Renaissance motet should have a reverence to it. Whereas, you know, if you're singing like a Handel oratorio, you're in the chorus, you're portraying the Babylonians. And so there should be some theatricality. So I think there's, you know, in the choral realm, if I were to have, you know, maybe there's, there's a scale from, you know, reverent on this side and theatrical on this side, I think maybe all choral music kind of falls, falls in that scale somewhere between reverence and, and theatricality.

And obviously Theatricality, I mean there's, you know, that that's its own can of worms in terms of, you know, eyes. You have to show on your face, raise your eyebrows and move your body a little bit. But in, in terms of the more subtle things, you know, I don't know if, if I were directing a choir, I don't, I think this is where I would really have to just kind of lean on the fact that vocal and visual inform each other. I don't know if I would really encourage a choir if we're singing a,

you know, a Brahms folk song or, or a, you know, even Benjamin Britten or something like that. I don't know if I'd really encourage something visual. I would, because I do think, you know, the more vocally expressed of the choir is, the more, the more you're going to see the investment.

If, if the choir is truly invested in the music with their voice and with their soul, you're going to see it. You know, it's just, it comes down to those subtleties of like, you know, you watch really great actors, you know, all the best actors they can, you know, on a film screen, you know, they can show enormous shades of emotion just by one tiny little, little thing on their face. And that's, that's the kind of thing if we're, if we're not dealing with the theatrical side of choral music, you know, that that's its own can of worms. The theatrical side of choral music with show choir or, or oratorio or opera or whatever. But if we're not dealing with that, then I do think, I, I think embracing the subtleties, it's what's important. And I don't know if, as a choir director, I would really use, if my choir were not being visually expressive, I would go the vocal route to bring more visual expression, you know, because just the more vocally invested they are in the music and the, the vocal expression, then it's just gonna show, you know, because I, I don't, I don't want my choir to be, you know, singing a renaissance mote and thinking about how they're moving, you know, that's, that's, that's not my school of thought.

So that's, that's how I would approach that.

Christopher: Absolutely. That's, yeah, I like your route of going instead of strict, strictly the performance style and going more of the vocal style and then getting that way. I like that. So I'm very much, I'm on the fence. I'm very much a straggler of music minded versus performance minded. Yeah. So, and that's, you know, having worked in various different states and various different situations, I feel like that has been really best suited for all my students is to have your kind of mindset of going the vocal routes, but also having some of the performance category as well.

Dan: Yeah. And it, it just definitely, like I said, it really depends on the genre. It just, you know, entirely depends on the type of music. I mean, there, there's some, even if you know, even if something like a Bach cantata that is kind of like there, that's classical. But there's, there's a theatrical element to that too. Even though if you're singing a chorus and a bachata, you're not playing a character, but it's just, it's still, it's, you know, that that music is, has the blood of opera in it, you know, there, there's some of that in there. So maybe you do need to encourage a little bit of, of, you know, intensity in the face there. It, it, it really depends on, on the genre. So like I said, there's just that, that scale between reverent and theatrical. Yes. And if we're just fully reverent, if we're just singing, you know, that, that type of music, then how, how much can we use the, the more vocally expressive they are, the more it's just gonna show, because the investment, the investment will express itself in the whole body. But then the farther you get on that scale, the more Okay. Can really show me that you're angry or really show me that you're passionate. You know, it's, it's yeah. So that's definitely a can of worms there.

Christopher: So for example, are you familiar with the Verdi *Dies Irae*? Yeah. How would you approach that particular piece from an expression style?

Dan: That's a good question. I mean, because that's, I mean, that's heavily, I mean, Verdi himself would say he, he was, he didn't want that to be an operatic piece. But I mean, it's verity, it's gonna be operatic. It's just the way it is, deal with it, deal with it, verity, whatever you say, it

sounds like opera, but, but that is, yeah. I mean, but that, that music, I would still, I think I would still go with the vocal expression because that, that music is just, there's such intensity in that, in that movement. There's such intensity. And that one for sure, I think if I think it's impossible to sing that piece with lots and lots and lots of vocal expression and not show it in your body. You know, like I, I think you'd have to try. I think you'd have to physically try to really sing

And not show in your body somehow. So that, that's definitely one I would say, you know, we're just gonna go vocal and, and if you get them singing it vocally expressive on that level, then it, it's gonna be there. You know, I, I wouldn't want them to, to be thinking about the shape of their face while they're singing that, you know, I wouldn't want them to think about their, their theatrical posture while they're singing that. And that's definitely one. And there you go. You can talk about the poetry right there. I mean, what's the poetry, you know, day of Death, day of Reckoning. And the more they think about that more, it's there. But yeah, I, I don't think I would talk visually for that. It, it would all be through impression, through poetry, all that. And it'll, it'll show itself.

Christopher: Sure. Okay. So now we're gonna transition. I'm gonna show you a video. This is a performance of a collegiate choir doing true colors. I think it's [redacted] setting. So, I will cue that up. Do all the fancy screen sharing rigamarole. And so if you were clinic, this group, what are you talking about? All right, before we start, can you see it? Yep, I can see it. Okay. Let's check sound.

Dan: Nice.

Christopher: Love that piece.

Dan: Yeah. Yeah. That's a, that's a good choice for this project because that's, I mean obviously that's, it's a great choir. I mean, [redacted] it's fantastic. And, but there's clearly why are they being totally expressive? All that's like a really good, good choice, I think.

Christopher: Thank you. I was trying to find, and I've actually got about three or four different videos and based on the experience based on the level, like you're, you're more in the collegiate realm right now, so I save that for you. I've got, sure. My elementary folks, I've got an elementary, et cetera.

Dan: Gotcha. Yeah.

Christopher: But yeah, so that's, I tried to find something that had some, a lot of promise, it was a good performance, but there's some things that could be enhanced.

Dan: Yeah. Well, I mean, so this choir obviously, I mean, they're technically, they're just a fantastic collegiate choir. Yes, they're doing so many great. Yeah, and, and for this, I would okay so far, for this, I would, I think I go the route of, you know, still kind of marrying the visual and the vocal because they're, they're doing a lot of things vocally expressive. But you're not seeing some of, some people you're seeing it, some people you're not. I think for the most, where I really noticed drop off a little bit is after the climax. It just kind of, the last part of the piece just kind of is, it's just kind of like a, a little bit dead. And so, so that's what I would focus on first.

And I think I would go through the realm of musicality and just that last phrase, you see your true colors.

I, you know, have them try to speak it as see your true colors. Look, look all those consonants in there, we're not singing. I see your true colors, I see your true colors. And the second they were to sing it like that, they'd start to really invest it on their face and everything. So that, for, for that that last part for sure, I would go the, the realm of let's sing this as expressively as we can, and then both visually and vocally, it would start to really come to life, I think for sure, for that ending right there. But then for the song as a whole, the first, you know, two-thirds of it, you know, especially getting that big part I think I'd go the route. Like I said, they're doing so many things technically well and expressively pretty well, but we could just, there's that, that's a group that just kind of needs that extra little, little something to really bring it to life, you know, so it's, it's really good and it's pretty expressive, but how do we just find that, that, that, that key in the right hole that just blows it up and really makes it magical.

And so I would probably go the route of, I've done this before where I just ask the choir, you know, each of them, and this, this, this really works well with what I've talked about is how so many in the choir, there's so many different learning styles, so many different ways to access a piece. I'd say, you know, I choose a moment, you know, a really poignant moment of the piece. I'd say, what do you really like about this moment? I have somebody say, you know, they'd probably say, oh, that's where the, the poetry says this. And, and so the person is doing this. Oh, that's good. And somebody would say, oh, that's where there's this really cool chord that I like that was right there. Oh yeah, that's cool. What do you like? Oh, I like how the melody goes like this. Oh, cool.

And so I'd find something for everybody to really latch onto so that everyone in the choir finds something to be truly invested in. And I say, okay, what's your favorite part about, out of all those things you just heard, what's your favorite, your favorite part about that moment? And just really latch onto it, you know, so, so, so, so they're not just singing a piece of music that's really good. They have something that they really love about it, and they get to that moment and they all harness it. And even if they're thinking about maybe four different things, one's thinking about the message, one's thinking about the harmony one's thinking about the texture. They're all gonna have some kind of intent. You know, there's gonna be a true musical intent. And when there's intent, it's, you're gonna hear it vocally and you're gonna see it in their face cause it's something they truly love.

And then just in general, I, I used this at the barbershop convention a couple months ago with a couple of courses I coached. And this might be kind of in the barbershop world because, you know, they, they go to contest or, or it could just be, you know, for performance. You know, you get so focused on the performance, the contest, and the second you say, okay, I know we're, we're trying to do, well you're gonna perform in like an hour. We're gonna do this. Take a second and stop and remember why you love this. You know, why do you love singing? Do you remember that? If it's barbershop, remember that first time that you sang a tag and your blood started to just kind of boil, you know? And here you are doing this now sing that again. But the only thing I want you to think about, I don't want you to think about anything else other than you're doing something that you absolutely love.

And then they'll sing it again. And it's just, whether it's a sad song or whether it's a happy song, whether it's a whatever song, it's just better, you know? So, and, and that's something I think I would try with this group too, because they're, they're being pretty expressive, but you can see

there, there's that kind of technical focus in there. And I'd say, here, here's a time to trust that you're singing. Well trust that technicality, you know, Dr. [redacted] here has trained you very, very well. And I want you to trust that training. And now just say, screw it and just sing it because you love to sing. And let's see what happens. And 99% sure it's gonna be a lot more expressive both vocally and visually. So those are probably the few things I would, I would use if I were, if I were fortunate enough to be asked to clinic the [redacted] choir with [redacted], in a universe where that actually happens. That's what I would do. That's what I would do. So

Christopher: I understand completely, I'm gonna be stealing that mindset of finding something in a, a random part of the song. What is it about this specific moment that you really connect with?

Dan: Yeah, because it really just all comes down to investment, you know? It, and it can be, and that's the thing about, and I, this is the things I've learned with the journey. Like, there's times with after hours, like all four of us have different reasons for really, really loving what we're singing at a particular song at a particular moment. But it doesn't matter if Drew's thinking about the message, I'm thinking about that really cool tritone substitution, Tim's thinking about that cool canon melody and Brian's just, you know, whatever. Like we're all thinking about four different things, but we all are truly invested in what we're thinking about. And it comes off as a unified performance because even if we're thinking about different things, there's the investment shows and, and, and the musical arrangement is good enough that it brings it all together and it's, you know, the investment is, is number one. Yeah.

Christopher: Well, I love the insight into after hours.

Dan: Yeah. I, well it's, it's, it's so crazy because After Hours, I mean, you know, we started the, our first contest was, you know, we scored a 71, you know, back in 2009. It's like, I feel like I'm fortunate that I've been in a quartet that has gone like through every stage of development. And I feel like I've learned a lot of poignant things about the art form that some people haven't, just because I've been through like this 70 to 94 journey and that that's one of them, you know, that's one of them is like the, just the value of investment. Yeah. So, we've, we've had an interesting decade, but

Christopher: So you've talked about several times and I curious to see if you'd go even further about intent. Why is that so important?

Dan: I mean, you, you just have, you have to have a reason to because it's, it's the opposite of complacency. Maybe that's it, because complacency, you know, if, if you're singing and you're complacent, then, then nothing is gonna happen. You know, no magic is gonna happen. Complacency is what creates boring run of the mill music that is just, we're just trying to get through the day. Yeah. You know, and, and, and the opposite of that is intent of, of am I really trying to create art? You know, art isn't made through complacency, it's made through. I want to create something, whether that's, whether that's I want to express this poetry or whether that's I want to create transcendent absolute music or whether that's, I want to make this person feel something, you know, there needs to be some kind of intent. So yeah, that, that's a big old can of worms you opened there, but that would be, I would say, if I were to sum it up and I would say

just the opposite of complacency, you can't, you can't create art with complacency. There needs complacency, there needs to be some kind of intent and an investment for sure.

Christopher: Well, you've covered everything that I had. Is there anything about this subject that you think needs to go further? Considerations for future or do you think we've pretty much covered everything?

Dan: I mean, yeah, I can't think of anything else. No, that's, I'm interested, I'm really interested to, I mean, if you're willing to, to share this after you're done with it, I'd love to check out the finished product.

Christopher: Of course, we will definitely talk about this once it's done. Well, thank you, my friend. This has been a pleasure.

Dr. Henry T Interview – 12/29/2022

Christopher:

So, well thank you for doing this project for me. I'm so glad we got to do this.

Henry:

You're most welcome.

Christopher:

So there are two overarching questions and then there will be a I'll ha ask you to watch a choir's performance and just evaluate it as if you were coaching them.

Henry:

Okay.

Christopher:

So, do you have any questions before we get rolling on this?

Henry:

No, I'm good.

Christopher:

Okay. Okay. Feel free, whatever. Yep. I was just about to say, whenever you need a snack, go for it. You know me, it's very informal. So give you a chance to think while you're eating. So my topic is on vocal and visual expression in traditional choirs. Okay. So, what is it? How do we get it? How do we judge it? So if we were putting it into judging rubrics at state contests, what does it look like? So that, that's where I'm going with my project.

Henry:

Okay.

Christopher:

So according to you, what is vocal expression? And we are gonna split them whether you think they're interrelated, feel free to talk about that. But for a while we are gonna separate them out.

Henry:

Okay.

Christopher:

So, what is vocal expression?

Henry:

I think vocal expression is when you are, when you interpret what you're singing and you are, you display what your, your interpretations vocally. If it's a sad sound vocally, you make it sound hmm. Not as happy as cheerful as something else, you make it sound, you know I think, I think the, the sound would be a, a bit more heavier, darker in terms of you know, the, the tone color and stuff like that. And it will be, I won't say a, a strange sound, but a sound that would come across as somewhat forced. Mm-Hmm or not forced, somewhat withheld.

Christopher:

So, you used the phrase come across come across to whom?

Henry:

To the general audience, to, to those who are listening your audience.

Christopher:

So are you trying to make is vocal expression trying to make a connection with the

Henry:

Audience? Exactly. I, I, I think music, I ha you have to make some kind of connection.

Christopher:

So how do we make that connection vocally? What, what tools, you said interpreting the music

Henry:

Interpret interpretation is, is, I think that's the key knowing you, you have perused your music. You you've studied your music, you know, you know what you're singing about. You. If, if there's a story behind what have you singing, you, you, you've, you've even read the story. You, you've done research on the, on the composer. You know, why did he write this? Why did he or she write this? What was happening at the time when they composed this? What led them to this composition? You know? And so I think all of that has have as a play a serious part in, in and, and interpreting the music as you sing it, learn it and sing it.

Christopher:

Sounds good. So when singers, they've done their research, the director has done their res their research, how do, how does the singer and the conductor convey that vocally, that message vocally so that it does come across to the audience?

Henry:

I if it, I think it has to be internalized because once you, once you have done the research and you begin to learn it, you have to learn in a way you, that you take on the characteristics of what you've read of the composer, of what the composer was probably going through, what he was thinking, how he was feeling when he was actually doing the composition. And when you take that on and you begin to do his composition, his work, you begin to, you know, perform it, learn it. You take on that and, and the idea as, as you sing it, as you, you know.

Christopher:

So now transitioning into visual, what can a group do to visually convey that message?

Henry:

Okay. that, that, that's, that's a good question. I was in Memphis this past spring with my choir and one of my friends, [redacted] did a workshop with my students. And, and I'm sort of old school. I will have my kids just stand still and sing, but [redacted] believes in movement. He believes in movement, and I bought into his philosophy of or movement. And I think when you move, when you have some kind of movement there, when there's an expression on your face I think if I'm watching a choir sing and there's, there's an expression and the expression matches what they're singing, you know if it's about jubilation and there's a happy movement that sort of adds to the interpretation that that is intended for the audience to walk away to get. So I think it's very important that there's a visual presentation to match what you're singing.

Christopher:

Why is it so important? You said match a couple of times. Why is it so important where the vocal matches the visual?

Henry:

Because I, I mean, I think vocal and visual are the two most important components of the performance. So if they, they mirror each other and, and they match I think the message would become they so that much more to be effective to the audience and also to the performer that you've really done what you intended to do.

Christopher:

So was there anything else specific about movement that, so you talked about it matching. What, what do you think the purpose of movement might be?

Henry:

You know, movement, you think about dance and you think about any kind of choreography, choreographed things are done. And especially in show choir and any kind of performances they're done to match whatever the, the, the, the topic is, the, the, the overall I well topic, the, the, the, the, the whatever, whatever we, we we're talking about. We're talking about a big a big celebration or something you wouldn't expect, you wouldn't expect a happy celebration to be something that, that looks so solemn. So I think that, that again, just reach back and just say reiterate this stuff has to be, I, I think it should be, it should match what we're talking about.

Christopher:

So if it's internalized Yes, then you do something, then it's purposeful or there's intent behind it. Is that what I'm hearing?

Henry:

Exactly. Exactly.

Christopher:

Okay. I don't wanna put words in your mouth, but I wanna make sure I'm understanding. Yeah. So, it's internalization. So you first do the research on the why of the performance, then going into internalizing at how do we get to that in inter how do we get singers to internalize,

Henry:

I think go back if I, if to understand, they have to be researched. You have to re research why you're singing it. First of all, what attracted you to this piece? Why did you choose this? You know, and after you decided why you chose it. At least go back and just do some kind of research on the composer and what, what, what, what made the composer, what led him to even arrange or compose something of this nature.

Christopher:

Okay. Absolutely. Okay. So, I'm going to play a performance for you. This is of Dawson, sooner will be done. Okay. and so after, so as you're watching it, think vocal and visual expression and what you would talk about if you were clinic, this group.

Henry:

Okay.

Christopher:

So, what are you noticing?

Henry:

I, I, well, you know, we're talking about sooner will be done with trouble of the world. You know, I know it, you think of something like this to be, I mean, I, I guess, I don't know. I, I don't know if they were interpreting this as being something sad, but really this is a jubilant song. It's, it is really jubilant because you, you're talking about doing the ultimate departure from the world, going to live with God. And

I, I guess the tone, the tone could have been just a wee bit darker and a little movement could have been, you know, just a little body movement. Because e even with the conductor, he was given great cues. E even if, if, if, if, if they had matched His cues was just a little movement, you know? Especially when they were doing the contrasting between the sooner we'll be done and those three verses I wanna meet my mother, we meet with Jesus. And those, those sections and then the overall facial expression could, could have indicated I want to meet my that's happy that that's, you know, it's, you know, everything was so historic and it was the same, you know, it's almost like I was programmed to do those verses. I sang all of 'em beautifully, but I mean, my facial expression didn't indicate that I wanted to beat my Jesus, you know, that there were gonna be no more weeping and waying. All this is this, this indicates a promise of happiness down the road. And I didn't see that in their facial expressions.

Christopher:

Vocally. What did you notice?

Henry:

Vocally? hmm. The blend could have used some work. And the tone o o overarching for, for, for the spiritual, like personally, like the spiritual would be just a wee bit darker. So, we, we bit darker. I like dark. That's just personal, that's personal, but darker spiritual especially. And then maybe on the end brighten up a little bit on the end. That's just that, that's, that's personal there with me.

Christopher:

But why, so you, I'm assuming you're wanting contrast there at the end of the song.

Henry:

Yes. To illuminate that ultimate hope. Yes.

Christopher:

Especially there's something in the music, it's in minor the whole time, except for right there at the end, I'm going to live with God and it's nice, happy, major chord. Yeah.

Henry:

But, you know, and we, we, we teach our students that all minor is not, not sad, although it's not, you know people equate minor and sad, you know, together. But it's not always that, and especially this piece here soon we'll be dump with troubles, the world. It may start out, you know, soon we will be done if something's sad. But then as you, as you go on into it, you know, there are all, all these messages of hope and that, that you know, are going, that, you know, going are going to happen.

Christopher:

So is it also, I think, are you talking about some development in the music?

Henry:

Yes. that,

Christopher:

And you would, and you would change if you were working with this group or working with your own groups, you would probably change something throughout.

Henry:

Yep. Even just the articulation. You know, I'll work on that, you know, hi, I want to meet my mother. Hi, I want to meet my mother. For those of us who've lost a parent and who was dear to us, you know, that's a, that's, that's just something that, that's a longing that you know, it, it's almost like a promise that one day I'll see my mom again. So, there's nothing sad about that. I want to meet my mother. I said, I want to meet my mother, you know, delivery.

Christopher:

Well, and you talked about interpretation. I'm wondering if this director in inter interpreted this as a somber longing without the hope.

Henry:

Yeah. Yeah. That could be it. But I mean, all it, it just listen to the piece that there's hope all through the piece.

Christopher:

Exactly.

Henry:

Just problem has promise all in the piece.

Christopher:

Trying to think if there's anything else. You've covered everything that I had. Is there anything on vocal or visual expression hat needs to be discussed? Or do you think we've covered everything?

Henry: We covered a great deal.

Peggy L. Interview – 1/7/2023

Christopher:

Okay. So, in your opinion, it will, and we'll start since you talked about the visual first, according to you, what is visual expression in the choral realm?

Peggy L.:

Visual. Well, there's two things actually, because one requires if they use music portfolio or if it's all memorized

Peggy L.:

So, if it's all memorized, it's so much easier than to communicate. Not the music musically orally or whatever, but also how it affects you emotionally. And the emotion, how it affects you emotionally is gonna come out on your face or your body movement. And that is what we, as an audience, that's what endears us to the group. That's what connects us to the group, because we've all just sat in an audience or heard a, a group sing and that, you know, we're thinking about something else because they just haven't connected with us. So, it's a real important thing. Problem with the folios is if they're always looking down, well, it's hard to do what the conductor wants or the conductor wants. There is still opportunities to continue to look up and be visual connection. You, you're not really connect, I think in a regular group, you are more connecting with looking at the director compared to looking straight out at an audience, unless there's no director. Right. Cause sometimes the director comes up and stands with you or stands for this high, then that's a whole new matter. So, I guess that's what I would,

Christopher:

Yeah. So what can a chorus do to enhance or either detracts from the visual performance?

Peggy L.:

What age frame are you talking?

Christopher:

I am talking anywhere from K through college. So, it, it can be different, and it has been different based on the expertise of you all.

Peggy L.:

Okay. because I would say, of course, in the elementary and in sometimes in the middle school, then when they come on stage and get ready to sing, that is one thing that might happen. You're also, here's another matter that connects with the audience or visually doesn't con makes a negative impression. And as that, that is your performance attire. So when you allow women or girls or whatever females are female identifying or whatever it is if you allow them, if you just tell 'em to wear black and black or black or white or whatever, it's, you get kids who have, or performers who are short, short skirts with white, white legs, or you get I know I had to actually ask one time a person not to sing or go with us because she had chains all over her. Because that was her personal expression, I guess.

But it was very distracting. It focused the tension all on one person. And if you're trying to communicate as a group and a unit, the music, you can't have people just looking at one person that definitely detracts. And the audience would never really think about the music as much as what is she gonna do. So those are things also just look looking, well, you're pitch blower or whatever. If it's acapella, if it's piano, then it's, or accompanied, then that's, that's totally different. But, well, in a way it is, it depends. You're looking, basically, if it's accompanied at the director and your group should be looking at the director to bring you in. If it's acapella and somebody is blowing a pitch, if you have everybody turning in and looking at the pitch person just to hear it, then that's also not a good start.

So as far as detracting or what not to do, I guess to take away from visually, that would be one thing. In the past, some judges, our evaluators would also comment about people's care and that that didn't look good on somebody. And that is not where I think we are at this point because of all the gender, the diversity, the, all of that Now in our society, our focus. So we cannot, we, we have to watch older school, older trained judges, or you need to know who's gonna judge you. And that can enlighten you as a director as to, well, maybe we better dress this way, or We better, these are things that you, you need to look at me instead of, you know, all of those things then are a little bit more qualified if you know who your, who your judges are. So can you think of another question visually or,

Christopher:

So what can do for example, so what, you've talked a little bit more about the detraction portion. How do they, how do choruses enhance their visual presentation?

Peggy L.:

I think if you can memorize music, of course, that enhances it. Totally. I think of the different ways that people are on the risers and as you know central standards idea and not just central standard to other ideas, you know from choral music too, they do spread out so that you are filling this space around you and not right next to each other, which is absolutely actually hard to sing. I, I find it because you don't hear yourself, and so people don't, so anyways, that's a whole other problem. But I do think that if one is visually, if one is spread out a little bit, that is fine. The way that they take the bows, the way that they start when they walk out, I, I totally think the way that when they walk out. So that's something to decide whether there's a curtain or no curtain.

And if there's no curtain, then are you a group, like say the ambassadors do where they have a row come out in front and then everybody, it hides everyone. Or do you walk across the risers all the way to your spot, or, so that is a decision that can help the discipline that you, how you get on a stage in front of, even though that's not what you're supposed to be grading on or evaluating, it still makes a mental image. You know what I mean? And as far as when you're on the risers, the spreading out a little bit, looking out at the audiences first, and then when the director turns around, those are all things that enhance. And then just actually the whole attention at the very opening. So how they take a breath how the director brings you in. And if somebody makes a mistake, no, nobody are, or whatever, you just go on. Yeah. Right. Vocally and visually. I don't, I don't know if that would be the same thing, but I'm just thinking about how where it's some places you need to take a breath, but say, like the ambassadors, it's really more of a wash of

sound and there's not very many breaths. And so vocally where your breath pattern is chosen is also can be an enhancement or a distraction.

Christopher:

Excellent. So, let's switch now to the vocal. So what can, so what is vocal expression?

Peggy L.:

Well, that would be your dynamics, your interpretation. The tenderness. A lot of really a lot of that. I mean, how do you, what words are you gonna emphasize to bring out, to tell the story? And I know if you're singing in another language, that that could be a little problem. So vocally you would wanna, of course, get somebody who speak, who has potentially spoken the language to help you out. The other thing I'm thinking is like a South African piece that you may do, because those are awfully fun to do, honestly, because they're, well, they're acapella usually. And that's, so that's another question about if you're doing a song from another country, say the South African, so if you sing it Ang English or English Way, or do you sing it with the right quality of sound that they would sing it in the country that's all can enhance.

Or if you do it the wrong way, you're speaking the German wrong or whatever then that could detract for some people. So, but that all leads to the expression category. So dynamics, I, I just think the tenderness and the way that the words are emphasized, and I, I'm gonna bring, I know this is barbershop, but I have to say that they do an awful lot of what we do just in the schools and in choral groups. And sometimes in choral groups, we wind up just singing a phrase and we just sing the words and we're singing the notes, but we never put it together. Exactly. Whereas with the barbershop emphasis it is more like the spoken word. It is more, let's draw that out, let's make sure the endings of the phrases don't drop out and they go somewhere. That's exciting. To the listener, and I know I hate to say this, but I think that was one of the pluses of like gas house game. I mean, I know that Rick would say that Jimmy would always say, however, Rick does it, that's the expression, because he just hit certain words that maybe I may not have, but what he shows really came across. So those are things expression wise that would help any other.

Christopher:

So last thing that I'm gonna ask you to do is I'm gonna actually play a video of a chorus singing, and I want you to pretend, put on your clinic, your clinician hats, what are you working on with this group in terms of vocal and visual expression?

Peggy L.:

What are they working on?

Christopher:

What are you going to be working on with them if you, you're coaching them? Okay. You're coaching them as I've seen you do so many times, so well.

Peggy L.:

That's fine. Okay. So, one of, so what I picked out is, number one I thought it was a plus the way that they were standing apart a little bit, and that they were holding their folders to the side while

they were singing a song memorized. Okay. So that was definitely visually very positive. It's hard to tell from the video where the soloist was located, whether they, she could be seen over the piano by most of the audience. So I'm sure that that would be something that they would check out. But sometimes it is, depending on your stage, what you can do and what you can't do. And that's so super to hear, see and hear a full grand piano. I mean, there's nothing more musical in a way than I mean, if you can really do a grand piano that's just beautiful.

Peggy L.:

I thought the, the young lady who did the solo came out there and she set it up with a nice smile. I mean, it's not necessarily a happy, happy song, you know, that type of style. But she still looked like on her face that she was giving you the reason why she was singing it. And it is one of my favorite songs too. I've sung that in barbershop style too. So I also think, well, one thing that I, oh, so I was looking, while she was singing the soloist, I was looking at the background singers, and you didn't get a good look other than the three or four girls that were standing there. So they looked pretty much like blank right away at the beginning. However, the little girl, Asian girl who was right closest to her started to, I thought, connect with her face as to what the soloist was singing or the words that were being done.

The other girl didn't next to her. So, I guess my attention would be drawn to the, the girl who was connecting. Overall, when they were singing as a unit, there wasn't much expression from what I can see, because again, the video's far away, so up close it might have been a different experience. And then I also think just from my standpoint, it was rather hard to hear the vocal and the vocal quality, because at least on my recording, I heard piano. And the piano covered up a lot of it. It was beautiful piano. And that young man is very excellent. He was very expressive, which also, you know, I don't know if the director worked with him or if the director asks the chorus to listen to what he is doing, because his expression in passages can also help a chorus get very expressive.

So, but that all depends on the director, whether he wants to be the one that directs that emotion or whether you can add other things in it to help. So again, it covered up a lot of it. The, I think at the beginning they were not doing an oo, they were probably doing a hum, maybe closed mouth. Hum. So yes, again, that didn't come across as well because I couldn't because of the piano, and I'm sure live would be a different situation, so I wouldn't change that. Because you are backing up a, a soloist. The, when they, I guess another thing visually that I would experiment around with would be their, their bodies are very still, the majority of their bodies were very still. And if they were emoting, it was, it was only on the face a little bit.

So not hardly even moving a neck or a head around. And I remember seeing when they were panning across, there was a girl in the front because they did a lot of the girls, not the guys, you know, when they in the video you could tell that she was like either she was just doing what she rehearsed. So there it was just a, ooh, something like that compared to what is the reason of doing the oo and where you gonna head for head with it. So one other thing that I would probably, well, well back to the freeing up of their, their bodies. I would explore what if you did even holding those folios? What if you did do some, I mean, showed a little how you really felt when you sang it and not limit yourself to being just straight.

Because once the solos came back in, then it, the focus was on the whole group and you could move a little bit. Voices were very good. I didn't really notice anything popping out and partially because of the piano being there. So vocally I wouldn't be able to tell expression wise. I think they could do a little bit, well, in many places they did do true colors. True colors and

emphasized, held onto the true. Now I know the song, not that version, but of course I know the song well enough. I just enjoy the, the harmonies and how it, they go floating in and out. But I can't say that there was anything necessarily that drew my attention to when they're doing a verse that this word was more important or that word was more important. So those are basically yeah, those are basically just off the end what I would, would say.

Christopher:

So you've covered everything that I had. Is there anything regarding vocal and visual expression that you think needs to be discussed? Or do you think we pretty much covered it?

Peggy L.:

For that just brief time seeing and through one time and on a video, we're not live. Those are the main things that I would first give as a positive, which worked well. And then what could be potentially enhanced. There wasn't we look for distractions, right? That take away from, from the beauty and the message, and that's what you work on. And it was hard vocally for me to hear anything. Again, because of the piano. So, another interesting factor, I don't know how you've explored this before too, is I was watching the director, so he hardly moved at all, you know, it was just the hand motions here. So, are your videos all pretty much with the director just directing like this? Or, you know how some you, you, it's almost like a ballet, but not over ballet, not over doing it, but especially on the holding out or stretching.

Christopher:

I've got some of both. And that's while slightly related in this case, it is something that I will be, luckily I'm young, I'm still starting out. This will vocal and visual expression is going to be my life's work. It's going to be something I study for forever. And that's conductors. Expressivity is been discussed a little bit, not much, but I think you're onto, you're definitely onto something about what the director showed.

Peggy L.:

Yeah. And I, I'm, I'm sure that in rehearsal he's doing some of that for sure because they're used to it. But does he then stop and do more with them in rehearsal? And this is just a performance attitude that he takes mm-hmm which would be interesting to study if you do it, if you direct differently in the, in the rehearsal and they're used to that and then you do something more straightforward because you think that's what a performance mode's supposed to be, how does the sound change between the performances?

Christopher: Exactly.

Peggy L.:

So, I'm curious, do you have a video of unchanged voices or for middle school?

Christopher:

Yes.

Christopher: Children's choir. So, they are all treble voices.

Peggy L.:

Hey, that was a great, great choice. Choice for the for the kids there. Yeah. Because it was an easy harmonizing and kind of an echo type situation where it was good for everyone. I thought that it was, it's so funny to are interesting to see kids and then to have already seen the adults or college kids or whatever they are. Yeah. Because who was more expressive, the little kids and they sang, there were a couple of course who may need some help there, but I mean, that's just them. They're growing. But a majority, I think it would be actually very worthwhile for adults, high school, whatever, to see videos of kids singing or to see kids like that. Because when you talk about what it is you want them to express facially, that's it. It comes out and kids can't help it, you know?

So that's awesome. The director, which was interesting too. So she directed them just for what they needed and she had the energy for the direction through colors. There's a different kind of direction. So it'd be interesting to compare two lively songs in generations. I did hear two things that I know what she's trying to do. It was very note notey, you know, but she was doing that for the purpose of trying to get all the words together and consistent as a unit. And personally, that's not bad. I mean, maybe if they work on, on it, cuz that's the hard part to get 'em all they can do that, especially memorizing. But if then in the future she was to take that and try to see whether da, da, da da, da, whatever, you know, keeping the, the wall of sound, so to say speak.

But that would be one thing. The other thing is, which is really hard for kids is when they're going from their lower voices to their higher voices, kind of over their break the chest and the head voice. And so, they were singing this arrangement was pretty much in their speaking voice arrange. So when they had to go up high and out of that speaking voice range, that's where they have to get trained how to get up there. And some of it is being scared and because they know it doesn't sound as good or it's not what they have control of, like speaking. So those are two things. The other thing is I have many, many times seen the, the piano in the middle like that.

I think it could have been on the edge. So it was not a matter of that was the only place it could be placed. It isn't a bad place for 'em. Because I would imagine sometimes the way that the accompaniment's written, they might have a part, one of the parts that's being sung as a backup right there in the piano arrangement. So it didn't detract from me, but that just is the recording. Mm-Hmm. So I just, I just love the excitement. It just meant something. And, and it's a tune. It's an earworm. It is. Awesome. So this, this was a audition group, I'm thinking?

Christopher:

Yes. So this was kind of like an auditioned middle school and upper elementary school choir.

Peggy L.:

Everybody's situation is a little different and you don't know what kind of situation you're going to step into. So, your insights are, are really good. You know, there was a name I was gonna tell you, I don't know if you know her at all. She's got some great music, but for the young, for the unchanged, I'm going to say, and that is Mary Goetze She was, she taught up at Indiana University and she taught with she used to do, oh, she's got some great arrangement arrangements that are nice and easy and for harmonizing. Mm-Hmm. What do you do with a drunken sailor? I used to use that. It's all acapella and it, it's awesome. But she with Orff schul work, so she would be at one of those certification places and do the vocal mm-hmm on that.

And she gave away a lot of music, but she was with Indiana University and their children's choir up there. So, but you, if you're ever into that part. Keep that in mind. She just totally writes.

Christopher:

Well, well, and who knows, I may teach middle school again. Well, thank you for your time today. I've enjoyed catching up with you and learning from you. Thanks so much.

Appendix F: Part Two Initial Coding for Each Interview

Vocal Distractions	Vocal and Visual Interrelated	Dynamics
Visual Distractions	Emotion is Emotion	Projection
Congruence	Musically Driven	Diction
Lack of Congruence w/Message	Compelling Music	Intonation
Ensemble Congruence	Music's Character	Contrast
Human vs Non-Human	Arrival Points	Shades of Emotion
Vocal/Visual Contrast	Climax	Sightread
Dynamic Contrast	Musical Direction	Audiation
Body Language Contrast	Composer's Intent	Tone
Texture Contrast	Unique Musical Characteristics	Vocal/Visual Congruence
Diction Contrast	Connection to Text	Distractions
Impact of Emotion vs Non-Emotion	Tension/Release	Alignment
Natural	Texture	Breathing
Authentic	Melodic Contour	Breath management
Organic	Good music	Singer Focal Point
Safe Space	Good sounds	Visual to support vocal
Discussions	Sound Poetry	Vocal to support visual
Believable	Know text and implications	Music Literacy
Building Culture	Shades of Emotion	Audience Desire for Expression
Tone	Composer vs Musical Intent	Eyes
Hands	Musical Physicality	Body Language
Faces	Genre Norms	Smile
Directors as Mirrors	Stylistic Norms	Building Skills
Eyes/Eyebrows	Face	Comfort as Singers/Performers
Active Participation	Body Language	
Everyone affects Everyone	Eyebrows	
Score Study	Visual Expression through Vocal	
Investment	Vocal Expression through Visual	
	Visual Congruence	
Social Norms	Auditory	Lyrical Driven
Singer Ownership	Inflection	Context
Transcend Technique	Dynamic Contrast	Interpretation
Audience's Experience	Vowel Modification	Tone Color
Face	Intent	Connection
Body Language	Purposeful	Articulation
Alignment	Visual affecting vocal	Diction
Before/In-Between/After Songs	Vocal/Visual Interrelated	Face
Vibrancy	Dynamic Continuum	Body Language

Tone	Language Production	Research Context
Enthusiasm	Vocal Timbres	Vocal/Visual Congruence
Vocal/Visual Congruence	Role of Rehearsal	Intent
Outward Expression	Teaching Expression	Movement
Vocal Enthusiasm/Passion	Riser Stacking	Choreography
Staging	Voice Placement	Purposeful
Audience Connection/Rapport	Audience's Enjoyment	Conductor as Mirror
Purpose	Face	Unity
Authenticity	Body Language	Contrast
Changing Interpretation based on new info	Non-Choreographed Movement	Development
Meaning	Choreographed Movement	Stylistically Appropriate
Purposeful Score Study	Staging	Musical Development
Discussion	Convey Message	Text Development
Student-Led	Engagement	Emotional Development
Commitment	Discussions	Tone Contrast
Unity	Authentic	
Contrast	Genuine	
Translate Story to Audience	Believable	
Role of Contrast	Musical Contrast	
	Unity	
	Contrast	
	Vocal/Visual Congruence	
	Show Audience-Focus	
	Safe Space	
	Trust	

Appendix G: Part Two Themes and Code Families

Visual Expression			
<i>Body Language</i>	<i>Purposeful</i>	<i>Context Driven</i>	<i>Supporting Visual Expression</i>
Eyes	Active Participation	Musically Driven	Safe Space
Eyebrows	Intent	Lyrically Driven	Social Norms
Face	Authenticity	Lack of Congruence with Message	Stylistic Norms
Alignment	Visual Contrast	Discussions	Genre Norms
Visual Distractions	Shifts	Composer's Intent	Investment
Ensemble Congruence	Believable	Music's Intent	Commitment
Human vs Non-Human	Directors as Mirrors	Text and Implications	Vocal to support visual
Development	Shades of Emotion	Performance Practice	Audience Rapport
Natural	Musical Physicality	Stylistic Faithfulness	Connection to Audience
Authentic	Congruence	Individual Text Meaning	Building Skills
Believable	Investment	Ensemble Text Meaning	Comfort as Singers and Performers
Hands	Commitment	Prosody	Process
Visual affecting vocal	Brain-Involved	Connection to Audience	Rehearsal Practice
Smile	Intentional Movement	Connection to Themselves	Connect to Music
Organic	Staging	Changing Interpretation based on new info	Pride
Singer Focal Point	Piano/Soloist Placement	Meaning	Internalization
Conductor Alignment	Vulnerability	Purposeful Score Study	Relating message to students' lives
Enthusiasm	Singer Ownership	Source Material	Expressive Choirs
Outward Expression	Audience-Focused	Song Origin	Experts
Observable	Not Prescribed		Building Culture
	Risk		Rehearsal vs Performance
	Courage		Cultural Norms
Body Language	Purposeful	Context-Driven	Supporting Visual Expression
	Student-Led		Education
	Purposeful Movement		Acting Skills for Singers
	Communicate Message		Trust
	Motivation		Translate Story to Audience
			Student-Led
			Empathy
			Translate Fun to Audience and Yourself

Vocal Expression			
<i>Elements of Vocal Expression</i>	<i>Unity, Development, and Contrast</i>	<i>Intent</i>	<i>Quality Music</i>
Vocal Distractions	Texture Contrast	Musically Driven	Compelling Music
Tone	Dynamic Contrast/Continuum	Lyricaly Driven	Music's Character
Texture	Diction Contrast	Purposeful	Arrival Points
Dynamics	Vocal Contrast	Authenticity	Climax
Diction	Shades of Emotion	Composer's Intent	Musical Direction
Tension/Release	Variety	Music's Intent	Unique Musical Characteristics
Melodic Contour	Tone Shifts	Audience's Response	Connection to Text
Projection	Vowel Unity/Modification	Congruence	Tension/Release
Breathing	Musical Development	Investment	Chord Structure
Breath Management	Text Development	Commitment	Good Music
Tempi	Journey from Origin to Goal	Brain-Involved	Pleasing Sounds
Articulation		Composer Diversity	Vocal to Support Visual
Focal Point of Line		Repertoire Diversity	Building Skills
Text Weight		Internalization	Connect to Music
Prosody		Individual Text Meaning	Freedom to Make Musical Decisions
Vibrancy		Ensemble Text Meaning	Song's Origin
Enthusiasm		Singer Ownership	Song's Goal
Inflection		Audience-Focused	Relatable to Singer and Audience
Vowel Choice		Not Prescribed	
Language Production		Risk	
Individual Timbres		Courage	
Sectional Timbres		Real Communication	
Riser Stacking		Student-Led	
		Convey Message	
		Motivation	