Founding Members Series: Dr. R. Clinton Parker, 16–17

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Reimagining Fall Conference
Wendy Looker, NC ACDA President

This issue of the newsletter was set to be chock-full of information about the 2020 fall conference, proudly titled, *We Rise, We Sing: Our Vision Unfolding*. The conference planning committee put exceptional energy and creativity into crafting an innovative conference that was to introduce a Lifelong Singer Track, an undergraduate conducting competition, and an opening session celebrating the contributions of African American composers to the American Choral Tradition. And of course, we were thrilled to welcome Dr. Eugene Rogers and EXIGENCE: a Sphinx vocal ensemble, whose singers were to convene from around the country for a week-long residency in North Carolina.

Over the course of the last month, we have had to make the difficult decision not to gather in person for our fall conference this year. The conference is not cancelled, it is simply postponed to 2021. We are making every effort possible to transplant each and every component of *We Rise, We Sing* to October 8-9, 2021. Same place, Meredith College, Raleigh. If you were planning to apply to perform, present an interest session, prepare your conducting student for the conducting competition, or encourage your adult singers to participate in the Lifelong Singer Track, please hold that thought! These opportunities will be open for registration or submission a year from now.

So, is fall conference cancelled? Absolutely not. As we are doing in so many aspects of our lives right now, we are reimagining how we can best support our membership. Our mission as an organization is to invest “in the development and growth of the choral arts through exceptional experiences in artistry, innovation, diversity, and leadership.” We have been charged with reimagining an awful lot in the choral arts. Change alone is overwhelming, but the unknowns we are facing as we attempt to prepare for the fall are not to be faced alone. What we intend to offer you throughout the summer and into the fall is support, community, information and inspiration. We are in the process of reimagining the 2020 conference not as a single weekend, but as a subscription series of virtual workshops and gatherings to help you reimagine how you can be an effective leader and advocate for your singers.

In order for NC ACDA leadership to best serve you, we first need to perform a triage of sorts – we need to know what you need most. To begin, many of us simply want to talk – to gather and consult the hivemind. Are we all in the same boat? How many different kinds of boats are we in? Once we know what you need most, the conference committee will design a monthly series of virtual sessions – some tutorials, some roundtable gatherings, perhaps a guest speaker or two. If you have ideas or you are, say, a whiz at virtual choir engineering, we would love to hear from you! Our offerings will change as necessary as the fall approaches. And if you have colleagues who are not ACDA members, they can subscribe as well. CEU’s will be
available.

What next? An open forum will be held via Zoom at 1pm, May 21st to hear your concerns. How can we help you respond to the many obstacles COVID-19 has placed in the path to choir as we know it? We need your voice in this conversation—please fill out this google form to share your thoughts.

No matter what kind of choir you conduct, NC ACDA is here for you, and we will get our choirs through this, together. And when we are finally able to gather again in a crowded concert hall, we will understand the choral experience in an entirely new light.

In solidarity,

Wendy

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A Reason to Celebrate! Southern Region Conference 2020 & 2022!

Jeremy Tucker, NC ACDA President-elect

NC ACDA was well-represented this year at the Southern Region Conference in Mobile, Alabama—right before the world changed! Hats off to the number of NC ACDA members who served as leaders and ambassadors during this year’s Conference. Your NC ACDA members are proud of each of you and celebrate you!

Performing Choirs
East Carolina University Chamber Singers
James Franklin, Conductor
Palmetto Voices Spiritual Ensemble
Sonja Sepulveda, Conductor

Performing Choir Host/Escorts
Libby Brown, Marshall Butler, Bobby Chilton, Cathy Moore, Carol Riggs, and Kathryn Sauls

Performing Choirs Chair
Marta Force

Cantare! Headliner Coordinator
Jose Rivera

Collaborative Conductor of choir comprised of

Historically Black Colleges and Universities
D’Walla Simmons-Burke

High School Honor Choir Coordinator
Peter Hayley

Children’s Honor Choir Coordinators
Catie Hitzigrath and Angel Rudd

Interest Sessions Presenters
Ryan Luhr, Phillip Morrow, and Jose Rivera

When the call was made for our NC ACDA members to gather for a celebration dinner, we were overwhelmed to have over 50 members RSVP to attend. As you know our conference was condensed quickly such as a bashful accordion! Sadly we were not able to gather at Felix’s Fish Camp—but the celebration was to announce that Raleigh would serve as our 2022 Southern Region Conference site! Grab your “tutu” and remember this date 2-2-22. This will be the opening day of the Southern Regional conference in Raleigh. You can count on our Southern Region to look to NC ACDA for leadership and guidance! It is exciting that NC ACDA has the opportunity to welcome the Southern region!
I’ll start with some acknowledgements. I was first inspired to become a choral conductor by my undergraduate voice teacher and choral conductor Paul Young, who was at that time at UNC Chapel Hill, and was later at the University of Illinois and then at Duke University. He made choral music come alive with passionate intensity in all three groups in which I sang under his direction — Men’s Glee Club, church choir, and a community oratorio group. In Chicago I sang in the Chicago Symphony Chorus prepared by Margaret Hillis and usually conducted by Fritz Reiner. Ms. Hillis was wonderful, treating the huge chorus with great individual respect and organizing rehearsals in a manner that was highly efficient and always productive. My admiration for Hillis was however counterbalanced by disappointment in Mr. Reiner, who always looked and conducted as though he hated the music, the performers, and the audience. At least that served to remind me of the importance of loving the music, the performers, and the audience.

Robert Shaw for several years presided over 15-day workshops at Westminster Choir College, and I had the great good fortune to attend one of those, culminating in a performance of the St. John Passion in Princeton after the first week and one of the Missa solemnis at Lincoln Center at the end. In that short period of time, I gained incredible insights into how music works and into musically productive means of rehearsing choruses.

Learning Music (as a Conductor). It was several years before I realized the importance of owning my own personal copies of the pieces I was conducting. That now seems really stupid because it should have been obvious from the beginning. Owning my own copies makes it possible to preserve cues, breathing marks, other markings, etc. and use them again. Even so, a conductor should in a way start from “scratch” each time he/she prepares to repeat a piece. It’s always helpful to memorize what you’re conducting, so that you can focus your attention on communication with the singers and with expressing the music rather than just going through the appropriate motions.

During each rehearsal, it’s essential to provide the chorus with the aesthetic satisfaction of performing something with full expressive involvement.

Relationships with singers. Conductors should resist the temptation to regard the singers (or instrumentalists) they’re conducting the way one might regard musical instruments — as objects to be played upon. Singers and instrumentalists respond better when they’re treated as fellow musicians, with respect and indeed with personal concern. It certainly helps to know them by name, and even to engage them in personal conversations outside rehearsal. It also helps to avoid any hint of personal favoritism. I think it helps enormously to organize convivial events during which chorus members can get better acquainted both with their conductor and with their colleagues. I had this kind of experience even with the 150-member Chicago Symphony chorus.

Rehearsal organization. Speaking of the Chicago Symphony chorus, it was singing under Margaret Hillis
that as much as anything else, helped me to organize rehearsals. Basically, there needs to be a balance between learning new material and reviewing music which has been previously learned. It’s also important to balance learning techniques such as rhythmic counting on pitches, rhythmic reading of text, and reviewing individual parts. In doing this, it’s good to learn by fairly brief sections of the music, repeating these until they’re well routined. There should also be a balance between sitting and standing. At some point, or points, during each rehearsal, it’s essential to provide the chorus with the aesthetic satisfaction of performing something with full expressive involvement. I always tried to end each rehearsal with a standing rendition of a well-rehearsed piece or segment of music. Finally, it really helps to come to rehearsal thoroughly prepared, including a written-out “lesson plan.”

Choral singers deserve to be challenged and inspired with great works of art.

Music selection. Obviously, music has to be selected to fit the capabilities of the chorus. At the same time, singers like to be challenged, not just to be given sight-reading material. I had the great good fortune to work with advanced music students at the graduate and advanced-undergraduate levels, and with a church choir whose members were all able to read music. My church choir responded very well to things like Mozart masses in Latin and Brahms motets in German. Such pieces were challenging but possible. Still, I wouldn’t have asked my church choir to sing “Friede auf Erden” or the first two-thirds of Ives’s “Psalm 90.”

There’s a great deal of wonderful choral music out there. Choral singers deserve to be challenged and inspired with great works of art. Unfortunately, there’s also a lot of choral drivel out there. It’s very difficult for me to imagine why some choral directors seem to gravitate toward this when they could be doing choral masterpieces. These choral masterpieces include pieces that can be performed by singers of any level of ability.

Performing in style. The principal musical responsibility of any performer is to present music in such a way as to allow the music to communicate effectively with the audience. For singers, satisfying this responsibility starts with giving meaning to the words. Obviously, singers can’t do this unless they understand the words. Therefore, if they’re singing in a foreign language, they must have word-by-word translations. But even if they’re singing in English (or once they understand the foreign language), they still need to be given every encouragement to sing those words with meaning.

It often helps to have singers read the text aloud so they can better understand how the text reads naturally.

It’s up to the conductor to present music in such a way that the structure is clear to the listener. Of course, he or she can’t do this without full understanding of exactly how the music is put together. So, analysis is clearly in order, starting with individual phrases and moving on to smaller and larger sections. Subtle adjustments of dynamics and tempo will help to reveal these to the listener, and it may also help to make these things clear to singers and instrumentalists as well, often by verbally sharing the analysis with the performers. I don’t know whether Robert Shaw always did this but when I rehearsed the St. John Passion with him, he shared every detail of the music with us.

The principles I noted above are applicable to music of all periods and genres. There are others that apply more specifically to different periods of music.

Renaissance Music. In singing music written between 1450 and 1600 (or somewhat thereafter), here are some specific stylistic features:

Barlines have been added by modern editors and were not usually present in the original. Therefore, it’s important to look for small metrical groupings in each part, and to articulate these rather than to articulate whatever groupings may be suggested by the measures. These metrical groupings normally coincide with verbal stress. It often helps to have singers read the
text aloud so they can better understand how the text reads naturally. Especially, singers need to understand that barlines do not suggest strong emphasis on the downbeat.

**Suspended dissonances are incredibly frequent in Renaissance music. Singers should be made aware of these and be encouraged to sing into those dissonances and back off the resolutions.**

As an example of this, think of the second phrase of Victoria’s “O magnum mysterium,” which reads “et admirabile sacramentum.” The verbal stress falls on the third syllable of “admirabile” and to some extent on both the first and the third syllables of “ sacramentum.” Especially, therefore, avoid any hint of musical accent on “turn.”

Related to this concept, without barlines the rhythmic notation is not conceived according to the metrical system of later music, but according to a system known as “mensuration.” In this system, the larger units remain identical when there’s a mensuration change, which is indicated not by our modern metrical signs (4/4, 3/2, 6/8, etc.) but by other signs. It probably helps for the conductor of this music to familiarize himself/herself with these signs. There are a number of pieces in which there are changes in the modern notation from duple to triple meter. When this happens for an extended section, the smaller note-values don’t usually remain the same, but the larger units. For example, Hassler’s “Cantate Domino” begins in duple meter, which may be rendered as 4/2 in modern notation, with “Cani” as a whole note and “ta-te” as half notes. Even here, the “Domino” and the following “canticum” are three-note units; but, since there’s no mensuration change, the half-note value remains the same. At “Et benediciete,” however, there is a change to triple mensuration. If “et be-ne” is notated in modern notation as three half notes, those three half notes probably should have the value of the whole note in the 4/2 section. That is, the three half notes should feel like triplet half notes with regard to the previous whole note.

Suspended dissonances are incredibly frequent in Renaissance music. Singers should be made aware of these and be encouraged to sing into those dissonances and back off the resolutions.

Some Renaissance pieces (like that Hassler piece, and many secular pieces) are primarily homophonic, but many are highly polyphonic. In these pieces, each vocal section needs to be encouraged to do its own phrasing. It’s impossible for a conductor to show all these individual phrase structures, so singers just have to do it on their own. It may help to have all singers sing the same phrase in unison, while the conductor shapes it.

**I think a performance of [early 18th-century] music should make it clear that every note matters, and every note is either going somewhere or returning from somewhere, rather than just sitting there.**

**Baroque music.** Choral music in the seventeenth century shows a fascinating mix of 16th- and 18th-century styles. I’ll discuss here music of the early eighteenth century, with the understanding that many of these principles apply also to much of the music of the seventeenth.

Too often, I’ve heard performances of early 18th-century music in which every downbeat is strongly accented, and the notes between downbeats have little or no meaning. I much prefer (from Robert Shaw, perhaps from Julius Herford) leading into downbeats and then backing away from them rather than just accenting them in isolation. I’ve often used the phrase “these three go here” with a little crescendo into “here” to illustrate how a remarkable amount of this music
goes. In any event, I think a performance of this music should make it clear that every note matters, and every note is either going somewhere or returning from somewhere, rather than just sitting there.

Though downbeats certainly have more significance as we move through the 17th century away from “mensuration” and toward the modern concept of meter, we still need to be very much aware of the metrical shifts often caused by hemiolas in triple-meter music. For example, in the chorus “And the Glory of the Lord” from Handel’s Messiah, the phrase “shall be revealed” no longer feels like ¾ with the stress on the first syllable of “revealed,” but like 3/2 with natural verbal stress on “be” and on the second syllable of “revealed.”

“A conductor needs to familiarize himself/herself thoroughly with the meaning of ornamental notes and understand exactly what they mean when they were written.”

We often hear dynamics in this era (and maybe even throughout the eighteenth century) described as “terraced,” meaning that it’s either loud or soft and there’s not much in between. This is an important concept, but I don’t think it should be taken to mean that even the slight adjustment of dynamics that define phrases should be avoided. Verbal phrases would never be spoken without the slight variations that define phrases and sentences; they shouldn’t be sung that way either, nor should accompaniments to vocal music be played that way. When I say “slight,” I mean slight; I do not suggest that a phrase should go from ♯pp to ♯mf and back again.

Speaking of “phrases,” it should be understood that late Baroque music often moves not so much in longer phrases, like those of the 16th or the 19th century, but in shorter fragments that might be better called “motives.” Obviously, these must be clearly articulated. At the same time, they should not generally be performed as one performs the legato phrases of especially the nineteenth century. I prefer a style that I have sometimes called “broken legato,” meaning that there’s a sense of continuous movement but that the individual pitches are not absolutely connected. I’ve occasionally asked a choir (somewhat unrealistically!) to imagine a series of quarter notes as a series of double-dotted eighth notes with a slight (again, slight) crescendo into the second dot, with each of those double-dots followed by a 32nd-note rest.

Throughout the eighteenth century, a conductor needs to familiarize himself/herself thoroughly with the meaning of ornamental notes and understand exactly what they meant when they were written. More about this later. Two more bits of Baroque performance practice, both having to do with rhythmic notation: Because Baroque composers never wrote, for example, a quarter note followed by an eighth-note under a triplet sign, there are a number of places where, because of a triplet accompaniment, a dotted quarter followed by an eighth should be treated as parts of a triplet. Also, because Baroque composers didn’t write double dots, there are many places where, especially in ceremonial-sounding music, a dotted quarter followed by an eighth should be “overdotted,” or even double-dotted. Such a place is the opening of “Worthy Is the Lamb” at the end of Handel’s Messiah Watkins Shaw in his Messiah edition has edited both the vocal and the instrumental parts to show this; but I don’t agree with his editing of “Behold the Lamb of God,” which I think should be performed as written.

Much has been written about the appropriate size of groups of singers and of instruments in the early 18th century. Some conductors have even put forth the theory that J. S. Bach intended his choral music to be performed with one voice and one instrument on each part. I’ve heard recordings of the Magnificat and the B-minor Mass done this way, and once heard a performance of the St. Matthew Passion according to those principles. The latter work was quite satisfactory that way, but I felt that those recordings of the very festive Latin works were decidedly lacking in the splendor that would be possible with even a few voices on each part. And the very glorious use of the high trumpet parts in those works weren’t even as glorious
when accompanying only one voice.

At the same time, in such works as the two Latin ones referenced above, it’s often very effective to use solo voices in places where there’s very limited accompaniment. The first exposition of the fugue in the opening “Kyrie” of the B-minor Mass comes to mind. This practice appears to accord with Bach’s own usage.

Finally, there’s often a lot going on in early 18th-century music, especially when there’s full orchestral accompaniment. The conductor needs to decide at every moment what’s most important for the listeners to hear, and make sure that’s what the listener does hear. Sometimes, in a highly polyphonic Baroque piece, it helps to provide different dynamic markings for different sections at the same time. In a fugue, for example, it’s usually more important for the subject to be clearly heard when it appears rather than to allow it to be obscured by secondary material.

**Classical music.** The music of Haydn and Mozart and their followers shows considerable thinning-out of textures by comparison with Baroque music, and more predominance of melodic line. Here are some important points to bear in mind in performing this music:

Those melodic lines, usually in longer phrases than those of the Baroque, need to be elegantly phrased, with a clear beginning, focal point, and ending to each phrase. And, since much of this music is homophonic, supporting voices need to match the phrasing of the tune; for example, if the basses go from sol to do at the end of a phrase, they need to match the slight diminuendo of the tune. This is of course equally true of the homophonic choruses (e.g., Chorales) of the Baroque Era.

The conductor should familiarize himself/herself with the proper realization of ornamental notes and symbols in this period. All this may be found in, for example, the Harvard Dictionary of Music. One of the very important things to remember is that “grace notes” do NOT precede the beat of the written note until about 1830. Until then, they should be articulated on the beat with rhythmic values clearly indicated in such sources as the dictionary cited above. These values were explained by no less an authority than Leopold Mozart. When those “grace notes” are appoggiaturas (they often are), the longer they last, the more expressive they become.

Choral groups were often considerably larger than the small church choirs typical of Renaissance and Baroque music. And instrumental groups may very well be larger as well, but don’t have to be. Much of the choral music of Haydn, Mozart, and Schubert (and even some Beethoven) may successfully be performed by small choirs and small groups of instruments. I’m convinced, however, that brass instruments have become much louder over the last 200 years. Mozart, in many of his more fully-scored works, typically doubled alto, tenor, and bass parts with trombones, maybe just to ensure that the singers would find the correct pitches. Unless the conductor can find some way to convince modern trombone players to play really quietly, three trombones can easily totally wipe out singers on those alto, tenor, and bass parts, and except in large choruses accompanied by full orchestras, may well be eliminated. Still, I recently heard a fine recording of the Mozart Requiem in which those trombone parts are played, and, with a large and rich-sounding chorus the effect is wonderful.

Because of the lightness of texture in this music, it has to be, quite simply, perfect in accuracy of pitch and rhythm since every note is clearly heard. Obviously, this is highly desirable in the music of all periods, but in music of thicker texture, an occasional wrong note in an inner voice might go unnoticed; not in the music of the Classical era.

The conductor needs to decide at every moment what’s most important for the listeners to hear, and make sure that’s what the listener does hear.

**Romantic music.** Basically, I think there’s one stylistic period of music between ca. 1750 and ca. 1910. Beginning, however, with much of the music of Beethoven and Schubert (and, indeed, some of the later music of Haydn and Mozart), melodic phrases become even longer and more varied, harmonies become more
intense, and dynamic contrasts become more dramatic. There’s much evidence of “terraced” dynamics in music before the early 19th century, but by the mid-century, crescendos and diminuendos become more prominent and more drastic. Choral and instrumental forces became much larger in the 19th century, especially with the advent of the big English choral festivals and of the writings of Berlioz.

Text-setting becomes perhaps more expressive and more dramatic in the 19th century, or maybe it just becomes more obvious. I think there’s almost no choral music, however, in which convincing expression of words isn’t of major importance (maybe some of Stravinsky’s Latin works?).

Rhythmic treatment is certainly varied in 19th-century music. Brahms, especially, probably because of his interest in the music of the previous three centuries, uses a lot of rhythmic variation, even shifting meters. Hemiolas are almost as common in Brahms’s triple-meter music as in Handel’s. And there are many places in which different voices seem to be in different meters, like the wonderful passage near the end of the fourth movement of the Requiem. Such passages need to be clearly articulated.

**The music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.** There have probably been as many varied styles of music in the last hundred years as there were in the music of the previous three or four centuries combined. Brahms may well have been the first composer who paid serious attention to music that was more than 100 years old. By the 20th century, most composers did so, with the result that much of their music reflects different aspects of earlier music. When this aspect combines with 20th-century harmonic practice, we find an incredible variety of musical styles. *It’s up to the conductor to decide what’s important in any piece of music and strive to reveal it.*

**In the a cappella music of all periods,** it’s important to find ways to have a chorus sound like an integrated body rather than like a collection of separate voice parts. The a cappella music of the last 100 years perhaps demands even more of this if it uses the full harmonic range of that century. In such music, limitation of vibrato is important in order to clarify the harmonies. I very much dislike absolutely straight-tone sound in sopranos above the staff and/or above about a mezzo-forte level, but full vibrato in all parts really obscures much a cappella music, especially that of the 20th century.

**We’ve written before about the extreme importance of meaning the words that are sung.** In the choral music of the Baroque era, there’s often an incredible amount of text repetition, and it’s helpful if singers can find at least a few different ways of expressing the words. Classical composers discovered the possibility of using thematic material while using different words. In the Romantic era, composers sometimes use entirely new music for changing texts, and this became much more common in the 20th century. Ives’s “Psalm 90,” for example, uses entirely new music for the various psalm verses, although similar textual ideas often elicit similar musical figures. The same is true for Copland’s great Biblical setting, “In the Beginning.” Here there are new musical ideas for the products of Creation, but at the end of each segment, the phrase “and the morning and the evening were the (whatever) day” is set to almost identical music. Where the music adjusts to the various ideas in the text, it’s especially important for the singers to respond appropriately to these changes.

**In choral music after about 1840, metronome marks were probably original with the composer.** It’s incumbent on the conductor to check these out and abide by them, though I think a variation of about 10 percent may be acceptable; and much depends on the nature of the chorus and the acoustics in the performance space. I once heard, at a national ACDA convention, a composer (I think it was Ross Lee Finney) complain vigorously (though nicely!) about a performance of one of his sets of pieces in which all the tempi were wrong. It was then that I decided I would never ignore a composer’s metronome markings. In John Mauceri’s excellent book *Maestros and Their Music* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), the author writes about a performance he conducted of Rigoletto in which he followed Verdi’s recently-discovered original metronome markings, exciting quite a bit of critical comment.
An Interview with Tom Trenney
Karrie Rushing, NC ACDA Music in Worship Chair

Many of us recognize Tom Trenney for his multi-faceted work in church music. However, Tom has spent the 2019-2020 academic year as a visiting professor at Nebraska Wesleyan University. During their choir tour in January 2020, I had the opportunity to speak with him on issues many church musicians have in common. Those who have had the opportunity to make music with Tom know that he is a tremendous musician, but an even more extraordinary person. As I write this article for the NCACDA newsletter, we have all been on a “stay at home” order for a month. All of our plans for Holy Week and Easter and really everything about the way we do our jobs have been reworked, and reworked again. Yet, much of what I find as I revisit this conversation with Tom is incredibly relevant. I hope that you will also find the simple, yet profound truths in what Tom had to share.

KBR: At this point, you have multiple job roles (First Plymouth, Visiting Professor at Nebraska Wesleyan, composer/arranger, organist, director, to name just a few). How do you find balance?

TT: I think the most challenging part for anyone’s life is figuring out how to be present in as much of what you have to do as possible. That’s to say, when you have lots of things to do, it’s easy to think about them all at the same time, which is maybe a good character trait, but can also prevent you from being “in the room you’re in.” So I think for me, the challenge always is to try to be as present and as focused on the people I happen to be with in that moment as possible. Recently added to that list, Brent and I have become parents, and that’s scrambled the deck in a lot of ways, because your vigilance to that role is transcendent. I feel so thankful that all the work I do involves people. People who are looking to grow in spiritual ways and to explore how to express themselves, and those are precious things to be a part of. I think it’s important that we don’t try to do so much that we can’t be present to the people we’re with. That’s always been my challenge. I do have to plan things a lot, but I’m open to being flexible – as long as there’s a strategy to begin with!

KBR: That’s key for church musicians because so many church musicians have other jobs in addition to their church positions.

TT: An additional challenge for church musicians is that there are no natural breaks. There is a cycle of seasons, but there is no “off-season.” Sunday is always coming. There is a huge challenge to that. One of the things I enjoy about the academic year is that natural space. I have tried to create some of that in my work at First Plymouth, particularly to make it possible for me to continue to do things outside of First Plymouth. I remember in my initial interview there, they noticed that it seemed that I did a lot of things outside of the church. At first I was sort of embarrassed, but then I realized what a blessing it was to have opportunities to share, and to be invited to other people’s churches to open up possibilities for them, and help them see music and faith in a slightly different way. First Plymouth has been so supportive in thinking of the work that I do elsewhere as being an extension of their ministry – kind of like a mission trip in a certain way. We’ve had a great privilege now with our YouTube outreach as well as for the time I can spend away to have an influence on worship and music in churches in America. It’s a surprising gift for me, being in the middle of nowhere doing what I do.

KBR: Speaking of the YouTube ministry, I’ve noticed through those broadcasts that the congregation at First Plymouth sings robustly. What are some things that you do to encourage congregational singing?

TT: I think in any congregation, there are enthusiastic singers and there are those who stand politely during the hymns and probably don’t even pick up a hymnal. One of the things we’ve tried to do at First Plymouth over time is to make it clear that music is not the space between the preaching and the scripture and
the prayer, but it is a mode and medium to connect us in a different way of preaching, and reading scripture, and saying prayer. There’s a great flow in our worship in the way that those things work together. There is a spartan spoken liturgy in our service. I notice that when I go to other churches how much more talking there is, and I think at some point, people don’t hear anything when there’s so much to take in. Can one be listening to someone else pray for them for five minutes – does that make it a richer experience than for one minute? I’m not sure it does. What if you took the next two minutes after that to have some silence so that they might have some space to pray, which they might not take when they’re at home, or when they’re trying to drive their kids somewhere. We’ve tried to give space in our service for silence and reflection so that people are invited to be actively involved beyond just listening to people speak. I think that’s why they understand that they have a role in worship.

**KBR:** What do you perceive as your greatest responsibility as a church musician?

**TT:** One of the passions I have is lifting up the communal song of the church. I tell our choirs that the reason we have choirs in churches is not so we have choirs in churches. It’s so that the congregation can sing with more joy and passion and be supported and encouraged. A lot of the time we spend in choir is on different settings and treatments to help bolster the hymn singing for the congregation. I think it’s a combination of figuring out what the messages of the hymns are, and helping people experience those messages by the way that we go about offering them in worship and inviting people to sing with us. I treasure that opportunity.

**KBR:** Many church musicians I talk to are wary of planning hymn festivals on their own. This is something you do quite often; what advice would you give someone who is planning a hymn festival for the first time?

**TT:** When I first started to do it years ago, I picked all my favorite hymn arrangements and just put them back to back. It was exciting and thrilling, but I can’t do that anymore. My heart now feels that there has to be a story. There has to be a compelling reason why one song goes into the next and that the context of what’s spoken in, around, and between informs the way that we receive the thing that comes next. I find myself drawn to a particular topic or theme. For example, in the program we present tonight, “Can We Sing the Darkness to Light?” that piece and that message inspired all the choices of everything I will say tonight, all the pieces and the order that they go in, and the way we involve the community in singing. Start with a small idea, and let the layers happen. Think less at first about how fast and slow and loud and soft things are. Do that later. Start with everything you’ve got in the kitchen and lay it all out on the table. Then figure out what ingredients you can’t live without. At that point, you start to choose other things. Too often, we start with the musical ingredients we think we need. Start with the words and the message – the things you can’t live without – and go from there.

**The reason we have choirs in churches is...so that the congregation can sing with more joy and passion and be supported and encouraged.**

**KBR:** If I interviewed the singers you work with every day, what are some things they’d tell me you say to them all the time?

**TT:** Shadow vowels! They tease me about that. I feel so strongly that we have the privilege and gift of language to help us express ourselves. I think it’s incumbent upon us as worship leaders to use that to its ultimate possibility. We spend 90% of the time in our rehearsals working on how to sing the words, and how to let them come to life and light. That’s been a new concept these students, so it’s a learning curve. I believe you have to be insistent and consistent and persistent about that. Also, we don’t ever sing a piece without spending some time thinking about why we’re singing it. I think that’s something that doesn’t happen as much as it could, because we get worried about all the things to get done: Check! Check! Check! I think the congregation and God won’t care if we sing the same anthem two
weeks in a row if we take really good care of it, and passionately sing the message of it. I’m one who would say less is more – be sure you’re getting to the heart of the song. I hope those would be the things people would communicate about me.

**KBR:** When you go and do a festival or short term event, what’s the “nugget” you hope people will take away?

**TT:** What people will often say to me after a festival is that they leave looking at music in a different way, and trying to figure out what the composer/arranger is trying to tell me about this text by the way that they’ve set it. I try to help people get drawn into the question of what is the music trying to have you do?

It reminds me of a story I often tell of a person voicing an organ, and he picked up one of a bunch of pipes that were on the floor and said, “We’re still trying to figure out what these pipes want to do.” Instead of saying, “We can’t make these pipes do what we want them to do.” That’s to say, any piece of music – down to each phrase – how does it want us to embody the music? I tend to be pretty insistent and persistent about that, and I think it makes people think differently. As a composer, I hope that my music does that too. That I would write music that helps people experience the message by the way that it’s composed and written. I want to give every composer whose music that I help rehearse and learn that same privilege of helping people understand why they wrote it that way, and what are they trying to say. Not to be definitive, but to be authentic from the inside. To have something to communicate.

**KBR:** I have to bring up Mister Rogers. How did Mister Rogers become such a big influence in your life, and how does it affect your direction and the way that you interact with people?

**TT:** Everyone is talking about Mister Rogers in the last couple of years. I’m not saying I started it, but... I was on the bandwagon first! It’s been wonderful to see. One of the things I’ve sensed in our culture is that we misinterpret the idea that strength and gentleness are opposites, when they are actually – a lot of times – synonyms. We tend to think of illustrations of strength as people who are going to be angry and harsh and heavy, instead of a strength that’s gentle enough to hold someone by the hand and help lift them up. That was what Mister Rogers was showing us. Two things primarily: You’re special just the way you are. As a musician what I often say is that you have an instrument and a way of creating that no one else ever has, and nobody ever could. But he also was quick to say after that, so it’s not just self-loudatory, if you can recognize that about yourself then you can also recognize that about everyone else too.

So those are the same basic foundational principals of the faith. I didn’t know about the faith until much later after I met Mister Rogers. I didn’t grow up in a religious home, and I’ve said many times that I’m glad of that because I don’t come with any baggage from it. I got to discover God and Jesus in my own way, and in my own time. But I learned important things about how to treat myself and my neighbor long before I needed to know about all the theology that can mess it up. Musicians can sometimes get a little too complicated, and can forget about the simple truths. When people come to be with you, you have a chance to share poetry and scripture and prayer with them every week. You have a chance to decide what music is on their lips, what songs are in their head, what messages are in their hearts. That’s a huge responsibility. We have to be sure that’s a time we are taking totally intentionally and really treasure that connection.

A lot of times people will send me something about Mister Rogers, and I always write back, “To think that something about Mister Rogers would remind you of me is a high, high compliment.” Mister Rogers was not trendy, and I hope I’m not either. I don’t want to come to your church and try to tell you the snazziest three new things you can do. But I want to help you remember the core principles upon which this whole endeavor is built. I think if you stick with that, it makes it so much easier. That said, at some point, if people have heard the things I say, I’m not necessarily going to have anything new. But think about the things we tend to go back to – they are things that stand the test of time. My ideas about how we treat the voice or one another don’t change every year. even though I may have different people in the room, or there’s a new bulletin board on the wall. Don’t be afraid to be consistent. There are ways to be consistent and relevant in any moment. You can connect any song with what’s going on right now, if the song is worth singing to begin with. I really do believe that.
I Am Not Built for This!

Jeremy Nabors, NC ACDA Men’s Choirs Chair

My friends, we are all struggling to find new ways of living, teaching, and making music in this world of social distancing. I don’t mind telling you that I am not built for this; I am a people person. I thrive on interacting with my students, making music with my community choir, and finding creative ways to teach people music. As we started exploring this new reality I found myself frozen and unable to comprehend how I could transition my in-person choral experience to the internet.

After a few days of sitting still, I identified the most difficult struggles for me during this time. I was grieving the loss of things that I consider central to my identity. Who was I without music, without my community, and without that collaboration of creation that is so critical in choral music? I was grieving...and that was ok. A few more days went by and I found ways to nurture each of those pieces of my life.

Who am I without music?

Before the pandemic, I never had enough time. I could barely keep up with all of my rehearsals, let alone find time to just sit and enjoy music. I was always creating but rarely taking in the music around me. In my new online existence I have discovered a wealth of time to listen to and experience music. I no longer feel rushed when listening online. I have found a lot of solace reconnecting with listening to music. It also turns out that I now have time to sing. I love singing. I am normally singing all day long to help other people learn to sing, but now, I can just sing for myself. There is great joy in singing, even if it is alone. That visceral, physical joy we get from singing is helping me every day.

Who am I without my community?

On any given day I see between 100-200 people in rehearsals. Between school choirs, church choirs, and my community men’s group, I am constantly interacting with people. Without those rehearsals, how can I keep the community connected and thriving? It turns out that the saying we have all heard is true. “I teach people. I happen to teach them music.” How do we keep our communities going? Just keep meeting. All of my groups are now online. We don’t rehearse, we don’t sing, we don’t make music, but we laugh, we check on each other, we hold our relationships up, and we discover that music brought us together but the community of people kept us together. I spend a good part of my day emailing, texting, or zooming with my choirs so we can keep in touch. Those relationships are the reason the music we make together is so important.

Who am I without the collaboration?

I was a horrible voice student and I was the stereotypical singer. I didn’t want to practice because practice meant that I was in a room, by myself, with nothing but my own voice (and crippling doubts about my ability). I thrived in rehearsal. Choir was the space where I was at my best. The joy and pride and confidence I felt when making music with a room full of singers was magical. So where do I get that now, when I am alone, in a room, with nothing but my voice (and soul crushing doubts about my ability)?

This should be the part of the article where I tell you that I learned to make a virtual choir and it filled me with great joy. But that is not true. I do not love a virtual choir. I think that in many ways, they are not choirs. A virtual choir is an amazing feat of sound engineering, but it lacks the moment-by-moment spontaneous music-making that happens in a choir. Singers in a virtual choir are each alone, in a room...you get the
point.

This is the part of the article where I start to accept the things I don’t love. While the idea of replacing my choirs with virtual choirs was not something I was interested in, I did start to branch out. What ways could I still collaborate and create music? I settled into some small projects with the A Cappella app. For example, my church choir put a small piece together for our online Easter service. The musical collaboration was more of a way to keep my community of singers engaged than it was about making music, but it turns out that the community part of music is often the strongest part.

What do we do next?

I think this is the most pressing question. After this “GREAT CAESURA,” how will we all be changed by this pause? I am sure we will see an explosion of new music expressing all of the feelings about our time apart and how wonderful it is to be together in a rehearsal. We will sing together, and we will cry, and it will be cathartic. I know that I will rejoice in being back with my community. I will program music that speaks to the soul. I will pick music that reminds us of how we are all connected. I will rejoice in letting music refill my life. I will move back to normal but I will remain rooted in the community.

Quarantine Connections: Composers as Music Creators

Shannon Gravelle, NC ACDA Conference Site Host

As conductor-teachers, we continue to brainstorm creative ways to create music and deliver content with our singers. In addition, we also look for ways to keep singers connected with the music creation process. While music creation encompasses multiple forms of music making, in this brief article, we are going to focus on connecting with composers as music creators.

You may have seen on social media that some choirs are bringing in composers to have virtual meetings with their singers. Perhaps you have even done this with your ensembles. But what happens after we meet with the composer to discuss that one piece? Or what about conductor-teachers with a smaller budget— is it even worth seeking out a meeting with a composer? The answers are: A lot can still be uncovered if you think outside-the-box and yes, it is worth it.

Let’s address some logistics first; specifically, how to reach out to composers and how to handle fees. Some composers can be reached through a publishing company. If they have their own website, contact and fee information will often be listed. When you email the composer, acknowledge their fee and, if it is not in your budget, propose an alternative. Chances are they will be as flexible as possible. Be upfront in initial conversations so there is no confusion, and make sure you get the appropriate paperwork in place (such as a W-9 form or a contract from them if required).

When you contact them, have an idea about how you want to shape the virtual conversation. Do you want the composer to speak about a specific piece? Will you expect them to present information and then leave time for Q&A? Will your singers submit questions in advance or will they have an opportunity to ask them in the moment? How do you want the conversation to flow? Or would you prefer a more formal presentation? Be clear about this with the composer.

It might sound simple, but if you have the composer speak about a specific piece or their catalogue of music, make sure your choir is familiar with the music ahead of time. The work you and your singers do before the session makes it more meaningful. For example, we had a Zoom Q&A session with Moira Smiley. In addition to the piece we were working on, many singers had
listened to her albums on a streaming service, and they were able to ask specific questions about Smiley’s influences not present in the piece we were preparing. And yes, they fangirled hard.

Consider having the composer speak about something other than a specific piece of music. Many of them will be happy to talk about the compositional process, inspirations, a career as a composer, etc. In addition, each composer has something to offer that is unique to them. Consider some examples: Paul Rudoi presents a session about his path to being a choral entrepreneur and different ways one could work in choral music. Would this appeal to any of your singers? Or... Sally Albrecht (North Carolina resident) makes it a priority to add sign language to at least one new piece of choral music published by Alfred Music, although it does not have to be her specific composition. What type of discussions could you and your choir have about accessibility or inclusion? Or... Timothy Takach has multiple workshops, including topics such as artistic risk-taking, engaging singers, and working collaboratively (this last one is a workshop he presents with Jocelyn Hagen). I’m particularly excited about the possibilities of live-streamed performances by the duo Nation (Takach and Hagen), as their show includes original compositions as well as covers.

Find a composer, a master technician, or someone you think would help keep your singers connected to music, and learn what unique gifts they can share. You do not have to do it on your own; this is a community endeavor, as music often is. Remember, this will be over at some point and we will again make music with each other in person. How can we grow as conductors, teachers, and musicians, and how can we support the growth and development of our ensembles and the singers in them? What can we bring to the table now that gives additional meaning to music both virtually and in person?

And, by the way, your NC ACDA board is working on this very question...
NC ACDA Founding Members Series: 
Honoring Dr. R. Clinton Parker

This article is the third in a series exploring the contributions, lives, and careers of the NC ACDA Founders.

Marta Force, NC ACDA Historian

It is a rare occurrence to be blessed with musical talent and administrative leadership skills. Even more rare to be able to balance and succeed in both, often adversarial, endeavors. We are fortunate to have one fine example in our Dr. R Clinton Parker of Boone, who passed away in 2019.

Clinton was born in Hickory. In the early ‘60s, unable to afford on-campus housing and without a car, he gave us an early indication of his determination by hitching a ride daily to get to Appalachian State Teachers College for his classes. He received his B.S. Degree from ASTC, now Appalachian State University, M.M. Degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and his Ph.D. from the University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.

Clinton taught at RJ Reynolds High School and Concord High School in North Carolina prior to being hired at Pikeville College in Kentucky. In 1972 Clinton was hired at Appalachian State University. During his tenure at ASU he was Professor of Music, conducted the University Singers, Appalachian Chorale, and the Men's Glee Club.

Clinton rose to serve as Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. He began as Assistant Dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts, director of Cannon Music Camp, and director of Summer Sessions for the University. In addition he was responsible for International Sessions, Appalachian Consortium, the Appalachian House in Washington DC and the NY Loft in New York City. Cultural Affairs and the University Library also fell under his leadership. From 1980-2003 Clinton was Chair of the Academic Policies and Procedures Committee, responsible for all changes of the curriculum and academic policies for the entire university.

Clinton served on numerous boards and committees as Chair including the Hiddenite Cultural Center, Appalachian Consortium and Boone Kiwanis Club. He received the Lifetime Laurel Leaves Award for his contribution to Appalachian Studies and a Lifetime Commendation for Service to the Boy Scouts of America. Clinton received the Lara Hoggard Award for Distinguished Service to Choral Music in North Carolina. Clinton was even named a Kentucky Colonel!

Musically, he was assistant conductor to Dr. Lara Hoggard of the North Carolina Summer Institute of Choral Art for ten years, while it was located at UNC-CH. He was instrumental in the transition of NCSICA from Chapel Hill to ASU. Clinton served as liaison and benefactor to NCSICA for 20 years while the camp was located at ASU.

While a graduate student at UNC-CH Clinton was instrumental (with Dr. Hoggard) in the formation of the North Carolina Collegiate Choral Festival, an annual statewide sharing of performances by collegiate choirs.
Clinton served as Choral Chair of NCMEA and served as President NC-ACDA from 1974-77. During this time Clinton appeared as guest conductor for the following all-states: North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, and Florida. He was frequently a guest conductor and clinician within our state that he received the nickname: R. “Clinician” Parker.

He was a member of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia and Phi Kappa Lambda as well as several community organizations. Clinton was choir director at Boone United Methodist Church for many years.

Like many of the ASU music faculty Clinton transitioned into administration within the university. Collectively they became known as the “Music Mafia”. Among them is Dr. Joe Logan (University Singers conductor then Dean, ASU College of Education, later Assistant to the Chancellor). Ascending from ASU Music Faculty to Chair/Dean of the School of Music are: Dr. William G Spencer (Applied Bassoon to Chair of Music Department), Dr. Max Smith S.M.D. (Applied Organ/ Harpsichord to Chair of Music Faculty to Chair of University Honors Program and Watauga College), Dr. Nicholas Erneston (ASU Orchestra to Dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts) Mr. Bill McCloud (Music Education to Dean of the School of Music) and Dr. William Harbinson (Professor of Music Theory to Dean of the School of Music).

Blessed with a sense of humor, intellect, compassion and kindness as well as his musical gifts, Clinton was a unique combination of gentle administrator and accomplished musician. When pressed as to how he balanced those gifts, he often remarked his greatest accomplishment and source of support and pride was his family.
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Editor’s Note
Carl Ashley, NC ACDA Publications Manager & Editor

I hope you are staying well during this unprecedented and challenging time. We as choral conductors have a major challenge on our hands. How do we continue to make music and keep our singers safe and healthy? Your executive board and conference planning committee will be addressing this and other timely issues in our virtual fall conference. More information about this is in our President’s article on page 2. You will also find in this issue Part 1 of 3 in a series of articles by Richard Cox—it is absolutely not to be missed.

You are not alone! We will get through this and make beautiful music again!

Musically yours,
Carl

Name That Excerpt!
Answer in the next issue.

Answer to previous issue’s excerpt: “Gloria” from Missa Papae Marcelli by Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina