

# MASS SINGS

A publication of the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Choral Directors Association

[www.massacda.org](http://www.massacda.org)

Spring 2003

## From the President

**C. Thomas Brooks**

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**Faith M. Lueth**  
*Acting Editor*

Welcome to the first issue of MASS SINGS, the newsletter of the Massachusetts chapter of the American Choral Director's Association. We hope that this publication will become a vehicle to help energize the membership of our state organization by providing information of interest to all the constituencies in our chapter. The newsletter will contain news about various events as well as articles that will be useful to the Massachusetts ACDA membership. We hope you will feel free to share your viewpoints through the newsletter

Each one of us needs encouragement and assistance in order to reach our goals and dreams in our profession. We all experience similar frustrations that are brought about by our daily routines, budget limitations, an apathetic public, undisciplined singers, and a myriad of other situations including our own need for fresh ideas and skills. Perhaps that is why there are so many self-help books, tapes, CD's, and videos on the market and why there are so many motivational seminars offered to us. It's clear we need help to keep moving forward.

By now you have received the brochure for the summer meetings. Jerry Blackstone, Joan Gregoryk, Alexander Dashnaw, and our future national ACDA president Michelle Holt will be with us from July 13 through 16. The workshops they present are designed to improve your skills, introduce you to new music, and encourage you as you prepare for the fall season ahead. One of our Massachusetts choral treasures, Allen Lannom, will direct us in the singing of a major choral work

In addition, you will also receive a large packet of music for the reading sessions. You will also have the opportunity to

share and discuss ideas and information with the conference clinicians and your colleagues at the scheduled social events.

I have been fortunate to work for many choral organizations in several states and regions during the course of my career. That has allowed me to observe that the most successful organizations seem to share many of the same characteristics. The areas with the most dynamic choirs, the most energetic and inspired choral conductors, (and who, by the way, seem to have the best skilled singers in ample quantity,) come from the states that have the strongest ACDA state chapters. It is clear that when conductors work together to create and maintain a broad base of singing, everyone has a better chance to succeed.

I invite you to actively participate in building a state organization that is strong and cohesive so that choral singing will be strengthened in Massachusetts. Many of you right now are thinking, "I am already active or participating in \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank)". These are undoubtedly worthy associations, but ACDA is at the heart of what we are about: ensemble singing. Great things happen when people join together in a common goal and MAKE it happen. Mass ACDA is dedicated to promoting choirs and singing on every level of life in Massachusetts. We must remember that we make up the local branch of a vibrant national organization of over 22,000 choral conductors who are working as we are in the other forty-nine states.

I invite you to rally around our incoming state president Bob Eaton as he continues our work toward building a vital state chapter. Begin by attending our summer meetings. You will have the opportunity to improve your skills, learn new literature, share ideas with colleagues, encourage one another, and join with us in making Massachusetts a singing state.

# Your Investment is Sound . . .

Wayne Abercrombie

If you live in Massachusetts, or teach music in Massachusetts schools, you have a stake in what goes on in music at the University of Massachusetts. You should, then, know that music, including choral music, at your state university's flagship campus is alive, well, and kicking in the right direction. UMass Amherst's Department of Music and Dance has a vital and talented student body, a dedicated and active faculty, and ensembles which continue to perform at top levels.

Like almost every other university — public and private, and almost every public institution these days, we face daunting fiscal difficulties. We have trimmed and refitted in many ways over the past few months and years. Some of the faculty who have retired recently were responsible for building the department's strength: a curriculum centered on a strong base of performance. The other side of that strength is non-musical, but very important: our tuition and fees have remained considerably lower than comparable institutions.

Those strengths, built solidly over time, have made the department attractive to some amazing teachers who have cast their lot with us in the past few years. World-class faculty in flute, percussion, trumpet, and — of most interest to readers of this issue — voice. William Hite, well-known in the region for years, joined our faculty this year. His recent appearance in Stravinsky's "Rake's Progress" garnered rave reviews. With him, Paulina Stark and Marjorie Melnick, we have a strong voice faculty.

Our Chamber Choir sang at the recent Eastern Division conference, and our other choral ensembles (Chorale, Women's Choir, Madrigal Singers, and the newly-established Men's Choir) offer all university students a place to continue choral singing, or to try it for the first time. They also present the University community with opportunities to experience a wide variety of great choral music - from the classics to the contemporary. Recent performances include two Brahms works with orchestra, music of Bach, Britten and Whitacre, music from Africa, the Americas and the Polynesian Islands. In one recent year, our choirs sang in nine different languages. Our Opera Workshop just completed a wonderful performance of "Der Fledermaus."

In tough times, teachers and teachers of music realize clearly the great value of doing what one loves for a living. Important and disturbing issues swirl about the educational world and the world at large. In our rehearsal and class rooms, however, we music professionals are "amateurs" in the truest sense of that noble word: we are making and empowering others to make music because we love. Every day — whether the news is good or bad, we are surrounded by learning and beauty. If one believes that learning and beauty matter, that they are essential to understanding

our humanity, then connecting to that belief in difficult times redeems many of our troubles.

Our undergraduate and graduate music classes of '03 are among our strongest ever. They, and their fellow alums who are now leaders in public and private schools and colleges and universities, confirm each day the value of public higher education at the University of Massachusetts. I hope you will continue a direct connection with the campus as you judge whether or not to recommend that your students continue in music with us. Media accounts have not always been encouraging, though they have generally been fair.

Yet, no media snapshot can capture the richness of the musical experience of a complex department such as ours. Nor can it convey the determination of a faculty and student body that are secure in their values and standards. Send interested students to check out their university, to meet the students and faculty, to see and hear them in action. (A wonderful chance to hear & see for yourself is the next Choral Spectrum, on November 8, 2003.)

The proof is in the doing — and you can be proud that your university is still doing it well. Your investment is sound and growing.

[Wayne Abercrombie is Professor of Music, Director of Choral Programs and Student ACDA Chapter Advisor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and President-Elect of ACDA's Eastern Division.]

## Election Results

We are pleased to announce that Kayla Werlin has been elected President-elect of the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Choral Directors Association. We appreciate Kayla Werlin and Chet Laskosky being willing to run for office.

The new slate of Mass ACDA board members will be introduced in the next issue of the Mass Sings newsletter later this summer. Look for announcements of some exciting choral opportunities for conductors and singers in the near future.

**Coming Saturday, Nov 8, 2003:**

**MASS ACDA WOMEN'S HONOR CHOIR  
MASS ACDA MEN'S HONOR CHOIR**

**Information in the next MASS SINGS  
Check the Mass ACDA website for more details**

**[www.massacda.org](http://www.massacda.org)**

# Vocal Health

Susan Brooks

How do I preserve and protect the voices of the singers in my choirs? What does a voice sound like and how does the singer look when the voice is being produced “right”? What techniques do I need to teach my singers and then consistently practice with them to ensure they develop healthy vocal habits? What do I do when I suspect there is a voice problem with some of my singers? What resources are available for me when I need help in these areas?

No matter what types or sizes of choirs they lead, choral conductors must consider these important questions as they work with their groups throughout each season. For most choir members, singing in a choir is the only musical experience they ever have, and learning about voice from their conductor is the only voice pedagogy they’ll ever get. And for most of them, what they do want from the choral experience more than anything else is to learn to sing better, not only in their section, but also as an individual voice.

Unfortunately it seems as if not much information about vocal technique or vocal health and hygiene is readily available for most choral conductors. Or at least not much seems to make enough sense to actually be incorporated into a rehearsal. And conductors, who may or may not have had much voice training themselves, can feel ill prepared to launch into teaching voice in the rehearsal even when they do have some voice expertise and experience in their background. Convinced that it takes too much time away from learning the music or that such excursions only spawn controversy over vocal techniques and schools of vocal thought or even “who am I to impose a particular way of singing on the choir”, many just give up and hope for the best. Is it any wonder that vocal problems often arise from such situations?

Singing over the long run with healthy, well-produced sounds is dependent on the mastery of solid vocal principles. These principles must be introduced into every choral setting, whether it is public school, college, church, or the community and to all kinds of singers, children, adolescents, volunteers, or professionals. For, the vocal health of any choir and specifically, the individuals in that choir, determines not only the quality of the basic choral sound today but also the long-term longevity, prowess, and resilience of that choir in the coming months and even years. Working for vocal health and preservation of the voice does influence how conductors audition singers, choose literature, plan and carry out rehearsals, and prepare for performance. In other words, vocal health is at the very heart of what a choir exists for: singing well!

Every member of a choir must be encouraged to learn more and more about how to sing, what to practice, what to avoid, and the warning signs of the voice in trouble. On the other hand, every conductor needs to be constantly monitoring his/her singers and providing vocal “good sense” and feedback for them, for that is certainly implicit in the job description for every choral specialist. What a responsibility conductors have to guard those voices and teach something helpful and concrete about voice production and voice preservation in every rehearsal. It is certainly a challenging task for us all.

And so we launch a new column in this and every future issue of our Massachusetts ACDA newsletter to speak to these

kinds of issues. We aim to offer information, advice, support, and commentary on vocal health topics and in particular as they are applied to the choral situation or are unique to choral singers. We hope to ease some of those vocal/choral fears and insecurities that plague all of us from time to time and try to answer those “voice in trouble” questions which everyone asks. We hope that you will find this material interesting and valuable in the coming months as you rehearse and perform with your choral singers.

*Susan Brooks is Professor of Music at Gordon College and maintains a large voice studio.*

## Children’s Choir Festival

Oh, the weather outside was frightful, but the sounds INSIDE were truly delightful at Wesley Methodist Church in Worcester on Saturday April 5th. The 2003 Massachusetts ACDA Children’s Choir Festival went on as scheduled, with four out of five choirs able to get to Worcester to participate. Those choirs were: The Hampshire Choral Society Young People’s Chorus (Amherst), KC Conlan, director; The Paradise City Children’s Chorus (Northampton), Pamela Getnick, director; The Springfield Children’s Chorus Allegro, Rebekah Lockwood, director; and the Springfield Children’s Chorus Vivace, Kayla Werlin, director.

After a welcome game in the nave, the day officially began with a massed choir warm-up. Then the groups rehearsed their three combined selections: “Song of Peace,” to the tune of Finlandia, would open the concert. The performance would end with Joshua Jacobson’s arrangement of ‘Ale Brider,’ a lively Yiddish folksong, followed by Charles Parry’s ‘Jerusalem.’

A surprise visit from Wesley Methodist’s Ghanaian Choir was a change of pace in the morning rehearsal. Coincidentally, the group rehearses on Saturday mornings and was happy to trade songs with the children. The morning ended with a fabulous performance by Simple Harmonic Motion, a male a cappella group from WPI. The guys did a program that included everything from Renaissance motets to the Biebl ‘Ave Maria’ to current pop music. After a great show, they stayed around and talked with the children through their lunch break.

Each choir rehearsed its own selections after lunch. As they did so, the singers in the other groups wrote them ‘telegrams,’ reflecting on their work. The choirs were able to bring these home to share at their next rehearsals.

The day ended with an afternoon concert, including repertoire from Bach to Broadway. Many, many thanks to host Marjory Ness, music director at Wesley Methodist, and to Monica Lund, the church’s administrator.

Those who are interested in being a part of this festival next year should contact ACDA’s incoming Repertoire and Standards Chair for Children’s Choirs, KC Conlan. E-mail KC at [kconlan@attbi.com](mailto:kconlan@attbi.com).

Kayla Werlin  
Longmeadow High School  
Springfield Children’s Chorus

# An Invitation to Collegiate Choirs

**Eleventh Massachusetts ACDA Collegiate Choral Festival**

**Theme: Collaboration Rather than Competition**

**Regis College, Weston MA • Saturday, February 21, 2004**

All collegiate choirs from Massachusetts and beyond are invited to participate in the Eleventh Annual ACDA Collegiate Choral Festival, at Regis College in Weston, Massachusetts on Sat., February 21, 2004. (This is the weekend after the ACDA Convention weekend in Boston). The event, which will include singing together, learning from one another, socializing, and performing, is an all-day affair beginning around noontime, and will once again be organized under the theme of Collaboration Rather than Competition. Activities will include (1) an ice-breaker warmup and vocalise session, (2) rehearsals of the combined choirs, (3) dinner and party with DJ for the singers, with simultaneous dinner/round table sharing for conductors, (4) concert by individual choirs (6 or 7 minutes from each choir, optional) culminating in several pieces by the combined choruses and Smith College Orchestra, and (5) after-concert reception.

## **Why Participate in the Collegiate Choral Festival?**

The Collegiate Choral Festival provides an opportunity for students and conductors to pool their resources for a peak choral experience by working together rather than by competing, and the esprit des corps which develops is one of the highlights of the event. Participating director(s) may volunteer to conduct an opening workshop or warmup session for the combined choirs, which can introduce singers and conductors to new ways of presenting vocal concepts and skills. It is a wonderful source of new choral repertoire. Student singers really enjoy hearing the other choirs, and always cheer for the performances of the individual groups. Another plus is the opportunity to sing movements of a major work with orchestra, a thrilling experience that smaller groups often do not get in their individual schools.

## **Will Your Choir Fit?**

The purpose of the festival is to inspire, affirm, and serve the needs of singers and conductors. Past festivals have seen the participation of all sizes of choirs (from 10 to 85 voices) and all types of groups (including all women, all men, and mixed voices). Type of repertoire is always varied, from classical to spirituals, folk tunes, and novelty pieces. The event is always inspirational, educational, and fun, as the choirs that participate year after year will attest. If you are looking for something new and different, this could be just what you're looking for.

## **Different Types of Participation Possible**

Several levels of participation are possible:

- sing both an individual concert program and the combined number(s),
- perform only the combined number(s) in concert, which would allow participation by (a) choirs whose full membership may not be available on that day, (b) choirs that would prefer not to sing an individual program, (c) schools that might want to bring a chamber group to sing an individual program and a general group that would sing only the combined numbers,
- come as observers to evaluate the day for possible future participation,
- come to the concert to support the festival and learn new repertoire.

## **Choosing the Combined Repertoire**

Participating choir directors choose the repertoire to be performed by the combined choirs. Those conductors who sign up during the summer will be included in the email process of suggesting and discussing pieces to be considered

## **Choirs that Have Participated in the Past**

Amherst College, Anna Maria College, Assumption College, Berklee College of Music, Boston Conservatory of Music, Brandeis University, Bridgewater State College, Eastern Nazarene College, Emmanuel College, Gordon College, Marist College, New York, Providence College, RI, Regis College, Salve Regina University, RI, Smith College, Suffolk University, State University of New York, Albany, Tufts University, University of Rhode Island

### Registration and Information

Registration cost: \$3 per student

Location: Regis College, Weston MA

For further information, contact festival chair:

Sheila Prichard, Regis College

Phone: 781-768-8326

Email: sheila.prichard@regiscollege.edu

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## **MASS ACDA**

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