

# LIFT EVERY VOICE



## Voices of Change: Impacting the Communities We Serve – Part 2

J. Donald Dumpson, Thomas Lloyd, and Wendy K. Moy, editors

The following is the second part of a panel discussion convened by J. Donald Dumpson, R&R Chair of Lifelong Singing, and presented at the 2022 ACDA Eastern Region Conference in Boston, Massachusetts, as part of the series, “Identity and Inclusion in Choral Spaces: Pathways to Lasting Change.”



The purpose of this session was to explore the identity, performance philosophy, and role in society of the choirs represented on the panel in light of a significant national reflection on American racism and inclusivity following the protests in response to the murder of George Floyd and other social justice issues that became particularly resonant during the Covid 19 pandemic. Julia Zavadsky moderated this discussion.

In part one in the September issue of *Choral Journal*, we discussed how we understand the cultural and social identities of the choirs we conduct and how we can encounter music and cultural traditions from outside our choirs’ identities to broaden and deepen our limited perspectives with integrity and respect. We left off discussing how collaborations with peer choirs in traditions different from ours was an avenue many had

found effective. The third session, “Creating Choral Community: Coming Together in Song” introduced repertoire from the choirs represented on this panel. [A list of the pieces is presented on page xx.](#)

Panelists with the primary choir affiliation referred to in this article:

Michael Bussewitz-Quarm, Composer

Rollo Dilworth, Temple University Singing Owls

J. Donald Dumpson, Philadelphia Heritage Chorale

Joshua Jacobson, Zamir Chorale of Boston

Thomas Lloyd, Bucks County Choral Society

Wendy Moy, Chorosynthesis Singers

Diana Saez, Coral Cantigas

Julia Zavadsky, Nashirah, Jewish Chorale of Greater Philadelphia



**Julia Zavadsky:** What kind of limitations have gotten in the way of collaboration—musical, financial, or otherwise?



**Thomas Lloyd:** Let me mention more personal limitations that I've had to confront in myself. In the first place, simply overcoming resistance to reaching out to conductors and singers I've never worked with before, especially those who work in very different identity spaces from the ones I'm used to. This is a fear not that different from the fear of a child moving into a new neighborhood and working up the gumption to knock on the door of the house next door to ask, "Can you come out and play?"

As a grad student and young professor starting to attend ACDA conferences, I was surprised to never see HBCU [Historical Black Colleges and Universities] choirs perform. I knew from my studies that there was a strong choral tradition there from which the Spirituals first became known to the world. I already knew I loved this music, but I needed a more personal experience of the tradition before I would be comfortable conducting these iconic arrangements. I began reaching out to directors at the universities of Fisk, Howard, and later Lincoln. They all were more than welcoming to invite us into their world. The lessons we all learned from these gifted singers and their esteemed conductors would last for a lifetime.

Other personal challenges were the need to develop a more generous capacity for patience and creative empathy. You need to take the time to really listen and understand the perspective of an ensemble you hope to collaborate with. How would the project support the work that they are trying to accomplish? Their goals might not be the same as yours, and you have to be willing to adapt your own expectations to include the priorities of both choirs.

Choirs also may have different operating budgets and sources of support. Some choirs have very different perspectives on what it means to sing sacred music. For some, singing is an act of religious faith and prayer; others are comfortable singing sacred music only in a secular context. With this and many other similar cultural issues, we need to become aware of our ingrown

assumptions about other traditions and do our best to leave those at the door. Seeing ourselves and the world as others see us can be the greatest benefit of collaboration.



**Joshua Jacobson:** Yes, to echo what Diana said before, I think we often paint with a very wide brush. I have colleagues, musicologists and ethnomusicologists, who refuse to use the term "Jewish music." They prefer to say "music from Jewish traditions." And there are many different Jewish traditions. There are African Jewish traditions, Asian Jewish traditions, Polish, and Sephardic (from Spain), and they're all quite different.

Also Rollo, if I can elaborate on your "A" of the acronym (referenced in part 1), let's be aware of standards. Within any tradition, there is good music, there is mediocre music, there is boring music. And that's true, whether we're speaking about the Eurocentric repertoire or music from a different ethnic tradition that we want to explore. Also, we should beware of consulting people who are self-declared experts. We do need to reach out, but not everybody who says that they know about the tradition actually knows. With Zamir, I have made a point of reaching out to ensembles that work in other musical traditions. We have enjoyed collaborating with Arab musicians and African American gospel choirs.

Just one other point, and that is that collaboration can be a loaded word in some contexts. Some people see it as a word for selling out. So, for example, in Israel or Palestine, an Arab who works with a Jew might be designated as a collaborator. That can be a very dangerous term. So let's just acknowledge that there are two sides to collaboration and we need to be very careful, and as you've all said, very respectful.



**Rollo Dilworth:** Yes, it's so important to sort out and redefine what we think about the term "collaboration" and understand that, as Tom also said, there have to be shared goals and there has to be an equal sense from the ensembles that there is a shared power in that infrastructure. Any time there is one ensemble that may have more financial means than the other, the possibility exists for a power imbalance to occur.

**There are experiences that are not for everyone. How do you make those decisions and how do you discuss them with your choir?**

**Dilworth:** That's a good point. I think you have to know and begin to do your research to understand what experiences are appropriate for your choir based on identity. For example, we know that in Native American culture there are certain pieces that should not be done outside [the Native American community]. I also get this question a lot about African American music, in particular about African American spirituals and gospel music, which of course is rooted in the African American experience.

And while there are very culturally specific ideas espoused in this music, they're also humanly universal ideas that are respected widely. That's how I create the rationale for choirs of all backgrounds. Slavery is

very unique to African American experience, but using one's faith to persevere over adversity is humanly universal. I challenge singers of different backgrounds to make human connections to those themes in the music as they begin to develop this code of respect in their approach to the music.

**Lloyd:** From the perspective of a white choir director introducing the Spirituals to predominantly white singers, it's important to look closely at the history of slavery out of which the Spirituals emerged. And part of that examination should reveal to us that slavery was based on the premise that black people and white people do not share a common humanity. Black people were less than human. The whole premise of American chattel slavery was based on that belief. If we later say that we shouldn't approach this music to perform because it doesn't speak to our experience, aren't we



*2022 ACDA Eastern Conference (L to R): Rollo Dilworth, Diana Saez, J. Donald Dumpson, Nick Page (community sing song leader), Julia Zawadzky, Soyeon Bin (collaborative pianist), Wendy Moy, Michael Bussewitz-Quarm*



again denying that we share a common humanity with Black people?

As human beings we have all experienced some degree of suffering, sorrow, and hope for deliverance from pain and fear. It is true that we haven't experienced torment that is anything like what was endured by people brought from Africa against their will and enslaved for centuries. But those same people created a body of music in which people from all around the world have found some of the deepest connections to their own personal struggles. If we say that music doesn't speak for us, are we denying our common humanity across racial categories yet again?



**Diana Saez:** Every time that Cantigas traveled outside the US we would bring music that represented the United States, and I would always choose a Black Spiritual because in my opinion, and in the opinion of most choral musicians outside of the US, the Black Spiritual is the quintessential American choral song.

**What forms of injustice are you and your singers experiencing? What forms of injustice are perpetuated against your community of singers?**



**Michael Bussewitz-Quarm:** First, I thank you, the choral directors, for what you are doing for the trans community. My high school choral experience is one of the few experiences I can remember clearly. Numerous trans people recount a disconnect they had from their body and from memories from before they transitioned. I thought I was the only one, but I'm not. There are some strong memories, like camping in the mountains. The other is singing in the choir. If you have a participatory choral experience in addition to a performative experience, that's even better for those that are struggling with their bodies because they have this experience of feeling beautiful and feeling beauty in the world through singing.

A whole-body experience is so important for trans and gender-expansive people to be allowed to feel. As for vocal parts, what we are learning now is to meet

singers where they are, especially if they're coming out as trans. I feel it's important to remember we're not teaching music to singers; we're teaching singers through the art of music. It is not just their physical voice that is a priority. It's also the emotional experience and the emotional survivability of the singer. All of this has to be taken into account when having the conversation with your trans singer about their vocal part. Yes, inform them of what is healthy for them, but also keep listening and allow it to be a conversation. Understand where they are and what they need.

As a singer with a physical disability, I feel we now have an incredible opportunity. During the pandemic, many of us found ourselves a part of the choral community again because of virtual choirs. If you have a hybrid experience or even a segment of your program that includes a virtual experience, you are able to include singers with severe disability (either hidden or visible), parents who can't afford childcare, singers who can't afford eldercare, alumni who have moved away, singers who live in choral deserts, and trans and gender-expansive singers who may feel unwelcome in their community or even their local choir. All these thousands upon thousands of singers now feel included, simply due to a virtual choir option.



**Wendy Moy:** The LGBTQIA+ community is still experiencing discrimination, hate crimes, and legislation that targets their rights in the areas of sports, medical care, and classroom instruction.

According to NPR, this year has set a record for the number of anti-LGBTQ bills introduced in state legislatures. Chorosynthesis Singers, the Seattle Men's Chorus, and the Hartford Gay Men's Chorus are using music to break down stereotypes, open hearts and minds, and build empathy. We do that by sharing stories. Often, the concepts we have of a certain culture or identity are based on stereotypes. However, when we go to a concert and hear about somebody's challenges and what they've overcome, the medium of music breaks down some of those barriers. We hope that conversation and listening to other people's stories will help create better relationships and understanding.

Chorosynthesis created the Empowering Silenced Voices Database, a free resource that contains pieces

for K-12, collegiate, community, and professional choruses (<http://chorosynthesis.org/esvdatabase>). You can find music by selecting the issues you want to address in your community. We are also creating a resource on how to facilitate conversations on socially conscious topics with your ensemble and community.

**Could ethnic pride erase humanism in our choirs? Can ethnic pride AND humanism co-exist in our choral communities?**

**Jacobson:** Many of us are working to get “white-bread” choirs to embrace greater ethnic diversity but when does our own ethnic pride cause us to ignore or deny that of the other? When does nationalism become jingoism and bellicose antagonism? Have we become so defensive of our own position that we resent all others?

Some of us direct choirs that are connected to a particular ethnicity, culture, religious practice, or gender identity. We are especially sensitive to discrimination and to the fact that our communities and our cultures are often unrepresented or misrepresented or reviled. We sense that we’ve been left out. Marginalized. Tokenized. Patronized.

Have we become so traumatized by others vilifying us that we raise the drawbridge, fearing any external influences? Is identity a zero sum game? Has ethnic pride erased humanism?

I’m a proponent of choro-diversity but I’m preaching from my pulpit as artistic director of the Zamir Chorale of Boston, specializing in Jewish musical traditions. Will I practice what I preach? Is there room for diversity within a specialized choir?

Obviously I’m in favor of raising ethnic musical banners but not to the point of excluding the wonderful mu-

**Creating Choral Community: Coming Together in Song**


Part three of this series presented the following pieces from the choirs represented on this panel. They are recommended as entry points to explore, engage, and perform music of various choral communities. We encourage you to research the tradition, consider the following resources, and contact the recommender for more information.

Recommender	Musical Community	Title	Composer	Publisher
Nick Page	American Folk	Bring Me Little Water, Sylvie	Lead Belly	Public Domain
Michael Bussewitz-Quarm	Queer	Scars	Michael Bussewitz-Quarm	MB Arts / MBQ Studio
Rollo Dilworth	African American Spiritual	The Storm Is Passing Over	Charles Tindley/ arr. Barbara W. Baker	Boosey & Hawkes
Wendy Moy	LGBTQIA+	Safe Places of the Heart	Robert S. Cohen	Leapfrog Productions
Diana V. Saéz	Latinx	Yemaya	arr. Diana V. Saéz	Boosey & Hawkes
Julia Zavadsky	Jewish	Hebrew Part Songs and Rounds	Stephen Richards	Transcontinental Music

sic of others. Many communities are insular with little exposure to people of other cultures, religions, sexual orientation, politics.

Most of Zamir's audiences are Jews. Bringing Jewish choral music to Jews... is that like bringing coals to Newcastle? Preaching to the choir? When Zamir presents concerts in synagogues, of course I include an educational component, presenting Jewish musics from many eras, many lands, many styles. Most Jews are unaware of the richness and breadth of their own cultural heritage. In fact, there is African Jewish Music and Hispanic Jewish music and Baroque Jewish Music.

**Dilworth:** So I hope that through all of our commentary here, there is opportunity for expansion and change. As choral directors, we must consider expanding our understanding of music connected to cultures outside of our own lived experiences. We can use those musical experiences to develop that mutual understanding as Wendy talked about, and perhaps expand our understanding of musical excellence. Musical excellence and beauty mean different things in different communities.

Finally, I think the exploration of musical experiences across all cultures and all boundaries can help us to expand our understanding of what it means to be musical, what it means to be a musician, and what it means to be musically literate. So often we determine how literate someone is musically by their ability to navigate five lines and four spaces. Note reading is not necessarily the only way in which we should measure one's musicianship or measure one's musical worth when it comes to choral music we are creating or recreating. 

## Resources

Karen Ahlquist, editor: *Chorus and Community* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006). An anthology of detailed stories of choirs with a variety of musical, social, and political identities and the impact those identities had on their local communities.

Ryan Cho: "Cultural Appropriation and Choral Music: A Conversation That Can Make Both Our Music

and Community Better," *Choral Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 10 (May 2015), 59-63.

J. Donald Dumpson: Diverse Arts Solutions Productions LLC builds bridges to diversity through the Arts by crafting stellar performances with a special focus on expanding the artistic landscape.  
<https://diverseartssolutions.com>.

Matthew L. Garrett and Joshua Palkki: *Informative Resources of the Transgender Experience in Music and Singing: Honoring Trans and Gender-Expansive Students in Music Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

Joshua R. Jacobson and Ethan Nash. *Translations and Annotations of Choral Repertoire, Vol. 4: Hebrew Texts* (Corvallis: earthsongs, 2009).

Joshua R. Jacobson: *A Choral Rainbow*. An online three-part series featuring choruses from diverse and under-represented communities.  
<https://www.joshuajacobson.org/video-podcasts>.

Joshua R. Jacobson: *Choral Music from Jewish Traditions*: The searchable website with information and recommendations and answering questions for conductors of all choruses. <https://www.jewishchoralmusic.com>.

Jin-Ah Kim: "Cross-cultural Music Making: Concepts, Conditions and Perspectives." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (June 2017), 19-32.

Thomas Lloyd with Susanne Kappe and Abdolrachman Omaren: "Singen, nicht hassen - انغنا، لا - Let's sing, not hate—Berlin's Begegnungschor brings refugees and locals together to overcome fear," *International Choral Bulletin of the International Federation of Choral Musicians (IFCM)*, Volume 36, No. 2 (2017): 30-34.

Thomas Lloyd: "Bringing Transformative Collaborations to Life," *ChorTeach* (Summer 2011).

Brian Manternac, Michael Chipman, Ruth Rainero, and Caitlin Stave: "Teaching Transgender Singers. Part 1: The Voice Teachers' Perspectives; Part 2: The



Singers' Perspectives," *Journal of Singing* Volume 74, no. 1 (September/October 2017): 83–88.

Mark Mattern: *Acting in Concert: Music, Community, and Political Action* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

Janet Mock: *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* (New York: Atria Books, 2014).

Wendy K. Moy: "Come Together: An Ethnography of the Seattle Men's Chorus family," In R. Timmers, F. Bailes, & H. Daffern (Eds.), *Together in Music: Coordination, Expression, Participation* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2021).

Wendy K. Moy and Jeremiah Selvey: *Empowering Silenced Voices: Database for Socially Conscious Choral Music*  
<http://chorosynthesis.org/esvdatabase>

Julia T. Shaw: *Culturally Responsive Choral Music Education: What Teachers Can Learn from Nine Students' Experiences in Three Choirs* (New York and London: Routledge, 2020).

Stephen Sieck: *Teaching with Respect: Inclusive Pedagogy for Choral Directors* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2017).

Thomas Turino: *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

James O. Young: *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts* (Malden, CA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

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