

# SCVA NEWS

Southern California Vocal Association

April, 2013

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

*John Hendricks*

As the school year draws to a close for many of us, I am reminded of the generosity of spirit and time that our members offer their students every day, not only because they care deeply about the art and science of education, but because it is the “only” right thing to do. In my first months as President, I have had the unique privilege of speaking with many of you about your hopes and frustrations regarding the state of music programs in California. I am truly inspired by what I have seen in your classrooms, by the expertise you have provided for SCVA at our events, by your pervasive optimism, and by the extraordinary talents of educators in the Southern California choral community. Thank you so very much for including your dedication to SCVA as one of your many commitments. Our organization could not fulfill its primary mission of supporting choral music in schools without you, your superb volunteerism, and at times, your Herculean efforts in advancing the state of choral music education in California.

I am also particularly grateful to the members on our board who have innovated so successfully during this school year. As a result of their work, we now have a large-scale Solo and Ensemble Festival that will continue to evolve for your students during the coming years. Our level of cooperation with other performing arts associations has become highly palpable throughout the state and in Sacramento. We are well on the way, due to joint efforts with CMEA and ACDA, to instigating a statewide adjudicated festival system. These festivals will be standardized throughout California in the articulated and published rubrics and adjudication format, regardless of the organization that hosts the event. The number of participants and audience members at our Honor Choir gatherings are the highest that they have been in years. We have continued to expand the geographic reach and stylistic variety of adjudicated festivals that we offer. Please know that we are an organization that exists to support and enhance programs in *all* of Southern California—from San Luis Obispo to the edge of Arizona and to the border with Mexico. San Diego, you are very much on our minds and in our plans. We are going to do more in the southernmost region of our state in the coming year, and, San Diegans, we will be asking for your help in expanding our offerings for students and educators there.

In other news, SCVA is rapidly moving forward with concrete efforts in advocacy at a legislative level for music in California schools through a coalition known as Stand Up 4 Music. Members of this joint effort include CMEA, California ACDA, The California Arts Project, SCVA, and other highly committed organizations. A large performance and meetings with legislators are scheduled at the California State Capitol for the weekend of May 24. We will keep you posted in the coming months as to further developments.

I'd like for you to mark your calendars and remind your students to continue their preparation for our events in 2013-2014, beginning with the auditions for the High School Honor Choirs that commence in September. As for our members, I'd like for you to seriously consider hosting an SCVA festival or audition site at your school next year. In the meantime, I look forward to seeing you at our remaining upcoming adjudicated festivals, the Junior High/Middle School Honor Choir rehearsals and performance (conducted by Dr. Christopher Peterson), and our Show Choir Spectacular. As we conclude our year, I again extend my deepest thanks to you for your support of our association, and wish you the very best for an inspiring summer.

John Hendricks  
President  
[jhendricks@buckley.org](mailto:jhendricks@buckley.org)

Jennifer Stanley  
Executive Vice-President  
[scvaexecvp@gmail.com](mailto:scvaexecvp@gmail.com)

Carolyn Kelley  
Treasurer  
[choralcjk@earthlink.net](mailto:choralcjk@earthlink.net)

Lisa Lopez  
Membership  
[llopezscvamem@hotmail.com](mailto:llopezscvamem@hotmail.com)

Crystal Stone  
Secretary  
[cstone@powayusd.com](mailto:cstone@powayusd.com)

Karen Bluel  
Newsletter Editor  
[kbluel@cox.net](mailto:kbluel@cox.net)

Tina Peterson  
VP - High School Honor Choir  
[tpeterso@iusd.org](mailto:tpeterso@iusd.org)

Karen Garrett  
VP - High School Honor Choir  
[kgarrett@cnusd.k12.ca.us](mailto:kgarrett@cnusd.k12.ca.us)

Molly Peters  
VP-JH/MS Honor Choir  
[mepeters79@gmail.com](mailto:mepeters79@gmail.com)

Jeffe Huls  
VP - Vocal Solo Competition  
[jhuls@smmusd.org](mailto:jhuls@smmusd.org)

Mark Freedkin  
Web/Barbershop Festivals  
[mfreedkin@yahoo.com](mailto:mfreedkin@yahoo.com)

Nancy Ludwig  
VP-High School Festivals  
[nancyschuette@msn.com](mailto:nancyschuette@msn.com)

Melva Morrison  
VP-Jr. High School Festivals  
[melsmusic@verizon.net](mailto:melsmusic@verizon.net)

Patty Breitag  
VP - Show Choir  
[pjbairhart@aol.com](mailto:pjbairhart@aol.com)

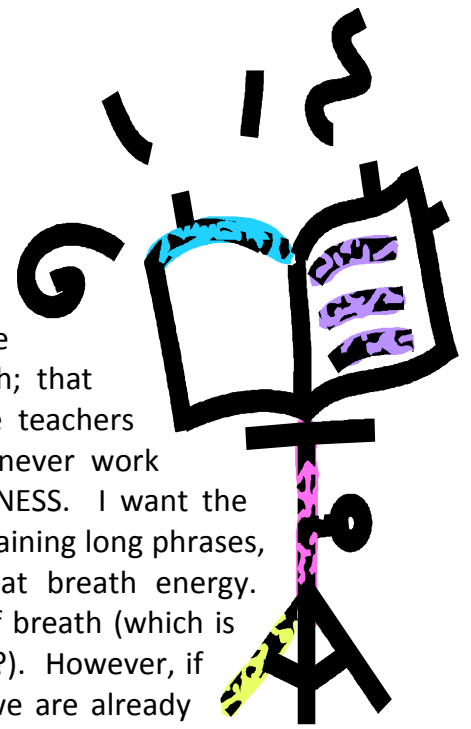
Christine Tavares  
VP-Jazz Choir  
[christinetavares33@gmail.com](mailto:christinetavares33@gmail.com)

Rodger Guerrero  
Past President  
[guerrero@hw.com](mailto:guerrero@hw.com)

## Concentrated Teaching Part 2: The Power of “Warm-up” (Breath)

*Jeffe Huls, Vocal Solo Competition*

Writing about teaching breath support is tricky. Some voice teachers believe that you shouldn't mess with the breath; that trying to “train” the breath creates more tension. Other voice teachers believe if the breath mechanism isn't “trained” the voice will never work properly. I try to approach the breath from a point of AWARENESS. I want the students to be aware that they are in control of the breath, of sustaining long phrases, of maintaining *appoggio*, and producing a vital tone with great breath energy. Instead, my untrained students breathe whenever they run out of breath (which is always in the middle of a word or right before the last note, right?). However, if we work awareness of the breath into the vocal regimen, then we are already planting the seeds of healthy, supported vocalization. Here are just a couple ideas to shake up your routine.



1. Sustained counting - Always start from the “noble posture” and invite students to take a silent, deep, and low breath. Have them hold their hands at their belly-button and drop their hands as they breath in “filling their hands with air.” Then have everyone count to 10 at a moderate tempo and varying the pitch through each number. When 10 is reached, use the remaining to shout, “HA!” (as if to say, “yeah breath, I see you 10 and up you one more!) Do it again and increase the number incrementally.
2. Take a nap - Have students lie down on the floor or other flat surface. Have them breathe normally and notice where their body naturally rises and falls. If they are doing it right it won't be the chest or the shoulders. Have them breathe in for two beats and sustain on an [s] for 8 beats. Do this several times, then have them recreate it from a standing noble posture.
3. In-sus-out - Starting from the noble posture, ask students to breathe in over a series of 4 beats. Without pause, suspend the air for 4 beats (be certain the there is no glottal tension/pressure or upper torso tension), then exhale over 4 beats. Repeat immediately with 5, then 6 etc. As you add more and more counts, you may need to have the students take in “thimble-size” breaths over the course of the inhalation.
4. Chair fall over - Students relax their torso over their legs from a seated position as if to touch their toes. They should take a low breath over 4 beats and concentrate on the back expansion (breathe into their kidneys). Exhale on [s,z,v,f, etc] for 8 counts while trying to maintain the sensation of back expansion. Always recreate the exercise from a standing position at least once or twice. This exercise also works from a standing position and bending over into a “hamstring stretch.”
5. Bark like a big dog - (thanks Joe Miller) Have students place the palm of their hand on the abdomen between the sternum and the belly-button. Tell the students to

- “pant like a little dog.” This will cause the muscle to bounce lightly and quickly. Change to “pant like a big dog.” The muscle will slow down, but still bounce. Alternate. This will engage the abdominal musculature, and it is great to follow it up with a staccato vocalization in which this muscle is so important. Joe likes to end the exercise with “bark like a big dog (woof)/little dog (ruff)” just for fun!
6. Timed breathing - This exercise is perfect for teaching the “catch breath.” Perform a series of 4 whole notes, 4 half notes, 4 quarter notes, and 4 eighth notes using [s] or other sound. Take a breath between each note. You and your students may discover that whole notes become dotted half notes, half notes become quarter notes, etc. Do we really need that much time to “catch” a breath? Sometimes? Perhaps a discussion of when this is and isn’t appropriate musically?
  7. Parroting - The students should place a flat palm on the abdominal muscle. Then the teacher chants rhythms using different aspirated consonants [f],[t],[s],[t] [p] [k] etc. I like to use rhythms from a piece of music we are studying.
  8. Blow out the candle - Students should hold out their index finger about 12” away from their face (ala “this little light of mine”). Using the consonant [f] they should pulse six times in rapid succession as if to use the [f] to blow out the candle. Refresh the breath after each set of six pulses and repeat 4-5 times. They most likely will not feel the air on their finger. This exercise is about the sensations of the muscles being used to create a supported singing breath. At no time should an attempt be made to tug the abdominal wall up and in. Rather, a concerted effort should be made to feel the dynamic muscle antagonism in the breath support mechanism.
  9. Additive - Breathe in for 2 beats and out for two beats using [s], then in for two again and out for 4 beats, in for 2 and out for 6 etc. Vary the consonant. Experiment with voiced and unvoiced consonants. Do some sounds allow for more control?
  10. Long phrase vocal exercises - Choose a couple vocalizations that require a longer breath to support the whole phrase. Explain to the students that it is better to start with a full supported breath and run out of air than to replenish and cheat in the middle of the exercise. Overtime, they will learn better breath management and be able to support all the way through the phrase. Sometimes, I will stop the vocalization and practice an unvoiced breath exercise and then come back to the vocalization. Inevitably, they are more prepared to consider breath management and typically can make it further with the phrase. Step two: teach them how to take an artistic breath in the middle of the phrase!!

As you work to create better breath awareness it is good to remind students that we are all built differently and we all develop differently and at different times. It is how we artistically work with what we have and how we diligently and meticulously work to improve, even incrementally, that ultimately helps us become better singers. Don’t forget to email me your ideas about body warm-ups and breath management so that I can include it on the website. Next issue: Resonance!



## Dealing with the Unexpected

Rodger Guerrero, Past President



When I initially sat down and began to compile and organize notes for this article, I fully intended to address the latest, most exciting news concerning the creation of a *Coordinated System of Statewide Choral Festivals*. I sincerely planned to update SCVA members on the fantastic reactions to the proposal that Scott Hedgecock and I presented at the CASMEC Choral Round Table on Feb. 23. I envisioned an article structured to inform everyone about the next steps in this transformational, collaborative choral festival process. I had my notes in order, my ducks all aligned in a row.

But then emotions overwhelmed me, and my normal, pragmatic approach to writing disintegrated into a mixture of indecision, erratic thoughts, and numbing sorrow. You see, the night before the CASMEC choral roundtable, as I began to relax in my Fresno hotel room after an incredibly hectic day, I received the tragic news that one of my students suddenly, unexpectedly died.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Tenor Section Leader in the Harvard-Westlake Chamber Singers and Jazz Singers, and the most dazzling of lights in any environment, this young man was a star-in-the-making and a life-changing human being. He knew everyone, spoke with everyone, encouraged and inspired everyone, listened to anyone about anything, and fought for anyone he felt was being treated unjustly. He was a scholar, dancer, actor, and athlete, and his soulful conscience and audacious willingness to speak up made him a friend to all. His parents arranged to have him buried in his choir tux because he was above all else a singer. I suddenly realized that amidst the tragedy of this student's death, funeral, and two weeks of recuperative drama within the close-knit HW community, as well as an intense doctoral recital, I had yet to deal with my own emotions.

I must clarify here that I used the phrase "one of my students" above for explanation purposes only. I honestly never refer to choral students at Harvard-Westlake as "my singers" individually or "my choirs" collectively. I have always operated under the philosophy that while I certainly belong to them and am thus "their teacher," they are no more "mine" than elegant stallions running free on government-owned property. They learn and grow and metamorphose under my watchful eye and within the physical plant in which I work, of course. But what they create and accomplish, musical and other, is theirs. Who they become, musicians and people, is but a realization of the human potential they come into this world with. Plutarch said, "*The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled.*" I may ignite the fire, but the students tend to, intensify, and develop it. They impact my life much more than I alter theirs. I thus find it more beneficial as an educator to try to function outwardly from their vantage point rather than from within my limited viewpoint.

The choral community can also be an inward-looking society, and choral classrooms can similarly exist as insular environments. We often emphasize the distinctiveness of the choral experience to such a degree that it becomes an exclusive activity centered upon our actions as choral educators. Perhaps this is because choral music is frequently an exclusionary aspect of the educational curriculum, a punching bag for shortsighted, budget-obsessed political figures. As a result, our close community often acts as our best security net. The reassurance we gain from our colleagues' support and work

frequently gets us through the day. Despite this truth, it is misguided to focus our classroom activities and experiences solely upon the idea that music itself can change the lives of our students. Rather, we should emphasize the idea that **what they accomplish** while they are in our care will enable them to better their own lives.

In his fantastic book, *Music Matters*, David Elliott contends that “*The primary values of Music and music education overlap the essential life values that most individuals and societies pursue for the good of each and all: personal growth, differentiation, complexity, enjoyment, self-esteem, and happiness.*” These life values cannot be commanded to occur by the choral teacher no more than they can be lectured into reality. They cannot be attained via the “Student Is a Blank Slate to Be Etched” methodology any more than the aesthetic facets of a choral work should supersede the praxial character of its creation and realization (*praxis: an action embedded in and responsive to a specific context of effort*; from Aristotle, “*Poetics*”). Great choral literature contains a plethora of admirable attributes, not one of which fosters personal growth or self-esteem in a young singer. However, **the pursuit of those qualities with others**, as empowered by a **student-centered educational facilitator** who seeks to **mediate and not control** the musical environment... well, that’s another matter. Such an interactive, constructivist approach can definitely serve to promote complex discovery and self-awareness and thus result in personal growth and happiness.

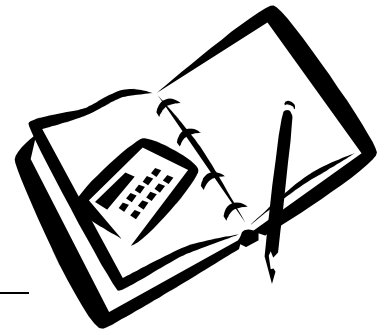
In the midst of the excessive verbiage above, I do have a point, and it is this: **the traditional philosophy of choral music education as aesthetic education, that is, centered in the appreciation of a musical work’s intrinsic beauty (product-centered) just doesn’t work for me.** This philosophy completely strips musical sounds of their social, realistic significance. Choral octavos are not framed, inanimate works of art lying still on the wall of a choral art gallery as we pass by, analyze, lecture about, and conduct them. Rather, they are living, breathing opportunities whose fertile expression relies upon human interaction of the most profound type. How can we undertake these life-altering openings without first developing individual relationships with our students, building upon and valuing each second we share with them? How can we humanize music’s expressive elements – *rhythm, melody, harmony, tone color, texture, and form* (Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education*, 1970/1989) – without first establishing and fostering the human connection we share with those who would realize those aesthetic facets with us? Rehearsals are not about the music, and they are certainly not about us. They should be *embedded in and responsive to* [the] *specific context of effort* of our students. Music-making is reliant upon the music-makers – our students. Music curriculum should therefore be about what we experience with our students as the result of interactions before, during, after, the musical work is prepared. The success of this praxial curriculum is dependent upon our ability to know all of our singers, speak with them, encourage and inspire them, and listen to each one of them about anything.

The unexpected death of a former student reminded me that my work as a music educator must be rooted in student-centeredness. The opportunity to share life-making and music-making with this phenomenal human being has been unpredictably taken away from me forever. Fortunately, like all of you, many other elegant musical stallions surround me. May we all treasure each and every one.

# UPDATE ON THE REVISION OF THE NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

*Jennifer Stanley, Executive VP*

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*This article is a summary of information presented at a session during the California All-State Music Education Conference (CASMEC) in Fresno in February. The session was presented by Kristine Alexander and Armalyn De La O, who are both members of The California Arts Project, and members of the committee to revise the National Core Arts Standards.*

**The National Core Arts Standards are being revised to be in alignment with the Common Core State Standards. The number of standards will be reduced from nine to four.**

These four arts standards will be

- Creating
- Performing/Presenting/Producing
- Responding
- Connecting

Each standard will articulate

- Enduring Understandings
- Essential Questions
- Model Cornerstone Assessments

Music educators are encouraged to follow the progress of the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards at <http://nccas.wikispaces.com/>

## UPDATE ON THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS AND MUSIC

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Ms. Alexander and Ms. De La O reported that music is listed as a “technical subject” in the new Common Core State Standards. Other technical subjects include science and social studies.

A concern that was raised at the meeting was administrators asking music teachers to have music students read non-fiction and write argumentative/persuasive or informative responses to the reading. While this type of writing is very important to the ELA elements of Common Core, Ms. Alexander and Ms. De La O did emphasize that developing literacy in technical subjects also includes learning to read documents in the notation style of the subject. They presented several examples to illustrate how learning to read music notation is a necessary skill that students need in order to understand music performances and evaluate the quality of them. This type of evaluation is also central to the literacy elements of Common Core.



## Barbershop Harmony Festivals Another Whopping Success!

*Mark Freedkin, VP of Barbershop Harmony Festivals*

**T**he **Harborlites Chorus** held their 8th Annual "**Diva Day**" on Saturday, February 2 at Orange Coast College. We had 225 young women from 27 Southern California high schools come together for the barbershop experience, including nine first-time schools. The young women and their choral directors thoroughly enjoyed the day of learning and performing four-part harmony barbershop style under the direction of guest clinician Jennifer Perry Edwards, lead of the 2009 International Champions Quartet **Moxie Ladies** and the Vocal Music Director for the Lake County Schools in Canton, Ohio. The festival ended with an evening performance for an audience of over 300 parents, families and friends. The audience enjoyed performance by the Harborlites Chorus and quartets including **Dolce**, the current 10th place International Quartet Medalists, along with ensembles from three participating high schools. The show ended with a combined 300-plus chorus with the Diva Day Chorus joining Harborlites on stage singing "**We Are Family**". Through the years we have welcomed nearly 1500 young women to our program.



**T**he **Masters of Harmony** held their 13th Annual **Young Men's Harmony Festival** on Saturday, February 16 at Orange Coast College. We had 204 young men from 29 high schools and junior high schools throughout Southern California in attendance, and the feedback from students, parents and teachers has been overwhelmingly positive. The evening show was nothing less than stellar, and it featured the young men's chorus; quartets or small ensembles from **Poway High School, Arlington High School, Granada Hills Charter High School, Beckman High School, and Scripps Ranch High School** and **Marshall Middle School**; guest quartets **The Crush, Masterpiece; The Westminster Chorus** and the **Masters of Harmony**, culminating with a combined finale with over 300 singers on stage. This year's event brings our 13-year total to just over 2,700 students who have participated in one or more of our festivals.



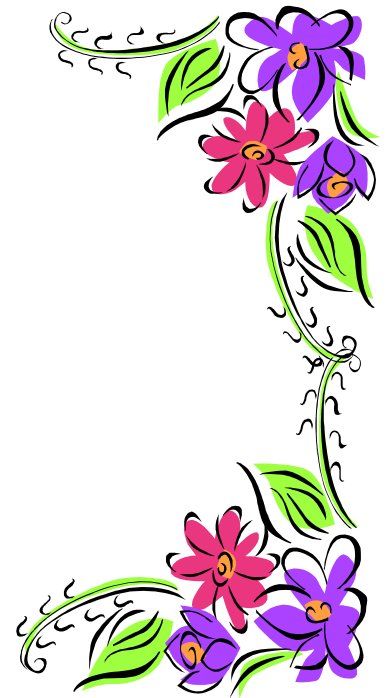
Plans are already underway for next year's Festivals. The women's festival is tentatively planned for Saturday, February 8, 2014, and the men's festival is tentatively planned for Saturday, February 22, 2014. Please watch the SCVA website for more information as it becomes available.

## **Southern California Vocal Association**

c/o The Buckley School

3900 Stansbury Ave. Sherman Oaks, CA 91423

[www.scvachoral.org](http://www.scvachoral.org) / email: [scvemail@yahoo.com](mailto:scvemail@yahoo.com)



### **IMPORTANT DATES & DEADLINES**

Junior High Honor Choir Concert  
Show Choir Spectacular

April 27, 2013  
May 4, 2013