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A UNIVERSAL
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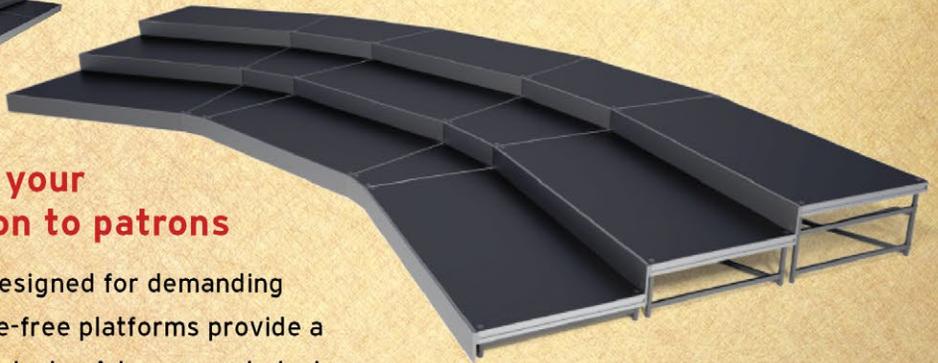
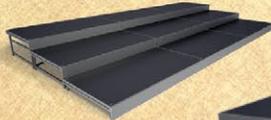
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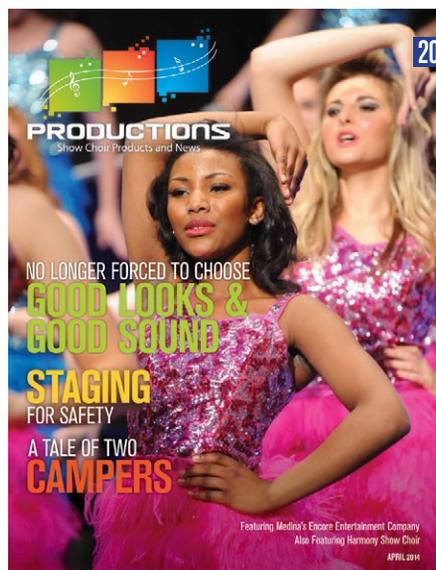
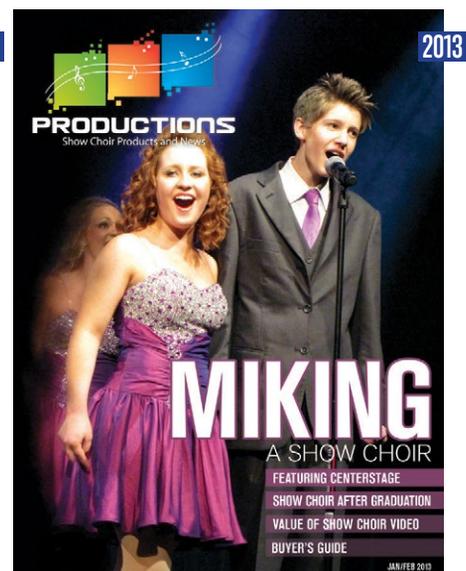
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EDITOR'S LETTER

A quick Internet search reveals that the most common New Year's resolutions are about individual health and well-being, and many of these resolutions are tall orders indeed. Every year, people (often the same people making the same promises) vow to lose weight, exercise more, stop smoking, stop drinking alcohol, get healthy, and get organized. They claim they will read more, learn more, start hobbies, and volunteer. They vow to get better jobs, find or develop more satisfying romantic relationships, devote more time to their churches or communities, and spend more time with their families. A few weeks into a new year, resolutions made at the stroke of midnight as one year came to a close are really put to the test.

In "The History of New Year's Resolutions," Sarah Pruitt explains that resolving to improve yourself is practically unavoidable as you transition to a new year, even though it's now well documented that most annual resolutions fail. Pruitt notes that ancient Babylonians were presumably the first to make resolutions; they held a religious festival that spanned nearly two weeks where they crowned a new king or reaffirmed their current king and also made promises to the gods in the form of paying their debts or returning borrowed items. If they kept their promises, they would earn favor with their gods. If they failed to keep their promises, they would no longer have the goodwill of their gods—hardly an enviable position.

These practices, according to Pruitt, paved the way for modern New Year's resolutions. In a similar practice, ancient Rome saw Julius Caesar establish the first of January as a new year's beginning, naming the month for the god whose spirit dwelled in arches and doorways, a two-faced god that looked back to the previous year while simultaneously looking forward into the future. The Romans would make promises for good conduct while making sacrifices for past behavior. The first day of any new year, for early Christians, became an occasion for considering errors of the past while resolving to improve in the future.

Despite having deep roots in religious practices, resolutions have become a popular, secular practice where people focus mostly on self-improvement and really only make promises to themselves. Pruitt posits that the dismal rate for kept resolutions—with only about eight percent of people successfully completing their goals—could be explained in the fact that these promises don't go beyond self. Self-promises alone don't seem to ensure change, even with thousands of years of practice at making resolutions.

Here we are now, a few weeks into a fresh calendar year and halfway through a school year. Whatever resolutions we made as the new year rolled around may be at a crossroads. Albert Einstein, who I imagine was far more successful at keeping resolutions than I have been, believed a strong leader can bring simplicity from clutter and harmony from discord. He stressed that a leader could find the opportunity within any difficulty.

There is little doubt that we are facing some difficult problems in our schools, some problems that have been decades in the making and others that have only recently gained notoriety. We face difficulties with racial, gendered, and sexual discrimination. We have too many excellent educators struggling to make ends meet and keep music programs afloat.

However, the educators and administrators with the ability to bring about positive change can resolve this year to lead the way in finding harmony within discord and bringing simplicity to the clutter. These leaders can make their resolutions publicly—calling for the help needed from parents and other community members—in order to meet their goals; they can make themselves accountable to others for those promises. In this way, our resolutions are shared, and our chances of meeting these goals are increased.



Rachel James Clevenger, MEd, PhD
Editor-in-Chief, Productions Magazine
rachel@productionsmag.com



Ed Bauer

Publisher

ed@productionsmag.com

EDITORIAL

Rachel James Clevenger

Editor-in-Chief

rachel@productionsmag.com

Sheila Wagner

Editorial Assistance

April James

Creative Advisor

ART

Hilary Moreno

Creative Director

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Zach Braithwaite

Nick Colleran

Jacob Levine

Rick Roe



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MARYSVILLE
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Unlimited:*

**Building
STEAM**

by Zach Braithwaite

Over the past ten years, the Marysville Swingers Unlimited have earned thirty overall grand championships, but the road to success has not come without its bumps. From multiple choreographer changes, to a school district that decided to put sports and science above art and music, the group and their director, Jeremy Alfera, have used this all as motivation to continue creating the art that they love.

The Beginning of the Winning

In 2005, Jeremy Alfera joined the choral program at Marysville High School. Previously, Alfera had worked with the Swingers Unlimited showchoir in a limited capacity doing the choreography for both the 2003 and 2004 shows. Alfera had a background in showchoir as he had been a member of the Twinsburg Great Expectations and an attendee of Showchoir Camps of America as both a camper and a counselor. After high school, he decided to attend The Ohio State University and study music education where he would meet his eventual co-director, Katie Paulson.

For the next ten years, under Alfera's increased direction, the Swingers Unlimited would change dramatically from a small locally competing choir to one that competed around the nation and made a name for itself as a group to look out for. During his first year at Marysville, Alfera helped bring in a new choreographer, Stephen Todd, a friend he had met while at SCA. At the end of the 2005 season, the Swingers Unlimited were awarded grand champion at the Fairfield Crystal Classic; unbeknownst to the showchoir or Alfera, it would be one of many to come.

In 2006, Alfera decided to do what he describes as a "mini-theme," book-ending the set with a small idea that "wasn't necessarily evident to the audience, but had an underlying thought to it." This sort of trend continued in Alfera's shows for the Swingers Unlimited covering such topics as Home, New Orleans, The Age of Aquarius, Crazy, and more. Alfera admits that this concept came from his days in Great Expectations. He felt that his "high school choir had very constructed themes" and he discovered "what I did and didn't like about it."

Stephen Todd would continue to work with the Swingers Unlimited until 2007, helping the group earn eight more grand championships, and multiple best choreography awards. In 2008 and 2009, Alfera took full responsibility for creating the Swingers Unlimited set and brought in alumni, Ashley Morgan, and past Great Expectations member, Ellis Jackson, to help create choreography with him. During the 2009 season, Alfera met Alex Hall at the DeKalb HS competition. Hall, impressed with the Swingers Unlimited, asked to come work with the group sometime and Alfera happily welcomed him to bring his insights to the group. Hall would become

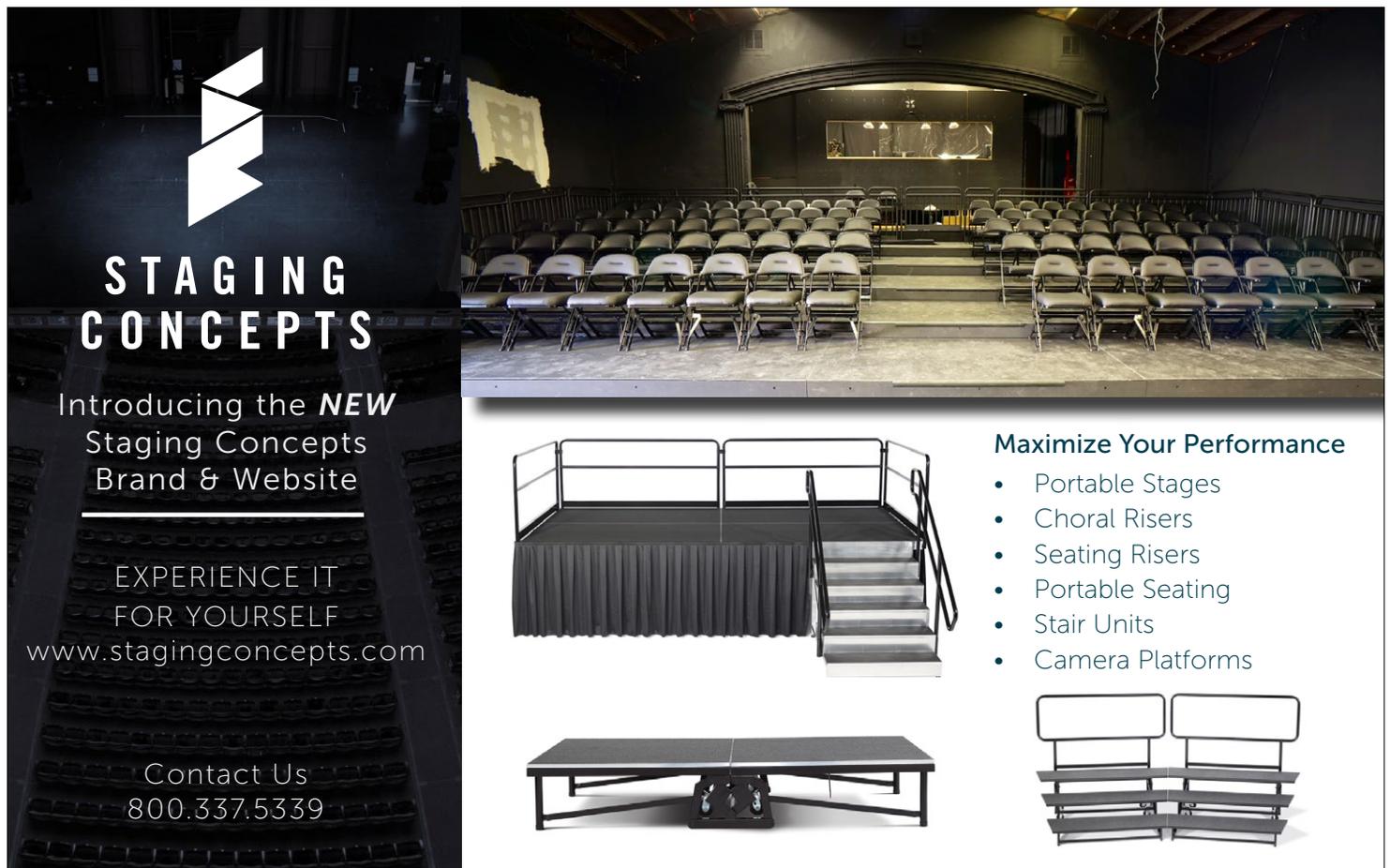
one of the mainstays of the Swingers Unlimited, working with the group continuously since 2010. That year also marked the first year that Randy Sage choreographed the group. Sage would become the other part of the Marysville team that has stayed consistent since.

Choral Boosters Save a Program When School District Won't

During the 2012 school year, the Marysville school district failed to pass a November operating levy and left the district with some choices to make. One of those decisions was to eliminate five music education staff in the district, one of those positions being Alfera's.

Alfera, with his job on the line, continued to work on the Swingers Unlimited set for the 2013 season. Support was coming in droves for Alfera and the Swingers Unlimited. Another local showchoir, Piqua's "The Company," made a video entitled "Save the Swingers" in an attempt to appeal to the Marysville school district.

After the 2013 season was over, the district announced final decisions on cuts to make, and Alfera's job was still on the chopping block. At the district board meeting, parent



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after parent came forward pleading not to cut Alfera's job or get rid of so many members of the music staff. One woman, unassociated with the Swingers Unlimited, claimed to even have family in Iowa who knew of the great success of Alfera and Swingers Unlimited and also asked that the district reconsider cutting such a large part of the district's music curriculum. In the end, Alfera was let go and it seemed that the Swingers Unlimited would be no more.

But as Alfera puts it, "The choral boosters presented me with an amazing opportunity." The boosters, unwilling to part with the creativity of Alfera or the fun and success their children had as a part of the Swingers Unlimited, came up with a stipend to help support Alfera financially so he could continue to be creative for himself and for the Swingers Unlimited.

"I felt like I had created such a community and family with the Swingers Unlimited that when presented with this opportunity to continue doing the most favorite part of my job, I couldn't say no," Alfera explains, adding, "At this point I feel like the Swingers Unlimited are my little personal theater company." Though the district tried to stifle the students' creativity by cutting so much music staff, the Swingers Unlimited would not stand for it.



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Students Need STEAM, not STEM

As Alfera put it, "The district laid on the table exactly what they valued by cutting so much music personnel, and the next year opening up a new STEM school." Though Alfera recognizes the educational opportunities associated with the new school opening he emphasizes that, "If we keep promoting STEM and not STEAM, we will only have mathematicians and scientists, and we will lose the value of our singers, painters, artists, and dancers."

Friends questioned why Alfera, a member of the district for eight years at the point of his release, would stay working within a district that had shown him what little value they placed on his position.

Though Alfera admits that he "felt betrayed by a community" he had poured

so much into and he no longer felt "a part of the district community," he explains that he is still extremely happy to be working with the choral boosters, the parents, the kids, and loves being a part of the Swingers Unlimited community and family." Along with directing Swingers Unlimited Alfera says he is "enjoying his freelance life," by arranging even more than before, and choreographing some other showchoirs locally and in other regions.

Swingers Unlimited into the Future

Just one season removed from his release, Alfera and the Swingers Unlimited had their most prolific year winning five overall grand championships. Alfera describes that year

as "refreshing, reenergizing, and a great time to start anew." Alfera also continues to push the envelope with the Swingers Unlimited doing the group's first story show, a Vampire themed love story, in 2015. "I just found three songs that felt like they fit a certain mood and just decided to do a full story show," Alfera comments.

Alfera's mini themes have turned into full-fledged ones though he doesn't know necessarily if he will continue down this road. He explains that he "has ideas for future stories that include my nerdy obsession, each year is different and sometimes it's just one song that gets the ball rolling on a new show for me." The Swingers Unlimited just hosted their annual Showcase in January and look forward to showing the country their ideas on space in the 2016 showchoir season.

Zach Braithwaite is a showchoir enthusiast and part time choreographer. He enjoys live music, good food, and great movies. He is excited to be contributing to *Productions* magazine being both a showchoir alumni and full time supporter of the advancement of the art of showchoir.



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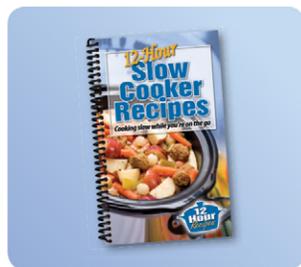
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OUTFITTING YOUR GROUP WITH MULTI-PURPOSE & FLEXIBLE STAGING

by Rick Roe

Today, schools all over the country are finding it difficult to meet the demands placed on them to provide the best possible education as well as making sure that their students get the most out of their education. If you are a group that competes and travels, the parents and students see what the other groups have for risers or staging and look to you to supply the equivalent for their kids.

Everyone wants to have the best system that is safe, enhances their presence on stage, and allows them to perform at their best. This can be difficult for smaller schools that may not have the full backing of the community as the sports teams or have a very limited budget that the school can allocate to the performing arts. Words like multi-purpose, flexible, or modular become an important part of your vocabulary if you want to gain the support you need to outfit your group.

Top-Level Equipment for Competing at the Highest Level

Many teachers and directors are great negotiators and top-notch fund raisers on top of their many other gifts. These fortunate ones have unlimited access to extremely wealthy donors, intensely active parents or boosters organizations or have an altruistic local company or organization that supports their every need.

For the rest of the teachers and directors, they have to work to find the extra money to support the programs. For the schools that do not have the free flow of financial support,

it is imperative that there are creative ways to find the funding to get the kids the top-level equipment that allows them to compete at the highest level. Finding other departments that have close to your same needs and are willing to find a cooperative solution may be the best in-house option.

A few ways of joint collaboration with other departments or the administration may allow you to find additional applications for staging or risers that can help them justify the purchase. If the collaboration is possible, the best place to start is to call on the other departments that share your passion for

supporting the kids and the performing arts programs. The overall impact can be reduced if you can come to a consensus on what the bulk of the staging needed is, and what is really needed for both programs to share. Then you would only need to add the specialty items that you need specifically to fit your exact needs. The Band Director collaboration would yield either the individual drum risers, key board risers or a large raised percussion platform that can make his orchestra or band look spectacular for the winter and spring concerts. These platforms can then provide you with the nine stage panels to build your 3 x 3 Show Choir configuration.

The Graduation Stage

Another great area of concern that administrations are constantly trying to overcome is the graduation stage that is moved into the main gymnasium and only used once a year. To purchase this is costly for only one use a year, and rental options are at a level that they can buy a system after only a couple of years of renting. Ultimately, the long-term value to the district to buy the system makes the most sense.

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If you look at the normal graduation stage set up, an average of 16 panels are set at either a flat height of twenty four or thirty two inches. Your graduation stage could be completed by utilizing the standard 4x4 Show Choir Riser System decks, and with the addition of a few supports of appropriate height, you can show a great return on the investment for the district and provide your students with a top-notch platform for performance.

As you move forward and look for ideas to help build the solid base that you require for your performance, think in terms of collaboration and multi-purpose to allow you to have the very best with the limited amount of impact on your budget.

Rick Roe has 23 years of StageRight sales experience serving all divisions through the years with the last 13 years as the StageRight School and Church Market Manager. Rick is based out of the home office in Clare, MI.



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Acoustics:

A UNIVERSAL CONCERN by Nick Colleran

Schools have a multitude of different rooms where acoustics matter. In addition to the obvious intelligibility requirements for classrooms, there are choir and band rooms, recording and broadcast facilities, gymnasiums that may need to double as performance areas and—if the performers are lucky—a dedicated theater for the performing arts.





When Sound Absorption Doesn't Add Up

If a performance space is too reverberant (echo, "slap back" or long "ring-out"), the obvious answer is to add sound absorbing materials. However, the end results may not be the total of what existed plus what is added. This is true if the walls had some absorption initially and the added materials cover that area.

If the walls are hard and bare, with zero absorption, the result will be the full value of the added material. Hard and bare may seem obvious but—in some cases—looks are deceiving. For instance, a single sheet of drywall mounted on a rigid hard surface will generally be very reflective. If a single sheet of drywall were added to close an opening in the original construction, it will have its own absorption characteristics and, in fact, be a reasonable bass trap. This is still true, but to a lesser extent, even when mounted on studs in standard 16-inch on center spacing.

In short, what you see isn't always what you get in acoustics. Applying hand pressure to a wall will determine if it is rigid or flexing. If one sidewall flexes and the other does not, there may be problems in studios where left and right response having equal characteristics is necessary to making sound judgments.

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Multi-Functionality

For a large space that is used for different purposes—such as sports games one week and theatrical performances the next—the most efficient means of reducing the room reverberation is usually hanging baffles. Since these items hang, they are not taking away from the sound absorption characteristics of the existing wall and ceiling treatments. Additionally, they add more surface area, hanging in free space.

Basic arithmetic suggests that a 2' X 4' suspended panel has a surface area of 8 square feet. On second thought, with both sides exposed, the total surface area doubles to sixteen square feet. Correct? Actually, no. The edges also add to the sound reduction. For a 2-inch thick baffle of the above dimensions, the edge perimeter adds two more square feet. This explains why performance of these devices is usually expressed in sabins of absorption rather than as an absorption coefficient.

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and limited to 1.00 as full absorption, the only way to reconcile this conflict is to use the total surface area of 18 square feet to yield a coefficient of 0.99 or to use a formula based on the absolute absorption number in sabins per unit.

Diffusion Isn't Always What It Seems

In the scientific community, the easy way to start an argument (or continue one) is to refer to all the various reflective devices as diffusers. For that matter, there is disagreement as to whether it is a diffuser or a diffusor. (You say potato, I say potahto.) For our purpose, we will use the term diffuser to include sound reflectors, scattering devices and just about anything that redirects most of the sound hitting its surface.

We will start with the polycylindrical (barrel shaped) diffuser as used on the early Hollywood sound stages and spelled with an "e". These devices not only spread sound rather evenly above 500 Hz, but they also absorb very little above that point, typically measuring a sound absorption coefficient of SAC = 0.10. Below 500 Hz is another matter. These devices absorb up to SAC = 1.00 in the range below 500 Hz where the center of their bell curve is determined by the dimensions of the poly.

A 4' X 10' unit is most efficient around 40 Hz. These characteristics make the units an excellent complement to typical wall panels that lose usefulness below 250 Hz. In other words, their sound absorption characteristics allow them to cover for the acoustical wall panels in the lower ranges

and eliminate residual "room boom" in an environment where the panels have already achieved speech clarity. The effect is to make the room feel smaller than the cavern as it began.

Acoustics of Artistic Spaces

When turning to the acoustics of smaller engineering and artistic spaces such as the broadcast and recording studio, the needs reverse and the mission is to make the space appear larger acoustically. Absorption will be placed to prevent unwanted reflections from arriving at the listener before the primary source is heard, unaltered.

It is not as simple as calculating a room reverberation time for a large hall. Once this is achieved, it is desirable to have sound scattered so that the back wall location is not obvious, but the ambiance and the life of the sound within the room remains. This is usually achieved with mathematics based "Schroeder" diffusers such as those commonly known as "Quadratics." (The observant reader will note that the spelling of diffuser has morphed to the use of -or, diffusor which is most common for designs of this type.)

With these units, not only does the sound reflect back at different time intervals due to well depth or element height, the reflections interfere with one another causing the sound to bloom. An analogy can be made to a brown butterfly wing appearing multi-colored as the light reflects from an uneven wing surface.

The more traditional "polys" can also be of use in these spaces but here more for their bass absorption "trapping" capabilities. The term trapping is counterintuitive. Although it implies destruction of sound, it is really preventing it by absorbing the bass like an open window rather than allowing it to reflect back on itself out-of-phase and cancelling.

A Common Thread

While not all areas of a school have the same requirement, all areas require acoustics to be addressed to perform properly. Thinking of acoustics first will save in the long run in both total cost and proper performance.

Nick Colleran is past-president of SPARS (Society of Professional Audio Recording Services), past president of the VPSA (Virginia Productions Services Association), a former recording artist and recording engineer. Nick now leads a "quiet life" as a principal of Acoustics First Corporation, where he was awarded two new patents for acoustical materials and continues work on new designs.

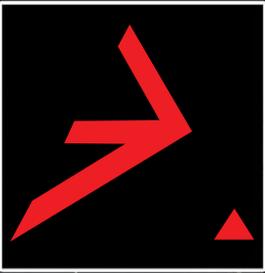
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The advertisement features a pair of black flip-flops with red straps. Each flip-flop has a cartoon character with a speech bubble saying "Nooo!". The character is wearing a white shirt and a black hat. The flip-flops are set against a background of a bright orange and yellow sunburst. To the left of the flip-flops is a red rose on a green stem. The text "FUNDRAISING Flip Flops" is at the top in a large, white, serif font. Below that, "FUND YOUR NEXT ACT" is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the flip-flops, the "TOROSI NEWS" logo is visible. At the very bottom of the advertisement, the website "BagusCustom.com" and phone number "760.721.1045" are listed.

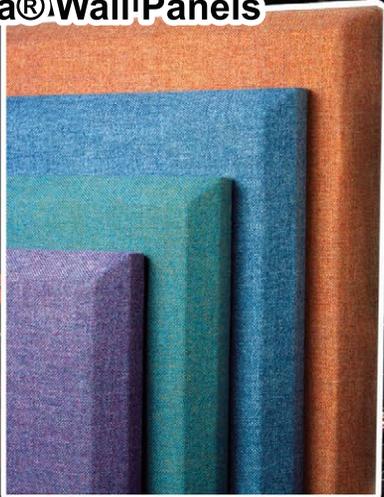


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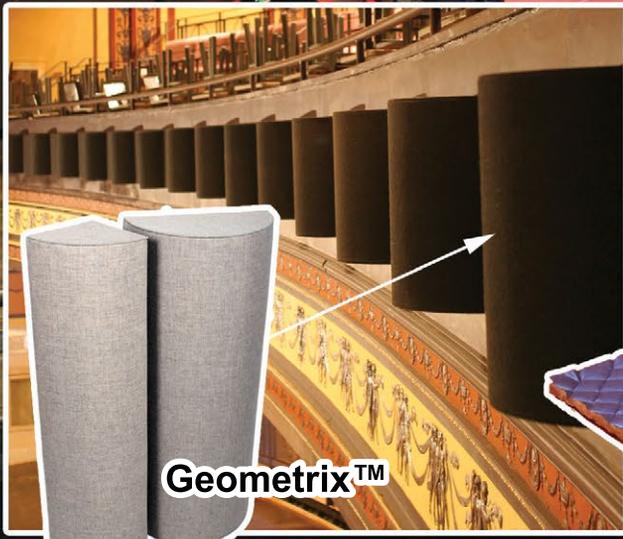
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IMPROVE YOUR ORGANIZATION

with Chorus Management Tools

by Jacob Levine

The beginning of a new season is an exciting time. That is, unless you're the poor sap who gets handed the stack of audition forms and has to copy everything into Excel. The data entry required for this two-step process (paper forms + Excel) is tedious and highly inefficient. You have to manually copy a large amount of data, you have to decipher messy handwriting, and you're basically guaranteed to have some errors. Fortunately, there's an easier way: go digital!

Using a chorus management tool will radically change your organization for the better. What are you waiting for?

The Secret To Simplifying Data Entry For The New Season

There are tons of fantastic free tools out there that can help you simplify data collection into a one-step process. Skip the paper altogether and have singers enter their info directly into a digital form that will automatically generate a spreadsheet. Then, the data can easily be copied from that spreadsheet into your membership roster in Excel or Access, or imported into chorus management software.

Collecting Data Online

Probably the simplest and easiest way to do this is to send new singers an online form. My favorite tools for this are Google Forms and Survey Monkey, but there are tons of others out there.

Collecting Data in Person

Your chorus may like to collect data in person, either at auditions or at the first

rehearsal. If you have internet access in the space, you can always create an online form, as mentioned above, and pull it up on a laptop or mobile device.

If you don't have internet access in the space, you can collect data offline using one of the many free form-builder apps available on mobile devices. I've been impressed by what I've seen so far with Device Magic's Mobile Forms, but if you have the time and patience, try out a few to see which you like the best.

7 Ways Chorus Management Software Will Radically Improve Your Life

Collecting information about new members is a major pain, but it's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the data management challenges faced by choruses.

Here's a very typical scenario: a new singer joins your organization. That singer needs to get added to the membership roster. Oh, and also the spreadsheet for

attendance. And did I mention the dues spreadsheet? That doesn't even count the email list for the weekly newsletter.

For most choruses, none of these functions are integrated, making them all the more painful to manage. But it doesn't have to be this way. There are a handful of chorus management tools out there designed specifically to help with the administrative challenges faced by choruses.

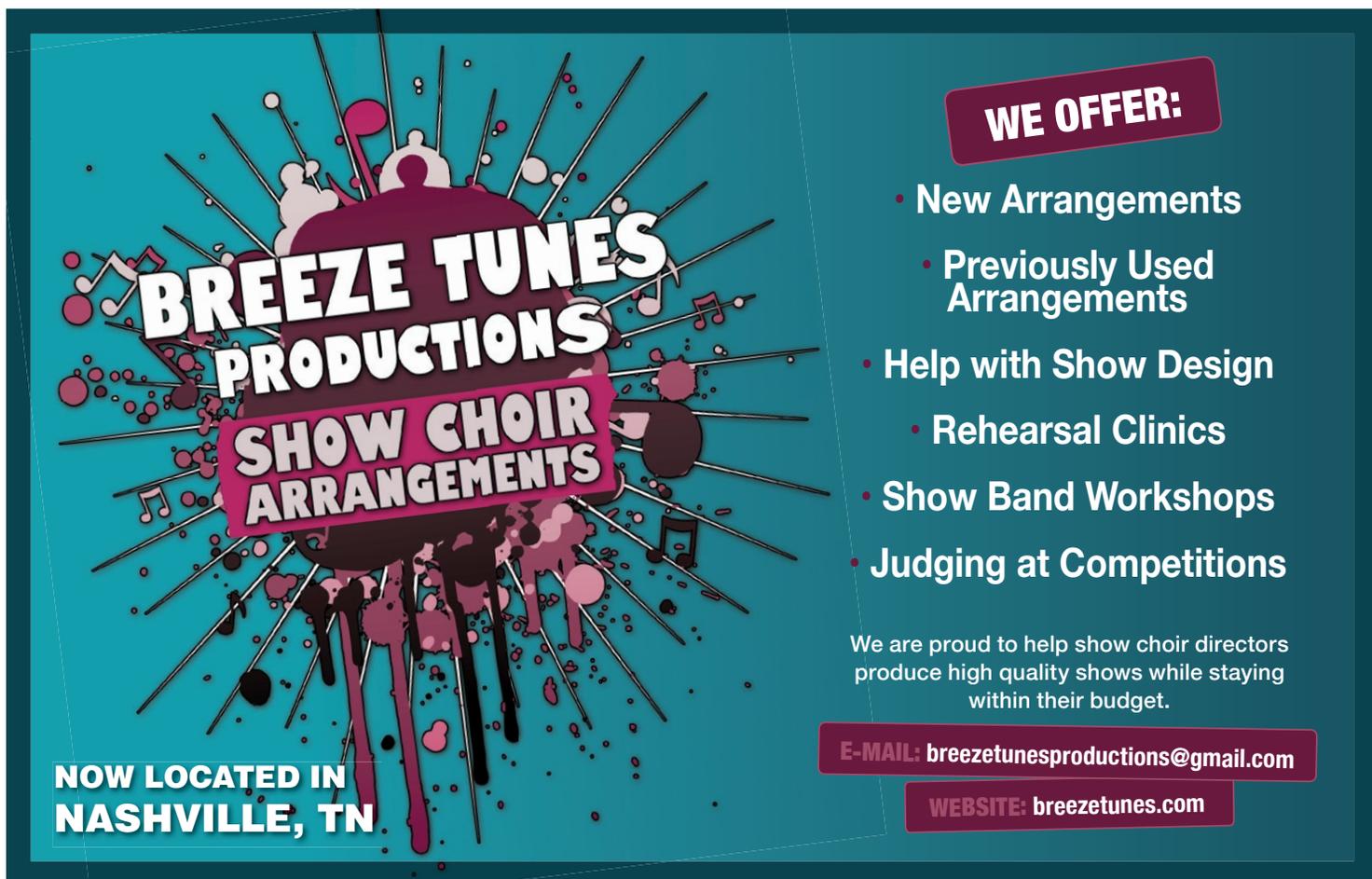
Here are 7 key reasons your chorus should consider using such a tool:

1) Eliminate duplicate data entry

Using an integrated system means the removal of a lot of duplicate data entry. When a new singer gets added to the database, she'll automatically get added to the appropriate email lists. If her contact information changes, she can update it herself in a single place and the change propagates everywhere. The list of similar benefits is long.

2) Save time

Eliminating data entry means your team will save a lot of time. As a result, they can focus on things that will actually grow your organization, rather than managing data.



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3) Make life easier for singers

Singers need access to a lot of information: the calendar, rehearsal tracks, contact information, etc. Life gets much easier when everything can be found in a single place.

4) Remove bottlenecks

Some choruses do put much of that information on a members' only page on their website. That can be really valuable, but typically all changes have to be made by a webmaster. A chorus management tool can allow less tech savvy people to easily make changes directly. Your artistic director, for example, could upload rehearsal tracks himself.

5) Smoother turnover

Turnover is constant in choruses. When everything is run from spreadsheets or custom built tools, new leaders have to learn the idiosyncrasies of their predecessors' systems or design something new from scratch. Either way, it's typically a bumpy ride.

A chorus management tool can help keep things standardized, smoothing normally chaotic transitions.

6) Support

Speaking of turnover, after transitions, leaders often don't have access to the people who originally designed their current systems. If they have questions or get confused, this can be especially frustrating. If they're using a chorus management tool, however, they have access to that company's team, meaning faster and more reliable support.

7) Constant improvements

If your organization has a system cobbled together by volunteers, improvements and bug fixes are completely dependent on their time and availability. If you use a vendor, however, you can and should expect to see improvements and fixes on a regular basis.

Using a chorus management tool will radically change your organization for the better. What are you waiting for?



Jacob Levine is the founder of Chorus Connection, the easiest way to manage every aspect of your chorus in one place. A lifelong choir geek and tech geek, he loves marrying his passions to help choruses run more efficiently. Learn more at www.chorusconnection.com!

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2016 Buyer's Guide

AUDITORIUMS AND ACOUSTICS

Acoustics First

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888-765-2900 or 800-342-2900
www.acousticsfirst.com

Acoustics First designs, manufactures, distributes and sells acoustical panels and sound-proofing materials to control sound and eliminate noise. These sound and noise control products include sound absorbers, diffusers, noise barriers, and vibration control devices from people who have been giving out sound advice for over 30 years. The principals of Acoustics First have been in the acoustics business since the seventies, when they introduced industrial foam as an acoustic panel for recording studios. We now supply many types of

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COMPETITIONS AND PROGRAMS

Ball State University School of Music

Hargreaves Music Building
(MU) 203

Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306
765-285-5400

bsu.edu/music

People to Know: Andrew Crow, Director of Choral Activities; Kerry Glann, Assistant Director of Choral Activities; and Alan Alder, Director of University Singers. There are six choral ensembles: Chamber Choir, Concert Choir, University Choral Union, Statesmen, Women's Chorus,



and University Singers. We feature several degree and diploma options: Artist Diploma in Music Performance, Doctor of Arts in Music (degree program includes a substantial primary area of study plus additional preparation for a career in collegiate-level teaching), Master of Music, Master of Arts, or Bachelor of Music. Graduate assistantships are available in all areas, including University Singers. Visit us to learn more at bsu.edu/music. For more information about the Ball State University Singers, contact Alan Alder at alalder@bsu.edu.

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www.showchoirs.org

Though FAME has promoted the Show Choir Cup as the National Championship since 1996, it was not until 2011 that a complete Show Choir National Championship Series was introduced. This new format not only provided a National Championship event for Show Choirs but a means to qualify for this event. Show Choirs register to participate in one of a series of six regional competitions to determine the National Finalists. The National

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