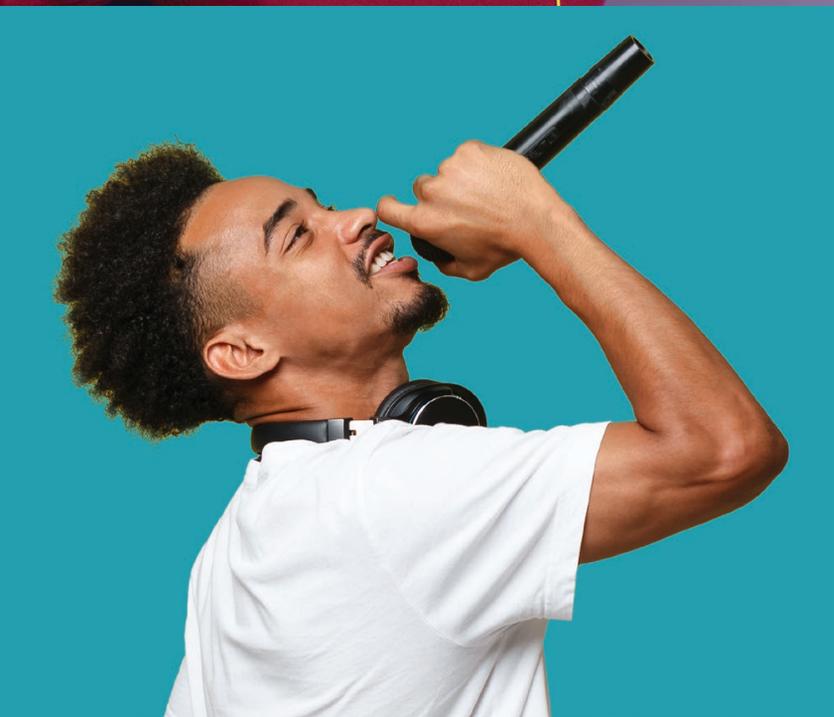


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Show Choir Products and News



# LIFTING VOICES AND SPIRITS

## SHOW CHOIR & COVID-19

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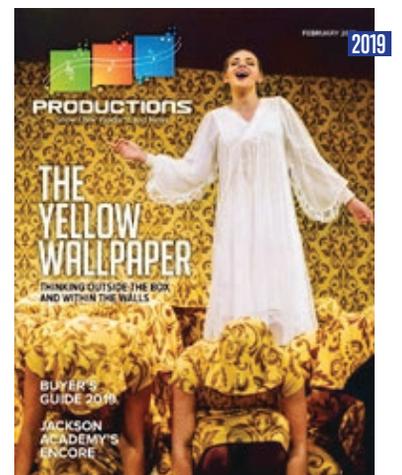
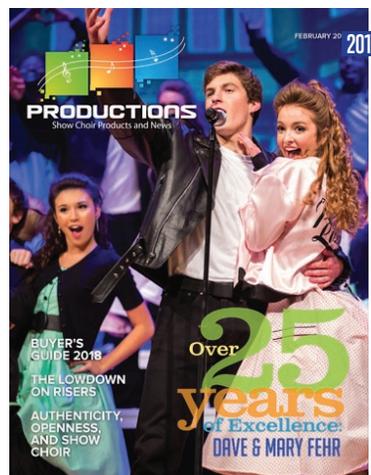
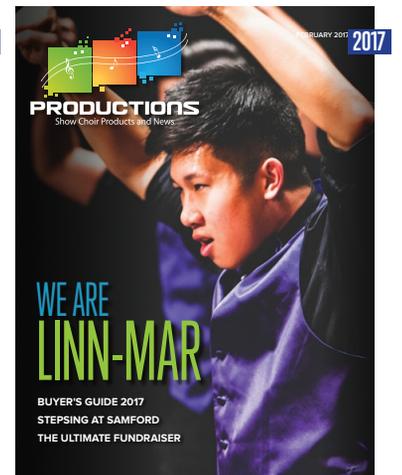
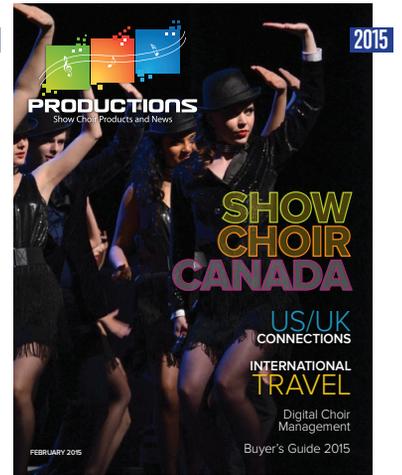
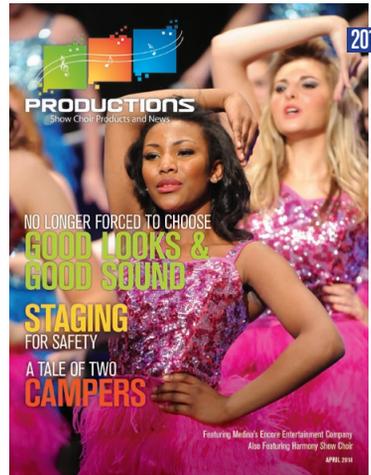
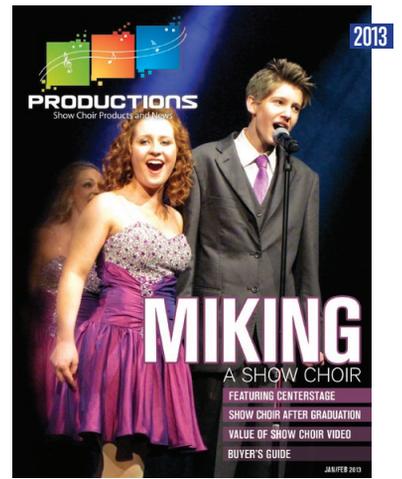


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Show Choir Products and News

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## 6

### LIFTING VOICES AND SPIRITS: SHOW CHOIR AND COVID-19

by Cassidy Clevenger

Normally whenever I cover a story for *Productions*, I will focus on just one school. For this piece, however, I will be breaking my normal protocol. Since the rest of the world is going off script, I might as well too. We are living in strange days, and many show choirs are making a concerted effort to keep life as streamlined as possible for their students. Due to COVID-19, many shows had to be canceled; competitions had to be canceled.

## 14

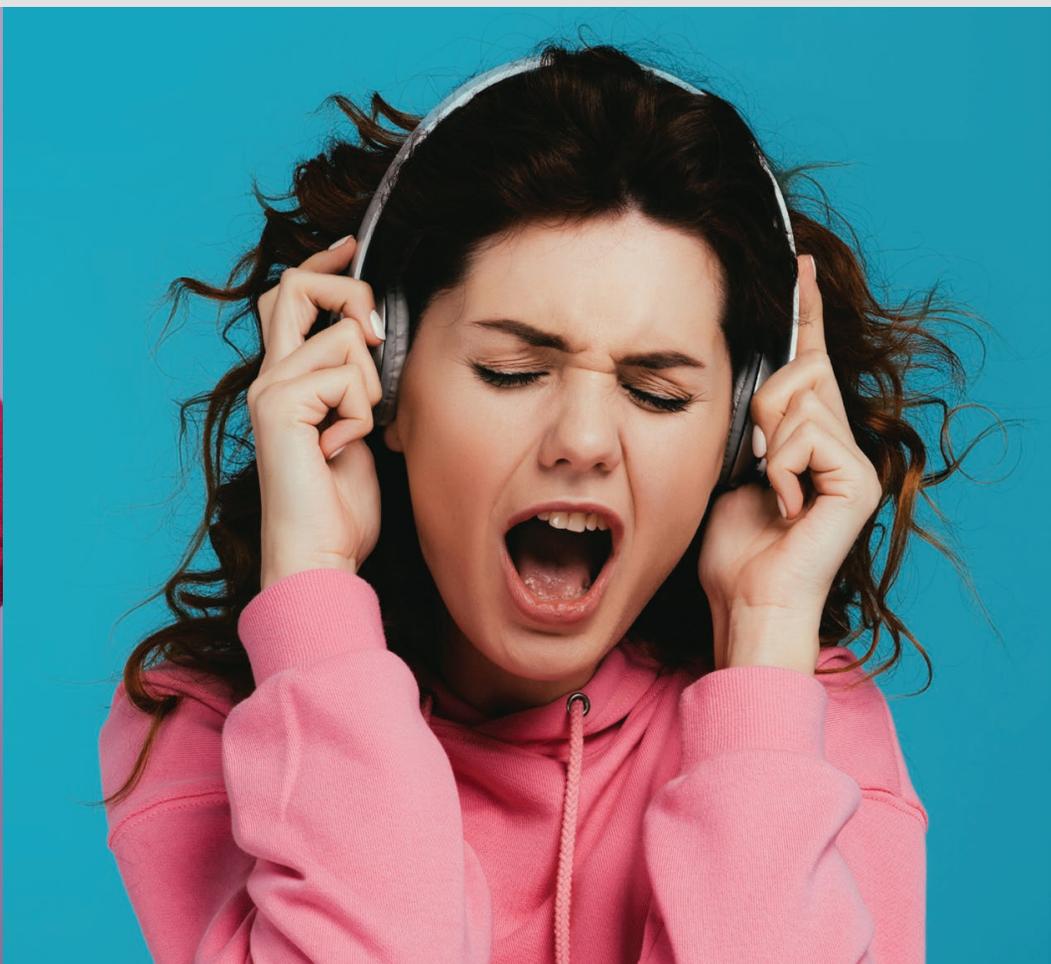
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We are living in strange days, and many schools are making a concerted effort to keep life as streamlined as possible for their students. Due to COVID-19, many shows had to be canceled; competitions had to be canceled.

Instead of focusing on what was lost—especially for seniors in these groups—the show choir world did what it always does: It rallied.

Many show choirs and schools took this disappointment, and fear, and decided to focus even harder on doing what they do: spreading light and hope.

Through this, we have all been reminded of the strength and perseverance in the show choir world, which comes from the power of the individuals in each group, and the power of the group being one united force.

Not only did they find ways to share the shows they had worked on, but they are even finding ways around other hurdles, like auditions for the upcoming year.

### Lags and Leaps: Video Conference Auditions

Several schools across the country have had to consider alternative options regarding how to hold auditions for the upcoming season. A



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solution for many schools has been holding live auditions via Zoom.

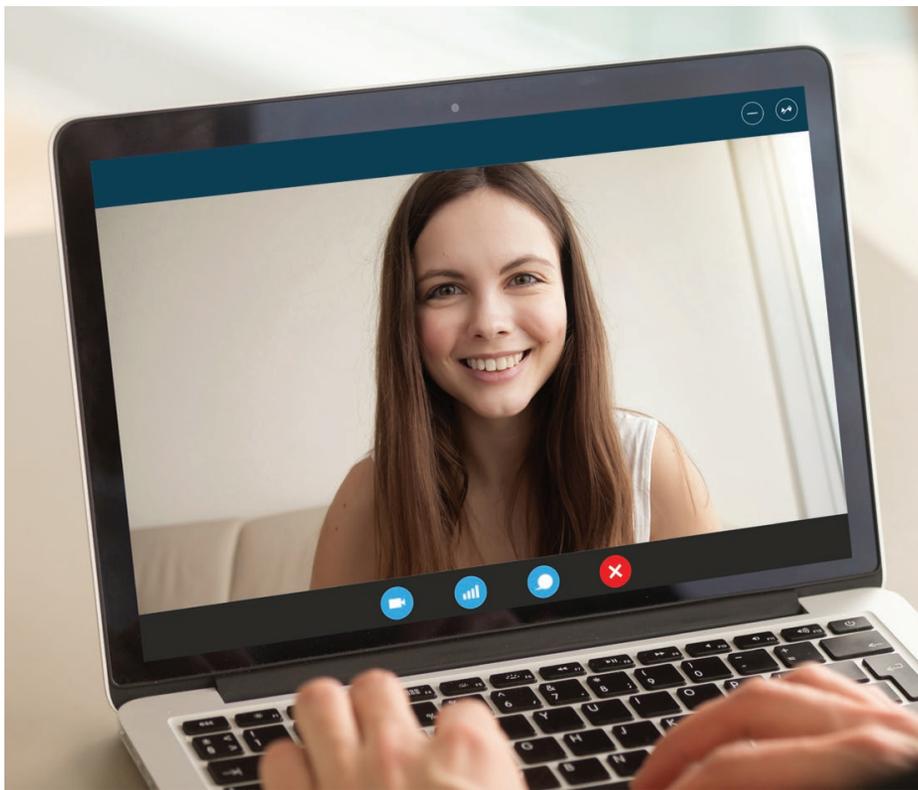
Prior to the Zoom audition, the students are sent a recording of the choreography and expected to perform the dance during the Zoom call. One common complaint noted by several directors, however, was how “laggy” most video conference apps can be. Trying to synchronize multiple singers, well, forget about it...

Other schools are using Google Classroom and Google Drive as a means to share videos and files for auditions. Using these tools, students and directors are able to communicate in real time, as well as review recordings as often as they want.

This option can benefit students who have questions, as well as directors who wish to review audition “tapes” more than once.

Many directors are choosing to break up auditions into two days. As long as the individual auditions are kept brief, they report that the process can be pretty simple.

Let’s face it, auditions are never that fast or easy; however, assuming there are minimal technical issues to sort out, this process shouldn’t be much more time consuming than a traditional audition process.



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Photo courtesy Camden Catholic High School

## Considerations When Auditioning in Quarantine

One major concern that has arisen is how to handle situations where students lack the necessary technology to submit an audition.

Some directors are opting to judge students based on their performances from the previous year, and bypass 2020 auditions completely.

Other schools are confronting the issue of technology access by providing students with laptops or tablets; however, even this accommodation can't address the potential issue of reliable WiFi.

Furthermore, not all students are living in an environment they feel comfortable sharing with their peers or directors. Home lives for students can be chaotic or embarrassing, and they would prefer not to broadcast their personal lives. When requiring video conferencing for auditions, directors may want to take these concerns into consideration.

## Charting a Path Forward

There is a lot of uncertainty in the world right now, and COVID-19 certainly rocked the competition scene. Many competitions were postponed or completely canceled. They are still discussing hosting and prepping for upcoming competitions

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We are living in a world that is thirsty for encouragement and empowerment, and some show choirs are responding to this social isolation with web-based performances. Students are sharing videos, working hard to get people smiling again, and many of those virtual performances that they have shared quickly went viral.

and even discussing camps as far out as Spring 2021. Show choirs know how to plan ahead.

For many, losing the chance to compete was initially heartbreaking. Prepping for these trips requires countless hours of practice as well as a financial commitment. When faced with adversity, there are a few ways to respond: get angry, get discouraged, or get motivated.

### Inspiring Hope

This spring, many of us are turning to the arts for comfort. While some have been binge-watching YouTube and Netflix for more than

a month, others are expressing themselves through music or crafts.

We are living in a world that is thirsty for encouragement and empowerment, and some schools are responding to this social isolation with web-based performances. Students are sharing videos, working hard to get people smiling again, and many of those virtual performances that they have shared quickly went viral.

I have to mention here, too, that it's not just show choir—other choirs are also staying upbeat and positive, finding ways to share their voices, even from isolation. Chicago's Camden Catholic High has been

featured on *Access Hollywood* and NPR due to its wholesome message and the choir's incredible talent. Cleveland's Wadsworth High is another school that was recently featured on a local news station for its uplifting message of hope in their rendition of "Sun is Gonna Shine Again."

These schools, and so many others, have been able to turn a tragedy into something inspirational. Even in dark days, we find solace in performing and enjoying music. It is no coincidence that so many songs featured on these virtual concerts are ballads and hymns.

Right now, more than ever, it is important to inundate ourselves with joyful music that soothes and uplifts—and to surround ourselves with people who persist, create, and never stop shining.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Cassidy Clevenger is a Samford University alum. She is currently in graduate school at Samford in the MSW program, while working as a staff writer for Flaherty Media.

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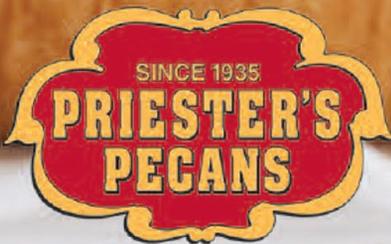
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# FREEDOM FROM OUR SHARED CHAINS

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Let's talk a minute about mental health and society—certainly not common topics associated with the wondrous world of show choir, where everything is beautiful, joyful, and synchronized to peppy beats. The weight of oppression and societal expectations is often invisible, yet feels as real as any physical wound. An amazing show choir, and their fearless leader, tackled a show that address these shackles.





Within each of us is a delicate interplay between *who we are*, *who we want to be*, and *who society tells us who we ought to be*. Sans the few brave, loner souls who live out in the wilderness, living off nature and hijacked WiFi, everyone can relate to the feelings of being judged, marginalized, or being unjustly dismissed.

Tess Tazioli, show choir director, and her girls from Fishers High School's female ensemble—Sound—shine stage lights on these often side-stepped topics among both the show choir world and our culture. In an environment that often focuses on the brighter traits of life, Sound and Tazioli instead dedicated their most recent productions to illuminating personal growth and community connectivity in the face of systemic oppression.

### From Self to Society

The theme of the show *Breaking Chains*—on its surface—is about a prison break. As the scene opens, the set is decorated with prison bars and chains. This iron-laden set design, in conjunction with the opening narrative voiceover

about the “ongoing battle” of stigmas, instantly creates a powerful atmosphere of immersion for the audience to become lost in.

As Tazioli explains, *Breaking Chains*, in its less literal translation, is about destroying the anchors of sexism, racism, and homophobia that are maliciously placed on someone. Then, by working as a team, everyone can loosen these shackles and find personal, emotional emancipation.

Ava Benvenuti, a junior at Fishers High and Morale Captain for Sound, summarized the purpose of the production beautifully:

"One of the big things in the theme of our show this year is how we need to find courage together to stand up to the things that are putting us down and the things that are oppressing us. And I really like how [the show] is so versatile [in covering] all the issues we are facing. Like yes, it's against sexism, but it's also against racism, and homophobia/transphobia...it's really important to lift people up and find strength together to overcome them."

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Morgan Joiner, fellow junior at Fishers, as well as Communications Director for Sound, added to this point by discussing how freedom for self, in both accepting and confronting emotions through authenticity, is what matters in the pursuit of freedom. Joiner also explained how the process of working through these emotions sparked exponential growth in her confidence to confront her emotions holistically; she hopes the audience is inspired by the story to face their demons as well. Additionally, as a person of color, she noted how inspiring it was to see so many people of color highlighted and headlining the production.

### Giving Life to the Intangible

After deciding to pursue her goal of bringing these powerful thoughts to the stage, Tazioli had to figure out how to portray all the *-isms* of society in a practical, palpable way. Tazioli explained this is largely done via songs which, in themselves, have layered meanings.

The show opens with “Renegade” by Styx, which establishes feelings of anger and fear. This tone was next continued by “Circus of Your Mind” from *Finding Neverland: The Musical*, which explores how the confines of imprisonment

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promote a type of psychosis among the inmates. Due to the recent self-isolation many are (hopefully) practicing in response to COVID-19, there is a newfound appreciation and understanding of how unwanted lockdowns can wear on a psyche.

### Fleshing Out the Figures

Next, the girls performed “Hard Hearted Hannah” by Ella Fitzgerald, which explores how the inmates are still able to find a sense of life, even within the captivity of the steel bars.

During this number, the show is exploring the concept of maintaining a sense of identity, even when—by all other accounts—someone has been stripped of the things that make someone an individual.

As the audience is being introduced to the idea of identity within prison, the girls transition into “Cell Block Tango” from *Chicago*—a song which is about humanizing these otherwise villainized women. And as the audience learns backstories and motivations of the characters, the themes of empowerment and strength are personified.

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### Time to Catch Our Breaths

Next, the group moves into the ballad. After the rousing “Cell Block Tango” number, many of the girls are ready for a slower song so they can regain their stamina.

Additionally, the ballad, which is a combination of “Free at Last” from *Big River: The Musical* and “Flight” by Carnelia Craig, is also the song Sound performed for their virtual choir video project—which has since gone viral. In the full production of *Breaking Chains*, this ballad allows the audience a moment to step back and appreciate the emotional journey that has unfolded. In the virtual choir

video, since the piece is segregated from the rest of the narrative, the audience is able to appreciate the message of hope on its own merit.

Within the context of the show, however, the ballad serves the purpose of giving the audience and the characters a moment of reflection, or as Tazioli explained, time for “clarity for these really dark and deep themes” the production was focused on expressing. Joiner explained that this song was the player’s opportunity to show the full range of emotions those imprisoned (in any form) likely experience. This, in turn, leads to the climax of the story.

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## Dashing Weights and Finding Flight

After the girls change into their second costumes, which shine with equal intensity to their unyielding confidence, the show transitions into “Jail Break” by AC/DC and “Keep Yourself Alive” by Queen. This is where the characters are showing what life can be like after prison; through teamwork, the girls are able to focus on the goals of autonomy and sovereignty within a community.

For the next songs, Tazioli chose “Freedom” by Beyonce and “Break Free” by Ariana Grande. Tazioli noted she chose artists that were a part of the same oppressed groups she was highlighting throughout the production: women, people of color, and LGBTQ groups were represented. As Tazioli stated, the girls were “doing so much more than just singing and dancing”; they were delivering a multi-tiered message.

## Audience Reactions

Sound is based out of Indiana, which is a consistently conservative state. When asked how the production was received at competitions, not only had the school won multiple awards for their performance, but they were also largely praised for their execution in portraying such difficult themes. Furthermore, Fishers High School administrators showed the utmost support for the show and its message.

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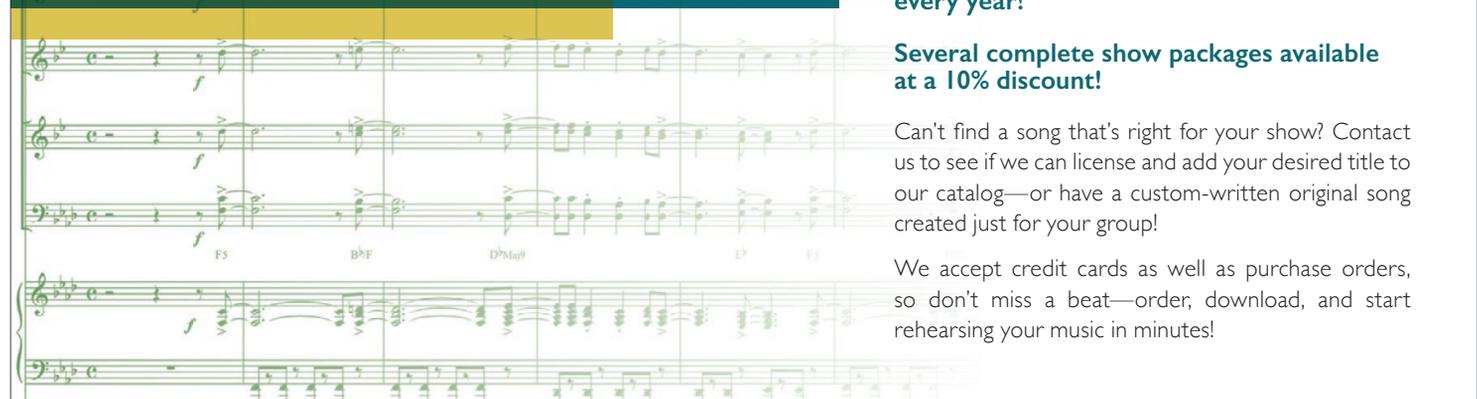
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## After the Curtain Drops

Spring 2020 has been a trying time for most Americans, and many of us are especially sympathetic to how hard this season is for graduating seniors. Sound is an extremely close-knit group of young women who tend to wrap up each rehearsal with a group hug. Due to COVID-19, the girls have not only lost many opportunities to show affection, but also have been denied the traditional, glorious sign-off they deserve.

In response to this, the day before social isolation was formally enacted, the group got together one last time to sing "Free at Last." And over the last few weeks, on social media, each day a single senior from the performing arts gets a special shout-out with their picture and bio.

Through these actions, the seniors—as well as the rest of the group—are reminded to focus on unity and support. Much like the characters in the show, the students are focused on appreciation and endurance. Tazioli and her girls are sparkling reminders of what it means to be strong, steadfast, compassionate women, undeterred by temporary setbacks.



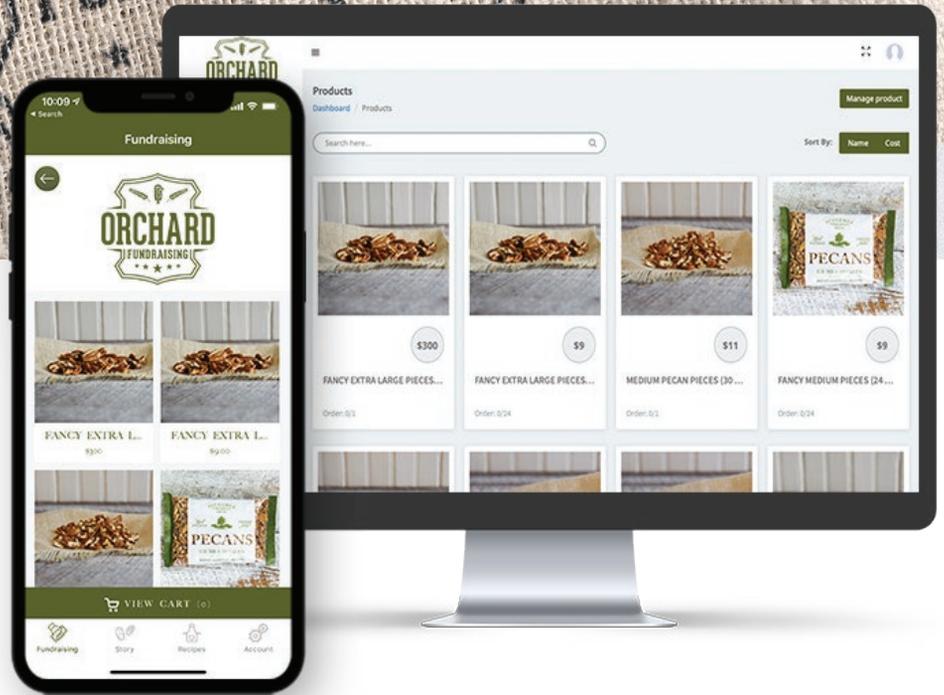
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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Cassidy Clevenger is a Samford University alum. She is currently in graduate school at Samford in the MSW program, while working as a staff writer for Flaherty Media.

An advertisement for Band-Mart &amp; Choir-Mart. The background is a light blue pattern of musical notes and staves. At the top left, there are two logos: "BAND-MART" and "CHOIR-MART" in blue, stylized letters. In the center, four young women are standing in a line, holding hands. They are wearing simple, elegant concert dresses in blue and black. To the right of the women, the text "Concert Wear &amp; Accessories" is written in a large, elegant, blue cursive font. Below this, in a smaller, blue sans-serif font, it says "Mention the code 'BCM20' when ordering." At the bottom right, the website "bandchoirmart.com" is listed, along with the email "support@bandchoirmart.com" and the phone number "888-345-1848".

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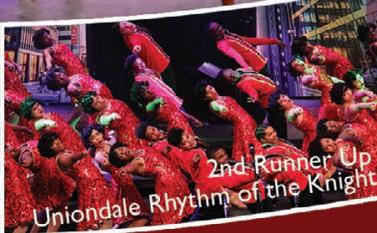


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Show Choir National Finals	April 25

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The **Show Choir National Finals**, held May 4, 2019 at the Genesee Theater in Chicago, presented the annual **Aspire Awards** to the following industry professionals:

Lifetime Achievement Award	Shelley Johnson
Vocal Vanguard	Aaron Childress (Huntington North HS)
Visual Vanguard	Jarad Voss
Best New Director	Kay Dick (Chelsea HS)
Best New Choreographer	Joynell Carr
Best Arranger	Nick Brockcamp
Best Costumer	Gail McInnis Productions
Spirit of Service	Damon Brown (Thirst Project)
Most Promising New Program	Milard North HS Infinity (Megan Tantillo)
Best Regional Competition	Sing ALL About It (Sioux City East HS, WI) Thomas Hales, director

Be sure and submit your vote for the 2020 Aspire Nominees beginning Feb. 1! Log onto [www.showchoirs.org](http://www.showchoirs.org) and select ASPIRE to vote.

