



# PRODUCTIONS

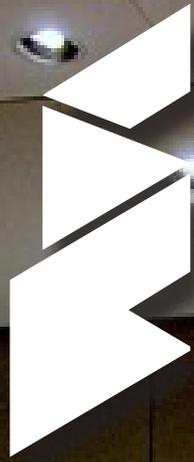
Show Choir Products and News

THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

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AND DANCING

HOW TO  
HELP YOUR  
STUDENTS  
SHINE

STAGING  
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THEATERS**

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# CUSTOM ACOUSTIC AND STAGING EQUIPMENT FROM STAGING CONCEPTS OPTIMIZES FUNCTION AND FLEXIBILITY AT NEW HIGH SCHOOL PERFORMING ARTS COMPLEX

Located in the far northeastern suburbs of Dallas, Texas, Melissa High School provides numerous creative opportunities for students to exercise their ingenuity as performers through fine arts programs such as band, choir and theatre.

Recognizing the importance and growing popularity of these disciplines, as well as the potential to host events such as University Interscholastic League (UIL) competitions, the school recently underwent a dramatic renovation and expansion that included the addition of a new 65,000-square-foot performing arts complex.

At the center of the new complex is a 1,000-seat auditorium featuring an expanded stage and state-of-the-art acoustic system engineered by Minneapolis-based Staging Concepts, a Trex Company with more than 30 years of experience as an industry leader in designing and engineering staging equipment. Working in tandem with theater consultant Schuler Shook, Staging Concepts custom-designed an acoustically flexible, multipurpose facility to support the school's varied visual, musical and theatrical productions.

To ensure optimal acoustics, the company engineered a fully customizable system using its top-of-the-line Bravado® Acoustical Shell. Ideal for use in larger performance spaces, this full-stage system features aluminum alloy towers comprised of movable panel wings that lock into place. The system at Melissa High School is comprised of four shell towers and three rows of acoustical ceiling panels with integrated lighting. The flexible system can be customized and reconfigured for different events and activities. The school's graduation ceremony, for instance, may call for a comprehensive set-up of the full shell system, whereas preparation for a student play might involve slight modifications to adjust the system's scope and scale.

Furthermore, the lightweight design of the towers makes transporting and storing them easy and efficient. The overhead ceiling panels feature a motorized operation mechanism for effortless transition from performance position to storage mode.

"We designed this system to be adjustable and portable knowing student crew members would likely be involved in the process," said Cindy Albrecht, director of sales and marketing for Staging Concepts. "The modular components also allow schools to optimize the usability of their performing arts spaces by swiftly rearranging to meet the needs of different types of functions, from band practices and choral concerts to seasonal plays and solo performances."



Staging Concepts also developed a custom stage extension for the facility, pairing its industry-leading SC90® platforms with specially designed front fascia panels. Ten platform sections, each with its own custom size and shape, were engineered to seamlessly fit with the theater's existing stage footprint and present an appealing convex front profile. Fascia panels along the proscenium were specially designed with a perforated pattern to conceal equipment stored beneath the stage from view, creating a clean, ornamental look while effectively maximizing space. In keeping with the flexible design theme, the fascia panels can be easily removed for quick access to equipment when needed.

In addition to the new auditorium, Melissa High School's performing arts complex includes a lobby, rehearsal spaces, classrooms, halls for making live recordings, scene shops and backstage areas to support productions.

**For more information, visit [StagingConcepts.com](http://StagingConcepts.com).**



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# features



## 8

### THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS: FOCUS ON GREAT SINGING AND GREAT DANCING

In 1980 as freshly degreed music educators, Dwight Jordan and Susan Moninger wondered what they could do with their passion and commitment to music education and entertainment. They pondered ways to elevate and broaden the scope of show choir. They asked each other, “What would it be like to be coached by the finest instructors in the country?”

## 30 STAGING FOR SAFETY

Show choirs often perform at different and unfamiliar venues, so safety should be a major consideration when looking at stage design and all its components. In light of the recent unfortunate and totally preventable orchestra pit cover collapse in Anaheim—which injured dozens of teenage girls performing at a high school—safety considerations are coming to the forefront in these productions.



## 18 CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO SHINE

Albertville, Alabama is a town of around 22,300 residents located southeast of the more populous Huntsville. It is the home of Albertville High School Choir, where students can expect “a professional-level vocal arts program which emphasizes work ethic, perseverance, team dynamics, creative problem-solving, self-growth, and independent learning through the rehearsal and performance process.”

# editor's letter

Hello, Everyone—

Well, competition season is winding down—and champions have been crowned—but really the winner is us, we who got to experience the gifts of your groups' performances. Thank you for giving all those long days and nights of sweat and maybe even some tears to bring it home on the stage. Your performances were definitely bright spots that brought smiles to everyone who saw them.

And now you get to start all over again. Now is the time to look at the 2023 competition season and plan for sets, costumes, staging, lighting, fundraising, and music (among myriad other preparatory details) that will fit the stories you will tell with your performances next season. The texts will go back and forth in the coming months, sharing *YouTube* clips, as yet again you display the amazing talent that you have for inspiring others with your creations.

In the midst of all this preparation, students will be attending Summer Camps after a hiatus due to the thing that shall not be named. I can only imagine the excitement the students feel in being able to gather with other talented young minds and be taught by the best in the business. All these elements combined are going to make the 2023 show choir season one that cannot be missed. I wish I had the means to charter a jet and hit every competition, holiday show, and special performance across the country. Nothing is as exciting as witnessing a performing show choir in a packed auditorium, bringing the performance down the home stretch. I get goose bumps thinking about it. While I will get to see a few performances in person, I'll have to settle for *YouTube* performances on my TV for the rest—thank goodness for smart TVs with surround sound, right?

As you are planning, please take a look at the advertisers here who help us bring the magazine to all of you, allowing us to help you with a resource which provides profiles of show choirs and dignitaries. The support of these advertisers also helps us to introduce you to arrangers, choreographers, equipment, and fundraising services that are invested in helping the show choir community because they love it as much as you and I do.

One last—and very exciting—thing: we have partnered with Warner Brothers to give you an opportunity to win a 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary digitally-remastered copy of *Singing in the Rain*. All you must do to be eligible for this special release is to go [www.productionsmag.com](http://www.productionsmag.com) and update or sign in for a free subscription to *Productions Magazine*.

Wishing you good luck in all your performances and plans! We look forward to getting together again next issue—

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A FORMULA FOR SUCCESS:

# Focus on Great Singing & Dancing

by Lisa Gibbs, Ed.D.



In 1980 as freshly degreed music educators, Dwight Jordan and Susan Moninger wondered what they could do with their passion and commitment to music education and entertainment. They pondered ways to elevate and broaden the scope of show choir. They asked each other, “What would it be like to be coached by the finest instructors in the country, to study with award-winning choreographers and choral directors with both educational and professional experience, and be exposed to vocal coaches who have worked not only in renowned choral programs but also with Broadway performers? What would it be like to have Broadway stars share their experience and expertise?”





**T**his kind of experience would be amazing, of course! In the summer of 1980, they hosted their first camp specifically for middle and high school show choirs at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois. More than forty years later, Showchoir Camps of America (SCA), led by Mr. Jordan and Ms. Moninger, continues to host annual camps for teachers and for students ages twelve to eighteen.

For a summer camp to continue flourishing for forty-two years is remarkable! The directors brought something of great value to the show choir community, as evidenced by the success of the camps. In this interview, Mr. Jordan shares some insights on how the camps have evolved over the years and why SCA has been so successful.

**What was that first camp like in the summer of 1980?**

“We had two hundred students and sixty directors at the first camp. Vocal director clinicians included Kirby Shaw, Roger Emerson, and Mac Huff. Our first guest star was Harry Chapin, who brought all the kids onstage as he sat on a stool, played his guitar, told stories, and sang all of his hits.”

**Wow! Those are some big names in the choral music industry. And Harry Chapin (rest his soul) was nominated for two Grammy Awards and was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame. What was the content and format of that first year, and have you changed your focus over time?**

“There have certainly been changes through the years, but we have kept the same basic format. The student camp has always been centered around preparing for a show choir show to be performed at the end of the week, workshops on all aspects of performing, and evening performances by Broadway performers and a capella groups, along with student and staff/teacher talent showcases. The teacher camp is much more than just show-choir related. It includes teaching

techniques, reading sessions, motivational and well-being workshops, as well as the option to perform in the teachers’ show choir.”

**Have you always hosted a teachers’ camp? If not, when and why did you add that program?**

“We have had the teachers’ camp from the beginning and continue to offer a wide variety of musical and educational experiences. The first year, the teachers did not present a show themselves. The second year, they started learning choreography to published songs. At that time, the majority of the directors had not been in show choirs growing up, so learning choreography for most was a big step. In the early years, they danced the choreography to the recording of the songs and sang along to the studio singers. It was at least fifteen years before they became confident enough to learn the vocals and perform live with the band.

Now, so many of the directors were in their high school show choirs, and because we now have a program for choreographers, the teachers’ show has become a very impressive and polished performance. For those directors who are just getting started in the show choir world, it is the perfect opportunity to



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jump in and really understand what their students are being asked to do and to have a blast doing it.”

**Show choir was a relatively new thing for schools in the 80s, so we can understand that the teachers were—for the most part—unfamiliar with dancing and singing at the same time. What are the most significant changes you have seen in the industry and implemented or developed yourself between your first year and 2019?**

“The production level of shows has continued to grow year after year. We are proud to have been a part of that journey, offering workshops and sessions in every aspect of show production. The development and the attention to details in all areas of the show, including costuming, elaborate sets, lighting, and tech has been fun to watch. But in the end, it still all comes down to great singing and great dancing.”

**The pandemic obviously created another significant change. This magazine published an article on your 2020 virtual camp plans. What was the outcome of that camp?**

“We were so pleased with what we were able to create. It was definitely harder than we thought it would be, but our team really took it to heart to find ways to make the virtual experience as close to and as rewarding as our regular camps. Particularly for the teachers, we were able to find workshop subjects that prepared them for what was going to be a very challenging year.

**What are some of the workshop subjects from 2020?**

“We had a clinical psychologist who is a Resilience and Well Being Expert provide teachers with tools to stay resilient during this trying time. During a panel titled “Virtual Victory,” we discussed how to make teaching music in a virtual setting a meaningful and inspiring experience

when you don’t even know where to begin. Another session gave advice on the technical aspect of how to successfully teach choreography and vocal parts while still in a virtual setting.”

**Did you host a virtual camp in 2021? If so, what did you learn and adapt from the 2020 experience?**

“We received so many positive comments that the information they received that week gave them the confidence to tackle the year that was in front of them. Our second year of virtual SCA was equally successful. We had a better idea of what to expect and were able to make some improvements. Most importantly, it provided the chance for everyone to be together for the week. SCA has become such an important network for the teachers and choreographers who always attend. Having the chance to share this time together has become the summer lifeline they all need, and we were so glad we were able to keep it going during the pandemic.”

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**I think everyone is grateful for the digital tools available to us now that helped us stay connected during the pandemic, even with lag times and connection interruptions. Your 2022 camps are in-person, June 19-25 at Millikin University in Illinois, and July 10-16 at Heidelberg University in Ohio. What are you most looking forward to at this year's camps?**

"It's pretty obvious—the chance to finally have everyone back together again, doing what we all love."

**Are you incorporating anything you learned and used during the virtual camps?**

"With the virtual camps, we were really trying to anticipate what the teachers were going to need most to help them prepare for the next year. We have always attempted to do that, but this experience definitely reminded us how important that is for everyone."

**That must be one of the reasons SCA has been so successful—making sure you are providing the participants**

**with valuable content. Will you provide anecdotes that illustrate your mission and reason for offering your camps?**

"We love hearing from participants. Here are just a few comments that we have received from teachers that remind us of the impact that SCA has had over the years:

I am largely who I am in part thanks to SCA! It has become a fixture in my life that I hold dear. SCA is perfect for the aspiring student musician as well as the teacher who wants to know more about show choir. The fellowship and networking is enough to bring a teacher back!

Coming in without a clue of what to expect, SCA was the perfect opportunity for me as a new show choir director to leave my comfort zone and grow as an educator, a musician, and person with some of the most amazing choral pedagogues in the world.

The friends you make and the memories that are made is the reason I love coming back!

"When Sue Moninger and I were given the unbelievable opportunity to create what was to become Showchoir Camps

of America, we had a clear vision of what we wanted it to be. With the mentorship of Jim Kimmel and the support of incredibly talented clinicians, this dream of ours came to life. The element we did not anticipate was how this network of teachers and campers would continue to grow year after year, and how someone's chance meeting at SCA would create not just lifelong colleagues but lifelong friends. Sue and I thought we were starting a camp, but we actually started a big family."

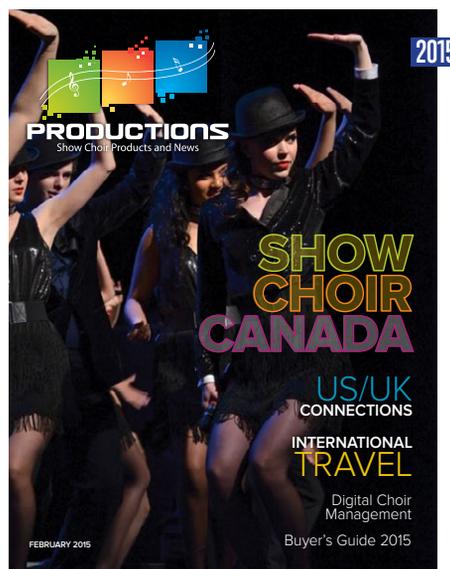
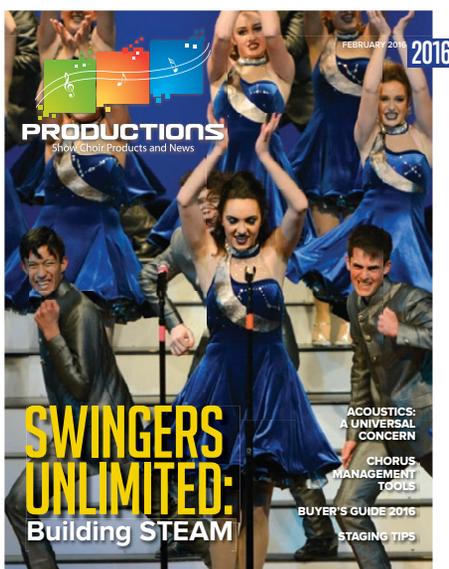
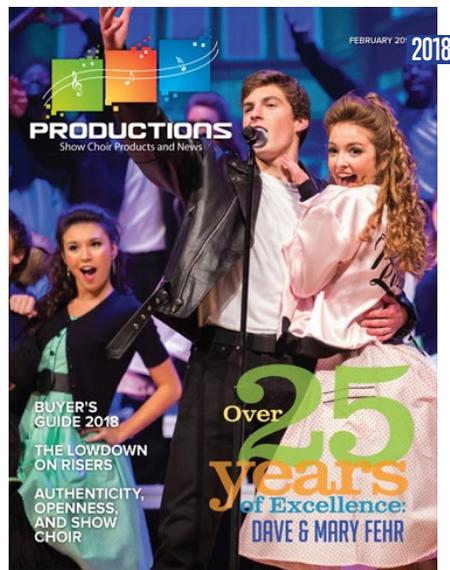
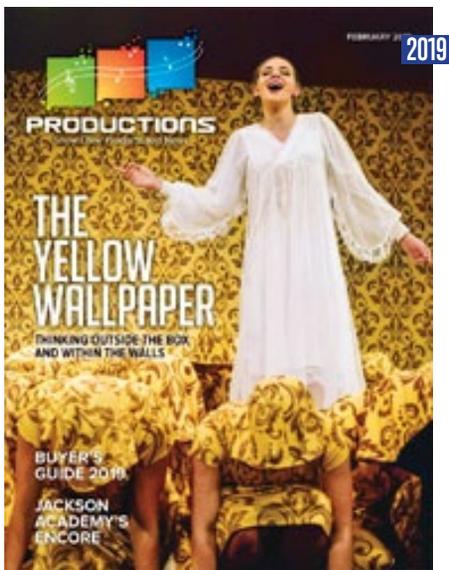
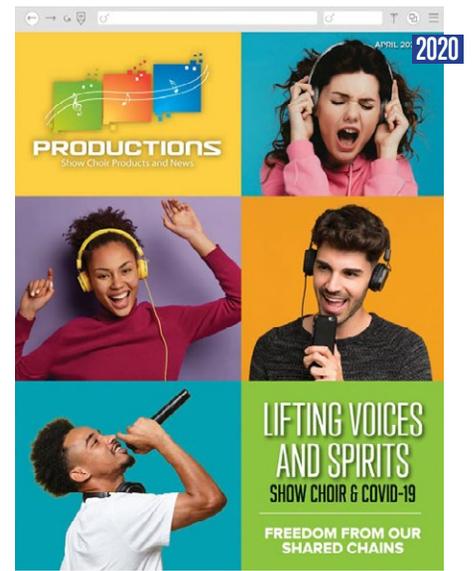
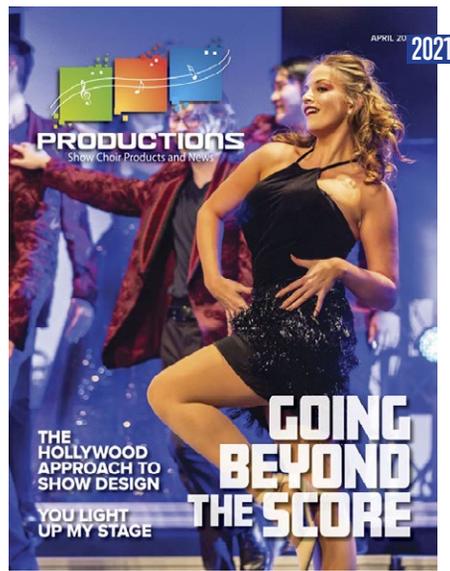
Today, with two camp locations and around two hundred directors—and over twelve hundred students from more than thirty states—attend SCA each summer. Showchoir Camps of America has become a very big family indeed.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *Productions* staff writer Lisa Gibbs earned her Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration in 2018. She is an advocate for arts, particularly dance, in education and for increasing the financial well-being of artists through financial education.

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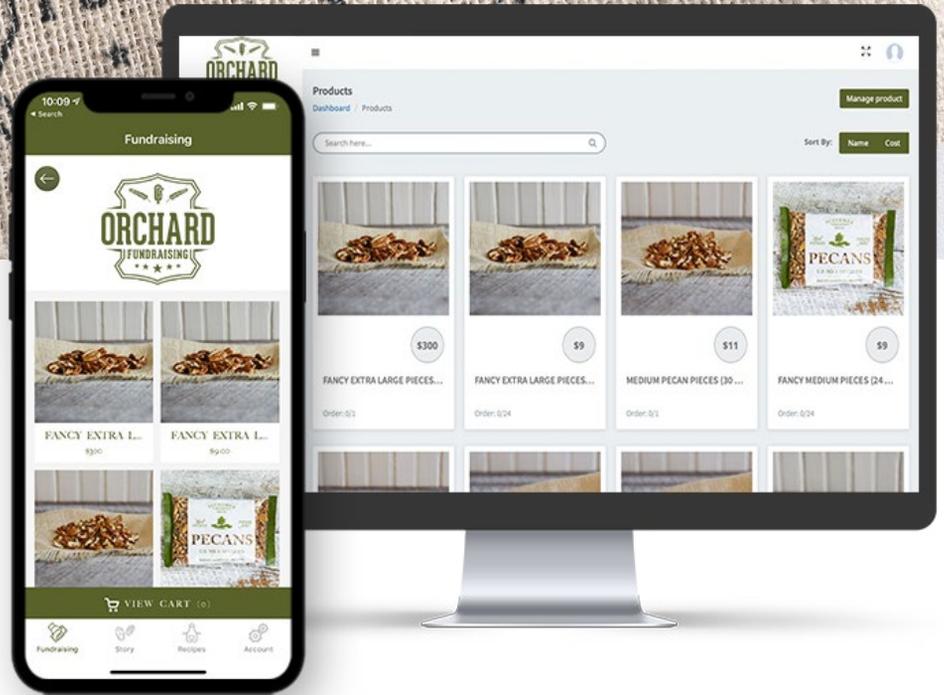
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Schermer Pecans shares some exciting news with the readers of *Productions Magazine* about how their app can help you and your team with show choir fundraising.

### Why Develop A New App?

Aron Wimberly from Schermer Pecans explains, "We wanted to develop an innovative platform for fundraisers. Orchard fundraising allows customers to sell Schermer Pecan products through this online platform. This platform creates a shareable link that makes sharing your fundraising information quick and easy. No need for brochures anymore, just share the link on your social media. Friends and family can use your link to purchase products and the funds go straight to the desired bank account."

Wimberly continues, "We've shared the idea with many different organizational groups who are looking for new ways to fundraise. Many organizational leaders are eager to learn about what is to come from this platform. We offer the ability to add their own products, which is even more exciting."

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Orchard fundraising is built on simple and intuitive web and mobile app platforms, which allow your fundraising organizations to present, order, and track their shipments in real time. A mobile-responsive link is also available to share on all social media platforms to further their reach.

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Aron Wimberly can be reached at [aron@schmerpecans.com](mailto:aron@schmerpecans.com) or by calling 1.800.841.3403. Contact Orchard at [info@orchardfundraising.com](mailto:info@orchardfundraising.com), call 833.850.8324, or visit [www.orchardfundraising.com](http://www.orchardfundraising.com)



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# Shine

## **ALBERTVILLE HIGH SCHOOL SHOW CHOIR PART ONE**

by Lisa Gibbs, Ed.D.

Albertville, Alabama is a town of around 22,300 residents located southeast of the more populous Huntsville. It is the home of Albertville High School Choir, where students can expect “a professional-level vocal arts program which emphasizes work ethic, perseverance, team dynamics, creative problem-solving, self-growth, and independent learning through the rehearsal and performance process,” according to director Gavin Dover. Currently the program consists of two show choirs, a mixed a cappella ensemble, and a women’s chorus, plus a band and a technical crew. The students study and practice all genres of choral music, which, as Dover says, “elevates their abilities on the show choir stage.”

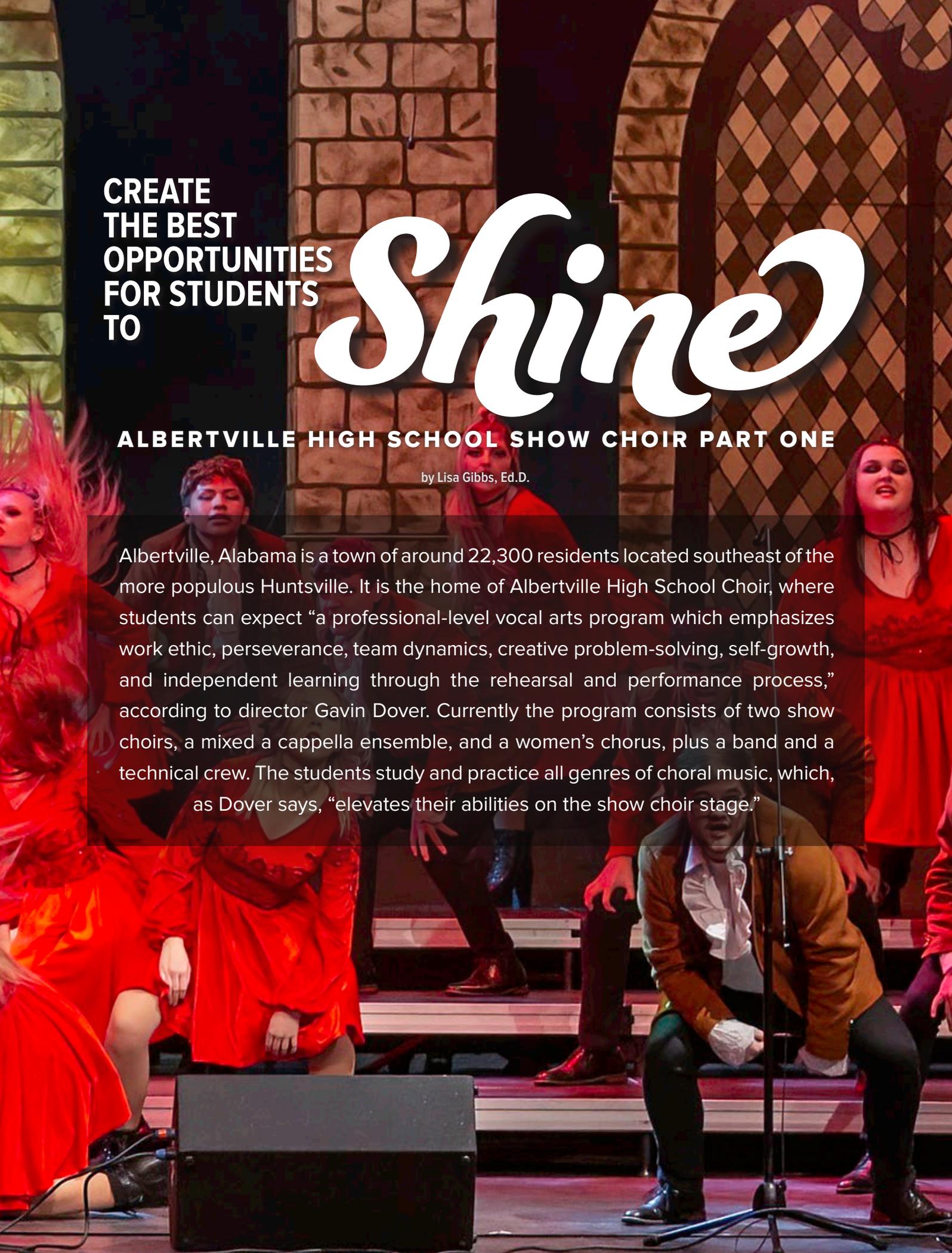




PHOTO BY STEPHEN STAIR PHOTOGRAPHY / CENSATIONS SHOW CHOIR

**A**s a student, Dover immersed himself in the performing arts. Now an educator, he blends his passion and experience together to create an environment of joy and excellence for the students. In this interview, Dover shares his process for creating original show choir productions, ways to cut costs, and ways in which his classroom is a place for creativity and inclusion.

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**CenterStage! focuses on entertainment and incorporates original storylines, casts of characters, elaborate costuming, and interactive sets. What is the process for creating this type of show?**

Alberville CenterStage! was actually one of the first show choirs to begin incorporating storylines, characters, and large-scale sets. Founding director Scott

Rains put theatrical show choir on the map with the 2010 CenterStage! competition set, *Faces*. In the years following, CenterStage! was consistently known for pushing the boundaries of what a show choir could be. It has been an honor to be able to continue that legacy.

As show designers, our minds must always think, “what is going to give the best opportunities for our students to

shine?” We typically spend January through April coming up with a list of general topics, themes, historical happenings, fictional worlds, and famous individuals that could potentially become a show. Once auditions have taken place and a group has been selected, we have to think on what the strengths of the group we have are going to be. Will their talents best lend themselves to something darker, something brighter, something character-driven, or something more traditional?

Once a source of material or theme is selected, we make a Spotify playlist and begin uploading music into it that fits the atmosphere we are trying to create and could fit the story we are trying to tell. Then myself and our creative team build a virtual storyboard. We focus first on the story itself with no songs involved and then begin taking songs from the playlist and placing them through the show where they might fit best. The process of cutting,

tweaking, and adding different songs takes up to two months to make sure that we have it right.

Once the show is set in stone and sent off to our arranger, we begin designing the physical set or the world in which our show will take place. It is our goal to transport our audiences out of their seats all while staying within a small budget. We work tirelessly to reuse, recycle, and repurpose set pieces and costumes from previous years in order to save money where we can. If we find that we do not have any costumes in storage that will work for the show, we connect with a costume designer to begin building costume pieces that are going to aid in telling our story all the while making our singer/dancers comfortable and polished. For many of our more elaborate costume pieces for this year's competition set, we found plain dresses on Amazon and embellished them ourselves! This was a great money saver in the long run.

We send our designs, music, and costuming off to our choreographer, Mike Weaver, and he comes in for a week to stage the show. Over the course of the school year, Mike visits us two more times to make changes to choreography, clean choreography, and work with us through our band/technical aspects of the show. We typically find ourselves making changes to the show weekly. This keeps the show progressing and keeps it fresh for our students.

**I was in show choir back in the late 1980s, and it sure is different now! Is it unique to have the band travel and perform with you, or do most high school show choirs have this type of live music? How do you go about putting the band together?**

It really is so incredible to see how far the world of show choir has continued to grow and develop with the times and with new technology. It is very common

It really is so incredible to see how far the world of show choir has continued to grow and develop with the times and with new technology.

It is very common for competing high school show choirs to have live accompaniment. Many competitions have a portion of the scoresheet dedicated to the marriage between the choir and the band.

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for competing high school show choirs to have live accompaniment. Many competitions have a portion of the scoresheet dedicated to the marriage between the choir and the band. Some competitions even give awards to the highest scoring band of the day!

We are extremely fortunate to have an outstanding band program right across the hall, with directors who actively encourage participation in show choir and show choir band. Through this partnership, we are able to travel with a sixteen-member band that is made up of current high school students, Albertville High School graduates, and a few adults from our community. The students fill out an application with a recommendation from their band director. We then comb through the applications and decide how many of each instrument is needed. Once that is decided and members are announced, we take one Saturday morning in October to work through playing both shows, while focusing on creating dynamic moments based on what the choir has been rehearsing. The band then begins to join the choir in their Monday evening rehearsals in November. We could not do what we do at the level we do if it were not for the dedication

of our show choir band and the encouragement of our band program.

**The tech crew works similarly to a technical crew for a theatre production. Do the same students work both show choir and theatre department productions?**

It is very similar! Our tech crew students spend the beginning of the year learning the ins and outs of the theatre space, scenic design, scenic painting, music production, basic sound engineering, lighting design, lighting operation, costume design, and stage management. They are then able to put their knowledge to the test for the remainder of the year by implementing the skills they have learned about in real life experience. Our crew students are not required to be a part of the crew for our after-school theatre program but are encouraged to participate as they can and when they are needed.

**Readers can find your bio online. What can you tell us about yourself that goes deeper than a one-paragraph bio?**

My goal has always been and will always be to create a classroom environment filled with joy, love, encouragement and

excellence. Through high school I was involved in every realm of the performing arts they would let me in. I was in band, choir, and theatre, and I spent my life at school in rehearsals. Now as an educator, I look back and try to ask myself what experiences made giving up monumental amounts of time and money to be involved in these activities so effortless? It was a culmination of the way that the teachers I had made me feel, the camaraderie with my peers that was created within those walls, and the safety that these classrooms created for those of us who had not found it elsewhere in school. I owe my career to the educators who poured into me as a student and created atmospheres that fostered inclusion, creativity, and acceptance... Mr. Jim Duren, Mr. Kevin Ownby, Ms. Sharon Morgan, and Mr. Ed Cleveland. I strive to teach the same principles and values learned in their classroom to my own students today.

**Do you have a favorite story or anecdote from the past two pandemic years?**

Last year, we participated solely in virtual competitions with the exception of one outdoor competition in April. At first we were all a bit disappointed, as most

were, but then our social chairs kicked it into high gear and began creating ways for us to still enjoy fellowship and the reward of show choir competitions. They planned a viewing party in our auditorium with a “pajamas only” dress code. We laughed. We cried. We cheered other groups on. We FaceTimed with another local group that was also having a watch party and congratulated them on their win. It was definitely one of the highlights for many of us in such a crazy year.

*Creating a classroom environment where students are loved, encouraged, and challenged to grow as both artists and peers—and creatively designing an original production that builds on the strengths of the students—undoubtedly uplifts each person involved in the Albertville High School Choir.*

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *Productions* staff writer Lisa Gibbs earned her Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration in 2018. She is an advocate for arts, particularly dance, in education and for increasing the financial well-being of artists through financial education.



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An Overview of  
*Teaching  
Arranging  
in the Choral  
Classroom*  
A Free Resource

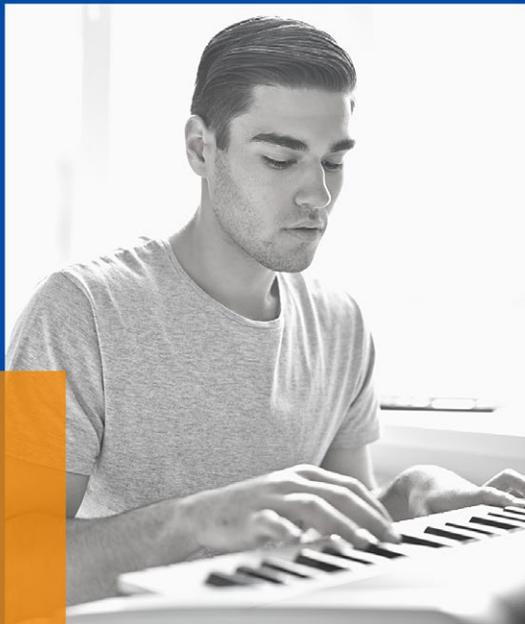
by Garrett Breeze

Arranging is an incredible tool for education because it provides a practical way to apply musical skills that is both creative and hands-on. The process is like handing students a fully formed Lego model with the instructions and then telling them to pull it apart and rebuild it in a new way.

# Teaching Arranging in the Choral Classroom

first edition

BY GARRETT BREEZE



© 2021 by Garrett Breeze  
(updated 6.30.31)

**T**eaching Arranging in the Choral Classroom is a set of lesson plans and assignments created by Garrett Breeze that are designed to teach arranging in a large ensemble setting. This text was designed with choral ensembles in mind to provide students with no prior experience the opportunity to collaborate with, learn from, and sing for each other. Perhaps the most groundbreaking part of this resource is the way it separates assignments into the “notation track” for students more comfortable using pencil and paper or notation software and the “aural track” for students who prefer recording themselves or improvising in a group setting.

The different tracks both consist of four lessons (each with a listening assignment) followed by a final project in which students arrange one chorus of a popular song for an SATB a cappella choir. This resource is available to download for FREE at [garrettbreeze.com](http://garrettbreeze.com).

## Why Teach Arranging?

They see how it was put together originally, but they also learn to recognize how it could be constructed differently. The genius of teaching arranging is that it can be used to reinforce any learning goals. With that philosophy at the heart, this course is designed in such a way that teachers can easily incorporate their own supplemental material if desired.

## What Are the Lessons?

### LESSON ONE:

#### **The One Thing All Music Has in Common (It Was Arranged)**

This lesson describes the differences between transcriptive and transformative arranging and provides listening examples of how arranging choices can dramatically change the feel of a song.

### LESSON TWO:

#### **The Two Most Common Types of Chords**

This lesson introduces the concept of chord progressions and provides examples to identify the sound of major and minor chords.

### LESSON THREE:

#### **The Three Parts of a Song**

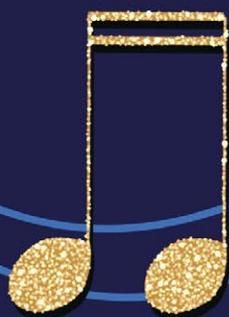
This lesson defines the three main components of a song: verse, chorus, and bridge, providing examples of each.

### LESSON FOUR:

#### **The Four Parts of Every Arrangement**

This lesson teaches students how to organize musical ideas by function: melody, bassline, groove, and filler material.

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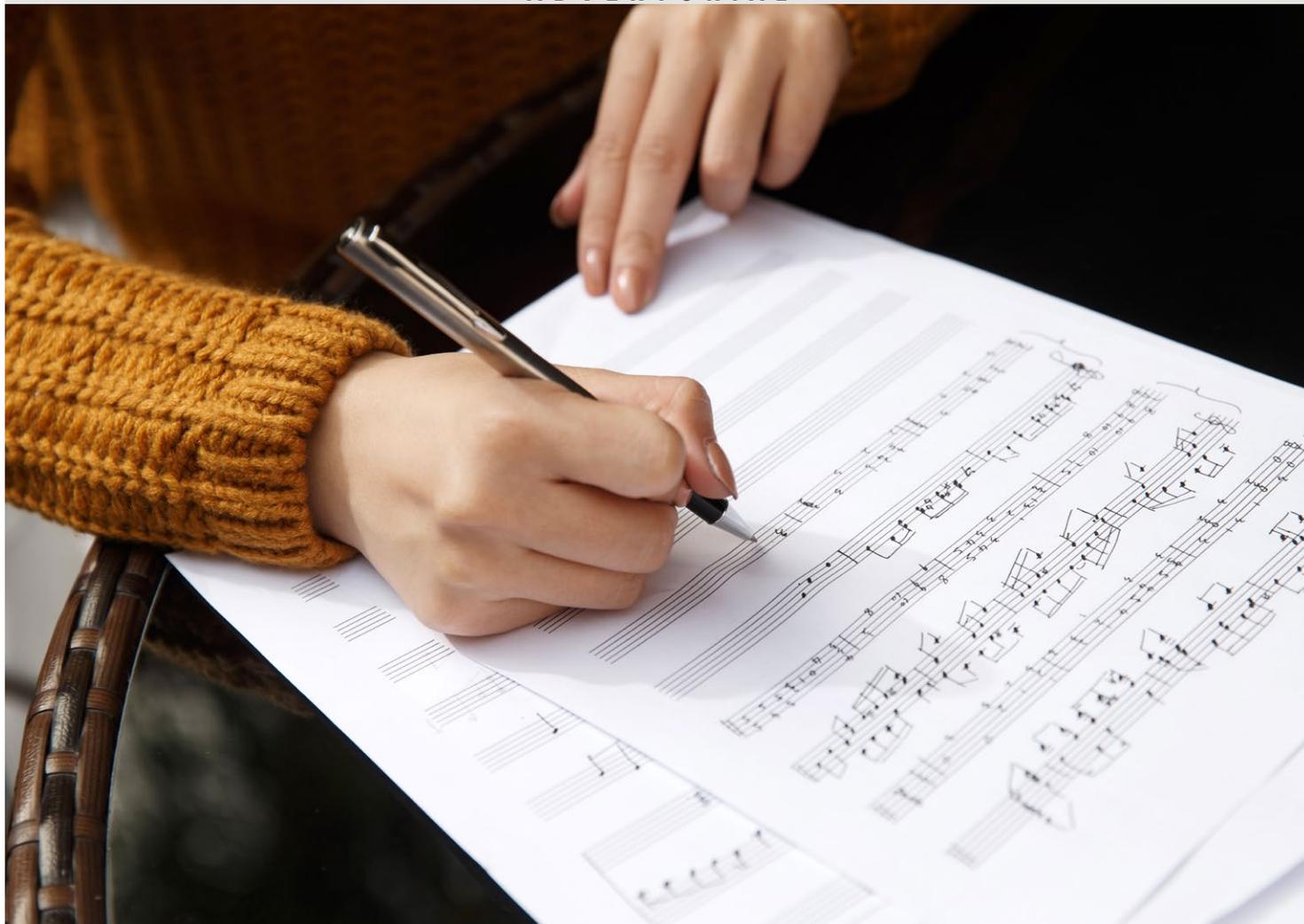
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## The Final Project

Each of the lessons contains listening and writing assignments to help students prepare for the completion of a final project: arranging one chorus of a popular song in four-part harmony. This final project encourages students to write their arrangement one voice part at a time and to perform for their classmates at each stage. Unless the teacher prefers otherwise, students can complete this project via pencil and paper, music notation software, recording technology, or rote performance.

The basic premise of arranging—taking an existing song and creating a new version—is something students are already deeply familiar with. They encounter it every day in TikToks, memes, remixes, and cover songs. This resource gives them the vocabulary and the tools they need to put that knowledge into a musical context.

## What the Critics Are Saying

“I love how the songs that I hear every day can completely change just by changing the key or slowing it down.” —Dustin\*, 7th grade

“This gives me a way to connect to music in an emotional way. Losing a family member this year was hard and I am now able to write about it and sing which we both loved to do.” —Keith\*, 8th grade

“Identifying chord progression in songs has given me a deeper understanding of how music works. The I IV V is used so much that I can hear a song and figure it out now on my keyboard!” —Camden\*, 7th grade

“The lessons are short enough to do in class and it opens your eyes to so many different songs that I have never heard before. breaking it down into small pieces has helped me become a better musician and

has opened the possibility of songwriting that i never thought I could do.”—Sarah\*, 8th grade

*\*Names have been changed.*

## How Do I Learn More?

Visit [garrettbreeze.com](http://garrettbreeze.com) to download *Teaching Arranging in the Choral Classroom* for FREE and join the Facebook group “Teachers of Music Arranging” to network and share ideas with other music educators.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** With more than 1,000 show choir arrangements in circulation, Garrett Breeze is a sought-after clinician and adjudicator whose credits include film and television, Broadway stars, and Grammy-winning classical artists. His show choir music is available at [breezetunes.com](http://breezetunes.com) and he recently launched a new catalog of music for concert and church choirs at [holidaychoirmusic.com](http://holidaychoirmusic.com).



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# STAGING FOR SAFETY

by Judy Fargher

Show Choirs often perform at different and unfamiliar venues, so safety should be a major consideration when looking at stage design and all its components. In light of the recent unfortunate and totally preventable orchestra pit cover collapse in Anaheim—which injured dozens of teenage girls performing at a high school—safety considerations are coming to the forefront in these productions. Show choir performances have more aspects to take into account than just the “Song and Dance.” Competition hosts, music directors, stage crews, and performers should review the items on safety checklist presented below.

## Check DIY Staging or Homemade Construction Carefully

Everyone involved with the performance should check the general condition of the stage floor, asking themselves the following questions:

- Is the surface level, with no trip hazards?
- Is the front apron edge easily seen?
- How good is the lighting from the wings to enter the stage area?
- Is there an orchestra pit cover or stage extension, and how is it constructed?

Many theatre and show choir groups have sets and floors that have been constructed in-house, but this sort of construction needs to be designed by professionals and carefully inspected. Many well-meaning booster groups have tried to help their programs, saving the school money by constructing their own stage equipment. When it comes to surfaces that the students are performing on, all portable staging should be designed by a reputable manufacturer or structural engineer.

## Check for and Prevent Wobbling, Creaking Risers

All the movement with a show choir's choreography increases the load or thrust on the supporting riser framework; thus, bracing between the riser legs must be present, and better-designed risers will have that bracing. Such engineering eliminates wobbling, creaking or worse, collapse.

- The decks should be dual sided with a sound reduction center core of fiber honeycomb material to eliminate the foot sound "drumhead" effect and possible bowing.
- There should be a means of unifying both the decks and the supports to provide greater structural integrity. Manufacturer supplied unit-to-unit straps secure the legs of one support to an adjacent one. Some manufacturers supply clips to lock neighboring decks together for added strength. With these safety items in use, separation between units becomes impossible, even with the liveliest dance routine.
- Risers must support a minimum of 125 pounds per square foot, which is the staging industry standard.
- Surfaces should be smooth enough to dance on, yet durable and slip resistant.
- A slightly textured polypropylene surface is recommended. Performing in stiletto heels or tap shoes requires a non-slip surface.
- Adjustable leveling devices ensure risers don't wobble; this consideration is critical to dancers.
- Smooth, rounded deck corners, minus sharp metallic edges, help to prevent torn clothing, scraped shins, and/or damaged costumes.

## Inspect Trussing

- Trusses erected for lighting, microphones, or scenery must be properly secured with recommended anchoring devices, such as guide wires. For instance, in some recent news reports, stories of a stage collapse were actually

a failure of rigging falling onto a stage rather than actual stage crumpling, and equally dangerous.

- Stage crews should add equipment to the rigging from the outside in, while factoring in proper weight distribution. All equipment mounted on the trusses must have safety wire retention in the event of loosening, thus ensuring equipment will not fall on the stage or performers.

## Make Sure Wires Are Taped

Lighting, monitors, microphones, and other electrical equipment should have cables secured with gaff tape to eliminate trip hazards. Duct tape leaves a sticky residue and is therefore not recommended.

## Consider Potential Effects of Lighting on Performers

Strobes and other dynamic lighting effects can dramatically add to the performance, yet these effects can distract performers or limit their vision, thereby creating a hazard for missteps or falls. Stage crews and directors need to consider these possibilities while setting and adjusting lighting instruments.

## Prevent Costuming Trip Hazards

- Costumes often represent styles that may be uncomfortable or unfamiliar for some performers; examples are long, flowing gowns and high-heeled shoes. Directors should schedule multiple dress rehearsals to help the performers feel at ease when wearing expensive and often fragile costuming.
- When designing or choosing costumes, directors should examine them for possible trip hazards.
- Costumes should be inspected prior to every performance for loose hems, seams, or trim.
- Big-brimmed floppy hats can potentially obstruct performers' vision. Dancers can be distracted by large, loose, or unstable headpieces; costumers should think about these considerations when choosing headpieces.

## Ensure that Performers Are Comfortable with Props

As with costumes, choirs need rehearsals with props until they are comfortable using them.

Canes, parasols, and the like can trip up both amateur and professional performers, so they should be used with care. Performers should practice with these items until doing so feels familiar.

## Keep in Mind Special Effects and Liability Issues

Fog, bubble machines, confetti, and other special effects are often used with show choir performances. As with lighting effects, these special effect components can be very dramatic and effective, but they can also pose safety hazards. Excessive moisture on stage introduces slip hazards. Condensate collection pans under special effects generators can greatly reduce stage moisture and related slippery surfaces. Pyrotechnics must be avoided, as they are generally in violation of Fire Code regulations, considered illegal, and their use can result in litigation should there be any material damage or personal injury.

While no director wants constant worry about worst-case scenarios, they cannot overlook safety considerations or related liability issues when planning student performances. In addition to polishing up those dance steps and fine tuning the music, directors and others involved in planning shows and their staging need to keep in mind the variety of safety considerations; if overlooked, these issues could literally trip up an otherwise perfect performance.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Judy Fargher is a school and worship market representative for StageRight Corp. in Clare, MI.. Judy has a Masters in Music and is a former school choir director and current church musician. StageRight manufactures portable stages, risers, sound shells, and related music performance equipment. For more information visit [www.stageright.com](http://www.stageright.com).



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