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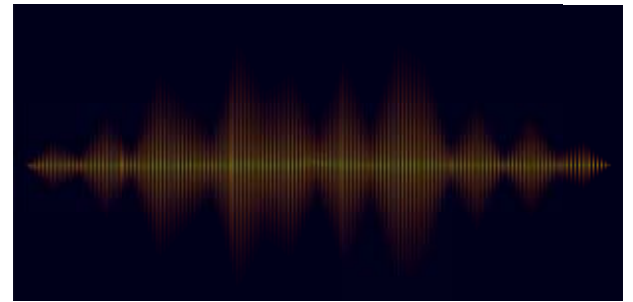
### ALWAYS LEAVE 'EM WANTING MORE: A WEST VIRGINIA SHOW CHOIR STRIVES TO MAKE EVERY SHOW MEMORABLE



Kaleidoscope, the show choir of Musselman High School in Inwood, West Virginia, used to limit its performances to local events. A new director and choreographer raised the bar—and it's lit a fire under students who never imagined they'd be winning awards and competing alongside the country's best show choirs.

## 14 CAMP CONFIDENCE: WHY SHOW CHOIR CAMPS AND CLINICS MIGHT BE THE BEST INVESTMENT YOU'LL MAKE ALL SEASON

Camps and clinics have long been a staple of the show choir world, but their value goes far beyond learning a few counts of eight or polishing vowels. Whether it's a national-level intensive, a regional weekend clinic, or a local day camp down the road, these experiences can transform both students and directors in ways that last far beyond the final showcase.



## 20 HEARING THE DIFFERENCE: HOW ACOUSTICS SHAPE SHOW CHOIR PERFORMANCE—AND HOW TO PLAN FOR EVERY VENUE

Acoustics are, in many ways, the final instrument in your show choir ensemble. Every room has its own sonic personality, shaped by size, materials, ceiling height, audience presence, and even temperature. We've broken down the ways to make show magic no matter where you are.

## 30 ENGINEERING THE SHOW: TECH TIPS FOR PERFORMING ON THE ROAD

Behind every unforgettable performance is the engineering that makes the magic possible.



# editor's letter

April always feels like that moment in a show when the lights shift, the tempo picks up, and everyone backstage suddenly starts moving just a little bit faster. It's the season of anticipation—spring performances, final competitions, and yes...the beginning of summer planning (whether we're ready for it or not).

This issue, we're diving headfirst into one of my favorite topics: camps. Not the "sit quietly by the lake" kind, but the high-energy, voice-tired, choreography-filled, "how is it only day three?" kind. There's something special about what happens at a great show choir camp. It's where confidence shows up, friendships form quickly, and students start to believe in what they're capable of long before the first competition bus leaves the parking lot.

Of course, all that hard work needs a place to land—and that's where staging equipment comes in. If you've ever watched a crew unload platforms in record time while someone yells "we've got 12 minutes!" you already understand: portability, durability, and smart design aren't luxuries—they're survival tools. We take a closer look this month at how programs of all sizes can find the right solutions without sacrificing their sanity (or their backs).

And then there's acoustics. The invisible force that can make your group sound like a million bucks...or like they're performing from the bottom of a swimming pool. It's one of those elements that often gets overlooked until it's too late, but when it's done right, it transforms everything. Think of it as the difference between singing at a room and singing with it.

We're also excited to feature the story of the Kaleidoscope Show Choir—a group that lives up to its name in every sense. Their journey is one of creativity, resilience, and a willingness to take risks that pay off in unforgettable performances. It's a reminder that behind every polished production is a whole lot of heart, hustle, and probably a few last-minute changes that somehow turn into magic.

As always, thank you for letting *Productions Magazine* be part of your season. Whether you're loading buses, tweaking sets, or just trying to keep everyone healthy through one more rehearsal, we see you—and we're cheering you on.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I think I just remembered three things I forgot to order for summer.

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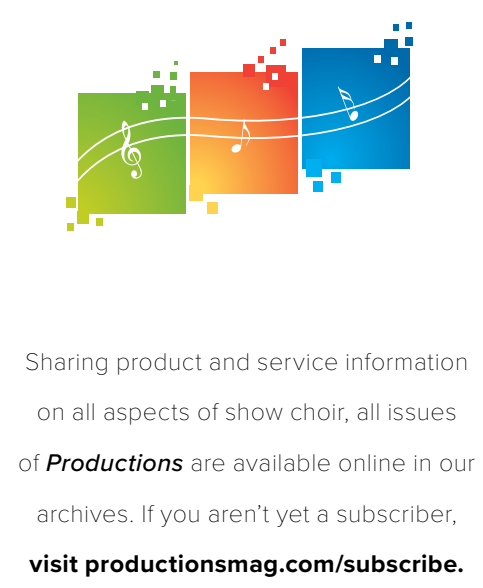


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PHOTO MUSSELMAN HIGH SCHOOL SHOW CHOIR



# ALWAYS LEAVE 'EM WANTING MORE

A West Virginia  
show choir strives  
to make every show  
memorable

by Rosalind Fournier



PHOTO COURTESY MUSSELMAN HIGH SCHOOL SHOW CHOIR

Kaleidoscope, the show choir of Musselman High School in Inwood, West Virginia, has been around for more than 40 years. But for most of that history, Kaleidoscope's world was limited to the West Virginia State Show Choir Festival or performing at a local music-in-the-park event.

When current director James Miller arrived in 2018, he began to rebuild the program by showing students what show choir looked like beyond state lines—and the more they saw, the more committed they became to reaching a higher tier.

Setting the bar higher than they ever had before, Kaleidoscope was named Grand Champions at the Alliance Royal Aviation Show Choir Competition in February of 2023, just a few years into Miller's tenure as director. In 2025, they competed

at Show Choir Nationals in Nashville as only the third West Virginia School invited to attend in the event's history.

The program experienced another boost when Miller recruited Isaac Mei, a show choir veteran with nearly 20 years of choreography and vocal experience who had worked with groups from Maryland to Mississippi. Having briefly retired from choreographing, Mei started a show choir podcast and eventually landed on Miller's radar. Sensing in him a kindred spirit, Miller hired Mei prior to starting the 2023 competition season as a choreographer and assistant director.

Mei admired what Miller had already accomplished at Musselman. "James had really brought his creativity and put a new spin on things,



PHOTO COURTESY MUSSELMAN HIGH SCHOOL SHOW CHOIR

and it brought a new culture to Kaleidoscope,” Mei says. “I was able to come in and help accelerate that process.”

### Memorable Shows

Though the program has now won awards such as Best Vocals, Best Choreography and Best Band at multiple competitions and competed at Show Choir Nationals—held at Nashville’s famed Grand Ole Opry—it’s still relatively new to competition-level performance, on top of which much of Miller’s early efforts were lost to the COVID years. For now, Miller isn’t focused so much on scores and placement as energy and entertainment.

“I don’t necessarily do something that says, ‘Oh this is going to get us points for the judges,’ he says. “For me, every show has a piece of my

creative mind on the stage, and I can explore it with people who are going to help me create the art on stage, because I want the audience to be

**"I don't necessarily do something that says, 'Oh this is going to get us points for the judges'"**

hooked from the jump. By the time they leave the auditorium, I want them to say ‘Wow, I was completely entertained, that got me to the edge of my seat.’”



PHOTO COURTESY MUSSELMAN HIGH SCHOOL SHOW CHOIR

Mei, who has a master's degree in Marketing, says that speaks to his own goals for Kaleidoscope. "As a marketer you want to find your niche as a brand," he says. "We know the program is continuing to develop in the fundamentals, but even if we're not already there yet, we can still be entertaining. That's how I approach my job as a choreographer."

Miller says that coming up with new ideas—and always including at least one song the audience will recognize ("and there will always be a rock song; that's part of who I am") helps build the momentum. "What can I do to get the kids really believing in show choir? I find unique ideas—we've done a Mario show; we've done "Avatar: The Last Airbender"—so people associate our choir with doing something they're going to remember. This season's show is an adaptation from the classic "Batman" comic-book stories.

### **Come One, Come All**

Miller and Mei say convincing the school, boosters, and parents it's worth the financial investment is a challenge for any program, and any director will tell you they can always use more talent. That's truer at Musselman than other schools; as long as they're still a growing program, it's less about picking and choosing at audition time and more about making it possible for everyone who tries out to join the choir and thrive.

Mei says he was surprised to learn Kaleidoscope has mostly a come one, come all audition process. "I had never been part of a group that didn't cut students," he says. "But if they can prove in auditions that they have a base level of competency—and the passion and reason to be there—we're going to coach them up to give the best performance possible. If they can bring the energy to the stage, the crowd will feel that."

Adds Miller: "That's the biggest achievement we have, that we take people who might get cut from other groups, and while some of them start the year by trying to hide from everybody, by the end of the year they're dancing in the front row. It's beautiful to see the progression."



PHOTO COURTESY MUSSELMAN HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Rosalind Fournier is a freelance writer/editor in Homewood, Alabama where she lives with her husband and kids. She loves to read and looks forward to March Madness every year, though her bracket is usually a disaster.

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# CAMP CONFIDENCE

**Why Show Choir  
Camps and Clinics  
Might Be the Best  
Investment You'll  
Make All Season**

by Ed Bauer



PHOTO COURTESY SHOW CHOIR CAMPS OF AMERICA

There's a moment—usually somewhere between the third full-out run and a slightly questionable lunch—when a show choir camp stops feeling like a schedule and starts feeling like magic. Voices are blending a little better, choreography looks less like organized chaos, and even that one tenor who “definitely knows the notes” suddenly...actually does.

Camps and clinics have long been a staple of the show choir world, but their value goes far beyond learning a few counts of eight or polishing vowels. Whether it's a national-level intensive, a regional weekend clinic, or a local day camp down the road, these experiences can transform both students and directors in ways that last far beyond the final showcase.

And yes, they usually do it while running on minimal sleep, maximum energy, and an alarming amount of

pizza.

### **The Reset Button You Didn't Know You Needed**

Let's start with the obvious: camps get you out of your normal environment. That alone is worth the price of admission.

Rehearsing in the same choir room day after day can create habits—good and bad—that are hard to break. Camps disrupt that routine in the best possible way. Suddenly, students are in a new space, working with new instructors, hearing new perspectives, and realizing that maybe—just maybe—there's more than one way to count a transition.

For directors, this can feel like hitting a reset button. You get to watch your students respond to different teaching styles, pick up

new techniques, and sometimes understand a concept in five minutes that you've been explaining since August. It's not frustrating—it's freeing. (Mostly.)

### **National Camps: The Big Leagues**

National show choir camps are the full experience. We're talking multiple days, top-tier clinicians, and students from all over the country who somehow all know the exact same warm-up exercises.

These camps offer something that's hard to replicate anywhere else: scale. Students are exposed to a wide range of talent levels, styles, and expectations. They see what's possible—not just in their own program, but across the broader show choir community.

For students, this can be eye-opening. That sophomore who thought they were “pretty good” suddenly meets a senior from across the country who can sing, dance, and emote like they've been doing it since birth. It's humbling, but in the best way. It raises the bar.

For directors, national camps are a goldmine of ideas. Choreography trends, vocal techniques, rehearsal strategies—you'll come home with a notebook full of “we should try this” moments. You may also come home slightly exhausted and wondering if your students can, in fact, handle eight hours of rehearsal a day. (They can. You might not.)

Another major benefit is networking. Students build friendships that last well beyond camp, and directors connect with colleagues who understand the unique joys and challenges of the activity. There's something reassuring about realizing that everyone else is also trying to figure out how to fit one more set

change into a three-minute opener.

### **Regional Camps: The Sweet Spot**

If national camps are the big stage, regional camps are the perfect middle ground. They offer many of the same benefits—expert instruction,

**If national camps are the big stage, regional camps are the perfect middle ground. They offer many of the same benefits—expert instruction, fresh perspectives, and a change of scenery—but with a bit more accessibility.**

fresh perspectives, and a change of scenery—but with a bit more accessibility.

Travel is often easier, costs are lower, and the time commitment is more manageable. For many programs, regional camps provide the ideal balance between impact and practicality.

Students still get the chance to work with clinicians who bring new energy and ideas, but the environment often feels a bit more familiar. You're likely to see neighboring schools, friendly rivals, and maybe even that group you've been trying to beat at competition for the last three seasons.

There's a unique camaraderie that comes from this setting. It's competitive, sure—but it's also collaborative. Students learn from each other, support each other, and occasionally



PHOTO COURTESY LOS ALAMITOS HIGH SCHOOL SHOW CHOIR

realize that the “competition” is just as nervous about that dance break as they are.

For directors, regional camps are an efficient way to recharge creatively. You’ll pick up new tools without needing to overhaul your entire program. Sometimes, a single staging idea or vocal exercise can make a noticeable difference once you’re back in your own rehearsal space.

### Local Day Camps: The Underrated Powerhouse

Now let’s talk about the unsung hero of

show choir development: the local day camp.

These are often shorter—sometimes just a day or a weekend—and may not have the same level of production as larger camps. But don’t underestimate their impact.

Local camps are incredibly accessible. They require less travel, lower costs, and minimal disruption to busy schedules. This makes them an excellent option for introducing younger students to the world of show choir or giving your entire group a quick boost

before the season ramps up

Because of their size, local camps often allow for more individualized attention. Students can ask questions, receive direct feedback, and build confidence in a less intimidating environment. For beginners especially, this can be a game changer.

And let’s be honest—sometimes it’s nice to improve your skills without living out of a suitcase for a week.

For directors, local camps can serve as a strategic tool. Need to clean up basics? Reinforce technique? Build ensemble cohesion? A well-timed day camp can accomplish all of that without requiring a major logistical operation.

### Skill Building That Actually Sticks

One of the biggest advantages of camps and clinics is the way they reinforce fundamental skills.

Vocal technique, for example, often gets a fresh perspective. A clinician might explain breath support or vowel shaping in a way that suddenly clicks for students. It’s not that the concept is new—it’s that the delivery is different.

The same goes for choreography. Camps expose students to new styles, combinations, and approaches to movement. They learn how to pick up choreography more quickly, execute it more cleanly, and perform it with greater confidence.

But perhaps the most important skill developed at camp is adaptability. Students learn to take direction from multiple instructors, adjust to new expectations, and perform in unfamiliar settings. These are skills that translate directly to competition—and beyond.

### Confidence: The Real Takeaway

If there’s one thing camps consistently deliver, it’s confidence.

Students return from camp standing a little taller, singing a little stronger, and

approaching rehearsals with a renewed sense of purpose. They've seen what they're capable of, and they're eager to bring that energy back to their home program.

This confidence isn't just about performance—it's about ownership. Students begin to take greater responsibility for their individual roles within the group. They listen more actively, support their peers, and contribute to a stronger overall ensemble.

And yes, they'll probably teach everyone else the choreography they learned at camp—whether you asked them to or not.

### A Boost for Directors, Too

It's easy to focus on the benefits for students, but directors gain just as much from camps and clinics.

Stepping outside your own program, even briefly, can provide valuable perspective. You see what other groups are doing, hear different approaches, and gather ideas that can enhance your own teaching.

Perhaps more importantly, camps can reignite your own enthusiasm. The energy, creativity, and sheer joy of the experience serve as a reminder of why you got into this activity in the first place.

And sometimes, that's exactly what you need halfway through a long season.

### Making the Most of the Experience

To get the full benefit of any camp or clinic, a little preparation goes a long way.

Set clear expectations for your students. Encourage them to be open, engaged, and willing to step outside their comfort zones. Remind them that it's okay to make mistakes—that's part of the process.

After camp, take time to reflect. What did you learn? What can be applied to your current show? What changes will



PHOTO COURTESY DERRICK KOLUS

have the greatest impact?

Even small adjustments can lead to significant improvements.

### Final Thoughts

Camps and clinics are more than just summer activities or preseason tune-ups. They are opportunities for growth, connection, and transformation.

Whether it's a national intensive, a regional gathering, or a local day camp, each experience offers something valuable. Together, they create a well-rounded approach to developing both students and directors.

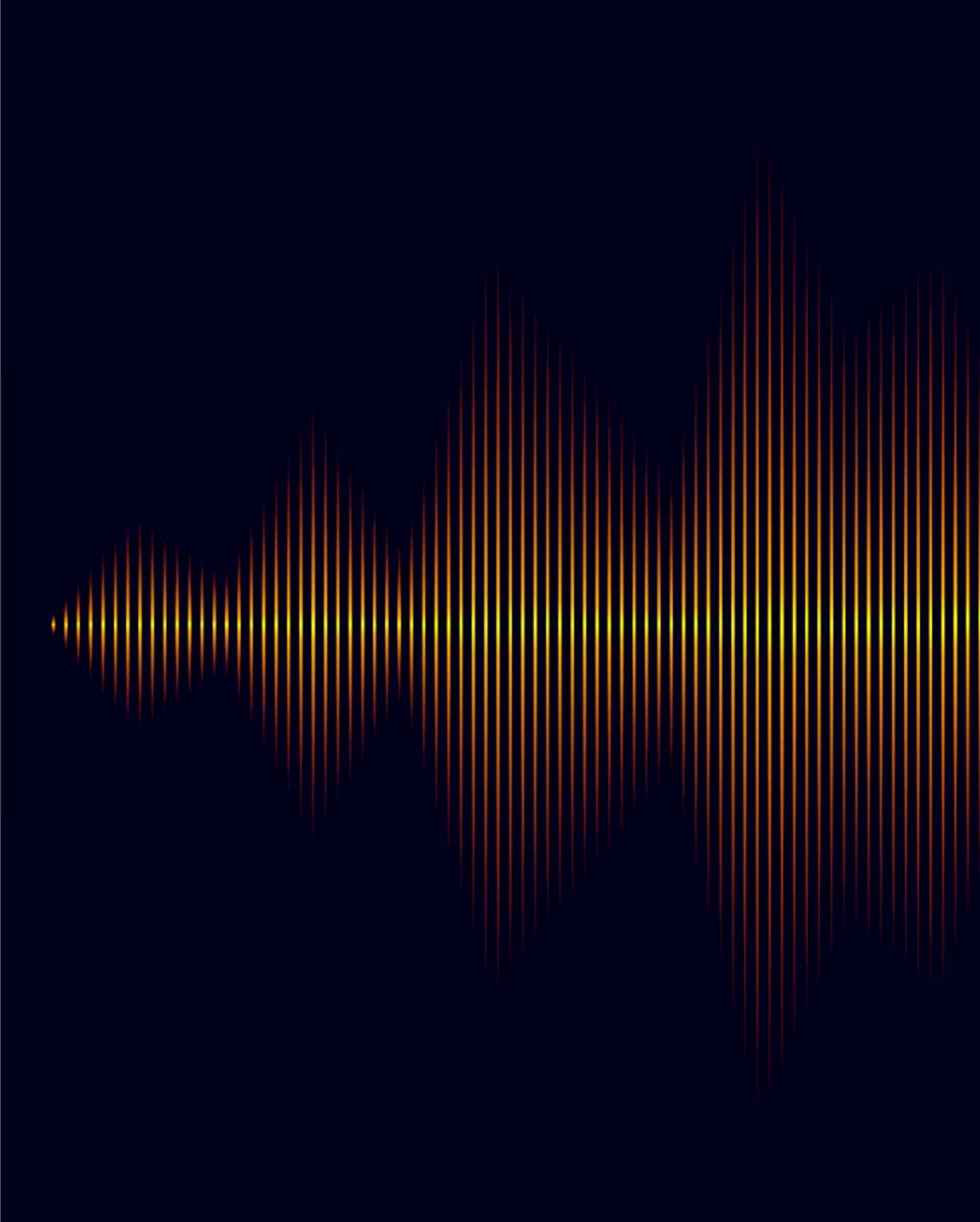
And while the memories of long rehearsals and late-night bonding may fade, the skills, confidence, and inspiration gained at camp tend to stick around.

Right alongside a few inside jokes,

a couple of new warm-ups, and at least one story that probably shouldn't be told in front of parents.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Ed Bauer has been in publishing for over twenty years. He was introduced to Show Choir by his daughter and he is forever grateful to her for this wonderful gift.

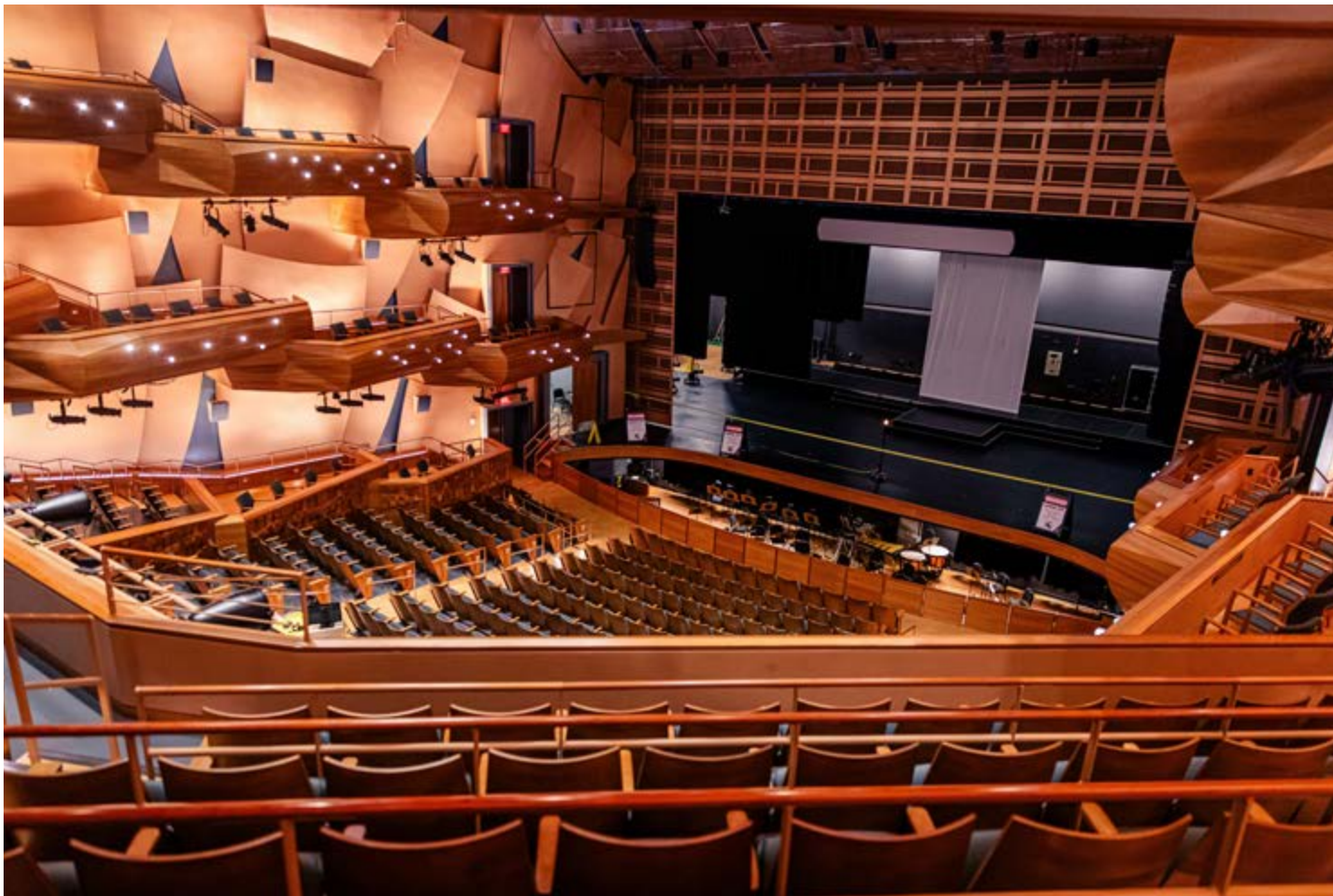




# HEARING THE DIFFERENCE

**HOW ACOUSTICS SHAPE SHOW  
CHOIR PERFORMANCE—AND HOW  
TO PLAN FOR EVERY VENUE**

BY ED BAUER



**Every room has its own sonic personality, shaped by size, materials, ceiling height, audience presence, and even temperature.**

There's a moment in every show choir performance when everything either locks in or falls apart. The choreography is sharp, the costumes catch the light, and the energy is there. But what ultimately determines whether the audience feels the performance the way it was intended often comes down to something far less visible: acoustics.

For directors and performers alike, acoustics can be the silent partner or the hidden adversary. A group that sounds balanced and powerful in its rehearsal space can suddenly feel muddy, thin, or overwhelming when stepping onto a new stage. Understanding why that happens—and how to prepare for it—is one of the most valuable skills a show choir program can develop.

### **The Invisible Instrument**

Acoustics are, in many ways, the final instrument in your ensemble. Every room has its own sonic personality, shaped by size, materials, ceiling height, audience presence, and even temperature. Hard surfaces like concrete and glass reflect sound, creating brightness and sometimes unwanted echo.



Soft surfaces like curtains, carpet, and upholstered seating absorb sound, often producing a warmer but less resonant environment.

For show choir, where vocal blend, diction, and balance must coexist with live or recorded instrumentation, these variables are amplified. A gymnasium—common for many competitions—can create long reverberation times, causing notes to overlap and lyrics to blur. A well-designed auditorium may offer clarity but expose every imbalance. Outdoor venues remove reflections altogether, often leaving singers feeling exposed and unsupported.

Recognizing that each space is fundamentally different is the first step. The next is learning how to adapt.

### Why Acoustics Matter More in Show Choir

Unlike traditional choral ensembles, show choirs combine singing, movement, and often amplification. This creates a unique set of acoustic challenges:

- **Movement changes sound projection.** As

**For show choir, where vocal blend, diction, and balance must coexist with live or recorded instrumentation, these variables are amplified.**



**Preparation for varying acoustics doesn't start at the competition venue—it starts in rehearsal.**

performers turn, travel, and dance, their sound is constantly shifting direction. In a live acoustic space, that affects how the audience perceives balance and clarity.

- **Microphones introduce variables.** Whether using handhelds, headsets, or area mics, amplification interacts with the room. Feedback, dead zones, and uneven pickup can all be influenced by acoustics.
- **Instrumentation competes for space.** Live bands or backing tracks must blend with vocals, and certain frequencies can become exaggerated or lost depending on the room.

Because of these factors, acoustics don't just influence sound—they influence performance decisions.

**Training the Ear Early**

Preparation for varying acoustics doesn't start at the competition venue—it starts in rehearsal. One of the most effective strategies is exposing performers to different listening environments as often as possible.

Rehearsing exclusively in one room can create a false sense of security. Directors who can occasionally move rehearsals into alternate spaces—a gym, a theater, even outdoors—give their students a critical advantage. These experiences help singers develop adaptability and awareness, teaching them to listen actively rather than rely on habit.

Encourage performers to ask themselves:

- Can I hear the ensemble clearly?
- Do I need to adjust my volume or vowel shape?
- Is my diction still understandable in this space?

These questions build the kind of musical flexibility that translates directly to stronger performances on unfamiliar stages.

### The Role of Sound Reinforcement

Modern show choir relies heavily on sound systems, and understanding how acoustics interact with amplification is essential. A well-designed system can compensate for some acoustic challenges—but it can also magnify problems if not properly managed.

Directors should work closely with sound technicians to ensure:

- **Proper microphone placement.** Headset mics, for example, must be positioned consistently to maintain even pickup.
- **Balanced mixing.** Vocals should sit clearly above instrumentation without overpowering it.
- **Room tuning.** Equalization adjustments can help address problematic frequencies caused by the space.

If possible, programs should invest time in educating students about microphone technique. Even small changes—like turning the head away

from a mic or inconsistent distance—can have a significant impact in acoustically sensitive environments.

### Adapting to Common Venue Types

While every venue is unique, most fall into a few broad categories. Understanding their tendencies can help directors prepare more effectively.

**Reward trips are the cherry on top of a successful season. Whether performing on a Disney stage or in a Universal Studios parade, these trips combine performance opportunities with theme park magic.**

### Gymnasiums

These are among the most challenging spaces for show choir. High ceilings and hard surfaces create long reverberation times, which can muddy fast passages and obscure text. In these environments, clarity becomes the priority. Slightly slower tempos, exaggerated diction, and controlled dynamics can make a noticeable difference.

### Auditoriums and Theaters

Purpose-built performance spaces generally offer better acoustic balance, but they can also be unforgiving. Every detail is exposed, from pitch accuracy to blend. In these settings, precision and control are key. Encourage singers to trust the space rather than over-sing, which can lead to tension and imbalance.

### Outdoor Venues

Without reflective surfaces, sound dissipates quickly outdoors. Performers often feel like their sound “disappears,” leading them to push vocally. This can



result in fatigue and inconsistent tone. Instead, focus on supported singing and rely on amplification to carry the sound. Confidence and consistency are more effective than sheer volume.

### **Multipurpose Spaces**

Cafeterias, black box theaters, and other flexible venues can vary widely. These spaces often require the most on-the-spot adjustment. A quick sound check and a few minutes of focused listening can help performers recalibrate before stepping on stage.

### **The Importance of the Sound Check**

If there is one opportunity directors should never overlook, it's the sound check. Even a brief run-through can reveal critical information about how the room responds.

During sound check:

- Test both soft and loud dynamics.

- Run sections with complex choreography to assess movement-related sound changes.
- Listen from multiple positions in the space, if possible.
- Communicate clearly with the sound technician about any concerns.

Encourage performers to treat the sound check as part of the performance process, not a casual warm-up. What they learn in those moments can shape their entire approach to the show.

### **Teaching Performers to Adjust in Real Time**

No matter how much preparation goes into a performance, surprises happen. A full audience can change the acoustics of a room by absorbing sound. Equipment may behave differently under performance conditions. The ability to adjust in real time is what separates good groups from great ones.

This skill comes down to awareness and confidence. Performers should be trained to:

- Listen across the ensemble, not just to themselves.
- Make subtle adjustments without disrupting choreography.
- Stay connected to the musical intent, even when conditions are less than ideal.

Directors can reinforce this by occasionally introducing “controlled challenges” in rehearsal—such as changing dynamics unexpectedly or altering spacing—to encourage adaptability.

### Planning with Acoustics in Mind

Beyond performance preparation, acoustics should influence broader program decisions. When selecting repertoire, consider how it will translate across different environments. Highly intricate, text-heavy pieces may struggle in reverberant spaces, while simpler, more rhythmic selections often maintain clarity.

Staging and choreography also play a role. Formations that spread performers too far apart can weaken ensemble cohesion in acoustically difficult rooms. Conversely, tighter groupings can enhance blend and projection.

Costuming, while primarily visual, can even have a minor acoustic impact. Heavier fabrics may slightly dampen sound, while lighter materials allow for more natural resonance. While not a primary concern, it’s another reminder of how interconnected every element of show choir performance can be.

### The Audience Factor

It’s easy to overlook the role of the audience in shaping acoustics. A full house absorbs sound, often reducing reverberation and creating a clearer listening environment. An empty venue, by contrast, can feel much more echo heavy.

This means that a performance during warm-ups or preliminaries may





feel different from finals. Preparing performers for this shift helps prevent overcorrection. What feels “too quiet” in an empty room may be perfectly balanced once the seats are filled.

### Turning Challenges into Opportunities

Ultimately, acoustics are not something to be feared—they are something to be understood and embraced. Each venue offers a new opportunity to refine musicality, strengthen ensemble awareness, and deepen the connection between performers and audience.

Programs that prioritize acoustic awareness often find that their overall musicianship improves. Singers become more attentive, more responsive, and more confident in their ability to adapt. Directors gain a deeper understanding of how their artistic vision translates beyond the rehearsal room.

### Final Thoughts

In show choir, where so much attention

is given to what can be seen—choreography, costuming, staging—it’s easy to underestimate the power of what is heard. Acoustics shape every note, every lyric, and every emotional moment of a performance.

By training performers to listen actively, preparing for a variety of environments, and embracing the unique character of each space, directors can ensure that their groups deliver consistent, compelling performances wherever they go.

Because in the end, the goal isn’t just to be seen—it’s to be heard, clearly and memorably, in every room.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Ed Bauer has been in publishing for over twenty years. He was introduced to Show Choir by his daughter and he is forever grateful to her for this wonderful gift.



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# ENGINEERING THE SHOW

## TECH TIPS FOR PERFORMING ON THE ROAD

by Ed Bauer

In the world of competitive show choir, performance quality is only as strong as the infrastructure supporting it. While vocal precision and choreography drive the artistic product, staging equipment determines how effectively that product is delivered across a wide range of venues. Traveling ensembles face a unique challenge: designing stage environments that are visually compelling, structurally sound, acoustically compatible, and—perhaps most importantly—portable.



PHOTO BY STAGERIGHT

From modular platforms and scenic elements to lighting and sound integration, staging equipment must strike a careful balance between durability, efficiency, and adaptability. For directors and technical coordinators, the goal is clear: create a system that enhances performance while minimizing logistical strain. Achieving that goal requires a thoughtful approach rooted in both engineering principles and practical experience.

### **Structural Integrity: The Foundation of Performance**

At the core of any staging setup are platforms. These units define performance levels, create visual depth, and support dynamic choreography. For traveling show choirs, platforms must meet three critical criteria: strength, stability, and modularity.

Load-bearing capacity is the first



consideration. Platforms must safely support multiple performers executing synchronized movement, often with significant force generated by jumps, turns, and directional changes. Industry standards typically recommend a minimum live load rating of 100 pounds per square foot, though higher ratings provide additional safety margins for high-energy performances.

Equally important is structural rigidity. Flexing or vibration in a platform not only creates safety concerns but also disrupts performer confidence and visual consistency. High-quality platforms utilize reinforced frames—commonly aluminum or steel—with cross-bracing systems that distribute weight evenly. Deck surfaces are typically constructed from high-density plywood or composite

materials with non-slip coatings to ensure traction under stage lighting conditions.

Modularity is essential for transportation and adaptability. Platforms designed in standardized dimensions (e.g., 4'x8' or 4'x4") allow for flexible configurations that can be adjusted based on venue size and performance needs. Quick-connect hardware systems significantly reduce assembly time while maintaining secure connections between units.

### **Scenic Design: Balancing Impact and Portability**

Set pieces serve as the visual identity of a show, but in a traveling context, they must be engineered for efficiency. Unlike fixed theatrical productions, show choir sets must be transported frequently, assembled quickly, and stored compactly.

Weight is a primary constraint. Materials such as aluminum framing, corrugated plastic panels, and lightweight composites are commonly used to reduce overall mass without sacrificing durability. Foam-based scenic elements, reinforced with hard coatings, provide additional opportunities for creative design while maintaining portability.

Breakdown capability is equally critical. Scenic elements should be designed to disassemble into manageable components that fit within standard transport vehicles. Hinged panels, collapsible frames, and tool-less assembly systems can dramatically improve load-in and load-out efficiency.

Durability must not be overlooked. Traveling equipment is subject to



PHOTO BY STAGERIGHT

repeated handling, vibration during transport, and variable environmental conditions. Protective finishes, reinforced edges, and secure fastening systems extend the lifespan of scenic components and reduce maintenance requirements over the course of a season.

### Lighting Systems: Portable Precision

Lighting plays a significant role in enhancing visual storytelling, but traveling show choirs must operate within strict logistical and technical constraints. Unlike fixed venues with permanent lighting rigs, portable systems must be self-contained, efficient, and adaptable to different electrical infrastructures.

LED lighting fixtures have become the standard for traveling ensembles due to their low power consumption, minimal

heat output, and versatility. Compact LED pars, strips, and moving heads provide a wide range of color and effect options without the need for bulky equipment or extensive power distribution systems.

Mounting solutions must be designed with portability in mind. Lightweight truss systems, collapsible stands, and integrated mounting points on platforms or set pieces allow for flexible positioning while minimizing setup complexity. Pre-wired configurations can further streamline installation, reducing the risk of connection errors and saving valuable time during transitions.

Control systems should prioritize simplicity and reliability. Pre-programmed lighting cues stored on compact controllers or software platforms enable consistent execution across venues. Wireless DMX technology can reduce

cable management challenges, though it must be implemented with consideration for signal stability in crowded competition environments.

### Sound Reinforcement: Consistency Across Venues

Sound is one of the most variable elements in traveling performances. Each venue presents unique acoustic characteristics, from highly reverberant gymnasiums to acoustically treated auditoriums. A well-designed sound system must provide clarity, balance, and consistency regardless of these conditions.

Microphone selection and placement are foundational. Headset microphones are widely used in show choir for their ability to maintain consistent pickup during movement. However, they require

careful positioning and secure mounting to ensure uniform sound quality across performers.

Mixing systems must be capable of handling multiple input sources while providing precise control over balance and equalization. Digital mixers offer significant advantages in this regard, allowing for scene recall, onboard processing, and compact form factors suitable for transport.

Speaker systems should be selected based on coverage requirements and portability. Line array systems provide even distribution in larger venues, while powered speakers offer a more compact solution for smaller spaces. Subwoofers may be included to enhance low-frequency response, particularly when using backing tracks or live instrumentation.

Acoustic variability requires adaptability. Equalization settings that work in one venue may not translate to another. Sound technicians must be prepared to make real-time adjustments during sound checks, addressing issues such as feedback, frequency buildup, and uneven coverage.

### **Mobility and Efficiency: The Traveling Imperative**

The success of a traveling staging system is ultimately measured by its efficiency. Load-in times, setup duration, and tear-down processes all impact a group's ability to perform effectively within tight competition schedules.

Transport considerations begin with vehicle capacity and configuration. Equipment should be designed to fit efficiently within trailers or trucks, maximizing space utilization while ensuring safe handling. Custom cases, labeled components, and standardized packing systems contribute to faster loading and unloading.

Assembly processes should be intuitive and repeatable. Clear labeling, color-coded components, and standardized hardware reduce the

likelihood of errors and minimize the need for specialized tools. Training students and support staff in setup procedures can further improve efficiency and distribute workload.

Weight distribution is another critical factor. Equipment must be manageable for the individuals responsible for handling it, particularly in programs where students play an active role in setup. Lighter components not only reduce physical strain but also improve safety during transport and assembly.

### **Scaling for Ensemble Size**

Staging requirements vary significantly based on ensemble size, and equipment systems must be tailored accordingly.

#### **Large Ensembles**

Groups with 40 or more performers require extensive staging solutions to maintain visual clarity and accommodate complex choreography. Multi-level platform configurations are often necessary to ensure all performers remain visible. Larger sets and more advanced lighting systems can enhance production value, but they must be carefully engineered to remain transportable. Modular designs are essential to allow for partial setups in smaller venues.

#### **Mid-Size Ensembles**

For groups in the 20–40 performer range, balance is key. Platforms should provide sufficient elevation changes without overwhelming the stage. Scenic elements should be impactful, streamlined, focusing on versatility rather than scale. Lighting systems can be moderately complex should remain manageable within limited setup times.

#### **Small Ensembles**

Smaller groups benefit from simplicity and precision. Minimal platform use—often limited to one or two levels—can create effective visual interest without complicating logistics. Scenic elements should be lightweight and multifunctional. Portable lighting and sound systems must be efficient and easy to

deploy, allowing the group to focus on performance quality rather than technical complexity.

### **Integration and Planning**

The most effective staging systems are those designed holistically. Platforms, sets, lighting, and sound should not be treated as separate components but as interconnected elements of a unified performance environment.

Early planning is essential. Directors and technical coordinators should collaborate during the show design phase to ensure that staging concepts are feasible within logistical constraints. Considerations such as transport capacity, setup time, and venue variability must inform design decisions from the outset.

Testing and iteration play a critical role. Rehearsing with full staging equipment allows performers to adapt to spatial and technical conditions, while also providing an opportunity to identify and address potential issues before competition.

### **Conclusion**

Traveling show choir staging is a complex technical endeavor that careful planning, engineering insight, and practical execution. By prioritizing structural integrity, portability, and system integration, programs can create staging environments that enhance performance while remaining efficient and reliable.

In a competitive landscape where every detail matters, well-designed staging equipment is not merely a support system—it is a strategic advantage.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Ed Bauer has been in publishing for over twenty years. He was introduced to Show Choir by his daughter and he is forever grateful to her for this wonderful gift.



PHOTO BY STAGERIGHT



# NEWSLETTER

With over 220 members, the National Association for Show Choir (NASC) has set an audacious goal: to unite the show choir community in identifying common objectives, finding solutions to shared challenges, and championing the art of show choir. We recently celebrated our first anniversary on Facebook.

The NASC held its inaugural, virtual meeting last September with approximately 30 members in attendance. While the number of attendees has dropped at subsequent meetings, they are filled with intriguing conversations and connected members from coast to coast.

Why does it matter? Since 2015, show choir programs in the United States have significantly declined by over 800. Music educators are quick to blame the pandemic for the decline, but blaming ourselves for becoming insular would be more appropriate. In July, I had the opportunity to collaborate with some of the best directors, choreographers, arrangers, and costume designers in the show choir world at Showchoir Camps of America. The week's experiences were incredible, but everyone left camp and returned to their respective cubicles once it was over.

Show choir pockets have become more common throughout the U.S., which makes it difficult for show choir programs to attend and host competitions. Show choir will flourish when we start advocating, educating, and inspiring current and future music educators outside our program through consistent collaboration. In most cases, show choir directors are the only choral music educators at their school, limiting opportunities to collaborate with someone who understands what we do. NASC provides a safe platform for monthly collaboration among music educators throughout the United States.

The short-term goal for NASC is to identify a common meeting time for monthly meetings and bring in compelling guest speakers who will appeal to a large audience. A longer-term goal is to have NASC representatives from each state advocate for show choir at state and regional music educator conferences.

This is essential to reinvigorating the show choir community in schools. Too often, show choir is considered taboo. NASC wants to shatter the stigma surrounding show choirs by continuing to educate vocal associations, music educators, and administrations how these dynamic programs not only foster students' creativity, teamwork, and self-confidence but also ignite a sense of community spirit, drawing audiences together to celebrate the arts and support young talent.

*The National Association for Show Choirs' mission is to advocate, educate, and inspire current and future music educators to progress show choir throughout the United States.*



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