

Building Our Voices: Building Our Ensembles 2020

Welcome!

Dear Friends,

Here we are in workshop week! I write this letter to you as I head up into the Blue Mountains near Walla Walla for a day hike. Never having been here I am struck by the colorful hills which look so empty, yet as I get closer become lush and verdant with gold and green wheat—each twist and turn of the road brings another surprise as we drive deeper into the hills. The process of this journey seems appropriate as we enter this week. Of course, I am thrilled to have the opportunity to work with you and share content, ideas, methods, and techniques. But so much of our learning will come from the experiences we share once we are together, the discussion and ideas, wisdom and experience that you will bring. And, as always, the unexpected twists and turns will always appear, and it is in those moments that the real “gold” of the workshop will happen.

Workshop Preparation for Full Participants

1. **Sing a little each day.** If you are like most of us, we have not been singing enough, I am certainly rusty. We will be singing, and demonstrating, and responding a good deal each day, and want you to feel relaxed and healthy.
2. **Prepare a bit for next year.** Choose a simple piece that you might begin the year with. If your choir will be virtual at all, or some kind of hybrid, I recommend choosing repertoire that is easily two grades below your typical beginning level. Every year, even with advanced students, it is good to start in a place where we can grow together: unison, partner songs, pentatonic melodies. Even the UW graduate students we full of tears singing this kind of music, as it focuses so much on the heart of what we do together.
3. **Create a PDF of 1-2 Pages** of the piece you are thinking of. You will use this, in addition to songs that I share, for the breakout sessions.
4. Prepare your **Heart and Mind:** We are heading into a big unknown! This is the first teacher workshop that I have led via Zoom, perhaps it is the first one you will have participated in. We are all faced with similar unknowns as we prepare for the challenges of next year. It is my hope that we will find joy in our play, inspiration in our sharing, and confidence in what we take away. Growing while conducting and teaching together can feel vulnerable, so get ready to play with these new ideas and with new friends and to go deep. But indeed play! None of us is expert in any of this, which makes this journey all the more valuable.
5. **Prepare your space.** Since you will be singing and teaching and discussing frequently, please have a space that you will feel comfortable engaging. I will be asking you to stand often and it is best if you teach standing up. If possible, arrange two levels for your computer, one as a work station for taking notes and discussion, and the second a standing position for teaching and singing. I use a metal music stand that can support my computer for that. If you have a way to **connect directly to Ethernet with a cable to**

your router and not use Wifi, your video, sound, and delay will improve. Please use a **laptop** or **good-sized tablet** for the workshop if possible. You will need your phone as a separate device in at least one session.

6. **Zoom Settings.** There are a few settings that you can adjust to make the zoom experience as good as possible. *Please disregard if you are fluent in Zoom!*

1) Turn on *Original Sound*

2) Open up a Zoom screen as if you are in a meeting. On the bottom left of the Zoom screen, if you are using a laptop, click on the carrot next to the audio icon. In the window that opens up, click *Advanced*. Here you can select *Show Original Sound*. This allows you to turn the original sound on and off. When you are listening, it is best to have it off, when you are sharing your screen or teaching or singing it is best to have it on. Frankly, I leave mine on. I recommend Full Participants leave it on all the time.

3) Also in the Audio settings you can turn on suppress background noise, this helps if you have a noisy environment.

4) Practice screen sharing. On an open Zoom screen, click on share. On the screen that pops up, you will have the option to click on what you want to share—if you have a PDF open or music, you will see small windows to click on. Also at the bottom of the window is a box that you should check—*share computer sound*, which makes the sound quality of recordings, Youtube videos and the like.

If you are having any trouble, we will have tech help available at 8:30 on Thursday.

7. **Set Goals.** Imagine the ideal sound that you think is possible for your singers. Find a recording, either audio or YouTube of the ideal choir sound for your choir. Bring to share on Day 1, as we talk about goals, language, and our aural biases.

8. **Do a Preliminary Assessment.** Attached to this introductory email is a chart titled *Choral Literacy and Skills for Performance*. It is the new national standard for NAfME, and has been vetted and supported by ACDA, NATS as well as a number of our nation's leading voice pedagogues. Get acquainted with two columns: **Breath Technique** and **Artistry**. Start at Level 1 and read the descriptors of literacy at that Level. Then move on up the chart through Level 4. Make a quick assessment of where your choir generally begins the year in terms of vocal ability. Most public-school choirs start out at Level 1, some advanced high school choirs start the year at Level 2. Only the most advanced groups begin at Level 3. Our workshop will begin with elements of 1, 2, and 3. Since you will be most likely applying new concepts and teaching in a challenging format, I recommend that everyone consider starting at Level 1. I do with my university choirs, and my symphony chorus, we just move more quickly

9. **Register for Credit or Clock Hours.** Should you wish for clock hours, we will have information for you at the close of the sessions. For university credit, please see the attached form, and follow instructions.

10. **Accessing the course.** Next week, I will send you a link to the Zoom meeting with your password.

Additional information for Observers

1. When signing into the Zoom course please select *Join without Video*.
2. If you will be with us for an entire session, you may add video so we can see you and perhaps **engage you in activities**.
3. If you know that you will be in and out or not able to be present for a particular session, please leave the **screen off**. If you know that you cannot be at a particular session, **please sign out**.
4. Please have your microphone muted at all times.

I look forward to meeting you all Thursday!

Have a good week.

Geoffrey Boers

