

From Britten to the Blues – From Rutter to the Renaissance

The 2013 National Conference of the American Choral Directors Association

By Scott W. Dorsey, Director of Education for the American Choral Directors Association

It is a goal to which countless choral conductors throughout the world aspire, but only a precious few achieve: an invitational appearance at a National Conference of the American Choral Directors Association. The competition to reach that coveted performance stage is fierce, but the concerts that result thrill thousands of choral musicians who gather for the biennial event.

In March of 2013, more than 10,000 ACDA members, singers, and industry associates from all 50 states in the U.S. and 35 other nations gathered in Dallas, Texas, for five days of interest and reading sessions, industry showcases, and, of course, stunning choral performances. With over 200 separate events presented during the Conference, there was an astonishing palette of choral artistry on display (to which no article could do adequate justice).



Members of the Asia Pacific Youth Chorale share their artistry during a reception celebrating ACDA's long association with the International Federation for Choral Music ©American Choral Directors Association, 2013

Among the musical highlights of the ACDA National Conference were two performances of the Britten *War Requiem*, staged in honor of the centennial of his birth. Performed by the Dallas Symphony Chorus, the Children's Chorus of Greater Dallas, soloists and orchestra, the pair of concerts resulted in long, thunderous ovations from the packed halls. "The performance of Britten's *War Requiem* by the Dallas Symphony Chorus was a particularly exquisite and momentous occasion," said Liz Doeblner, a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Bookending the other end of the spectrum of the choral art were two "Jazz Night" performances that featured exceptional vocal jazz ensembles, from both the educational and professional ranks – including Just 4 Kicks and The Voca People.



Members of the vocal jazz

*ensemble from Oregon's
Willamette University
perform during one of the
ACDA National Conference's
two "Jazz Night" concerts
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In a recent survey, ACDA members indicated that what they most desired from the Association was high-caliber choral performances. On this, the Dallas event delivered. Concert performances during the ACDA National Conference provided both a comprehensive study of the unequaled breadth of the choral art and a taste of the latest works by emerging composers; with no fewer than 20 premieres taking place during the week. These concerts included stellar performances by school ensembles (from children through graduate students), church and community choirs, and professional ensembles – with each performance more engaging and breathtaking than the last.

The American Choral Directors Association is dedicated to new composition, a commitment that was in evidence with the world premieres of the two latest works in the Brock Series. Pulitzer Prize winning composer Steven Stucky was commissioned to write the Raymond W. Brock Memorial Choral Composition for 2013. His work, *Take Him, Earth* (for chorus and nine instruments), was premiered by the chamber choir of the Dallas Symphony Chorus under the direction of Craig Jessop. The work selected as the winner of this year's Brock Memorial Student Composition Competition was also debuted. *Redemption Mass* (scored for mixed chorus, soprano soloist, winds, brass, and percussion) by Julian Bryson was performed by the University of Louisville Cardinal Singers under the baton of Kent Hatteburg.

When not engrossed in jaw-dropping concerts, Conference attendees were able to select from a dizzying array of

interest sessions that offered information and insights from some of the best musicians in the choral art. From the reflections of such luminaries as John Rutter and Dale Warland, to masterclasses by the Philippine Madrigal Singers and Rajaton, the Conference offered a veritable sonic smorgasbord for the choral musician.



*Hundreds of choral conductors pack the Cathedral Shrine of the Virgin Guadalupe raising their voices together during one of more than two-dozen reading sessions
©American Choral Directors Association, 2013*

Beyond the incredible sights and sounds of the week, members found the social component of a Conference equally edifying. "The ACDA National Conference gave choral professionals the opportunity to reconnect without the distraction of work, allowing personal, social and professional conversations to intertwine and enrich the work that we do with our choirs, thereby infusing the art with the essence of our humanity," said Louis de la Rosa of West Valley College (Saratoga, California). UNCG's Liz Doeblar agreed, saying, "The environment was one of wonderful camaraderie that naturally grows from the shared love for the choral music experience."

All of these events, and countless more not discussed here,

took place in the sunny, temperate climes of Dallas, a city in the south central part of the United States. At every turn, the city lived up to its well-earned reputation for Texas-sized hospitality. From gregarious cab drivers (driving surprising clean taxis), to food vendors, to official representatives, city known as 'The Big D' made Conference attendees feel welcome. Certainly, those who traveled to Dallas from northern locales appreciated the spring weather that awaited them.



*The plaza at the JFK Memorial is bathed in sunshine and packed with listeners during a special concert in remembrance of the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy
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National Conferences are the jewels in ACDA's crown; certainly the Dallas conference will be remembered as among the best of such events. Adam Scott, a member of the education national staff of the Barbershop Harmony Society (Nashville, Tennessee) summed it up quite succinctly, saying, "It was great week of wonderful concerts, competitions, and fabulous singing."

There was perhaps one problem with the 2013 ACDA National Conferences: we left Dallas wishing that it wasn't over.

Learn more about the American Choral Directors Association at these sites:

- ACDA website: www.acda.org
- ChoralNet: www.choralnet.org
- ACDA Facebook page:
www.facebook.com/pages/American-Choral-Directors-Association-ACDA/168011303238089
- ACDA Facebook group:
www.facebook.com/groups/AmericanChoralDirectorsAssociation
- ACDA Student Initiative:
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