

2005 NATIONAL MUSICAL DIRECTORS FORUM RECAP

The National Musical Directors' Forum took place in Toledo, Ohio on July 29 & 30, 2005 and was hosted by the Teutonia Männerchor and Damenchor. Twenty Directors and officers of the National Board were present. Directors in attendance came from Milwaukee to Pittsburgh and from Toledo to Cincinnati, Evansville and Dallas and cities in between.

Relationships between Directors and Choruses

Apparently, Directors have problems dealing with the officers of the choruses – this is a problem that is almost universal. There seems to be a feeling (from the Musical Directors present at the Forum) that the officers of the choruses have very little understanding of *musical* needs and problems as seen by the Directors. There was a general feeling that there was not enough communication in many cases (not all). A solution to this would be leadership seminars. The National Board is considering a seminar for leaders of choruses similar to the meeting of Musical Directors. The Directors recommend:

- Business section: including good business practices, marketing, graphics, use of local media, publicity, etc.;
- Basic leadership training: What does the leadership of a chorus have to consider? Topics such as: how should a chorus operate, what makes a good concert, picking costumes, membership, how to run meetings, how to work with volunteers;
- What makes a good chorus? Perhaps developing a model for all choruses.
- How to interact with director and other music professionals

It was emphasized that it should be the officers who are most concerned with increasing membership.

Selection of Directors for Sangerfest

A great deal of time was spent discussing how directors are selected for either the District or National Sangerfest. The perception is that the same people/districts are called on to direct. Also, that there is no participation from certain areas/group, so why would they feel included? It's always the host chorus plus Directors on the national music committee or others. The Directors felt that this was not fair, could greatly be improved, and that a method of choosing conductors should be developed. We need to give the opportunity to work with a large chorus to all *qualified* Directors.

A variety of suggestions and features were considered:

- Possibly a list of the Districts should be made and an order agreed upon. The district would submit the name of one director to the national committee as one who would be qualified to direct a large group of singers. Each district should decide how they choose their district nominee.
- Each director from each district should be on rotation basis.
- National Board of Directors should not elect or choose conductors.
- Develop minimum criteria; for example, conducting at the district level. Host city should have input.
- Interested Directors nominate themselves as to why they would like to conduct. Those who are interested could request the chance.
- Any new conductors go to the bottom of the list.
- At a district Sangerfest, have 3 conductors, not just host city director.
- Rotate the 8 districts at each national.
- Each director must be at the national Directors' Meeting. A national vice president would be in charge of the list or national music committee chairman.
- Austrian choruses should sing Austrian national anthem.
- A fourth director could conduct national anthems to give more directors a chance.
- Consensus seemed to be that the Fest Dirigent come from the host chorus or city and that 2 or 3 other directors come from any of the other Districts, with each District submitting a candidate to be considered and those Districts who had directors in the last Saengerfest go to the bottom of the list. There are 8 Districts with a total of 83 choruses and about 60 directors. One of these directors could just direct the opening: *Gruss Gott*, and the National Anthems.
- Districts not represented by having a director at the National in the last 15 years would be at the top of the list.

- More directors at the festival, doing fewer pieces? The singers may have trouble following such a variety of styles.
- The host city can pick from the top five on the rotation list;
- Directors are not necessarily selected from the members of the National Music Committee
- Not all districts participated in the Music Committee Meeting, so not all districts are being represented
- National Empfangskonzert: past district conductor conducts, others directors could direct so more would get practice with a large chorus.

The Directors formed a committee to develop a recommendation to the National Board. Ed Helgerman, Ron Markle, Ernie Flamm, Richard McGinty and Dennis Costanzo agreed to participate.

Commissioned Work

Continuing the discussion on finding new music, the Directors discussed commissioning a work for each Sängergfest starting with the 2010 National Sängergfest.

Various concepts and parameters were discussed:

- Need accompaniment for singers or *a capella* or either way (so piece can be performed by individual choirs at any time);
- More modern and easy;
- We must see examples of previous compositions by this composer;
- Nonstrophic.
- Text might be on joy of singing and song,
- Mix German and American text perhaps,
- Might also address sharing traditions and passing on our heritage and keeping it alive with song.
- We'd recommend to the Board who, what and how to proceed. Carolann Slouffman has contact in Cincinnati who is arranger for the Cincinnati Pops. She could contact him as a possible candidate if we decide to proceed.
- Hold a contest for young people to submit a text for the music with first/second/third prizes. ownership stays with NASB.
- Recommended to have perhaps a 3-part work, maximum 5 minutes; do new Sängerggruss, a main choral piece for the center of the concert and a concluding piece. This would unify the work and the Festival.
- Committee for commission would be one from each district.
- Many directors felt range for the sopranos should be limited to no higher than F2 - perhaps alternate notes for the higher range could be incorporated.
- Question came up asking if a committee should be formed to make suggestions for a commissioned piece to the National Board.
- Another suggested that there be a theme for the program
- Accompaniment must augment the piece without over powering
- Range is an issue for most choruses, so this is an important point for the composer/arranger
- Four-Part (SATB), but easily converted to SSA, TTBB, etc.
- Not too 'busy'/hard
- Able to be used on local programs to maximize rehearsal time
- Orchestral accompaniment that would still feature the vocal portion
- Text – perhaps a story that highlights passing our heritage to the next generation through song;
- German text with some portion in English (Into the Woods, the Witch's piece, *Children Will Listen*)
- Select a committee to represent the Directors as this moves forward.

Future of German choruses

A great deal of time was spent on this very important topic as all of our groups are concerned about old and new members. In some groups the medium age is close to 70 years of age.

- How to get members?
- We are no longer "German Singing Societies" but "American-German Heritage Societies" and are dying out, but community choruses are thriving.
- Sing at local festivals, even National Anthem or God Bless America.
- Challenge each member to recruit one person per year.
- Offer free German classes before or after rehearsal.

- Leadership training for officers about what are the chorus' strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities. How do we build on strengths?
- Start another choir and rehearse in same place; maybe tour together and/or give concerts together.
- Publicize your activities, e.g. European tours and get more singers. It was emphasized that we need to publicize our activities to attract members.
- A suggestion was made to invite music students from the University to preview their recitals at the club.
- Do cabarets at your club. Get visiting artists who get half the take at the door and advertise in the paper and on radio; do fliers and tickets; sell tickets for about \$10.00
- Unbelievably, some choruses still virtually exclude any non-German speaking members, even conducting their meetings in the German language!
- Most have found their singers getting older and very few younger replacements for those they lose.
- Some still have quite strong choruses with both the men and the women, even though we also seem to be fighting a losing battle with aging and not enough new younger members in the choruses. What works for them?
- How do you work and build a chorus, which it seems, is continually on "Vacation"?
- Don't get in a rut for all of your concerts. Design new programs, meals, and concert locations.
- Tell your members the aspects of running a good choir. Marketing, seeking new members, new and different concerts, keep in contact with all members.
- Accept new members into your chorus with open arms. It is imperative that we seek/find/keep younger members if we are to continue to exist.
- Our communities and the surrounding areas do not know we exist.
- Develop a stronger PR program for your choir. We need to seek new ways of drawing new people to our concerts.
- One interesting comment was made... our choirs exist in isolation. We do not know that other choirs exist in neighboring states.
- What does the future look like? The immigrants that started these choruses, and served each other are dying.
- Competition between local choruses? Rehearse together to meet each other?
- Develop sister chorus relationships, like sister cities?
- THE GREATEST ASSET OF ANY OF OUR GROUPS IS THE DIRECTOR!!!!
- Participation in community choruses is growing, while veterans groups; ethnic-focused groups, etc. are dying. The second generation has not joined the chorus. Let the community know what the chorus is doing. Old thinking that the group serves its members, not the community, no need to invite others in doesn't make sense. Serve the community by singing at nursing homes, those with former members.
- Directors should be focused on music, but we are spending a great deal of time on membership, which should be the responsibility/focus of the chorus leadership. Another argument for the leadership training for the choruses.
- How to 'toot' our own horn? Float in the July 4th parade, singing *God Bless America*; invite church choirs to sing at German fests;
- German classes before rehearsals for pronunciation and meaning;
- Community Chorus running parallel to German Chorus; not part of the German chorus, but a relationship with the German chorus; sometimes to sing together.
- Protect the German music; it has value and needs to be passed on.
- One director commented that his chorus meets all year because "if we stop for the summer we might not see each other again." (Before the next fall rehearsal).
- We have to tell people we exist over and over and over...
- How can we develop a kinderchor????
- One chorus has "sing-a-long sheets with words for several schunkle songs--*Du, Du, liegst mir im Herzen*, etc.--for casual singing.
- It was brought to our attention that the largest German population exists in Brazil... possible concert Tours???
- German music: is appreciated all over the world and is taught in all music schools. You don't have to be German; it's worthwhile music (ever heard of Bach, Brahms, Beethoven?).
- Concerts: perhaps do some in Florida for our members who spend the winters there. Florida couples – list of FL towns, have a concert in the winter in Florida?
- Perform at local concerts in the park.

- Some Choirs travel to other cities/countries; add nursing homes; libraries; partnering with other organizations in the community to raise awareness and share volunteer needs
- Hand out brochures on our choir during festivals, etc.
- To revitalize choruses, we must please our members as well as our audiences

Foundation

We have a §501(c)3 tax exempt status. We can write grant requests for the Foundation. Are there individuals who can help with grant requests?

Archiving music

- Directors would like every Sangerfest book from each district, if they publish one. Books from District festivals – could these be made available to other districts? Not all districts have a book from their festivals; in previous years, this created a great deal of music being sent to the choirs.
- Deposit music with ACDA (American Choral Directors Association) for archive host; access as member or NASB participate in funding to ACDA for access rights for all of the directors, or at Sinfonia headquarters in Evansville.
- Richard McGinty proposed making a book of public domain German music available for all to use. Use songs from that book for Sangerfests.
- Perhaps we could establish some sort of library web site where there might be hundreds of pieces available for download
- Possible unifying impact amongst directors and various groups?
- Collecting music from prior to World War I, hand-written arrangements is important

Committee: Chuck Eakins, Dennis Costanzo, Nick Lipichan, others??

Tours and traveling choruses

- Richard McGinty talked about the Chorgemeinschaft Texas, with which he is associated. That chorus is a select group from a wide area in Texas that was formed strictly for the purpose of travel. They meet a few times a year in Austin, rehearse for 3 hours and once every 3 years make a tour. They have been to several places in Germany and Austria as well as Russia and other places. The last year before their trip, they rehearse every month. They save money quarterly for the trip and invest it so the trip is virtually paid for by the time they go. They have two directors. Singers are selected by audition. All trip expenses are paid for the directors and accompanist. Also can combine choirs to perform at historical events or regional events. Can get larger number of singers that way, by combining several choirs.
- Dayton has proposed a Chorgemeinschaft for all choruses in Ohio, where they would take a selection of the best singers from all the clubs.
- There was talk of the advantages of traveling in the U.S. to meet other choruses, which establishes good relations among the clubs.
- Can we get grants for tour on the state or national level utilizing the Foundation as a conduit
- One or two-day trips nearby.

Beverages during Practice

Question of drinking during rehearsals came up. Some directors prohibit it, mainly because of the distraction from knocked over glasses and spilled drinks. A short distraction seems often to lighten the rehearsal and keep it from getting too intense.

National Anthem Protocol

It was previously pointed out that the German National Anthem is sung first, and the American National Anthem last.

- Some choruses have members that wish to argue over this, but this is the correct protocol.
- It was suggested that one version of the National Anthems in four part harmony be distributed for all to use as “official” and sung by memory
- The American National Anthem should be sung in the key of A-flat and the German in E-flat.
- It was suggested that, because we have some Austrian choruses in the NASB, we include the singing of the Austrian National Hymn as well, the order being: Austrian, German, American.

Communications

Apparently a notice from the National did not get to most directors when there was a request for music selections to be made to Evansville and the National Music Committee for the next Sangerfest. (A verbal request was made to all the directors present that there was still time to submit music suggestions up until September 1. Music should be sent to Rolf Hoffmann so copies can be made prior to the meeting of the Music Committee October 15). **Presidents: Please keep your Directors in the information loop.**

2007 Sangerfest Arrangements

- o In Peoria, the accompanist was clearly sight-reading the music during the rehearsal and even cut out a verse of one of the songs (*Mein Madel hat einen Rosenmund*) because she was not really familiar enough with the music. The Fest Dirigent from Evansville gave assurance that this would not happen there.
- o Any correspondence relating to the next National Saengerfest should be sent to Paul Bockstege in Evansville.
- o How can we assure there is enough rehearsal time on the massenchor pieces? Music selection criteria are the key. Could the conductor visit the choirs for pre-rehearsal? For the Evansville festival, the National will try to get a CD of the pieces to send with the music. Also trying to get an accompaniment for each piece. For Peoria, the accompaniment was included in the book.
- o Sing with the choruses during the Haupt Konzert
- o Directors (and accompanists) are to be acknowledged at the end of concert.
- o Perhaps a social event at the end of the National Festival for all Directors

Dirigenten/tin Chor

After some rather impressive sounds coming from the singing of the directors, it was proposed that the directors sing as a chorus at the end of the Empfangs Konzert at the Saengerfest: 2 songs--one English and one German. It would be fun and perhaps result in a little more respect for the abilities of the directors from the singers! Our groups need to know we can really sing....

Master Class

The afternoon was spent with two professors from the University of Toledo. Professor Bernard Bopp talked and demonstrated the Physics of Sound and Professor Erik Johanson tied singing to the physics of sound.

Instruments have three common elements: an Energy Source, a Primary Vibrator, and a Resident Vibrator; Dr. Bopp presented several basic instruments using the concept of wind (organ pipe), reed (straw), percussion (tuning fork with wood box), metal tube for convection, and water

Professor Johanson – discussed the importance of vowels as combined with resonators and frequency for pleasantness of tone quality, intonation, and blend within a group; reviewed diagrams reflecting the combination of Resident vibrators available in the human form, including the throat, tongue position, and facial muscles. Discussed breathing – diaphragm muscles vs. abdominal muscles. Did you know that you cannot sing vowels on notes above the staff?? Facial expression is about the music, not about the act of singing. There should be no facial tension in singing

Sanger Zeitung

It seems that the Directors do not receive the Sanger Zeitung (and information on upcoming Sangerfests.

Presidents.... please give a copy to your Director and Accompanist! Many Directors commented that they were really in the dark as to happenings in their district and at the national level.

- o How often are National Newsletters distributed? Four times a year;
- o In each issue we want to put an article by a director. Richard McGinty to coordinate. This could be written by any of the 60 or so directors in the NASB at any time they felt they had something to contribute. It would let the general membership know that the directors really *care!* There were a couple of good story lines:
 - o FIRST the flag return to the German community story;
 - o SECOND national anthem protocol;
 - o THIRD: practice all the music in the book, not just their section;

- FOURTH sharing information with directors, members, etc. and another about having cabaret concerts, membership drives; community projects; use of English in concerts

Articles for publication can be sent to the Editor-Publisher Bill Banzhaf wbanzhaf@verizon.net

Other topics

- Where do you find new music? Tables of music were available
- How can we share new music and new ideas with all of the other choirs in the District?
- Educating officers, singers, and committees on how to become a contributing member of your choir. Having sung in a church choir for many, many years does not make them an expert on music or directors or rehearsal techniques.
- Information and/or decisions from the Forum are taken to National Board of Directors.
- Web Page: would enhance communication among directors, links to choruses, links back to National. National is reactivating the web-page.
- How to communicate with fellow directors throughout the year? Monthly topic of discussion through e-mail?

Handouts

- Minutes of the 2004 Musical Directors Workshop
- Building an Organization of Leaders
- Basics of Identifying Strategic Issues and Goals
- Basic information on Music.... Notes, Staff, Signs, etc.
- A Lifetime of Civic Engagements Starting in Childhood.
- What is necessary for Good Singing

NEXT DIRECTORS FORUM

THE CONSENSUS IS THAT THIS IS WORTH THE TIME AND EFFORT. **THE POINT OF MEETING IS TO DEVELOP A SENSE OF COMMUNITY WITHIN THE DIRECTORS AND WITHIN THE CHORUSES.** IT WILL BE ONE WEEKEND EARLIER: JULY 21 & 22, 2006, AGAIN HOSTED BY THE TEUTONIA MÄNNERCHOR AND DAMENCHOR AT OAK SHADE HALL AND CLUBHOUSE IN OREGON, OHIO.