

Dear PMEA All-State Chorus Member,

Congratulations on being selected to perform in the 2024 PMEA All-State Chorus Ensemble, April 17-20, 2024! Now that you've made it, I think it's fun to stop and think about all it took for you to achieve this accomplishment: your own hard work, skill, and dedication; the support of your teachers, parents, and fellow musicians; the musical knowledge and life lessons that have been passed to you by people who are rooting for you to be the best you can be. You made it to this one wonderful moment in time! As much as I hope this will be one of the best experiences you might have had, I also hope that it serves as a springboard for a larger and richer life in music.

Just a few quick items to help you know me better before the first rehearsal:

1. Music, and especially choral music, seems to me to be one of the most miraculous things about being alive.

I could go on for days (weeks and months, really!) about how music is a unique and special art form and how much it does for me on a regular basis. We all know this even if we choose different words to express it. I will tell you that I don't know what I would have done without music. Even though my life, just like yours I'll bet, has been full of important and beautiful events that have little or nothing to do directly with music, music has been the best way I have found to understand myself, to understand others, and to make sense of the world around me. It makes every part of my life better. I hope to share this perspective with you and to help you find new things about music that bring out the best in you.

2. As much as I love music, PEOPLE are the real reason I do this.

That's why I'm a choral musician and not a soloist! The human connections that are made through ensembles are what make it so special. And, as happy as I am to share my perspectives and my spirit with you, I am even more excited for you to share yours with me. It's hard to get to know everyone at a festival with over 200 singers, but let's not let that stop us from trying.

My background (as quickly as possible):

Please remind me to tell you about my high school and college years as a musician. I'm going to skip all of that until we are in person so we can have a more meaningful conversation. I grew up in Oklahoma and (skipping over everything from that to college) while I was at Oklahoma State University I decided to take a chance on becoming a Music Major. It was between Psychology, Philosophy, and Music - if that gives you a good idea of what I'm interested in or what makes my brain happy. It turns out, music was a great choice - but then I couldn't decide what specifically to do: Vocal Performance? Music Composition? Music History? Music Education? I tried all of them because I love it all.

I taught Middle School and High School Choir in Arizona. I began singing as a professional choral singer about this time and that has been a big part of my life ever since. So, in addition to getting my masters (Westminster Choir College) and doctoral degrees (University of North Texas) in Choral Conducting and going on to conduct full-time as a College Professor (Lycoming College, Muhlenberg College, and Moravian University - ALL in Pennsylvania) I have remained a choral singer at heart. I still love singing, maybe even more than conducting because I don't actually love telling people what to do all that much. I say all of this to let you know that there is such a thing as Professional Choral Singer, and if you love choral music and you've made it to All-State then you stand a good chance of making that a part of your life.

Now I conduct the longest running Bach Choir in the United States down in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, (It's called The Bach Choir of Bethlehem) and I get to work with people from 7th grade all the way to folks in their 80s and 90s sharing my love of music and love of people with people in southeastern Pennsylvania.

I also love cooking, reading, visual art and poetry, football, video games, and all animals (but especially cats, sea life, and crows). Let's attempt to get to know each other much better in April!

A quick word about preparation:

The only way we will get to the good stuff (getting to know each other, deep interactions with art, life-changing experiences) is if you come prepared. That's it.

This is a very challenging program. I do not expect you to be perfect, but I do expect that you do not take this moment for granted. This will be decidedly less enjoyable if you do not know your music.

Prepare as hard as you can or as much as your life allows. I will do the same. I also promise to bring my absolute best to every moment in rehearsal because imagine what it's like when over 200 people bring the best they can to every moment. It creates something you will crave again for the rest of your time as a musician.

I cannot wait to spend this time with you. Let's all do our best to make it memorable.

- Christopher Jackson

CONCERT PROGRAM and CONDUCTOR NOTES

MUSIC PROGRAM / TITLE

Although our concert does not have a particular theme or title, it gives me so much joy to share this music, and especially this POETRY, with you. If you are curious about how diverse voices are being represented, I encourage you to look up the composers and poets for each piece. There is a chance that we will even be able to chat with one of the composers during our time together.

Don't forget - this is a challenging program - but with art worthy of a good All-State Choir.

1. Ring Out Wild Bells - (Composer, Jonathan Dove - Poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson)
2. Hear My Prayer, O Lord - (Composer, Henry Purcell - PSALM 102)
3. Come To Me, My Love - (Composer, Norman Dello Joio - Poet, Christina Rossetti)
4. It's A Long Way - (Composer, Nell Shaw Cohen - Poet, William Stanley Braithwaite)
5. I Conquer The World With Words - (Composer, Jonathan Woody - Poet, Nizar Qabbani)
6. The Dream Keeper: No.4 "Song" - (Composer, William Averitt - Poet, Langston Hughes)
7. So I'll Sing With My Voice - (Composer, Dominick Argento)

a. *** **SOLO OPPORTUNITY FOR SOPRANOS I,II AND TENORS I,II- ms. 87-101**
b. Only students who have completed the Audition for Ensemble Seating Placement in the Ensemble will be eligible to apply for the SOLO Opportunity. The Window of Opportunity to audition begins **Thursday, March 21 and closes at NOON on Monday, March**. If you are interested in auditioning.

- All of the scores should have easy to follow measure numbers or letters. If, for any reason, you cannot easily find a measure number or rehearsal letter on your score, write in the measures before you arrive!
- Bring at least 2 pencils to every rehearsal (with erasers).

How to be most prepared:

- Be precise and confident about every rhythm and cut-off. You'd be amazed how much this helps large choirs get to "the good stuff" much faster.
- Mark/highlight (and be able to sing, of course) important instructions: tempo changes, changes in character, articulations and dynamics before you arrive.
- THAT'S IT! (I shouldn't have to say anything about the notes being learned, right? I've heard that some people arrive at All-State without learning the notes because there isn't much else to audition for after this. This music is too hard to do that and still actually enjoy your time. Don't be that person.)

AUDIO LINKS!

Ring Out Wild Bells: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPlqqvOM8Og>

NOTES:

- Believe it or not, the hardest pages are the first 3 and the last 3. Please practice being exceptionally accurate with your pitch and rhythm here. (CUT OFFS!)
- Tenors and Sopranos: Your high “To the Wild Sky” in the 2nd half of the piece is hard. Make sure the pitches are perfect. I can help us get the rhythm together.

Hear My Prayer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyieyUw3GXk>

NOTES:

- The purity of tone that is on this recording is how we need to approach this piece. This is exceptionally important. Hear how the tension in the harmony builds from bar 1 to the end? That is only possible with a simple and pure tone.

Come to Me, My Love: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8il1WMEUk_k

NOTES:

- In contrast - this tone is full and vibrant! Listen to their beautiful rich sound and be impressed by how DETAILED they are in every moment!

WARNING - This may be the hardest piece on the concert. PLEASE prepare this well.

It's a Long Way: <https://www.skylarkensemble.org/itsalongway.html>

NOTES:

- This piece was written during the first wave of the Covid19 pandemic specifically for choirs to be able to perform it virtually or in person. You can see from the link to this website that there are TONS of resources here to help you learn the piece. Feel free to check out all of the resources available here! (you'll even see a very sad and isolated version of me in a little segment at the bottom of the page)

I Conquer The World With Words:

<https://www.skylarkensemble.org/iconquertheworldwithwords.html>

NOTES:

- This ALSO was written for the same purpose. Tons of resources.
- This piece is rhythmically much trickier! Please use all the resources at your disposal to be prepared!

The Dream Keeper - “Song”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfO393mYDhc>

NOTES:

- Another piece where knowing your exact rhythm and how it fits into the measure is invaluable.

So I’ll Sing With My Voice: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iz-tFxQhm8Y>

NOTES:

- What an awesome closer!

Key to success: Be able to sing the notes to the fast sections - SLOWLY and accurately. If you can sing it at half-tempo accurately, you will be GREAT!