

Thank you for taking the time to check us out online. It is with the heaviest of hearts and our most sincere apologies that we are not performing at this year's ACDA National Conference. It was on a bus headed to NYC for the Honors Performance Series' Carnegie Hall Experience back in June that I received the news that my school's choir had been blessed with the honor to perform at this year's conference. Needless to say I was excited beyond words. As soon as the school year began, even before students were allowed in the building, I turned in my district paperwork to get the trip approved (as all overnight trips must be approved at the district level). However, we did not get an approval from the district until the beginning of December. At that time, our travel company, who had pushed back numerous deadlines while we waited, gave us a deadline of Dec. 21st for a deposit. With Christmas right around the corner, we missed that deadline but our travel company was still willing to work with us, nonetheless a decision was made to cancel the trip.

Things I have learned from this experience:

(1) Advocacy is everything.

Educating administration and district leadership on the importance of what happens in our classrooms and ensembles is of the utmost importance. Whereas my school-wide leadership was apprised of what a tremendous honor this perform opportunity is, I failed to adequately share that information at the district level and with the size of our district it is easy for arts accomplishments to get downplayed and overlooked. Sharing news with principals and teacher colleagues is wonderful, but inviting superintendents, school board members, business leaders and legislative officials to attend a concert is even better. When was the last time you personally extended an invitation to local community leaders to hear your ensemble? When was the last time that you intentionally brought your ensemble to community leaders? Advocacy is everything!

(2) Kids are worth the extra effort.

I remember being a part of amazing choral experiences back in high school, and I remember the transformative power that they had on me then and now. It wasn't until I became a teacher and started planning some of those same amazing experiences for my own students that I realized how much work is required to make it happen. Nonetheless, with every ounce of extra energy expended, I have found that students

are worth it. For every major performance experience my students have risen to the occasion and produced some of the best musical experiences I have ever heard. In getting ready for our ACDA performance, students have submitted video part tests, sight-singing assessments, stayed for after school rehearsals and tried all manner of crazy things that I suggested. Needless to say that they were bummed about the news that our trip had been cancelled, yet that never diminished their resolve to continue to perfect the music. They have continued to submit part tests and sight singing assessments and continue to make amazing music at every rehearsal, so much so that we will be presenting our ACDA selections as a feature presentation before our Spring Concert on April 27th (stay tuned to our website for videos). I tell people all the time that I am extremely fortunate, in that I come to work everyday and get to make great music with some of the most talented individuals that I have every met. They are definitely worth any amount of extra effort.

(3) ACDA is a loving, caring organization.

In my undergraduate experiences, ACDA wasn't a big part of it. At NCCU there was no collegiate chapter and even at surrounding universities, ACDA membership wasn't expected (though it certainly should have been). However through the efforts of a phenomenal choral director and friend, Mr. Bert Fox, I have come to really appreciate all that ACDA has to offer choral directors. The print resources, online resources and even the Facebook group has provided invaluable professional development and encouragement. However it was through the process of this year's conference performance that I have come to know ACDA in a new way. After learning that our trip had been cancelled, I posted the letter written by my principal online. I was really disappointed and upset by the decision and was greatly dreading contacting Marta Force to break the news. A few days later she contacted me after stumbling upon the cancellation letter online. Horrified that I would be forever stricken from membership in ACDA, I reluctantly answered her phone call. She not only reassured me that I wouldn't be forever stricken, but also proceeded to help me feel significantly better about the entire situation. So now, I not only know ACDA as the best place for choral directors to connect, share and grow, but also as a warm, loving community of musicians who are not only concerned about music, but also concerned about people.

I hope that you are greatly enjoying this year's conference! #ACDA4Life