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A Choral Conducting Portfolio

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A Choral Conducting Portfolio

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors
in Music

By
Sydney Sewell

Under the Mentorship of Dr. Chris Bechtler and Dr. Laura Stambaugh

ABSTRACT

This project is a cumulative portfolio of my work as a conductor during the past two years of undergraduate study. It is designed to prepare me for both graduate school auditions and the graduate level work-load. I have evaluated myself as a conductor, filmed videos of myself conducting rehearsals and performances, attended conducting master classes and completed a comprehensive analysis of choral works that I have studied or conducted. I have also included evaluations by mentors or professors administered throughout the course of the project. The project demonstrates by its very nature my growth as a conductor over the course of the project, and the improvement is clearly illustrated through both the outside evaluations and the videos of my conducting.

Thesis Mentors: _____

Dr. Chris Bechtler

Dr. Laura Stambaugh

Honors Director: _____

Dr. Steven Engel

November 2014
Music Department
University Honors Program
Georgia Southern University

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Acknowledgements

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Next, I want to thank Dr. Shannon Jeffreys for her unending faith and encouragement in my growth as a conductor. She has inspired me by exemplifying everything I hope to become as I continue my education and move toward my ultimate goal of conducting at the collegiate level. Thank you for believing in me and never accepting anything less than the best.

Though she is not on faculty at Georgia Southern, I would like to thank Dr. Deanna Joseph from Georgia State for her undying mentorship and faithful correspondence throughout the past two years. She always gives up her time willingly to watch videos of my conducting and give feedback through email and coaching me in the most encouraging and uplifting ways. The master class I attended under her tutelage both motivated me and pushed me to new levels, and I strongly believe I would not be where I am today as a conductor without such a wonderful and inspirational experience.

I also wish to thank Dr. Steven Engel, whose probing questions about music in both a classroom setting and in our meetings together helped me create the idea for my portfolio from the start. Thank you for always keeping me in mind whenever musical opportunities have come up through the University Honors Program and for aiding me in my journey as an Honors student at Georgia Southern.

I also want to thank Dr. David Langley for his mentorship throughout this process as it coincides with student teaching. Though our encounters have been brief, I always feel encouraged and motivated to meet my goals when we work together.

I need to thank Dr. Chris Bechtler, though he is no longer on faculty at Georgia Southern. During his time with the music department, he provided me with countless opportunities to conduct both the Women's Chorale and the University Singers. Were he still at Georgia Southern, I believe he would have seen me through this arduous process. As it is, he helped me organize my ideas and create the foundation for the final product. I am thankful for his mentorship and the resources he made available to me in order to facilitate this project.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr. Brent Whitaker who has generously allowed me to use class time during my student teaching to film videos conducting his top ensemble. Thank you sincerely for supporting my growth as both a conductor and a musician.

1. Introduction

Throughout my academic career, I have always known that I would find a career in music, but I did not know which field I would specialize in until my junior year of college. I can remember vividly the moment I realized that choral conducting was the career path I wanted to follow. Suddenly, all the different aspects of my studies that did not seem connected before aligned into one trajectory that was headed toward one final goal. Graduate school became inevitable, and I began research on the requirements for most graduate school auditions. The task seemed daunting at first, and I could not imagine myself being able to confidently conduct and rehearse a choir successfully. Despite my extensive background as a pianist and a performer, I had no experience conducting or leading an ensemble. I needed to garner the resources that would help me gain entry into a top conducting program while also equipping myself with the skills that make a conductor great. In order to prepare myself for the auditions, I decided to create a portfolio of my work as my honors thesis. This seemed to be the most effective way to connect my study and growth as a student and a conductor with the requirements of the capstone project.

2. Need

My goal is to eventually be a collegiate-level conductor at a university with a fantastic choral program, and I want to distinguish myself as an expert in my field. I am dedicated to doing everything it takes to learning all that I can possibly learn and becoming the best choral conductor I can be. Though all of these goals are excellent dreams to have and are most definitely within my reach, perhaps the

most prominent goal is to make a difference in the lives of the students I work with on a daily basis. I want my students to take away a genuine love of music after spending time in my choir. The process has been daunting, and I have set many smaller goals for myself over the past two years with the end goal in mind. In order to achieve it, I needed to start at the beginning considering I knew barely anything about conducting when I decided to commit to this profession. Since then, I have already improved greatly, but there is much more work to be done. I need to study choral conducting at the graduate level, and I need to get into a distinguished program. In order to get into a distinguished program, a prospect must be able to demonstrate both competency in basic conducting skills and ability to direct a group of musicians. The requirements for most graduate school auditions include videos of the prospective student conducting choirs in both performance and rehearsal settings as well as at least one sample of collegiate-level writing. This portfolio is considered a pre-screening, and if the prospective student passes this portion of the application process, they are invited to the school for a formal audition. The formal audition process assesses the prospective student's ability to lead rehearsal, usually requiring the candidate to direct one of the school's ensembles in front of the choral/voice faculty. It is, perhaps, the most intimidating portion of the audition, but making all of the videos for this project has helped me get over the fear of the live rehearsal.

3. Purpose

The purpose of my thesis is to create a portfolio that satisfies all of the requirements for a graduate-level conducting audition, while also equipping

myself with the tools that I need to be an effective and competent choral conductor at the graduate level and beyond. The portfolio is also designed to demonstrate an upward trajectory regarding improvement and growth as a choral conductor throughout the course of the two year project.

4. Artifacts

My portfolio is composed of a series of artifacts that demonstrate both my growth as a conductor and my knowledge as a musician. The first artifact is an edited video of me in a conducting master class at the Atlanta Summer Conducting Institute at Georgia State University during the summer of 2013. The second artifact is a video of subsequent recordings of me conducting various ensembles in both rehearsal and performance settings over the course of one year. The third artifact is a series of conducting evaluations, each from a different faculty member at Georgia Southern over the course of four semesters. The fourth and final artifact is my analysis of several different works of choral literature.

5. Commentary

Before I started this project, I already knew I wanted to pursue a career in choral conducting. I knew I would need to go to graduate school in order to eventually teach choir at the collegiate level. Unfortunately, I did not have the slightest idea what I needed to know before applying to graduate school. I did not feel comfortable working in front of a choir as the instructor, much less conducting the group. The only experience I had was conducting a short

excerpt from a Haydn *Agnus Dei* in front of my eight-member conducting class. I sought out Dr. Jeffreys as a mentor and asked that she recommend a way for me to get some extra experience conducting during the summer. She recommended that I attend a conducting workshop, explaining that the best way to learn to conduct and become more comfortable as a director is to get in front of a group.

This brings me to my first artifact, the excerpts of my conducting at the master class. I was accepted as one of the conducting fellows at the 2013 Atlanta Summer Conducting Institute. Dr. Deanna Joseph, the choir director at Georgia State, was the facilitator, and she helped me grow as a conductor tremendously. The week consisted of various lectures on conducting and rehearsal techniques and conducting master classes. I was able to conduct the ensemble five times, and I learned a lot about my strengths and limitations as a conductor, which are detailed below.

The video is interesting as it demonstrates an upward trajectory of my conducting abilities even within the span of one week. The first excerpt was my first time ever conducting a group, and you can certainly tell by the scared look on my face and how I fidget and shake while conducting. The second video was taken midweek, and there is a palpable difference in confidence between the first video and this one. I do, however, have a bad habit that somehow formed which took a while to fix. The habit is my excessive motion on the 3rd beat of every measure – though it can be expressive sometimes, it gets distracting if a conductor uses it in every

measure. The last video was taken on the final day of the institute, and I conduct the work in its entirety. Although there are many aspects of my conducting that are amateurish at best in this recording, Dr. Joseph comments that I have a distinct sincerity about the way I conduct and encourages me to embrace that aspect as I continue to improve technically. Ultimately, the institute was one of the foundational moments of my transition from choral student to choral conductor. I was able to see recordings of myself in the leadership position for the first time, and the dream that had previously existed only in my mind had a focal point to build upon.

The next artifact is a compilation of clips of my conducting in both rehearsal and performance settings. These are clips that have been filmed over the span of one year, and they illustrate my growth as a conductor and director over time. The first clip is from my first performance as a conductor in the Christmas Celebration concert in the fall semester 2013. The piece, *Adoramus te, Christe*, was performed by the Georgia Southern University Women's Chorale, and I was the student director of the piece. I spent weeks working on this piece with the choir in class, and I was responsible for determining all expressive and musical details. The piece did not prove to be incredibly difficult for me as a conductor as there were not many inconsistencies in terms of rhythm and pattern. What was difficult about the piece was the need to provide the choir with a pulse while also reminding

them to sing with good technique in order to achieve the right blend and tone for a Renaissance-period piece.

Being granted the opportunity to conduct *Adoramus Te, Christe* with the Women's Choir prepared me for the following semester with University Singers. Though I do not have a video clip of my conducting University singers, the experience is indirectly related in terms of my long-term growth as a conductor and director. Dr. Bechtler helped me pick a challenging piece called *Tafellied* by Johannes Brahms. It is written in 8-part divisi piece, and it highlights female and male sections alternately. The trickiest part of teaching the piece was the German text. Many students shut down before they even attempted to learn the pronunciations. At the time, I was not sure why the students did not respond well to learning the piece. Since then, I have had nearly a full semester of student teaching where I am learning different teaching techniques. Therefore, I believe the reason University Singers did not respond well to learning the German diction was because I did not make it interesting or different as a director. If ever there was a time I felt discouraged and as if I failed as a conductor, it was during my time working on *Tafellied*. The choir did not respond well to the piece, and the performance was a nightmare. First, the female section missed an entrance and dropped two measures. Our pianist did not take seriously the enormous difficulty of the piano part and was unable to play the piece well. She dropped two measures of accompaniment during an interlude, and as a result, the men missed an entrance as well. Though I and the choir maintained the performance and

held out until the end, I felt utterly disappointed in myself as a director and wondered if I had chosen the right career path.

The third is an excerpt taken from a rehearsal I conducted with the Sigma Alpha Iota (SAI) women's choir on the David Childs piece *Weep No More*. The piece is in SSAA divisi and changes meter frequently. Though the meter change is a definite challenge for a conductor, and I had to study the pattern closely before rehearsing with a group, the biggest challenge of the piece was working with the SAI group. Most of the members of the choir are instrumentalists that do not feel comfortable singing. During my three years of affiliation with SAI, we have consistently worked on getting our members more comfortable singing rather than always playing their instruments, but there is still much work to be done in that area. In this excerpt, it is easy to hear the untrained voices and lack of blend throughout the group.

Addressing the weaknesses of the SAI choir reminded me that many choirs in the public school system have groups that sound more like the SAI choir than any other group I had worked with thus far. Therefore, it was my responsibility as the director to help them overcome their weaknesses and achieve more than they thought they were capable of achieving. It was in this setting that I came up with the concept of having the individuals take a moment to conceive of a mental image that represents the piece in their minds and perform it that way. The emotional connection this creates between the singer and the piece transcends the individual and becomes a changed mindset for the choir. This was an epiphany for me. The performance

went very well, and many of the instrumentalists from the SAI choir approached me after the concert claiming that performing *Weep No More* had ignited an interest in singing for them. For the first time, they were excited to sing in the SAI ensemble in the future. This was a huge mile-marker in my growth as a conductor, and it helped restore my faith in myself as a director.

The rest of the segments in the video are samples of rehearsals that have been filmed during the fall 2014 semester of my student teaching at Southeast Bulloch High School. There are clips from several different types of pieces, including both rhythmically and melodically challenging works. Like the master class, these clips do a fine job of illustrating my evolution as a conductor, this time over the course of nearly a year.

The first is a segment of Advanced Chorus singing Kevin Memley's *Ave Maria*. The piece is a melodically challenging piece to conduct, and the piece is technically quite difficult for the singers. The most difficult part of this piece from a conductor's perspective is keeping the singers on the beat and not letting a tear between vocal lines manifest. Though growth is evident between my earlier videos conducting and this segment, I still notice certain weaknesses. For one, I have a tendency to mouth the words along with the choir. Many conductors are known for doing this, but it is a habit that Dr. Jeffreys strongly suggests for her students to avoid. I feel that mouthing the words helps me connect with the ensemble better, and more importantly, it helps keep my facial expression engaged and active. If I stop mouthing the words, it is quite difficult for me to keep my face engaged with the same

energy-level. Thus, my next goal should be to engage my face with the piece without mouthing every word along with the choir.

The second excerpt is a piece by Z. Randall Stroope called *The Conversion of Saul*. This is one of the more difficult pieces to conduct as it vacillates between 6/8 and 7/8 meter quite frequently. The best way to conduct this piece successfully is to memorize the piece and only use the music as a reference when needed. Incidentally, it is probably most effective for conductors to memorize their pieces whenever it is possible. This allows for the conductor to make eye contact with the choir at all times and be able to focus on intricacies he or she might not hear buried in the score. During the video segment, I stay accurately on the beat about 95% of the time, but this is not good enough. The next step toward improvement as a conductor is to have the changes in pulse memorized so thoroughly that I stay on beat 100% of the time.

The third clip is, perhaps, my favorite of the four clips. On the day of filming, my mentor teacher was unable to rehearse the choir due to an issue with a student in another classroom. The students were aware that we were filming for a project in partial fulfillment of my degree, and they encouraged me to sight-conduct *Nox Aurumque* by Eric Whitacre. At first, I laughed off the notion thinking it would just be a useless video that I would not be able to use as part of the final project. I ended up surprising myself, and I think this excerpt demonstrates my competency as a conductor better than any of the others. Thus, in this excerpt, I am essentially sight-conducting a very difficult

piece that splits into 16 parts at certain points in the piece. There are a lot of difficult entrances and other factors that need to be address while conducting this piece. Although I certainly did not conduct this piece perfectly, and it is probably not even my best clip technically, it does demonstrate my ability to conduct a piece that I am not familiar with relatively well.

The fourth and final excerpt from this video is of me conducting the piece *Vox Populi* with the Advanced Chorus. *Vox Populi* is the piece that I am directing with Southeast Bulloch this year. In a sense, it is the culmination of everything I have learned in student teaching. I introduced the piece to the class, entered all of the notes into Finale, supervised class sectional time and told the students everything that I wanted with the piece in terms of expression and musicality. I enjoy watching myself conduct this piece because I can tell by my facial expression and energy that it is something I really enjoy doing. The piece is rhythmically challenging for the singers and for the conductor as it is very syncopated, and I have learned that a good way to keep the singers on the beat is to accent the upbeats of the notes. This keeps the choir on the edge of the beat rather than letting them fall behind. Certain aspects such as this exemplify what I have learned about my conducting in my student teaching. I was often told that I would learn more about my conducting when I had my own ensemble to rehearse with, but I certainly did not realize how true that was until I began working with Southeast Bulloch. The students and Mr. Whitaker have helped me as a conductor through both their responsiveness to my instruction and their encouragement.

The third artifact is a set of three evaluations of my conducting over the past two years. The first was completed in the fall of 2012 by Dr. Shannon Jeffreys during the Choral Conducting and Literature class required for all undergraduate music education majors. Looking back on the evaluation, I am able to notice improvement in areas that were weak at that time. For example, Dr. Jeffreys gave me a 1- out of 3 on phrasing, which means there was no visible evidence of phrasing in my conducting pattern during the fall of 2012. Since, I have worked intently on improving my ability to shape phrases, and there is marked improvement. The subsequent evaluations scored phrasing in my conducting pattern as a 2.5/3 and a 2/3, respectively. The second evaluation comes from the fall semester 2013 by Dr. Robert Dunham. Having already taken all other undergraduate conducting classes, I elected to take the instrumental conducting class under his instruction. Though this evaluation concerns my conducting a wind ensemble rather than a choir, the rubric is the same. Some conductors claim that there are significant differences between instrumental and choral conducting, but most subscribe to the idea that they are quite similar. In fact, many of these conductors advocate that proficiency at one type of conducting makes one better at the other. The reasoning behind this is that proficiency at both forms of conducting attunes the conductor to different intricacies of the craft that one would not typically be aware of without perspective from both sides. Dr. Dunham did not give me any 3/3s in this evaluation, and most of his marks were right in the middle at either a 2.5 or a 2. Perhaps my weakest area on his conducting evaluation was concerning magnitude. I feel that this ties in a lot with facial expression, which is an area I

can always use improvement in. I got a 2/3 in magnitude, and the biggest factor that was missing, in fact, was a change in facial expression with musical expression.

The last evaluation is the most recent and it represents the most improvement, in my opinion. The evaluation was completed during my second observation of student teaching in September 2014. Dr. David Langley came out to watch me work with the Advanced Chorus at Southeast Bulloch high school. He evaluated my conducting of *Vox Populi*, the piece I am directing with the advanced chorus. The evaluations are evidence of my improvement and development as a conductor, and it is satisfying to stand on the other end of the project and know how far I have progressed since the beginning. For instance, Dr. Langley gave me a 2 in phrasing, which though it is not a perfect score, is a vast improvement over Dr. Jeffrey's 1-/3. I am also aware of phrasing as being one of the difficulties I face as a conductor. Interestingly enough, I scored a 3/3 on magnitude and on facial expression on my evaluation from Dr. Langley. This made me feel as though my work and special attention to improving in those areas paid off.

The final artifact I am presenting is a comprehensive literary analysis of selected choral works. I have chosen these pieces having considered several different factors. First, I wanted to represent a variety of styles and periods. Second, I wanted to present works that I have studied or conducted in some capacity. Third, I wanted to choose repertoire that presented different types of challenges for the conductor and the choir. My

choice in repertoire and analysis of each piece demonstrates not only an understanding of the form and style of the piece but also an ability to think critically about potential issues that might arise during rehearsal or performance.

Undoubtedly, I have grown and evolved as a conductor over the past two years and during the course of this project, but there are still many areas in which I can improve. Some areas that I used to struggle with are no longer problem areas. For instance, when I first started conducting, I was unable to focus on all of the aspects of music and conducting techniques and have a pleasant facial expression. My brow would furrow and my expression would go blank, and I would always get comments claiming that I needed to look more engaged and show some facial expression. Since the choral conducting class, I have focused intently on fixing this issue, and it is evident in my video clips that I have succeeded. I look much more engaged and excited in the recent clips, and the choir readily responds to my actively engaged facial expressions. Another weakness was in my conducting pattern where I developed excessive motion on the last beat of a pattern. This is effective sometimes, but it can get distracting if used too often. I still struggle with this aspect of conducting, and it is clear in a couple of my clips; however, the improvement over time is significant and the excessive movement is barely noticeable to the untrained eye. Perhaps the most crippling weakness I have as a conductor is my tendency to fidget and move around while conducting. I get really involved and engaged in the music and tend to use body language to

convey what I want out of the choir. This can be a really great strategy; however, if I am bending forward and leaning down when I want the volume to get softer, I am instilling in my singers the notion that low volume is equivalent to bad posture, and this is a weakness I need to fix. It has also been the most difficult hurdle to overcome.

Although there are several weaknesses within my conducting pattern, I also have some significant strengths. For one, I have developed an ability to connect with the choir I am conducting in a way that I cannot fully describe. When I get in front of any ensemble at Southeast Bulloch, it does not take long for me to convince the group we can make beautiful music with my facial expressions and enthusiasm for music alone. I am not sure where the ability came from, or why it is so effective with these groups, but it is certainly a strength I am thankful for. Another strength I have noticed in my conducting is my attention to detail when it comes to staying on beat. Many singers struggle with rhythm, and it is imperative to have good rhythm if you are a conductor. Thankfully, rhythm is one of my strong points, and I am able to effectively conduct and communicate pieces with difficult rhythmic patterns and mixed meter.

Conclusion

This project started out as a way for me to create a portfolio for my graduate auditions, and though I am finishing this project with such a portfolio, I have also gained much knowledge about myself as a student, a director and a conductor. Thinking critically about my advancement in the craft I wish to make

my expertise is an excellent way for me to continue learning and push myself to new levels on a daily basis. This project has taught me things I did not know about myself, including my ability to surprise myself by sight-conducting a piece. I am thankful to have some excellent teachers and mentors, an endless amount of resources and the desire to push myself and be my personal best at all times. I am confident that the product I have assembled will garner me entry into the graduate program of my dreams, and I will eventually become a collegiate-level choral director. Though this is just one step on my long journey, I can say that I have enjoyed every part of it, and I look forward to my continued growth as both a director and a choral conductor.

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Appendix I:
Conducting Evaluations

Date:

Candidate Name: *Sydney*

School/Course:

Grade/Ensemble:

Clinical Supervisor:

University Supervisor:

MUSC 4411 Choral Conducting & Literature

MUSC 4432 Instrumental Conducting & Literature

MUSC 4532 Secondary Methods

MUSC 4611 Senior Seminar

MUSC 4799 Student Teaching

Georgia Southern University
Music Education Program
Content Knowledge (Conducting) Evaluation
Key Assessment #2a
 (NCATE #2 Content; NASM Standards #1d, 2c, 4;
 GA PSC Requirements #7; GSU College of Education
 Conceptual Frameworks #1, 4;
 GA Frameworks for Teaching Domain #1)

Performance Indicators		Candidate rating indicates quality of skills demonstrated during the conducting experience.			
		Unacceptable	Acceptable	Target	Score
		1	2	3	
Music Content	Conducting Pattern	Unable to demonstrate a basic pattern	Demonstrated a proficient pattern with few inconsistencies	Demonstrated a consistent pattern	2
	Tempo	Tempo choices were inappropriate, inconsistent and/or ensemble led conductor	Appropriate choices in tempo with some fluctuations or inconsistency in control	Appropriate choices. Consistent control.	3
	Dynamics	No dynamics	Primary dynamic changes indicated	A full range of dynamics demonstrated	2-
	Cues	Missed many cues	Primary entrance and exit cues given	Consistent cues given with excellent timing	2
	Phrasing	Demonstrated no phrasing or musicality in conducting	Conducting generally musical showing primary phrases	Phrasing and musicality clearly evident	1-
	Application of music and pedagogy knowledge	Demonstrated lack of understanding about instrument, voice, or repertoire	Demonstrated understanding of instrument/voice and repertoire, including historical and cultural perspectives	Used understanding of instrument/voice and repertoire to enhance instruction	
Physical Attributes	Posture	Continued to demonstrate poor posture after mentoring	Demonstrated proper posture with occasional lapses	Consistent appropriate posture	3
	Facial Expression	Neutral or inappropriate expression related to music	Facial expression somewhat related to music and engaged with ensemble	Facial expression engaged with music and ensemble	2-
	Eye Contact	Candidate did not look at musicians	Looked at musicians before starting, for most cues and releases	Consistently looked at musicians to enhance performance	2+
	Independence of Hands	Demonstrated only one-handed or mirror conducting	Some instances of dynamics or cues in left hand while pattern in right hand	Demonstrated fluidity in using hands together and independently	2+
	Voice	Little vocal inflection. Difficult to hear or understand.	Vocal inflection enhances presentation. Waited for silence most instances before speaking. Generally easy to hear and understand.	Vocal inflection enhances presentation. Always waited for silence. Easy to hear and understand.	
Leadership	Lacked initiative, difficulty making decisions, insufficient knowledge or skills to lead	Made decisions and gave directions with minimal 'down time'	Consistent ability to take initiative, problem solve, and lead musicians		

New Key-Assessments.xls

Still work palms down especially on two hand forte smile! you look scared

Magnitude	Flat affect and/or low confidence	High energy when needed Changes in reflection, facial expression, and energy Generally confident	Consistently confident Energy and affect consistently match observable needs	2
Communication	Directions/Gestures unclear and/or inconsistent and incorrect information	Directions/Gestures generally clear. Communicated correct information with minor inflections	Consistent clarity in directions and gestures. Related correct information to students.	
Reflection	There are no noticeable improvements from previous conducting	Several changes evident or growth in areas previously needing improvement	In-depth analysis reflected through significant improvements in conducting	
Comments			Total Score	745
			Target - 40-45	
			Acceptable - 30-39	
			Unacceptable - 0-29	

Date: 12/12/13		<p align="center">Georgia Southern University Music Education Program Content Knowledge (Conducting) Evaluation Key Assessment #2a (NCATE #2 Content; NASM Standards #1d, 2c, 4; GA PSC Requirements #7; GSU College of Education Conceptual Frameworks #1, 4; GA Frameworks for Teaching Domain #1)</p>			
Candidate Name: SYDNEY SEWELL					
School/Course:					
Grade/Ensemble:					
Clinical Supervisor:					
University Supervisor:					
MUSC 4431 Choral Conducting & Literature					
MUSC 4432 Instrumental Conducting & Literature - FINAL					
MUSC 4532 Secondary Methods					
MUSC 4611 Senior Seminar					
MUSC 4799 Student Teaching		Basic Conducting must earn average of "Acceptable"			
		Choral/Inst Conducting must earn at least "Acceptable"			
<i>Candidate rating indicates quality of skills demonstrated during the conducting experience.</i>					
Performance Indicators		Unacceptable	Acceptable	Target	Score
		1	2	3	
Music Content	Conducting Pattern	Unable to demonstrate a basic pattern	Demonstrated a proficient pattern with few inconsistencies	Demonstrated a consistent pattern	2
	Tempo	Tempo choices were inappropriate, inconsistent and/or ensemble led conductor	Appropriate choices in tempo with some fluctuations or inconsistency in control	Appropriate choices. Consistent control.	2
	Dynamics	No dynamics	Primary dynamic changes indicated	A full range of dynamics demonstrated	2
	Cues	Missed many cues	Primary entrance and exit cues given	Consistent cues given with excellent timing	2
	Phrasing	Demonstrated no phrasing or musicality in conducting	Conducting generally musical showing primary phrases	Phrasing and musicality clearly evident	2.5
Physical Attributes	Posture	Continued to demonstrate poor posture after mentoring	Demonstrated proper posture with occasional lapses	Consistent appropriate posture	2
	Facial Expression	Neutral or inappropriate expression related to music	Facial expression somewhat related to music and engaged with ensemble	Facial expression engaged with music and ensemble	2.5
	Eye Contact	Candidate did not look at musicians	Looked at musicians before starting, for most cues and releases	Consistently looked at musicians to enhance performance	2
	Independence of Hands	Demonstrated only one-handed or mirror conducting	Some instances of dynamics or cues in left hand while pattern in right hand	Demonstrated fluidity in using hands together and independently	2

KA #2 Conducting.xlsx

Leadership	Magnitude	Flat affect and/or low confidence	High energy when needed. Changes in inflection, facial expression and energy. Generally confident.	Consistently confident. Energy and affect consistently match ensemble needs.	2
	Communication	Directions/Gestures unclear and/or communicated incorrect information	Directions/Gestures generally clear. Communicated correct information with minimal exceptions	Consistent clarity in directions and gestures. Related correct information to students.	2
	Reflection	There are no noticeable improvements from previous conducting	Several changes evident or growth in areas previously needing improvement	In-depth analysis reflected through significant improvements in conducting	2.5
Comments				Total Score	45
- FOLLOW THROUGH WITH DOWNBEATS DON'T LET THEM HESITATE				Target = 40-45	
				Acceptable = 30-39	
				Unacceptable = 0-29	

- BE SURE TO REBOUND & REFFIRE THE NEXT BEAT ADJUSTED SCORE

BETTER 2X THROUGH - TARGET = 25-36

- BE AWARE OF ROCKING BACK AND FORTH. ACCEPTABLE = 13-24

- LET LEFT HAND BE MORE NATURAL UNACCEPTABLE = 0-12

25.5 = TARGET
B

Date:		Georgia Southern University Music Education Program Content Knowledge (Conducting) Evaluation Key Assessment #2a (TAPS 1.4, 1.5, 3.1, 3.6, 7.4, 7.7, 10.1; TKES 1, 3, 7, 10; NASM Attributes H.IX.O.3.a2, b1, b4, c2, c3; 7; GSU College of Education Conceptual Frameworks #1, 4; InTASC Standard #4, 5, 6, 8; GSU SLOs 1, 2)			
Candidate Name: Sydney Sewell					
School/Course:					
Grade/Ensemble:					
Clinical Supervisor:					
University Supervisor:					
MUSC 4431 Choral Conducting & Literature					
MUSC 4432 Instrumental Conducting & Literature					
MUSC 4532 Secondary Methods					
MUSC 4611 Senior Seminar					
MUSC 4759 Student Teaching					
		<i>Candidate rating indicates quality of skills demonstrated during the conducting experience.</i>			
Performance Indicators		Unacceptable	Acceptable	Target	Score
		1	2	3	
Music Content	Conducting Pattern	Unable to demonstrate a basic pattern.	Demonstrated a proficient pattern with few inconsistencies	Demonstrated a consistent pattern	3
	Tempo	Tempo choices were inappropriate, inconsistent and/or ensemble led conductor	Appropriate choices in tempo with some fluctuations or inconsistency in control	Appropriate choices. Consistent control.	3
	Dynamics	No dynamics	Primary dynamic changes indicated	A full range of dynamics demonstrated	2
	Cues	Missed many cues	Primary entrance and exit cues given	Consistent cues given with excellent timing	2
	Phrasing	Demonstrated no phrasing or musicality in conducting	Conducting generally musical showing primary phrases	Phrasing and musicality clearly evident	2
	Application of music and pedagogy knowledge	Demonstrated lack of understanding about instrument, voice, or repertoire	Demonstrated understanding of instrument/voice and repertoire, including historical and cultural perspectives	Used understanding of instrument/voice and repertoire to enhance instruction	2
Physical Attributes	Posture	Continued to demonstrate poor posture after mentoring	Demonstrated proper posture with occasional lapses	Consistent appropriate posture	2
	Facial Expression	Neutral or inappropriate expression related to music	Facial expression somewhat related to music and engaged with ensemble	Facial expression engaged with music and ensemble	3
	Eye Contact	Candidate did not look at musicians	Looked at musicians before starting, for most cues and releases	Consistently looked at musicians to enhance performance	3
	Independence of Hands	Demonstrated only one-handed or mirror conducting	Some instances of dynamics or cues in left hand while pattern in right hand	Demonstrated fluidity in using hands together and independently	3
	Voice	Little vocal inflection. Difficult to hear or understand.	Vocal inflection enhances presentation. Waited for silence most instances before speaking. Generally easy to hear and understand.	Vocal inflection enhances presentation. Always waited for silence. Easy to hear and understand.	3
	Leadership	Lacked initiative, difficulty making decisions, insufficient knowledge or skills to lead	Made decisions and gave directions with minimal 'down time'	Consistent ability to take initiative, problem solve, and lead musicians	3

2014-2015 Key Assessments.xls

Leadership	Magnitude	Flat affect and/or low confidence	High energy when needed. Changes in inflection, facial expression, and energy. Generally confident.	Consistently confident. Energy and affect consistently match ensemble needs.	3
	Communication	Directions/Gestures unclear and/or communicated incorrect information	Directions/Gestures generally clear. Communicated correct information with minor infractions.	Consistent clarity in directions and gestures. Related correct information to students.	3
	Reflection	There are no noticeable improvements from previous conducting	Several changes evident or growth in areas previously needing improvement	In-depth analysis reflected through significant improvements in conducting	3
Comments				Total Score	
				Target = 40-45	40
				Acceptable = 30-39	
				Unacceptable = 0-29	

Appendix II:
Literary Analysis

Sydney Sewell

Dr. Stambaugh

Honors Capstone

3 November 2014

Literature Analysis 1

Title: Weep No More

Composer: David Childs

Text: John Keats

Voicing: SSAA (SATB and TTBB also available)

Composer Information:

David Childs is an American composer who was born in 1969 in New Zealand, and he has devoted his life to both composing choral music and conducting at the collegiate, primary and community levels. He received his undergraduate degree from Canterbury University in musicology and composition, an MM in conducting from Florida State University, and a DMA in conducting from Louisiana State University. He currently resides in Texas.

Review of Piece:

Weep No More opens with a beautiful, flowing piano accompaniment. The voices enter on an immediate four-part split, with close harmonies throughout.

Though the piece is completely tonal, it certainly presents some difficulties for a late intermediate or early advanced choir. The singers must be comfortable singing major second intervals, as they happen quite frequently throughout the piece.

An interesting facet of this piece is its seamless shift from minor tonality to major tonality. The piece is composed in a basic ABA form, with the A section hovering in F# minor while the B section shifts to A major. This tonality matches the text as the A section implores the “reader” (or in this case listener) to “Shed no tear.” Conversely, the B section shifts to a happier tone, encouraging the listener to “Dry your eyes for I was taught in paradise.” Childs certainly uses these compositional techniques to appeal to the audience’s emotions, and if performed well, the piece can certainly evoke strong feelings.

The most difficult aspect of this piece is its use of irregular meter. It is primarily rooted in $\frac{3}{4}$; however, it frequently vacillates between $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$ and $\frac{2}{4}$ throughout the piece. This is the most difficult facet of the piece for the conductor, particularly if the conductor is performing the piece memorized. The conductor needs to be very aware of the meter changes and know exactly when they occur in order to conduct confidently and create a solid foundation for the singers. Since singers typically struggle the most with rhythmic challenges, the meter changes will probably be the most challenging parts of the piece for them as well.

In conclusion, the piece is beautifully composed and is an excellent setting for such an emotional and effective text. The singers should be confident in their

parts and comfortable singing close intervals, such as major 2nds, throughout the piece. The mixed meter throughout the piece will be a challenge for both the conductor and the choir, so hyper-awareness of the meter changes will be the factor that creates an effective and impressive performance. I have conducted this piece with the Sigma Alpha Iota women's chorus, and it is an excellent piece to use with a late-intermediate group. I hope to use this piece again if I ever conduct an 8th grade women's choir. I would also be interested in conducting the SATB version of this piece with a high school intermediate mixed choir.

Sydney Sewell

Dr. Stambaugh

Honors Capstone

3 November 2014

Literature Analysis 2

Title: Ave Maria

Composer: Kevin A. Memley

Text: Traditional Latin text setting

Voicing: SSAATTBB

Composer Information:

Kevin Memley's education is slightly unconventional. He has been composing for years, and he is becoming more and more renowned for his ability as a choral composer worldwide. Memley has no formal undergraduate or post-graduate education, and he is a largely self-taught musician. Despite this, he is in high demand as a commissioned composer, and his music is performed throughout the United States at All-State workshops and American Choral Director Association conferences. In addition to being a competent composer, he is also a talented pianist. He currently resides in California.

Analysis of Piece:

Ave Maria starts out with an ethereal back-and-forth accompaniment figure between the soprano 1 and soprano 2. The alto and tenor voices enter on top as the melody, and they are accompanied by the basses while transitioning into the next section. The men then take the melody in a 3-4 part divisi while the altos and sopranos accompany on top with triplet and eighth alternating figures. Next, all parts join in homophonic rhythm and create beautiful harmonies at what seems to be the climax, but it is followed by a beautiful transitional section. All parts come together to create a continuous accompaniment figure while the altos and basses sing a melodic figure that transitions into the true climax. The men share the melody with altos while the sopranos add icing to the harmonic cake. After the final homophonic climax, the falling action highlights a soprano 1 sustained note while the altos and sopranos share the back-and-forth accompaniment figure from the beginning. The piece ends with a slow and emotional cadence with a *molto ritardando*.

The most interesting thing about this composition by Memley is his use of the voice as an accompaniment figure. He orchestrates the piece as one would orchestrate a symphonic work, and that is what makes it so effective and so different from many other choral compositions. Though this is a beautiful and effective way to compose, it certainly provides the biggest challenges for the singers and the conductor.

The entire mood and aura of the piece depends on the sopranos' ability to start the piece rhythmically accurate while also trying to make the sound beautiful without imposing upon the melody. These are very difficult tasks to accomplish with a choir, and it would present the same challenges for even the most advanced chorus. This work is definitely designed for late-advanced high school chorus or college choir.

Another difficult aspect of the piece is the men's vocal part against the female accompaniment figures. The tenors and basses have the melody at measure 15, and it is important that they are in tune with one another and with the ensemble. In addition to that, they are singing in eighth notes against the soprano/alto triplet figures. The men need to be rhythmically solid in their part and also right in the center of pitch. The key to the men being in tune is for the bass 2s to be extremely accurate. Because they have the root of the chord and the lowest and most audible note, their focus on intonation helps ensure that the rest of the chord is in tune with the root.

Conversely, the soprano 1s will also struggle with intonation while sustaining the high notes towards the end of the piece, in particular the high F# in measure 49. The director should constantly remind the singer to think light and spinning in order to keep the pitch up and the tone healthy.

Conducting-wise, this piece does not present too many challenges. However, there are a couple of transitional spots that should be monitored closely. The director should think of this piece in a slow 4 throughout, but at measure 22 (going into the homophonic climax) the conductor should subdivide

the eighth notes and take time before moving forward. This adds a nice effect and helps make sure the ensemble is moving together and centered on pitch. Another spot for the conductor to be careful about is at measure 32. The fall into the fermata starts back in measure 30 in the altos, but it terraces until finally the sopranos join in at beat 3 before the fermata rest. It is important for the conductor to be sure he or she is utilizing the ritard technique while conducting so as to create the effect of the fall, causing all parts to end together at the fermata rest before the final rise to the climax. Finally, the conductor should make sure not to end the piece too quickly. The last three measures of the piece are debatably the most beautiful parts, and the conductor should take a lot of time here so as to create an appropriate ending for such a gorgeous piece of music.

Memley's *Ave Maria* is a beautiful composition that would be appropriate for most advanced high school choirs and beyond. The piece is harmonically, rhythmically and expressively challenging while still remaining a piece that the audience will find entrancing. The interesting use of voice orchestration as a compositional technique definitely sets this apart from most other *Ave Maria* settings, and I hope to conduct this piece with a choir someday.

Sydney Sewell

Dr. Stambaugh

Honors Capstone

3 November 2014

Literature Analysis 3

Title: The Conversion of Saul

Composer: Z. Randall Stroope

Text: Original text

Voicing: SSAATTBB

Composer Information:

Z. Randall Stroope received a Master of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of Colorado and a Doctorate in Choral Conducting from Arizona State University. In addition to his proficiencies as a vocalist and a conductor, Stroope has become one of the most well-known composers working today, having over 100 published works. He composes mostly choral music, and his work is typically designed for advanced mixed choirs. In addition to composing, Stroope spends most of his time conducting and teaching choral conducting at Oklahoma State University. He conducts annually at Carnegie Hall and spends his summers and winters conducting abroad.

Analysis of Piece:

The Conversion of Saul depicts the familiar biblical story of Saul (who would eventually become the apostle Paul) and his conversion to Christianity on the road to Damascus. The piece opens with a rolling bass unison exclaiming in Latin, “Caedite, vexate, ligate vinculis!” repeatedly. These words translate to, “Murder! Harass! Bind into chains!” The tenors, altos and sopranos build in, exclaiming the same words and adding, “Condemnate!” or “Condemn!” The result is a cacophony of sound, including shouting passages and unison stomps for emphasis.

At measure 25, the parts join together for four bars in a homorhythmic pattern with parallel tonalities. Afterwards, they immediately split into eight-part divisi again as the piece approaches its climax. As the piece builds, the dynamics slowly increase, creating a nerve-wracking sensation for the listener. Finally, at measure 47, the motion comes to a sudden halt and the upper voices sustain clashing chords while the Tenor 2s and Bass 1^s chant the familiar Latin text underneath. There is a dramatic decrescendo at measures 52 and 53 and eventually the whole ensemble lands on a Db octave fermata.

The altos and basses then take on a new character, the voice from the heavens, and beg of Saul, “Why do you persecute me?” While the sopranos and tenors sustain the Db octave, the rest of the ensemble pleads again, “Why? Why? Why?” The Bass 2s represent Saul’s fleeting temptations by repeating at a whisper, “Vexate. Vexate. Saul!” There is a break in all sound but the soprano 1s, who keep sustaining.

The soprano 2s and altos bring a drastic shift to major tonality, representing the start of Saul's conversion to Christianity. Slowly, the entire ensemble joins in, leading up to the final peak of the piece and Saul's rebirth. "Turn darkness into light. Turn hatred into love. Bow down, Saul," are the words the voice speaks pleading with Saul.

As the piece comes to a close, the voices repeat, "bow down, Saul" in hushed voices, but some tension still remains. The soprano 2s creep down to create harmonic stress. Although Saul has been converted, there is still some doubt. This likely represents the temptations of the world that Saul will face now that he has found new life.

There are many difficult aspects for both performers and conductors in this piece. The hardest aspect of the piece for both would probably be the mixed meter. In order to create the feeling of unrest and discomfort, the strong beat moves around deceptively. The piece is in 6/8 for most of the first part of the piece, but there are occasional measures of 7/8, 4/4 and 3/8. These changes create a challenge for the director because he or she needs to be aware of where each meter change happens in order to keep the piece moving forward. Another reason this is so crucial is because of how much singers tend to struggle with rhythm – most choirs will need a very strong and confident conductor when performing this piece.

Another difficult part of this piece, and debatably the most challenging aspect is the Db octave that is sustained for 17 measures while other things are happening harmonically underneath. It is very easy for the pitch to sag and even

for the choir to modulate to another key entirely. Therefore, it is the director's job to use motions that represent pulling the pitch up and keeping it steady while also conducting the other parts. An effective rehearsal strategy would be to give the students these images ahead of time so they are already thinking about it before starting the section.

Finally, another challenge for the conductor manifests itself at the end of the piece around measure 72. The men have a feature and then the women come in on top, sustaining the crunchy harmonic tones. Then, the men sustain again while the women repeat the same figure. There is a huge breath mark written in all parts and the meter changes to 2/4. The basses come in on a sustained note and the rest of the parts come in on top. This is hard to conduct because the conductor needs to both give the breath and cue the basses. Some conductors will likely add in a beat here to give a full breath and then cue the basses, while others will use the breath as a release/prep for the bass entrance.

The Conversion of Saul is a challenging, chilling and moving piece that is appropriate for some advanced high school groups and beyond. The piece presents rhythmic and harmonic challenges, and it paints a picture to which many audience members will relate and respond. It is a piece that a director could easily present at LGPE and use for auditions/exhibitions for larger honors (such as trips to Carnegie, Disney World festivals and the like). While it can be appropriate for some advanced high school choirs, the director should definitely be aware of his or her particular choir's strengths and weaknesses and be realistic about their ability level before attempting such a virtuosic piece.

Sydney Sewell

Dr. Stambaugh

Honors Capstone

3 November 2014

Literature Analysis 4

Title: Adoramus Te, Christe

Composer: Orlande de Lassus

Text: Adoramus Te, Christe Latin text setting

Voicing: SSAA

Composer Information:

Orlande de Lassus was a one of the three most influential composers of the Late Renaissance period. His choral music is often referred to as a mature polyphonic style, which means that each part has a melody independent of the other parts, and they weave into each other without accompaniment. De Lassus was born in Mons, Netherlands in the 1530s. He is known for writing both sacred and secular music in the Renaissance style, and his music has transcended the test of time as it is still performed today.

Analysis of Piece:

Adoramus Te, Christe is a composition that is gorgeous to listen to. The piece is in SSAA divisi, and it is polyphonic, meaning each part exists independently of the other parts. Their convergence, in effect, creates a beautiful and rich melody filled with suspensions and gorgeous, resonant chords.

The notes in this piece are quite easy to learn, and there is not much that is technically difficult about this piece. The most difficult parts of the piece come from following performance practice. For one, the singers need to be sure they are performing in the “Renaissance” style at all times, which is typically represented by a straight-tone with little to no spin. This can be difficult for the conductor to demand of his or her choir without sacrificing supported air. The conductor should use hand motions occasionally that lend themselves to helping the singers create this spin and focus rather than keeping the beat at all times.

The piece is in a simple duple meter, so it does not need to be conducted except for when approaching and leaving cadence points. In between these points, the rhythm and pulse will occur naturally. The director should instead focus on creating the best tone possible and bringing out the best in his or her singers.

In conclusion, *Adoramus Te, Christe* is a shorter work that is not very demanding musically or technically. It could be appropriate for an advanced middle school choir, an intermediate high school chorus and beyond, depending on the resources available to the schools. Having conducted this work, I find it

quite beautiful and believe I will probably conduct it with a women's group if and when I get another chance to work with a women's choir.

Sydney Sewell

Dr. Stambaugh

Honors Capstone

3 November 2014

Literature Analysis 5

Title: Tafellied

Composer: Johannes Brahms

Text: German drinking song

Voicing: SAATBB

Composer Information:

Johannes Brahms was a German pianist and composer who lived and worked during the Romantic period of Western music. He was born in Hamburg, Germany but lived and worked in Austria most of his life. Brahms composed all sorts of works, including symphonies, solo piano and choral works. He was a perfectionist and was known for destroying work of his that he did not deem “flawless.” Brahms drew his inspiration heavily from the Classical and Baroque periods, and this is clear in his compositions as they are often very contrapuntal and reminiscent of the Baroque era. Brahms found himself on the opposite side of the fence from innovators such as Liszt and Wagner and subscribed to more of a “purist” mindset. He believed that the Romantic period was meant to be a continuation of the Baroque and Classical periods yet more refined; whereas, Liszt and Wagner were more interested in

experimenting with new harmonies and pushing the boundaries on what was and was not acceptable to compose.

Analysis of Piece:

Tafellied is quite a fun work to do with a choir as it is written in 6-part division and trades off between the women and men several times before the full group finale. The piece's compositional form is strophic, and the verses alternate between the men and the women. The women begin the piece, the men respond. The men are asking the women to have a drink with them, and the women are responding with a polite 'thank you, but no.' Finally, the men convince the ladies to have drinks with them and the choir sings as one in a thrilling push to the finale.

Some challenges this piece presents stem mostly from the German diction. Many students will struggle with the pronunciation of German words no matter how many times the conductor speaks the text or writes the IPA. The conductor should think of creative ways to help the students remember how to pronounce the words. For example, in German, the "ich" syllable is called an *ichlaut*. It is meant to be pronounced with an almost hocking type of sound made with the throat. It is often hard to convey this sound to a group of students, so a good way to make a connection is to have the students think of the sound of static from a television. If there is extra time in class, it may be helpful to actually teach the students German IPA so they can decipher the pronunciations on their own at home.

Another difficult aspect of this piece is the need to rely quite heavily on the male section. Oftentimes, there is an abundance of women in chorus and a corresponding need for more male singers. *Tafellied* demands a male section that is

independent and able to carry the melody and harmonies on their own without the help from the female section. The conductor can counter this by having extra sectionals with the men to ensure they are able to handle this kind of independence before taking on a piece such as this one.

One challenging aspect of this piece for the conductor is conducting the piece with the piano part. The piano sounds as if it would start on beat one; however, the part starts on the pick-up to the first measure, and it is quite easy to get thrown off by the accompaniment if one is not strong in their own independence as a conductor.

A logistical constraint to consider when programming this piece is that the piano part may actually be too hard for most accompanists. The director should be careful to ensure that their pianist is capable of playing the accompaniment part and has ample time to learn the accompaniment before the rehearsals start.

Lastly, some conducting things to be aware of include transitional sections. There are some fermatas at the end of the final female and male sections respectively that need to be observed and not rushed through, particularly the final male fermata that involves a transition into the coda. Many of these can be approached by subdividing the measure into four while approaching and leaving the fermata. The *accelerando* to the end of the piece at the coda should be handled with care and not overdone as the piano part becomes even more difficult and could derail if the conductor gets overzealous.

Ultimately, *Tafellied* is a great piece to program. It is fun for the audience, the singers and the conductor, and it features the strengths of the female and male sections individually as well as the whole choir at the end. This piece is probably too

difficult for most high school choirs due to the 8-part divisi, the female and male features, and the German diction. This would be a great piece to program with any university-level choral ensemble and beyond. Having attempted this piece once, I would like to program this piece again someday with my own choir.

Appendix III:

Video Excerpts

Excerpt 1: Atlanta Summer Conducting Institute Master Classes Summer 2013

- *Kyrie* from *Missa Sancti Nicolai Hob. XXII* by F.J. Haydn
- *Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen* from *Ein Deutsches Requiem* by Johannes Brahms
- *Wie der Hirsch schreit* from *Der 42. Psalm op. 42* by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy

Excerpt 2: Compilation of Excerpts

- *Adoramus te, Christe* by Orlando di Lasso
- *Weep No More* by David Childs
- *Ave Maria* by Kevin Memley
- *The Conversion of Saul* by Z. Randall Stroope
- *Nox Aurumque* by Eric Whitacre
- *Vox Populi* by Giedrius Svilainis