

THE EMERGENCE OF ALL-STATE VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLES IN THE  
UNITED STATES FROM 1978 TO 2022

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Since the creation of the first all-state vocal jazz ensemble in 1978, similar ensembles have been established in roughly half of the United States. This paper contains historical summaries of the creation of all-state vocal jazz ensembles in nineteen of those states, primarily as recounted via interviews with those ensembles' founders. Each semi-structured interview was conducted over video conference or phone and lasted approximately one hour; resulting interview data was analyzed using qualitative methods. During the creation of each ensemble the respective founders needed to secure the support of a host organization, determine where and when to convene, and decide how to address auditions, sound reinforcement, rhythm sections, and funding. The diversity of solutions to these shared challenges reflects the diverse priorities of each founder as well as the unique conditions in which each all-state vocal jazz ensemble was established. However, several elements were common across these stories, including the influence of existing festivals and all-state ensembles, and tensions within the choral education community regarding the value of the vocal jazz idiom relative to traditional choirs, show choirs, and other vocal ensembles. In a few cases, established all-state vocal jazz ensembles were discontinued; these stories further illustrate the challenges such ensembles face and the conditions that foster their perpetuation.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Preface

This study examines all-state vocal jazz ensembles in order to present a historical narrative of the process by which such ensembles have emerged in the United States. At present, while all fifty states host one or more traditional statewide honor choirs, only twenty-four states either currently host or once hosted one or more statewide honors vocal jazz ensembles. Extant histories suggest the development of formal vocal jazz education has occurred in liminal contexts between the traditional choral and instrumental jazz paradigms. Statewide honors jazz choirs provide a measure of vocal jazz education at the secondary level, as well as the perceived validity of vocal jazz in each state vis-à-vis traditional choirs, show choirs, and other ensembles.

The majority of all-state vocal jazz ensembles have been hosted through either state music educator associations (MEAs), or state chapters of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). The creation of these ensembles has occurred over a long period, with the earliest dating to 1978, and the most-recent slated to debut in Summer 2022. Their founders reflect an array of professional backgrounds and motivations for creating all-state jazz choirs. Some ensembles have remained largely stable since their inception, while others have been discontinued or reestablished, have changed host organizations, or expanded. Several different approaches have emerged with regard to auditions and recruitment, amplification, ensemble make up, and financing. With such a diversity of outcomes, and in light of current ongoing efforts to establish new such ensembles around the country, I believe that the process of their development represents a rich and largely unexplored facet of the history of vocal jazz education, with important implications for the advancement of the field.

## Terminology

Throughout this document, I use the terms *jazz choir* and *vocal jazz ensemble* interchangeably. Individual organizations or educators may use one or the other—sometimes both—to refer to a given ensemble, but because there does not appear to be any consistent difference between the use or meaning of these terms in current scholarship in the field, I make no distinction here.

Additionally, I use the term *all-state* to refer to any statewide honors ensemble for the purposes of this research. Definitions of an all-state ensemble that seek to differentiate it from other statewide honors ensembles do exist. However, these definitions vary by state; they are not unified by any consistent criteria and are often only maintained to reinforce a perceived hierarchy of music education organizations and activities within a given state. As such, I have not retained these distinctions—except in those cases where they have played a significant role in the historical narrative—to more clearly and consistently reflect the common function and shared features of these ensembles within vocal jazz education.

Finally, the term *repertoire and standards* (R&S) refers to either individuals or groups in positions of leadership within the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). R&S chairs and/or committees exist at the state, regional, and national levels, and are responsible for representing, promoting, and supporting choral activity for a given constituency (i.e., community choirs, middle school choirs, etc.) or paradigm (i.e., vocal jazz, show choir, children's choir, etc.). Although in recent years ACDA has replaced the term R&S with *repertoire and resources* (R&R), for the purposes of this research the terms may be considered interchangeably.



## CHAPTER 2

### STATE OF RESEARCH

#### Research on the History of Jazz Education

Jazz education has received increasing scholarly attention over the past four decades. Early scholarship included pedagogical and philosophical studies explicitly aimed to advance curricular jazz education (Fisher, 1981; Kuzmich, 1989), as well as general histories of jazz education in academia (Carter, 1986; McDaniel, 1993; Murphy, 1994). These early works prioritize educational practice at the post-secondary level, and largely exclude vocal jazz. As Perea (2012) notes, this exclusion of vocal jazz from the traditional canon of jazz education history reflects still-dominant attitudes of instrumental jazz educators and scholars, who “deride the vocal jazz subgenre as inauthentic, disingenuous, or just plain cheesy” (p. 221).

While more recent jazz education history scholarship has been critical of earlier narratives, most still presume the exclusion of vocal jazz. West’s (2015) meta-analysis of jazz education research includes only one article with an explicitly vocal focus—Madura’s (2008) study of vocal jazz improvisation cognition. Prouty (2005) aimed to decentralize the role of post-secondary institutions in the development of jazz education, and to locate those developments within the context of shifting practices in professional jazz performance and recording. Prouty asserts that this institutional focus has undervalued the contributions of influential individual jazz musician-educators and has alienated jazz education from the non-academic jazz community. This latter point is explored extensively in Wilf’s (2014) ethnographic study of the jazz programs at Berklee College of Music in Boston and the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music in New York City. Wilf highlights pervasive epistemological and cultural tensions between academic and non-academic jazz, as does Warner (2014) within the context of secondary-level

jazz education. Jones's (2005) survey of jazz in Oklahoma music teacher education notably gives equal consideration to both the instrumental and vocal paradigms, and specifically recommends further study of jazz education activity within ACDA.

### Research on the History of All-State Ensembles

Statewide honors ensembles have been a part of secondary-level music education in the United States for nearly a century; they emerged in tandem with the proliferation of secondary school bands and orchestras in the 1920s and 30s (Maddy, 1929; Mark & Gary, 2007). As such, they have a commensurately long history of scholarly attention. Most of these studies have aimed to examine contemporary all-state practices and policies, and are not explicitly historical; however, because they describe the practices of their own times, these studies can serve as primary documents that help reveal a history of all-state ensembles.

### All-State Bands and Orchestras

Many of the earliest statewide honors ensembles were established in an effort to promote collaboration over competition, channeling contemporary fervor for interscholastic competitive festivals. Instead of pitting individual district ensembles against one another, students representing districts across the state were selected to perform together at state music educator conferences (Maddy, 1929; Mark & Gary, 2007; Welker, 1997). Oldham's (1966) national survey of all-state bands and orchestras necessarily excludes jazz bands, as it predates the expansion of secondary jazz education. In contrast, Elliot's 1995 survey (as cited in Welker, 1997) included both all-state concert and jazz bands, reflecting both shifting attitudes toward jazz in schools and the spread of jazz within high school band programs.

## All-State Choirs

Although Welker (1997) focused on all-state bands, he provides an account of an early study of all-state choirs as well. In 1954, Campbell conducted a study of all-state ensembles in Pennsylvania, including members of both the 1947 and 1954 ensembles, in an effort to examine student and teacher perceptions of the festivals (as cited in Welker, 1997). As this study predates the presence of vocal jazz ensembles, it necessarily excludes them.

However, following the emergence of vocal jazz ensembles at the post-secondary and secondary levels, a number of studies have partly included vocal jazz within surveys of all-state choirs. When Wine (1996) surveyed the structure, procedures, and variance of all-state choirs around the country for the 1994-95 academic year, he only accounted for two all-state vocal jazz ensembles. Reames (1997; 2000) conducted a series of annual reports on all-state choirs for the *Choral Journal*; these articles contain similar inconsistencies as those that appear in Wine (1996). Spillane's (2004) study of repertoire across all statewide honor choirs from 1995 to 2000 drew extensively from Reames's reports. His description of her method sheds light on the source of these gaps in vocal jazz representation: Reames, like Wine before her, relied primarily on self-reported information as furnished by host organization leadership and state choral chairs. I contend that the gaps in the historical record produced by this narrow data set reveal both weak operationalization of "all-state choirs," and possible ignorance of and indifference toward all-state vocal jazz ensembles. As Perea (2012) notes, although vocal jazz ensembles draw from both the instrumental jazz and Western choral traditions, "[c]horal traditionalists view vocal jazz as fun at best, [and] potentially damaging at worst" (p. 221). My analysis of representations of vocal jazz in fifty years of articles in the *Choral Journal* suggests that the field has indeed faced decades of mistrust, misunderstanding, and trepidation from the traditional choral community.

Not all research by traditional choral scholars has suffered from these inconsistencies. A similar study by McCord (2003) produced a more complete picture of national all-state choral practices, which accounted for vocal jazz ensembles; perhaps this outcome resulted from her specific elicitation on the diversity of all-state ensemble types and host organizations in the survey instrument. McCord's results indicated the presence of thirteen all-state vocal jazz ensembles throughout the country at the time of her data collection. Due to the generalized quantitative reporting of McCord's study, it is impossible to glean more specific information on all-state vocal jazz ensembles from this study. And while Hickman (2015) notes that "all-state jazz choirs and show choirs are increasingly common" (p. 37), her detailed, updated summary of all-state choral practices in each state does not include any of these jazz choirs, instead discussing only traditional SATB, SSAA, and TTBB ensembles.

#### Research on Vocal Jazz Education

Since neither traditional choral nor instrumental jazz scholarship regularly includes vocal jazz in its scope, an independent series of scholarly conversations have emerged from within the vocal jazz education community over the past thirty years. Notable lines of inquiry have developed around vocal jazz pedagogy (Buchholz, 2010; Moline, 2019; Silvera-Jensen, 2005), vocal jazz teacher education (Amerind, 2013; Cruse, 1999; Venesile, 2011), vocal jazz improvisation (Hargreaves, 2016; Walker, 2005; Ward-Steinman, 2014), and vocal jazz ensembles, detailed below.

#### Vocal Jazz Ensembles

Pisciotta (1992) crafted the first substantive history of the vocal jazz education movement. She chronicled the pioneering efforts of Hal Malcolm, Waldo King, and John Moawad, the development of the field through the festivals, workshops, and camps directed by

those she identified as among the “second generation” of vocal jazz educators, and described the then-current state of the field, highlighting the efforts of the “third generation.” Pisciotta’s research also established definitions for vocal jazz ensembles, including changes in performance practice and voicing/instrumentation from the late 1960s to the early 1990s.

Monkelien (2001) detailed the singular influence of noted vocal jazz educator Phil Mattson, whom Pisciotta described as being among the “second generation.” Monkelien paints a rich and engaging portrait of Mattson’s career, his expansion of the field, and his ensemble innovations, pedagogical, aesthetic, and structural. Monkelien attributes aspects of the modern definitions of a vocal jazz ensemble to Mattson’s innovations.

Letson (2010) described the emergence and development of vocal jazz education in three widely acclaimed post-secondary institutions, focusing on the efforts of the educators who established and directed those programs: Gene Aitken at the University of Northern Colorado, Larry Lapin at the University of Miami, and Stephen Zegree at Western Michigan University.

Amerind (2013) updated Pisciotta’s historical account, explicitly centering the vocal jazz ensemble as the core of the movement, aesthetically and pedagogically. His research added an exploration of the professional precursors to the vocal jazz ensemble, its musical foundations in the arrangements of Jon Hendricks and Gene Puerling, developments since the early 1990s, and a rationale for its widespread adoption in scholastic music education.

Each of these authors focused on developments at the post-secondary and professional level, and as such, largely do not address the growth of vocal jazz education in high schools, including all-state ensembles. Scholarship focused on the secondary level has tended to stay within the confines of individual states or regions. Cruse (1999) surveyed the status of vocal jazz education in Texas high schools. She reported that vocal jazz ensembles were included in

roughly one quarter of the programs of survey respondents, demonstrating both the spread of vocal jazz education at the secondary level and barriers to its advancement. Postas (2017) presented what he describes as a rise and fall of vocal jazz education at the secondary level in New Jersey, highlighting the influence of individual educators and programs. And Hamilton (2017) chronicled the emergence and development of vocal jazz ensembles in the secondary schools in the Boise Valley in Idaho, from the late 1960s through the 1980s.

Neither Cruse nor Hamilton include any description of all-state vocal jazz in their studies, since both examined periods that predate the creation of such ensembles in their respective states, and Postas makes only a passing reference to the establishment of the New Jersey all-state jazz choir.

### Significance of Study

While meaningful discourse exists on the histories of jazz education, all-state ensembles, and vocal jazz ensembles, no prior study has explored the origins of all-state vocal jazz ensembles. I believe this is primarily attributable to the exclusion of vocal jazz from the traditional choral and instrumental jazz discourses, the prominent role of post-secondary programs and educators on the development of vocal jazz education, and the relative nascency of vocal jazz education research. In documenting this history, I aim to illuminate an important and ascendant aspect of the field, ultimately advancing vocal jazz education in the United States. As McCarthy (2003) asserts, “history is freedom, that it engenders consciousness in oppressed groups;” “historical understanding benefits all music educators, not simply the small group of historical researchers already convinced of its value” (p. 131). Historical research in music education should “raise consciousness about what is important,” (Humphreys, 1998, p. 90), and can inspire, motivate, unify, and organize current practitioners (Heller & Wilson, 1982, p. 16).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

This study utilized a qualitatively informed historical approach, drawing on semi-structured interviews with key figures in the creation of each ensemble, as well as primary documents including past all-state programs, professional journals, internal organizational memos, correspondence, news articles, and social media posts. Through this triangulation of multiple data sources, I have worked to improve the credibility of the resulting historical narrative (Bhattacharya, 2017; Tracy, 2010).

In 2020, I conducted a study of vocal jazz in *Choral Journal*, the flagship publication of the American Choral Directors Association. Assisted by two published indices of the journal, available on the ACDA website, I identified, summarized, and analyzed the content of each article on vocal jazz from 1970 to 2020. The themes and chronology that emerged from that study provided additional historical context for the interview data (Thomas, 2020).

Oral history conducted through interviews with influential jazz educators has informed a substantial body of research (Letson, 2010; Mason, 2005; Monkeliën, 2001; Pisciotta, 1992; Postas, 2017; Tolson, 2013). I have sought to build on that tradition. According to McCarthy (2003), it is “valuable to survey the perspectives of teachers who were practising at the time,” and “important to capture the memories of current and retired teachers through oral history, thus documenting practice for future researchers” (p. 131). According to Volk (2003), interviewing those “who played a key role in the specific event being explored,” can “provide new information that is often unattainable any other way” (p. 56).

I conducted the interviews according to the following procedure. I contacted the current vocal jazz chair of the host organization in each state, or a knowledgeable figure within my

professional vocal jazz network who could help identify the all-state jazz choir's founder(s). Using archival documents and personal communication with said contacts, I identified the individual(s) who played a key role in the creation of the respective all-state vocal jazz ensemble and contacted the identified individual(s) to confirm their role and establish their provisional willingness to participate in the study. This phase of the procedure often necessitated communication with extended networks of educators, particularly in those states where the all-state jazz choir establishment predated the involvement of current leadership by many years. Following confirmation of an individual's founding role, I distributed and collected letters of consent to participate in the study, including a list of primary interview questions.

The questions were informed by Spradley's (1979) approach (as cited in Bhattacharya, 2017, pp. 132-134): sequenced to establish rapport and facilitate the flow of responses from one to the next. I intended them to progress from the general towards the specific in an effort to note salient details at each step, informing follow up questions.

- What can you tell me about your relationship to vocal jazz?
- How did the idea of starting the all-state jazz choir first come to you?
- Were there other ensembles that you considered as a model for this one?
- What can you tell me about your role in the creation of the all-state jazz choir?
- What steps did you take leading up to that first ensemble?
- To whom did you propose the creation of the ensemble, and how was the proposal received?
- What challenges did you face in establishing the ensemble?
- How do you think you might do things differently if you were trying to create the ensemble now?

I conducted one approximately sixty-minute interview with each participant over Zoom, or phone call at the participant's request, recording the interviews, and collecting field notes



during each. I conceived of these sessions according to Hochschild's (2005) term "elite interviews," meaning those that seek to

acquire information and context that only that person can provide about some event or process: What did that person do and why? How does he or she explain and justify his/her own behavior? What does the person remember of how others behaved, and why? How does the person understand and explain the trajectory of the event or process? What succeeded or failed, from that person's vantage point? (p. 124)

Hochschild explains that elite interviews are well-suited to research that "traces the history or development of a phenomenon" (p. 124)—in this case, the establishment of all-state vocal jazz ensembles. Given the semi-structured nature of the interview protocol, I was able to explore several specific aspects of each participant's experiences and engage in a dialogue that improved both their understanding of my questions and my understanding of their responses.

I manually transcribed the recorded audio from the interviews and provided a denaturalized transcription of each to the respective participant for member checking. Manual transcription afforded the opportunity for close, sustained engagement with the data. While transcribing the interviews, I maintained a collection of research memos and highlighted passages that suggested emergent themes (Saldaña, 2014). I continued to add to my research memos during the re-storying process, while writing a series of condensed historical narratives on the origin of each state's ensemble (see Chapter 4, State Summaries). I then consolidated my research memos into a preliminary list of emergent themes and searched each interview transcript by corresponding keywords. The process allowed me to refine the emergent themes by observing connections in the data I had previously overlooked, condensing or expanding individual themes according to my improved understanding. This analytical approach was informed by the qualitative tradition, as articulated by Saldaña (2014) and Bhattacharya (2017). I have presented the resulting emergent themes in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4  
STATE SUMMARIES

Preface

I have identified 24 states that either currently have or once had one or more all-state vocal jazz ensemble. I was able to gather interviews from those who established (or in some cases, reestablished) the all-state ensembles in 19 of those 24 states. Summaries of those histories are presented in this chapter, organized by approximate chronology of inaugural performance. In instances of ensembles reestablished by the research participants, I have presented those narratives according to the year the ensemble was restarted, rather than by the year of the previous ensemble's debut, to better contextualize the history of that reestablishment. I have also briefly presented the information I was able to gather from secondary sources for the all-state ensembles whose founders were unavailable for interview.

In Table 1, I have identified each of the educators who provided an interview for this research. These interviews informed the historical narratives that comprise the rest of this chapter, except where secondary sources are cited. Any direct quotes from these interviews have been indicated as such. In all other instances, I have paraphrased from the interview transcripts while writing each state summary as part of the restorying process.

**Table 1: Interview Participants**

<b>Interview Participant</b>	<b>Associated State</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>
Brenda Buchanan	Indiana	2/16/22
Lonnie Cline	Oregon	3/13/22
Jill DeWeese	California	2/23/22
Diana Dohrmann	New Jersey	2/23/22
Beth Fritz	Missouri	2/24/22
Bruce Gatchell	New Hampshire	2/17/22
Neil Hansen	Wyoming	2/15/22

Interview Participant	Associated State	Interview Date
Jeff Kerr	Rhode Island	3/3/22
Marty Lassman	Delaware	2/1/22
Rob Lawrence	Missouri	2/28/22
Dave Perry	Arizona	3/22/22
Mike Plunkett	Oklahoma	1/26/22
Fred Ritter	Nebraska	2/3/22
Kathy Schereck	Wisconsin	1/24/22
Jed Scott	Michigan	2/2/22
Kathleen Shannon	Delaware	2/1/22
Diana Spradling	New York	2/7/22
John Stafford	Kansas	1/25/22
Will Taylor	Colorado	2/21/22
Quinn Van Paepeghem	Idaho	2/15/22
Linda Vanderpool	Iowa	2/17/22
David von Kampen	Nebraska	2/1/22

### Washington, 1978

As reported by Gene Grier in the September 1978 issue of *Choral Journal*, Frank DeMiero established the all-state jazz choir in Washington, hosted jointly by the Washington Music Educators Association and the state chapter of NAJE. In the spring of '77, DeMiero had begun hosting a vocal jazz festival at Edmonds Community College, anchored by his ensemble there, Soundsation. The article included DeMiero's guidelines for establishing all-state jazz choirs in other states: He stated the need for MEA support, suggested that taped auditions demonstrate both solo and ensemble skills, highlighted the importance of all-state rehearsals as educational experiences, and defined the ensemble as 24 singers—three per 8-part mixed divisi—and four-piece rhythm section. DeMiero also noted that the conductor of the inaugural ensemble, Doug Anderson, programmed works arranged or composed by Washington writers.

### Illinois, 1981

As memorialized in the February 2006 issue of Illinois ACDA's *The Conductor's Podium*, Walter Lamble began teaching at Glenbrook South High School in the north Chicago suburbs in 1977. The year prior, while teaching choral music and music education at California State University, Sacramento, he published one of the earliest articles promoting, defining, and defending swing choirs in ACDA's *Choral Journal* (Lamble, 1976). Lamble was the driving force behind the creation of the all-state jazz choir, first appearing at the 1981 Illinois Music Educators Association conference (L. Southard, personal communication, February 20, 2022). The ensemble was conducted by Frank DeMiero, who presented a workshop the day before the performance entitled "Vocal Jazz Techniques" that featured the all-state jazz choir. A rhythm section for the ensemble was provided by Northeastern Illinois University (Illinois Music Educators Association, 1981).

### New Hampshire, 1983

When Dave Seiler left his position as director of bands at the University of Idaho in the summer of 1972 (Seacoast Jazz Society, n.d.), Bruce Gatchell had just finished his first year as the band director at Concord High School. That fall, as Seiler began teaching at the University of New Hampshire, it seems he brought something of the Pacific Northwest vocal jazz spark with him. Within two years, Seiler had established the UNH Jazz Festival—later renamed in honor of Clark Terry—which invited participation from both instrumental and vocal jazz groups. Gatchell was among the educators who brought their bands to the festival and there got their first taste of the vocal jazz idiom. He had been inspired to teach jazz at the hands of his own high school choir director, a jazz pianist by the name of Arthur Mirabile, with whom he saw Joe Williams and Count Basie, Thelonious Monk, and Lionel Hampton on school trips. When Gatchell became

director of both the band and choral programs at Concord in 1980, he was quick to establish a new jazz choir there.

Already a member of the New Hampshire Music Educators Association executive board, Gatchell was approached the following year with a suggestion by the NHMEA president: why not warm up the audience with a pre-concert jazz band at the traditional all-state festival? Incensed by the suggestion that jazz was suitable background music as parents and teachers filtered into the concert hall, Gatchell was inspired to seize the opportunity to establish all-state ensembles for both instrumentalists and vocalists. Leading a small handful of like-minded New Hampshire jazz educators, including Seiler, Gatchell proposed a new, separate festival to be held in February—the only unoccupied time in the school calendar—rather than compete for a spot in the already-crowded traditional all-state festival in April. A separate festival, Gatchell contended, would also allow students to participate in both jazz and traditional all-state ensembles without needing to choose between them.

Beyond their concerns about the potential for bad weather, the NHMEA board worried that the audition expectations for the jazz choir would turn students away: students were asked to audition individually, including a sight-reading component, neither of which were part of the traditional choir selection process at the time. But through Gatchell's persistence—and at times, by his own description, belligerence—the NHMEA executive board relented, and the first all-state jazz festival was convened at West High School in 1983. Despite a lack of funding—'on a shoestring,' according to Gatchell—the event was a success.

#### Arizona, 1989

When Dave Perry first brought his madrigal choir from Mountain View High School to the Jazz Madrigal Festival at Northern Arizona University in the early '80s, he had no prior

background in jazz. But when NAU's vocal jazz ensemble took the stage alongside a handful of top-performing high school jazz choirs at the festival, Perry was intrigued. To his ears, many musical elements were common to both the madrigal and vocal jazz idioms, and so he began programming jazz repertoire for his 24-voice ensemble. Informed by the groups he heard at NAU, Perry soon added a three-part rhythm section, recruiting instrumentalists from the school band and orchestra. Within five years of their first appearance at the Jazz Madrigal Festival, Perry had switched from area mics to a one-to-one set up, cutting the ensemble down to 12 singers in pursuit of the tighter sound of the NAU ensemble.

Soon he had established a reputation in the state for the strength of his vocal jazz program, leading George Gardner—a seasoned show choir director from Holbrook High School—to approach Perry to head up the jazz side of a joint jazz choir/show choir all-state initiative. At the time, the Arizona Music Educators Association already hosted an all-state jazz band in a stand-alone fall festival, in addition to the traditional all-state band, choir, and orchestra in the spring. By adding the jazz and show choirs to the fall jazz band event, students would still be able to pursue the traditional all-state ensembles. Surprised and excited by the suggestion, Perry agreed that an all-state jazz ensemble ought to be accessible to vocalists as well as instrumentalists, and the two men brought their idea to the leaders of AMEA's choral branch.

With the organization's blessing, Perry devoted himself to preparations over the summer: designing an audition process, drafting a timeline, contacting prospective guest conductors, and calculating the cost per student. He consulted with leading vocal jazz educators in other states, including Gene Aitken at the University of Northern Colorado and Doug Anderson of Oregon, then-recent national ACDA repertoire and standards (R&S) chair for jazz and show choirs. Armed with their guidance, Perry's careful and thorough preparation allowed him to bypass

many of the potential pitfalls of a new all-state jazz choir. He assembled a team of decorated high school choral directors from around the state to evaluate audition tapes, selecting the 16 singers who demonstrated the strongest pitch accuracy on major and minor scales and a scat line composed by inaugural conductor Nile Norton of Foothill College. Though limited to 16 voices by the 16-channel mixer volunteered for the event, Perry and his colleagues also selected a few alternates as insurance against students arriving underprepared.

The only logistical hurdle they faced in the first year were time-consuming stage resets needed between the jazz band, jazz choir, and show choir portions of the concert. Though the fall date was later dropped in favor of hosting the jazz choir at the educators' conference in January, Perry maintains that a fall event avoids conflict with musical theatre productions in the middle of the school year, the spring all-state, and the heat of Arizona summers that see many students leave for cooler climates. And though the relationship is sometimes contentious in other states, the jazz and show choir communities in Arizona remain amicable, with mutual respect for each idiom's unique strengths and with a number of students auditioning for both ensembles in any given year.

#### Oregon, 1992

Lonnie Cline was a young teacher at East Junior High School in the Boise School District when he first heard a jazz choir at a district festival. Directed by Jerry Vevig, the vocal jazz ensemble at Capital High School was one of the earliest and most successful exponents of the idiom at the secondary level, with winning jazz festival appearances from as early as 1971. Cline was so inspired by the Capital Singers' performance of Dave Barduhn's arrangements on "Four" and "Am I Blue?" that he immediately created a similar ensemble at East. The following year, Cline took a job at Meridian High School, where he would go on to create and direct no fewer

than three vocal jazz ensembles. His expertise and passion for the art form deepened with guidance from pioneering educators including Vevig, Waldo King of Roosevelt High School, and most especially Hal Malcolm, whose own work at Mt. Hood Community College formed the epicenter of the vocal jazz ensemble movement. For three years while teaching at Mountain Home High School, Cline's ensembles delivered consecutive winning performances at Malcolm's Northwest Swing Choir Festival.

By 1991, a decade into what became his career-defining tenure at Clackamas Community College in Oregon, Cline was already a veteran vocal jazz educator and ready to spearhead the creation of a new all-state jazz choir there. Aware of the many efforts across the state to make room for more vocal jazz in secondary school schedules and budgets, Cline believed that an all-state ensemble would help to strengthen those arguments and legitimize the ascendent idiom throughout Oregon. After persuading the Oregon Music Educators Association all-state chair to give him a chance, Cline's objective was clear: make the first year so successful that even the skeptical traditional music educators couldn't say "we don't need this." His vision for the inaugural ensemble aimed to honor the emergent legacy of vocal jazz education in the state, featuring a program of repertoire by Oregon arrangers. Cline reached out to high school directors whose programs had strong vocal jazz reputations, hoping to secure applications from the most proficient students. Of the 70 or 80 applicants, Cline prioritized reading ability, vocal quality, and especially aural skills when selecting the 25 students who sang in the first ensemble. In order to ensure a strong rhythm section, Cline enlisted the aid of colleagues, including guitarist Quinn Van Paepeghem and pianist Dave Barduhn, to help with the recruitment and coaching of players.

On February 14, 1992, the OMEA all-state jazz choir debuted, performing on risers and amplified with area mics, per the tradition established throughout the northwest since the late



'60s. Though this approach was soon eclipsed by the one-to-one miking advocated by Phil Mattson, Cline believes that the widespread success of vocal jazz education in the northwest—including the first Oregon all-state—was facilitated by the simpler, less expensive amplification strategy.

### New York, 1993

Diana Spradling had been singing jazz since the age of 15. In her hometown of Winter Haven, Florida, her first engagements were with a semi-professional jazz band, led by her high school director, and though singing jazz was strictly forbidden at Florida State University—had her voice professor known, she risked expulsion from the studio—Spradling continued to gig throughout her undergraduate years. In 1981 she created the first vocal jazz ensemble at Syracuse University, establishing a nexus for the movement between her program and the program directed by Dave Riley at Ithaca College, 50 miles to the south. Shortly thereafter, Spradling began hosting a vocal jazz festival at Syracuse, first featuring Kirby Shaw, followed by Frank DeMiero, as guest clinicians. DeMiero and Spradling became fast friends, and through their friendship she was introduced to the Pacific Northwest network of vocal jazz educators whose work most-directly informed Spradling's concept of the idiom, including Dave Cross, Kirk Marcy, Dave Barduhn, and Vijay Singh. Following DeMiero's inaugural direction of the ensemble, Spradling was invited to conduct the second all-state jazz choir in Wisconsin in 1992, and the experience provided a catalyst to initiate such a group in New York.

Several all-county vocal jazz honors ensembles had already been established in New York, but Spradling knew that only a well-organized and thoroughly researched proposal would secure the support of the New York State School Music Association. NYSSMA's existing all-state program utilized a highly structured and systematic process for the selection of students, a

system Spradling closely adhered to when drafting materials for vocal jazz. She also devised a system for training all-state vocal jazz adjudicators, paralleling NYSSMA's existing adjudication practices; Spradling invited a group of educators already engaged in the vocal jazz idiom to be trained for consistent assessment of auditions across the state. Students would perform one ballad and one uptempo from a specified collection of Jamey Aebersold play-along recordings.

Spradling also gathered information from states with more-established traditions in vocal jazz education—including California, Colorado, Arizona, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Wisconsin—to contextualize her proposal to NYSSMA leadership. She brought her materials to a meeting with NYSSMA's executive director Bruce Purrington, then-president Pete Brasch, and former president Joe Sugar. Impressed with her thorough preparation and intrigued by the opportunity to join an emergent movement, the three men immediately approved Spradling's proposal.

Following approval, Spradling invited leading high school vocal jazz director Carol Jacobe of Baldwinsville, NY, to co-chair the ensemble. While the bassist and drummer were selected from the all-state jazz band auditions, Spradling hired retired music educator and jazz pianist Leighton "Sox" Tiffault to anchor the rhythm section and provide support to the vocalists in rehearsal. The initial sound system was volunteered and operated by the choral director at Dix Hills in Long Island. Though just over 30 students auditioned for the 24-voice ensemble, Spradling had contacted directors of strong vocal jazz programs in advance to ensure that their experienced students auditioned. And though by the fall of 1993 Spradling had begun teaching at Western Michigan University, the system she established was successful, and with Jacobe's assistance the NYSSMA all-state vocal jazz ensemble debuted in November '93.

## Iowa, 1998

Since early childhood, Linda Vanderpool had a passion for jazz. Inspired by her father's love of Louis Armstrong, she learned by singing along to his records and those of other jazz trumpet players. In high school, she played guitar in the swing choir, though by her own description the ensemble had no connection to jazz, and while her college training in music education was strictly classical, she never stopped looking for ways to bring jazz to her students. When Vanderpool accepted a position at Hoover High School in 1991, she inherited direction of a show choir. Later that year, following their appearance at a competition, Vanderpool was struck by the feedback from one of judges; with very little accompanying commentary, the adjudicator questioned Vanderpool's intent for and commitment to the show choir. Having little enthusiasm for the idiom herself, Vanderpool presented her conflict to Jerry Tolson, celebrated jazz educator and fellow music teacher at Hoover. The incisive adjudicator had been none other than Phil Mattson, who had recently relocated to Creston, Iowa, and had begun teaching vocal jazz at Southwestern Community College. Already enamored with Mattson's ensemble recordings, Vanderpool eagerly accepted her instrumental colleague's advice to attend the new vocal jazz summer camp at SWCC. Her experiences with Mattson in the summer of '92 established the foundation of Vanderpool's concept of the idiom and its pedagogy. Thus inspired, she transformed the Hoover High School show choir into a vocal jazz ensemble the following fall and created a vocal section of the school's existing jazz festival in an effort to build enthusiasm for the art form among Iowa choral directors.

Vanderpool's zeal for the movement was accelerated as she began attending national IAJE conferences, through which she connected with an ever-wider community of vocal jazz educators. The most influential of these luminaries proved to be Diana Spradling. Fresh from her

own success creating an all-state jazz choir in New York, Spradling was happy to share her wisdom with Vanderpool and encourage her to pursue such an ensemble in Iowa. The evidence of Spradling's influence runs throughout the model Vanderpool proposed, most clearly than in the audition procedure, which included both sight reading and second-chorus treatments of standards over Aebersold backing tracks. However, rather than propose that the jazz choir be added to the existing all-state program, Vanderpool petitioned the Iowa Choral Directors Association to host the ensemble at their summer conference. Confident that the long-established traditional all-state festival's organizers would have no interest in supporting the new ensemble, Vanderpool caught a lucky break at ICDA—the coordinator of the 1998 conference, a show choir expert herself, was open to the idea and approved it, despite some members' misgivings.

At the time, ICDA hosted no other statewide honors choirs at the summer conference, and though they provided no direct financing of the ensemble, certain members decried the decision to host as unfair to other portions of the choral community in Iowa. And because so few choral directors in the state had any skill or experience in vocal jazz, Vanderpool's own students were heavily represented in the first few ensembles. But year after year, she persuaded successive summer conference chairs to host the jazz choir until interest grew and it could be sustained on its own momentum.

#### New Jersey, 2001

When Diana Dohrmann first began teaching in 1974, she hoped to become a jazz band director. Faced with the barriers of sexist hiring practices, the young pianist opted for a choral position at her alma mater instead, flexing her arranging skills as the founding director of a show choir. The high school's instrumental jazz program had been strong since Dohrmann's years as a student, and by the early '90s the jazz band was earning top marks in several regional festivals.

So it was that Dohrmann, while accompanying the band as a chaperone, attended the Berklee Jazz Festival and was inspired by the vocal jazz ensembles she heard there. By 1997, her newly formed jazz choir took first place for the second consecutive year at the festival. Her reputation in vocal jazz spread and soon she was invited to organize the Mid-Atlantic GRAMMY Jazz Choir. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when the New Jersey Association of Jazz Educators decided to create a new all-state jazz choir in 2000, they looked to Dohrmann to spearhead their efforts. In the span of less than half a year—from October '00 to March '01—Dohrmann brought the ensemble from initial proposal to inaugural performance. She mailed letters to around 350 New Jersey directors, inviting their students to a centrally located audition for the ensemble. Enthusiasm and turn out were high for the new opportunity. The group consisted of 16 vocalists, plus the pianist, bassist, and drummer with the second-highest audition for the all-state jazz band.

For the first three years, the New Jersey Honors Jazz Choir performed in the Hilton lobby at the NJMEA conference in New Brunswick, appearing alongside selected school ensembles, while the traditional all-state ensembles, including jazz band, performed at the NJEA teachers convention in Atlantic City. By 2004, however, NJAJE decided the jazz choir had established a successful track record and deserved to perform beside the jazz band at the NJEA convention, including a joint New York Voices arrangement to close the concert. But the move to Atlantic City brought new challenges: now, students who had previously been able to participate in both the jazz and traditional choirs would need to choose between them, and many conservative choral directors steered their students toward the prestige of the more-established ensembles.

This opposition was exacerbated by NJMEA's refusal to co-sponsor the jazz choir as an 'all-state' ensemble, citing insufficient student participation and underdeveloped regional-level feeder ensembles. For Dohrmann, these were nonstarters: The intimate size of a vocal jazz

ensemble—compared to a traditional choir of a hundred or more voices—was essential to the integrity of the idiom, and without NJMEA’s co-sponsorship it was difficult to expand engagement beyond those teachers who already had a background in jazz. For several years, she petitioned the executive board to grant ‘all-state’ designation to the jazz choir, but again and again the votes were blocked by the conservative choral wing of the organization. Dohrmann eventually turned coordination of the ensemble over to others, but the effort to secure NJMEA’s full support continued, and in 2020—two decades after the ensemble’s creation—the vote to grant it ‘all-state’ designation passed.

#### Oklahoma, 2001

By his own estimation, Mike Plunkett knew nothing about jazz when he arrived as a choral music education student at what is now the University of Central Oklahoma in 1976. The school was known for its strong instrumental jazz program, but Plunkett’s introduction to jazz came through the dual influence of his roommate and his men’s glee club director, Coleman Smith. Smith had come up writing and performing with ‘dance’ bands, and he brought his swing arranging skills to the glee club, writing custom arrangements for them. In the spring of his freshman year, Plunkett had a sudden revelation: For the first time, he recognized a track from his roommate’s Stan Kenton collection—Dave Barduhn’s arrangement of *Send In the Clowns*—while working on Smith’s arrangement of the same in glee club. Three weeks later, Plunkett found himself face-to-face with Kenton at a tour stop in Oklahoma, the meeting facilitated by Plunkett’s roommate, whose brother was playing trombone in the band. The concert opened with none other than *Send In the Clowns*, and from that moment on, Plunkett was hooked. He listened to as many Manhattan Transfer, Singers Unlimited, and Lambert, Hendricks, & Ross recordings

he could find, and when he began teaching at Carl Albert High School in 1980, he immediately established a jazz/show choir.

For the first three years, the ensemble performed and competed in both jazz and show choir festivals, before separating into ensembles dedicated to the respective idioms. Plunkett's reputation in vocal jazz grew through the '80s and early '90s, building a small community of likeminded educators through local festivals and exchange concerts. By the mid-90s, this handful of vocal jazz advocates began petitioning the Oklahoma Music Educators Association to add an all-state jazz choir to their traditional band, chorus, orchestra, and jazz band offerings. Citing the logistical challenge of changing an already full and well-established system, OMEA declined. A year or two later, Plunkett was approached by the all-state jazz band coordinator looking for a vocal soloist with the band. Plunkett auditioned over fifty of his own high school students, and the selected singer's performance with the jazz band was well-received. Believing this could lead to the eventual creation of a full vocal jazz ensemble, Plunkett continued to help provide soloists for the jazz band until the year Dave Barduhn was invited as the band's conductor. Already connected through the wider vocal jazz community, Plunkett asked Barduhn to incorporate repertoire for jazz band and SATB quartet, confident that an all-star quartet would pave the way for the creation of an all-state jazz choir. But despite the quartet's outstanding performance, OMEA leadership remained unpersuaded and requested a return to the vocal solo format the following year.

During this same stretch of years, the Oklahoma Choral Directors Association had begun establishing all-state junior high and women's choruses for an event one week prior to the OMEA concerts. When fellow vocal jazz advocate Tony Gonzalez of Norman North High School was elected OCDA president, Plunkett seized the opportunity and proposed that a jazz

choir could join the junior high and women's groups. In time, this approach provided an invaluable boost to vocal jazz interest across Oklahoma, as the audience for the jazz choir included the roughly 250 students in the junior high group, many of whom would be inspired to sing jazz in high school as a result. The proposal was accepted, with an inaugural performance planned for January 2001.

Duane Davis—a masterful and enthusiastic teacher well-versed in both jazz and classical practices—was selected to conduct, and an astonishing 600 students auditioned for the 24-voice ensemble. In a brilliant, mutually beneficial maneuver, Plunkett arranged for the all-state jazz band rhythm section to perform with the jazz choir, reasoning that the students would arrive the following week much stronger for having already played together. In exchange, he would provide the top soprano, alto, tenor, and bass to perform with the jazz band, and the tradition has continued to this day.

#### Colorado, 2001

The story of all-state vocal jazz in Colorado begins when Will Taylor was assigned to student teach with Jim Guinn at East High School. Guinn was a veteran vocal jazz educator; his group, the Angelairens, had a long record of excellence, performing widely—including at a national IAJE conference—since the early 80s. His passion for the art form was passed to Taylor, as was the continued tradition of vocal jazz education at East when Guinn retired in 1995. Taylor's training in the idiom had been strengthened through summers at Phil Mattson's workshop in Creston, IA, starting in 1993, and later at Frank DeMiero's Soundsation jazz camp. In his second year directing the Angelairens, Taylor was invited to bring the ensemble to perform at the Colorado Music Educators Association conference, cementing his reputation as a leading vocal jazz educator.



He soon became a representative on the state music council, and it was there that Steve Meininger—a legendary choral director, by Taylor’s description—introduced Taylor as the teacher who would “start all-state jazz for us here.” The announcement was a complete surprise to all, most of all Taylor, who while supporting the idea found himself unexpectedly charged with the daunting task of realizing Meininger’s vision. Taylor’s first step was to identify and consult with as many all-state jazz choir coordinators as possible from around country, tracking them down when necessary at ACDA and IAJE conferences. Every logistical detail, from designing the auditions and recruiting adjudicators to hiring a conductor and securing student rooms at the Broadmoor hotel fell to Taylor. The first year produced 40 recorded auditions for the 16-voice ensemble, which debuted at the 2001 CMEA conference in Colorado Springs alongside the all-state jazz band.

The inaugural performance, while successful, drew the ire of the instrumental jazz leadership, insulted that many in the audience left after the vocal portion of the concert. Though it soon after acquired a separate performance slot, Taylor was eager to move the ensemble out of the CMEA conference altogether. The many traditional all-state choirs—also hosted by CMEA—performed in a separate ticketed event two weeks after the conference, at the opposite end of the state in Fort Collins. In an effort to increase exposure and generate ticket revenue, Taylor proposed moving the jazz choir to a stand-alone concert in Denver, including a headlining vocal jazz group. The idea was firmly rejected, though several on the CMEA all-state choral board voiced concerns that the jazz choir was too small to ever achieve financial independence. Frustrated, overburdened, and unable to enact the changes he believed were necessary to solve the challenges facing the ensemble, Taylor stepped down after only two years as coordinator. Following his departure, CMEA established a small team of educators that formed a vocal jazz

subset of the all-state choral board, lessening the burden on any one person, and the all-state vocal jazz ensemble survived, subsidized with income from the traditional choral ensembles.

In time, Taylor returned to the choral board, and a chance for his reforms appeared when he became chair. He first moved the all-state choral event from Fort Collins to the Buell Theatre—a major venue in Denver—substantially increasing audience accessibility. Then in 2017, he secured a recurring performance slot for the all-state jazz choir at the same event; fresh from their performance at the CMEA conference two weeks prior, the vocal jazz ensemble would present an abbreviated set for the students in the many traditional all-state choirs. Despite apparent resentment from the most-staunchly traditional choral directors, the majority of students were thrilled and inspired, substantially increasing interest in all-state vocal jazz in each year since. But the increased interest has not diminished applications to the traditional ensembles, and to the present, a large majority of the vocal jazz students perform in both traditional and jazz all-state groups.

#### Wyoming, 2002

Neil Hansen had taught for three years in his home state of Iowa when he moved in 1976 to take a high school band position in Big Piney, Wyoming. He brought with him an interest in jazz, first nurtured while playing trumpet in dance bands in his hometown of Woodward, IA. His first exposure to vocal jazz, however, came while attending the MENC All-Northwest festival in '77. Soundsation—Frank DeMiero's celebrated jazz choir from Edmonds Community College in Washington—blew Hansen away with their musicianship and jazz authenticity. Thus inspired, Hansen looked for a way to start both all-state jazz band and choir in Wyoming. His first move was to seek the support of the Wyoming High School Activities Association; he secured a spot on their agenda, requested time off from work, and made the five-hour drive to their meeting.

His proposal was dismissed almost instantly. Hansen was understandably dejected but undeterred; after five years teaching in Big Piney, he earned his master's degree at the University of Wyoming and began teaching at Northwest College in Powell.

Around this same time, he established the Wyoming chapter of IAJE and began organizing both instrumental and vocal jazz reading ensembles for the state music educators conference, giving many of those directors their first authentic experience in jazz. While teaching at Northwest he established a jazz festival at there, and in 1988, a summer jazz camp in Yellowstone. Enlisting the expertise of his vocal colleagues, Hansen added a week-long camp for singers to the summer program two years later. His experiences establishing and running the camps and festivals honed Hansen's administrative and management skills—perhaps most importantly his financial skills—while simultaneously establishing a statewide network of jazz educators centered on his leadership.

By the start of the '00s, Hansen realized he did not need the support of the activities association, only their sanctioning, and devised a novel solution for his all-state jazz vision. The ensembles would convene on rotation within existing jazz festivals at Northwest, Casper College, and later, the University of Wyoming, sponsored by the state IAJE chapter and funded entirely through student participation. Each all-state ensemble would open for the headlining professional group at their respective festivals, helping to ensure larger concert audiences and inspiring students, parents, and teachers alike. All students auditioned using specified Aebersold backing tracks, with rhythm section players for both groups selected from the same audition pool. With well under a hundred high schools in the entire state, Hansen relied on targeted recruitment to balance the ensembles, sometimes requiring post-audition solicitation from trusted programs. Only teachers who were members of IAJE could submit applications on behalf of their

students; in time, this policy drove statewide membership from fewer than ten educators to nearly sixty.

Less than a decade after the inaugural ensembles in 2002, Hansen was faced with a critical setback: IAJE filed for bankruptcy in 2008, leaving the Wyoming chapter legally defunct. Some teachers felt it was time to ask the Wyoming Music Educators Association to bring the all-state jazz ensembles under their auspices, joining the traditional all-state bands, choirs, and orchestras. Hansen, however, doubted the enthusiasm and dedication of the WMEA leadership to the cause of jazz education, and was suspicious of their expertise in the idiom. Confident in the strength of the system he established, Hansen founded an independent organization—the Wyoming Jazz Educators—to continue the work of the former IAJE chapter, and the organization has sponsored the all-state jazz ensembles ever since.

#### Pennsylvania, 2004

In 2003, Pennsylvania Music Educators Association president Ben Holste proposed the creation of an all-state vocal jazz ensemble to promote the idiom in high schools across the state. Jazz band programs were already strong throughout Pennsylvania—including an all-state ensemble—and Holste’s proposal had the support of veteran instrumental jazz educator and PMEA immediate past president Rich Victor. Nora Burr ridge, first vice president and conference chair, directed one of the few high school vocal jazz ensembles in the state and was eager to see vocal jazz represented at the all-state level. Together, they organized an audition by recorded submission, and the first all-state vocal jazz ensemble debuted at the 2004 PMEA conference in Erie, PA. And though the proficiency of the early ensembles disappointed some members of the instrumental jazz community, their quality gradually improved as choral directors across the state gained experience in the idiom (N. Burr ridge, personal communication, February 23, 2022).

### North Dakota, 2004

Established in the '04-'05 school year by Vicky Boechler of St. Mary's Central High School in Bismarck, ND, the ensemble was hosted by the North Dakota ACDA for its first three years. In 2007, the ensemble was adopted by the North Dakota Music Educators Association with the coordination of Michael Seil, choral director at Legacy High School (M. Seil, personal communication, February 3, 2022).

### California, 2005

When Jill DeWeese started at Downey High School in 1987, she was the only music teacher at the school. Tasked with running both the band and choral programs, the young trombone player worked diligently to learn all she could about directing choirs. It was through this pursuit that she first met Michele Weir and began discovering the vocal jazz idiom. Already familiar with instrumental jazz, DeWeese was well-positioned to apply her skill and knowledge in jazz choir setting. Between 1989 and 1990, she transformed the existing advanced choir at Downey into a vocal jazz ensemble, directing the group until her departure to pursue a master's degree in jazz studies in 1996. While at Downey, a handful of DeWeese's students participated in an all-state jazz choir. In the late '90s, the ensemble was discontinued, but was later resurrected under the auspices of the California chapter of IAJE.

By then, DeWeese had completed her master's degree, taken a position at Fullerton High School, and was again sending students to participate in the ensemble. But in 2003, Dina Humble—then-teacher at Riverside Community College—left her position as state IAJE vocal jazz chair, and the all-state ensemble was discontinued again. Frustrated by the loss of opportunity for her students, DeWeese contacted California IAJE to voice her complaints. With no clear replacement for Humble, DeWeese was invited to the state vocal jazz position and

began to reestablish the all-state ensemble. The organization had cited insufficient student interest as a challenge in previous years, so DeWeese worked hard to improve communication with choral directors around the state and boost participation. Kerry Marsh had just begun teaching at Sacramento State, and with the upcoming state music educator's convention to be held in the city, DeWeese invited Marsh's ensemble to perform on the evening concert. The performance was enthusiastically received, and that night DeWeese announced that Marsh had agreed to conduct the next all-state vocal jazz ensemble. While that year's jazz choir was a success, the years that followed again saw declining student interest.

With the collapse and bankruptcy of IAJE in 2009, DeWeese and the California chapter president Jeff Tower worked swiftly with the rest of the executive board to create an independent nonprofit to continue to support jazz education in the state. DeWeese wrote and submitted the 501(c)(3) application, and within a matter of months, the California Alliance for Jazz was born. CAJ continues to host an all-state jazz choir at the CASMEC conference, but now without external financial support. And though participation costs for any all-state ensemble at CASMEC were standardized, the recent emergence of regional honors jazz choirs—hosted by the Southern California Vocal Association and Northern California Band and Choir Directors Association, respectively—have provided less-expensive alternatives to the CAJ-sponsored ensemble. 2022 saw very few students audition for the all-state jazz choir, and DeWeese—no longer involved with CAJ—believes the ensemble may once again be discontinued in 2023. Beyond the competing influence of the SCVA and NCBCDA ensembles, DeWeese cited the loss of several prominent vocal jazz programs and the departure of prominent collegiate vocal jazz educators for opportunities in other states as among the factors that have contributed to a weakened all-state ensemble in California.

## Wisconsin, 2006

Kathy Schreck first fell in love with jazz harmony while singing in her high school vocal jazz ensemble in Racine, WI. However, when she began her undergraduate work at UW Madison in 1982, she discovered that the pursuit of jazz singing would earn the scorn of the faculty and most of the students. In the confidence of a small group of friends, she kept her passion for the art form alive, listening to Manhattan Transfer recordings and taking the few gigs she could find beyond the university. During her fourth year of teaching, Schreck inherited direction of a high school show choir; by the following year, she had replaced it with a dedicated vocal jazz ensemble. That same year—1991—the Wisconsin School Music Association hosted their first all-state jazz choir, conducted by Frank DeMiero. Although Schreck was not involved the first year, she was soon serving on the WSMA audition committee. There, she revised the vocal jazz audition procedures for the '93 ensemble onward, scaling back what she believed were unrealistic expectations for high school students, particularly in terms of their improvisation proficiency. In 1996 and '97 she served as assistant coordinator, moving to the coordinator role for the following two years. During this period, vocal jazz education flourished in several Wisconsin high schools and colleges, anchored by Lawrence University's jazz festival and the string of celebrated vocal jazz artists they invited to perform. But in 2003, citing the prohibitive costs of professional sound reinforcement, WSMA discontinued the all-state ensemble, and for the next three years Wisconsin had no statewide honors jazz choir.

By 2006, Schreck and fellow vocal jazz educators Janette Hanson, Gary Walth, and Tom Ajack persuaded the Wisconsin Choral Directors Association to add a jazz choir to their existing complement of statewide honors ensembles, which ranged from a children's choir to a collegiate group. Despite the concern of some WCDA board members that they, too, would be

unable to support the equipment needs of a jazz choir, Schereck and her colleagues volunteered to coordinate sound reinforcement from their own inventories, and the all-state jazz choir was resurrected through a new host. In stark contrast to the rigorous selection procedures once used by WSMA, the WCDA ensembles relied primarily on teacher recommendations alone. Well-aware that most high school choral directors in the state lacked training or expertise in vocal jazz, Schereck and her colleagues established audition procedures for the ensemble, refining them over the coming years to focus on aural skill, blend, and tone over improvisation.

WCDA hosted an ensemble for each of the next six years, but towards the end of that period, Lawrence University discontinued the vocal side of its jazz festival, delivering a major blow to vocal jazz around the state. While Schereck attempted to fill this void by hosting a festival from her high school, she could not match the prestige, material resources, or guest artist roster of the festival at Lawrence. The joint television debuts of *Glee* and *The Sing-Off* in 2009 fostered a surge in pop a cappella across Wisconsin, often at the expense of discontinued high school and collegiate vocal jazz ensembles. By 2012, WCDA was unable to form an all-state jazz choir due to insufficient interest, and for three years the ensemble was suspended. During this hiatus, Wisconsin native Tim Buchholz returned, fresh from his doctoral work in vocal jazz at the University of Miami. In 2015 he, Schereck, and Jannette Hanson re-established the ensemble, though for the next five years it was relegated to performance during a luncheon at the WCDA conference to avoid the logistical difficulty of resetting the stage before and after a vocal jazz group in an otherwise unbroken series of traditional acoustic choirs. In an effort to improve the quality of the ensemble, Schereck, Buchholz, and Hanson began incorporating college students as section leaders in 2018. Their participation has significantly strengthened the



ensemble in the years since, though few collegiate vocal jazz programs remain in Wisconsin from which the all-state jazz choir can recruit.

#### Nebraska, 2008

For the first fifteen years of his teaching career, Fred Ritter had no vocal jazz experience whatsoever. Feeling burned out on the pursuit of show choir trophies and dissatisfied with the amount of time and energy devoted to choreography over music in the idiom, Ritter was ready for a new direction. Inspiration struck twice in 1994: At a college festival, Ritter heard a vocal jazz group from Lincoln Southeast High School; later, an ensemble from Douglas High School in Wyoming made a guest appearance at Ritter's Columbus High School on the invitation of the building principal. The two performances left Ritter awe-struck and determined to start exploring vocal jazz with his own students. Despite the prevalence of show choir across the state and over the protest of some students' parents, he dissolved his show choir and transformed it into a vocal jazz ensemble. With no opportunities to do so in-state—Columbus and Lincoln Southeast having the only two high school jazz choirs in Nebraska—Ritter brought his students to festivals in Iowa and in Colorado, modeling his group after the more-established ensembles he heard there. A decade into his vocal jazz journey, Ritter had gained enough experience to establish a festival of his own at Columbus, in collaboration with Joel Schreuder of Chadron State College. During this period, Ritter became increasingly involved with the Nebraska Choral Directors Association, serving as jazz and show choir R&S chair and later as the organization's president.

At the '07 summer NCDA conference, Ritter brought in Steve Zegree and Eph Ehly to direct an educators jazz choir as part of his mission to foster vocal jazz in the state. Following that conference, with support for vocal jazz at a new high, Ritter successfully persuaded NCDA to host an all-state jazz choir the next summer. Though he felt an NMEA-sponsored jazz choir

would do more to advance vocal jazz, the leadership had long denied Ritter's requests, citing already-overcrowded facilities for their traditional all-state ensembles and a prevailing sense that if any new all-state choir were to be added it should be a show choir instead. The inaugural NCDA jazz choir was formed without auditions: each student who was recognized for outstanding performance in their respective high school groups at the 2008 Columbus festival was invited to join in the new all-state ensemble that summer. Formal audition procedures were later established, and the festival continued to serve as a pipeline for the all-state group, including break-out sessions to help students and directors prepare the audition material. Eventually, the festival became an NCDA-hosted event and the auditions themselves were held there.

In time, this insularity became a liability for the all-state jazz choir, with most of the participating students coming from a dwindling number of high schools. In 2015, Ritter retired from Columbus High School; soon, coordination of the all-state ensemble was passed to David von Kampen of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Though von Kampen was and still is a passionate advocate for vocal jazz, the creation of a new all-state show choir signaled a rapid decline in the number of schools participating in vocal jazz. Unwilling to sponsor an ensemble that represented only a few schools, NCDA discontinued the all-state jazz choir following the end of von Kampen's term as R&R chair.

#### Missouri, 2009

Rob Lawrence's path to vocal jazz began with his involvement in show choirs. Lawrence completed his master's at Ball State University in Indiana, studying and performing with expert show choir director Fritz Mountford. Lawrence's experiences at show choir festivals and workshops gradually led him into the adjacent vocal jazz realm, eventually participating in the

first New York Voices summer camp at Bowling Green State University in 2008. He became the jazz and show choir R&S chair for the Missouri Choral Directors Association while teaching at the University of Central Missouri, and though other R&S chairs organized honor choirs for their respective disciplines, Lawrence had no ensembles to coordinate. At the time, MCDA's elementary, middle, and junior high all-state choirs performed on the first night of their summer conference—high school juniors and seniors were eligible for the all-state choirs hosted at the Missouri Music Educators Association conference in January. Believing the MMEA event was already too tightly scheduled to permit any new ensembles, Lawrence found his opening on the second night of the MCDA summer conference. The evening was traditionally reserved for participants to engage with the vendor and institutional exhibit booths, though in Lawrence's experience, most educators opted for a long dinner break instead. With the enthusiastic support of the MCDA president—a show choir aficionado by Lawrence's description—he secured sponsorship for both all-state show choir and jazz choir. From the beginning, his model sought to subsidize the expenses of the smaller jazz group with the audition and registration income from the much larger show choir.

Lawrence devised a novel and uniquely modern plan to audition for the inaugural 2008 ensembles: On a given day, at designated locations across the state, students would audition over the internet, with each of the live feeds routing to the University of Central Missouri. But directors were unfamiliar with the audition procedure, and their inexperience—combined with local exam schedules and snowstorms across much of the state—left Lawrence with only one completed audition for the all-state jazz choir. Understandably frustrated and unable to reschedule the auditions, Lawrence revised his selection procedure the following year according to the precedent established for MCDA's existing ensembles, and in 2009, the first all-state jazz

choir in Missouri performed under the direction of Bruce Rogers from Mt. San Antonio College. Unable to persuade the rhythm section of the MMEA all-state jazz band to play with the ensemble, Lawrence hired professional instrumentalists to perform with the singers. He organized a successful follow up in 2010 before turning the fledgling ensemble over to Beth Fritz, his successor as MCDA R&S vocal jazz chair (by that time, leadership for jazz and show choirs had been split into two separate positions, in accordance with the split at the national level in 2004).

Fritz's passion for jazz had been ignited by her high school band director, whose collection of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross recordings first grabbed her attention. Ella Fitzgerald, Chet Baker, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie added to her aural foundations, turning to an interest in Take 6, Pat Metheny, Harry Connick Jr., and Branford Marsalis after graduating from high school. In her freshman year at the University of Missouri - Kansas City she worked with Kirby Shaw before his departure the following year. After two years at an elementary school and four years at a middle school, Fritz became the first choral director for the newly established Fort Zumwalt West High School in 1998 and immediately created a vocal jazz and madrigal ensemble. Within a few years, Fritz was serving on the MCDA executive board, a position from which she later supported Lawrence's push for all-state vocal jazz.

When Fritz assumed leadership of the ensemble, she implemented changes she hoped would increase the size and quality of the group. Her first priority was hiring a dedicated professional pianist who could support the vocals in rehearsal as well as in performance. For this, she turned to Webster University educator Carolbeth True, whom Fritz had met while earning her master's degree there. Fritz also engaged in direct recruitment from beyond the small handful of high school vocal jazz educators and wrote an article for the MCDA website aimed at defining

and demystifying a successful vocal jazz audition. With only nine singers in 2009 and a dozen in 2010, Fritz opened the ensemble to college students, hoping to boost the size and proficiency of the group and improve continuity by encouraging auditions from those who had participated in previous years. Though she found that many returning college student participants were less-thoroughly prepared than were their high school counterparts, their maturity and greater experience often did improve the overall quality of the all-state ensemble.

#### Indiana, 2012

Brenda Buchanan's first vocal jazz experiences came at the hands of her high school teacher, Sheryl Monkeliën. Long before Monkeliën wrote her dissertation on the career and legacy of her mentor Phil Mattson, and before her distinguished career as a vocal jazz educator at Mansfield University in Pennsylvania, she taught in Indianola, Iowa. There, fresh from her studies with Mattson, she passed on her skill and passion for vocal jazz to her high school students. Buchanan's own first teaching position at Snider High School in Fort Wayne, Indiana, included direction of an established vocal jazz ensemble; when a student in her first graduating class decided to continue studying vocal jazz at Western Michigan University, Buchanan started bringing her ensemble to the festival there. Through these appearances at the festival, Buchanan met and befriended Steve Zegree, who welcomed her into his orbit and mentored her for many years. In time, both Stephen Widenhofer of Millikin University and Brad Rees of Tiffin University also offered guidance as Buchanan's command of the idiom grew.

During this period, Buchanan's students regularly performed in an all-state vocal jazz ensemble hosted by the Indiana Music Educators Association. Founded and organized by Cheryl West, the IMEA all-state jazz choir began to decline around 2009, and as West handed off leadership to concentrate on her work with the Indianapolis Children's Choir, the ensemble

steadily shrank and was soon discontinued. At the suggestion of the Indiana State School Music Association, the Indiana Choral Directors Association—already the co-sponsor of IMEA’s traditional all-state choirs—adopted the all-state jazz choir in January 2011. Under ICDA’s sponsorship, the ensemble was moved from the IMEA winter conference to ICDA’s summer conference; for the first time, students would no longer have to choose between the jazz and traditional choirs, improving the audition pool for both. As the recently appointed vocal jazz R&S chair for ICDA, the responsibility to lead this effort fell to Buchanan’s enthusiastic care. She gathered a small group of colleagues to assist with planning, and the ensemble debuted in summer 2012. Some members of board had voiced concerns that a one-on-a-mic approach would turn away students who didn’t regularly rehearse and perform on mics, but Buchanan successfully argued that microphone technique was essential to the vocal jazz idiom. The students in the 30-voice ensemble—necessarily large in order to cover operating costs—shared mics in the first two years, but eventually the sound system was expanded to fully accommodate the group.

Soon after ICDA began hosting the all-state jazz choir, Buchanan was approached by ISSMA to design a vocal jazz component for their existing statewide ensemble competition. However, Buchanan—like many others influenced by the philosophy of Steve Zegree—insisted on a non-competitive approach to vocal jazz. The state finals would simply provide a platform to showcase the eight high school jazz choirs with the highest scores at the qualifying round, with awards for outstanding soloists and a recognition of one “most outstanding” ensemble performance. The program was launched in the 2015-16 school year and has since helped foster growth in vocal jazz across the state, with special recognitions reserved for high school programs that perform well in all aspects of ISSMA’s ensemble festivals, including vocal jazz. ISSMA’s

programs have also improved participation in the all-state ensemble, allowing Buchanan to send audition invitations to each choral director who brings a vocal jazz group to the festivals.

#### Idaho, 2017

Since his days as a middle school student, Quinn Van Paepeghem was enamored with jazz. A native of the Boise Valley, his musical foundations were laid at a time when the region was at the forefront of the vocal jazz movement. In his junior year, a young Lonnie Cline became Van Paepeghem's choral director. Cline's vision for vocal jazz education had been directly inspired by the movement's founders, including Waldo King and Hal Malcolm, and it was this vision that formed the core of Van Paepeghem's own conception of the idiom. He sang and played guitar in Cline's jazz choir, as well as in the school's jazz band. Initially a guitar performance major at Boise State, Van Paepeghem changed his major to music education following transformative experiences directing a jazz combo and an adult choir. Over the span of his 34-year career as a high school educator, vocal jazz was always part of his teaching work.

In the fall of 1984, after four years teaching at his alma mater, Van Paepeghem took a job in Bend, Oregon. During this period, he assisted his former teacher Lonnie Cline in establishing the all-state jazz choir in Oregon; the experience later informed much of his approach to the ensemble in Idaho. Van Paepeghem returned to his home state to teach at the newly-created Mountain View High School in 2003. A few years later, he petitioned his District 3 representatives to ask the Idaho Music Educators Association about forming an all-state vocal jazz ensemble. IMEA declined, offering the compromise of a Boise Valley honors jazz choir; the state organization felt that since the strongest vocal jazz programs were concentrated in that region, a local honors ensemble would serve a majority of the most experienced students and teachers. Van Paepeghem, however, felt that such an ensemble would only serve to isolate the

educators of the Boise Valley and could do little to promote vocal jazz for students throughout the state. Already fully occupied with the demands of the burgeoning music program at Mountain View, he tabled the pursuit of an all-state jazz choir until the right opportunity presented itself.

That opportunity came over a decade later, when Van Paepeghem was contacted by Corrina Steinbach at Vallivue High School who, along with Corbin Rasmussen at Rigby High School and Marianne Saunders at the College of Idaho, sought the veteran educator's assistance in their fresh efforts to establish an all-state jazz choir. The team found ready allies among their instrumental counterparts across the state, since the all-state jazz band had been discontinued some time previously; with the combined support of jazz educators across Idaho, they were able to persuade IMEA to host both ensembles, starting in 2017.

The partnership has remained strong, with two of the all-state concerts since then featuring a joint work for jazz choir and jazz band. The rhythm sections of both ensembles were formed from the same audition pool, consistent with Van Paepeghem's view that a fully integrated rhythm section is essential to the vocal jazz idiom, co-equal with any vocal section of the ensemble. Van Paepeghem was also careful to ensure that an experienced educator was selected for the ensemble's debut, securing Kirk Marcy as the first conductor. Marcy had conducted many all-state jazz choirs around the country, and his enthusiasm, positive disposition, and deft programming facilitated the ensemble's success and paved the way for continued excellence.

#### Michigan, 2018

Jed Scott first experienced vocal jazz as a high school student when April Arabian-Tini was brought in to direct an extracurricular ensemble at Grosse Pointe South in the Detroit



suburbs. He sang under her direction for three years, and studied privately with her, instilling a passion for vocal jazz that brought him to Phil Mattson's workshops and later to Western Michigan University. Scott studied with Diana Spradling and Steve Zegree there, performing for three years in GCII followed by three years in Gold Company. Following graduation from Western, he earned a master's degree in studio jazz writing at the University of Miami; though he never studied directly with Larry Lapin, Scott continued to be surrounded by great vocal jazz. In 2003, Scott returned to Michigan following his wife's choral directing appointment at Grosse Pointe North. Though it would take several years to come to fruition, Scott's interest in pursuing all-state vocal jazz in Michigan began soon after his return to the state. As he would later discover, the push for an all-state jazz choir had begun years before at the hands of more experienced educators, including Duane Davis and Steve Zegree.

Zegree's opportunity came in 2014, when he was selected as the artist-in-residence for the prestigious Michigan Youth Arts festival, a long-running, selective festival of around a thousand high school students across many artistic disciplines. Zegree stipulated that his residency include a full-day vocal jazz experience sponsored by the statewide choral organization, the Michigan School Vocal Music Association. The traditional all-state choir—also sponsored by MSVMA—already performed as part of the MYA festival, though Zegree's initial vocal jazz event differed substantially from conventional all-state models. Four chamber choirs were selected by audition to form a single large ensemble; they rehearsed throughout the day with Zegree and performed that evening. Following this initial success, Scott was able to maintain the festival ensemble for the next two years under the subsequent direction of Greg Jasperse and Duane Davis.

At the end of the third year, Scott successfully persuaded MSVMA to replace the large

group with a conventional all-state jazz choir despite vocal opposition from some members of the board. The ensemble would be included alongside MSVMA's traditional all-state choirs at the Michigan Music Conference in January, though it would need to be entirely self-funded through student participation fees. Knowing that any initial weakness would doom future ensembles, Scott prepared for nearly two years to ensure the first ensemble's success.

Scott worked closely with Greg Jasperse to determine audition procedures, housing and rehearsal locations, sound system logistics, and budgeting, facing unique challenges with each decision. With few choral directors regularly teaching vocal jazz, securing enough strong auditions was difficult, forcing Scott to directly recruit students from trusted directors—after the auditions—to balance the ensemble. The ensemble was also forced to rehearse at an off-site location, making it difficult for students and educators to interact with the rest of the conference and reducing the ensemble's visibility. Arguing that the sound system is a vocal jazz ensemble's instrument, Scott and the MSVMA director of honor choirs kept the audio contractors for the conference out of equipping and engineering the ensemble, cutting the cost per student in half. Instead, sound equipment was volunteered from Grand Rapids Community College for rehearsal and from Western Michigan University for performance. The cost per student remained substantially higher for the jazz choir compared to that of the traditional choirs, though due to the three-tiered prerequisite ensembles on the traditional side, the cumulative cost difference at the all-state level is closer than the fee per ensemble would suggest. But despite these challenges, the ensemble successfully debuted in January 2018 and has enjoyed continued success under Scott's diligent leadership.

Delaware, 2018

When Kathleen Shannon met Marty Lassman through the Delaware ACDA in 2013, their

shared interest in vocal jazz inspired them to pursue the creation of an all-state jazz choir. Both had a long history in jazz: Lassman started playing jazz piano in middle school, and Shannon grew up immersed in the music through her father, who taught music and played jazz gigs most weekends.

Although both earned degrees in music education, their paths to the vocal jazz idiom differed. Lassman taught instrumental music, including jazz band, for 18 years before taking a choral position in a new middle school for the arts. After helping to coordinate high school backing vocalists for a tour appearance of Sesame Street's Bob McGrath, Lassman was tapped to create a vocal jazz ensemble at the high school which he directed until his retirement. In contrast, Shannon's foundations in the idiom were laid while singing in Larry Lapin's vocal jazz ensemble at the University of Miami and cemented through her dissertation on Ward Swingle and the Swingle Singers.

Thus equipped with their considerable experience in vocal jazz, Lassman and Shannon first proposed the ensemble as a collaboration between the Delaware ACDA, the Music School of Delaware (a statewide community music organization), and the Delaware Music Educators Association, host to the existing all-state groups. Though some of their members supported the concept of an all-state jazz choir, the DMEA leadership proved unwilling to accept Shannon and Lassman's vision for the ensemble, citing concerns over auditions, financing, and the inclusion of a rhythm section. Support from the Delaware ACDA board, however, was enthusiastic, and so Lassman and Shannon abandoned collaboration with DMEA, forgoing 'all-state' designation. The two educators had gathered information on all existing honors jazz choirs across the country to inform their approach, and though many all-state ensembles utilized rigorous audition procedures, Shannon and Lassman felt that such auditions would dissuade too many students and

teachers, given the absence of strong vocal jazz programs in the state. In the ensemble's first year students submitted recorded auditions, but in an effort to encourage interest Shannon and Lassman accepted every application; in subsequent years, they dropped the audition entirely, forming the ensembles on teacher recommendation alone.

The challenge of funding the ensemble, however, remained daunting, with DE-ACDA only able to offer limited financial support. Lassman and Shannon worked to minimize costs wherever they could: They called in favors to secure a commutable rehearsal and performance space and hire a rhythm section, supplied equipment and repertoire from their own inventories, and together co-conducted the students. With a small, mostly-parent audience, the Delaware Vocal Jazz Honor Choir debuted in April 2018. Though the initial venture lost money, DE-ACDA was encouraged by the positive reception of the ensemble and agreed to an expansion of the program to include both a mixed and a treble group in the following year. By 2020, Shannon and Lassman had built enough momentum to justify the addition of a middle school ensemble as well, with combined participation around 40 students in total. And though the pandemic precluded ensembles in '21 and '22, Lassman and Shannon remain committed to advancing vocal jazz in Delaware, with plans to add a parallel ensemble for teachers in future years.

#### Rhode Island, 2021

Though he never performed in the ensemble, Jeff Kerr was first introduced to vocal jazz by Dave Riley's ensemble at Ithaca College. Kerr earned a music education degree at Ithaca in 1993 and was "blown away" by the sound of the vocal jazz ensemble there—an ensemble that only a few years prior had been the proving ground for Kim Nazarian, Darmon Meader, and Peter Eldridge of New York Voices. For the first several years of his teaching career, Kerr remained on the outside looking in on vocal jazz, until he took a job in Colchester, Connecticut.

Tom Kessler directed an acclaimed instrumental jazz program there, and inspired Kerr to begin teaching jazz to the vocal students. Kerr's training in the art form came through many hours of self-directed listening—to both solo vocalists and vocal jazz groups—combined with persistent trial-and-error and eager pursuit of Kessler's mentorship. Supported by strong student rhythm sections from Kessler's program, Kerr's singers participated in the jazz festival at Berklee; there, they were inspired by the performances of more experienced high school ensembles, most notably those of Ned Rosenblatt's program from Sarasota, Florida. Slowly, Kerr's ensembles made stronger showings at the festival, moving from among the lowest-scoring groups to among those earning top marks. In 2011 and 2012, Kerr brought his students to participate in Disney's jazz festivals, in both Florida and California; there, he first met some of the leading figures in vocal jazz education, including Jennifer Barnes, Greg Jasperse, Connaitre Miller, and Christine Guter. Their support and generosity inspired in Kerr an even stronger commitment to the idiom.

Though he advocated for the creation of honors jazz choirs in Connecticut, his efforts had failed to gain traction. Accordingly, when he left Colchester to take a position as head of performing arts at Portsmouth Abbey School in 2012, Kerr was determined to continue his vocal jazz advocacy there. He soon became active in the Rhode Island Music Educators Association—host to the all-state jazz band and other traditional ensembles—but was unable to persuade them to add a jazz choir to their all-state roster. RIMEA had once hosted such an ensemble but had discontinued it several years prior. Despite his ability to point to other successful models in nearby mid-Atlantic and neighboring New England states, RIMEA leadership deferred again and again, suggesting that the Rhode Island ACDA might be the more suitable host. Although RIACDA held considerably less influence throughout the state and had much smaller budgets, a frustrated Kerr turned to the choral directors association when RIMEA approved the addition of

other new all-state ensembles but still had no interest in a jazz choir.

From his position as R&S vocal jazz chair, Kerr brought his all-state proposal first to Regina McAdam and then to her successor as RIACDA president, Sarah Prickel-Kane. Then, in the fall of 2020, when many music programs throughout Rhode Island were struggling to survive amid COVID restrictions, Kerr had a breakthrough: He proposed the creation a virtual ensemble. With fewer competing interests and lower fixed costs, the proposal was approved. Students rehearsed in a series of Zoom sessions in January 2021, with appearances from both Kerry Marsh and Rosana Eckert who workshopped their respective arrangements. Later, each student recorded their individual performance and submitted the files to Kerr's colleague at South Kingstown, Ryan Muir, who stitched together the composite recordings. Though the ensemble was not convened in 2022, Kerr believes that the YouTube-accessible 2021 recordings can inspire educators around the state and he remains hopeful that RIACDA will sponsor an in-person all-state jazz choir in the future.

#### Kansas, 2022

When John Stafford arrived at Millikin University in Illinois to study music business in 1996, he had no background in vocal jazz, nor any aspiration to teach. But through the influence of Stephen Widenhofer and his vocal jazz ensembles there, Stafford began to take an interest in the art form. In his second semester, he was deeply inspired by a live performance of The Real Group and went on to sing their arrangements in Widenhofer's ensembles, along with Take 6 and Clare Fischer charts. Soon, he acquired a copy of the New York Voices album *What's Inside*, further cementing his passion for vocal jazz. In 2010, Stafford was hired at Kansas City Kansas Community College to replace retiring director of choral activities Dale Shetler. A native of the Pacific Northwest, Shetler had established one of the only collegiate vocal jazz programs in

Kansas during his later years at KCKCC, and it was important that his successor be well-versed in both the traditional choral and jazz paradigms.

Though Stafford had an immediate interest in promoting vocal jazz at the all-state level, he knew it would take time to establish a positive reputation as a choral and vocal jazz director and to thoroughly prepare his proposal. His first step was joining KCDA, and soon he was building professional relationships with high school and collegiate choral directors across the state. When the position of R&S vocal jazz chair opened, Stafford was well-situated to step into the role. His efforts at KCKCC were recognized in 2017, when his jazz choir was selected to perform at the national ACDA conference; that same year, the group won the first of what became several DownBeat Student Music Awards, further catapulting the program into the national spotlight. In the wake of these successes, Stafford recognized that his opportunity to push for all-state vocal jazz had come, and he began preparing for his proposal. Each of the four states that border Kansas (Colorado, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Missouri) had a tradition of all-state vocal jazz with further strong traditions in nearby Iowa and Illinois, providing Stafford with ample models to consider. Ultimately, Stafford felt that the Missouri model was best suited to the conditions in Kansas, given the similar distribution and relative strength of jazz, show, and traditional choirs in each state. He spent a summer observing their all-state at the MCDA summer convention, and maintained a close dialogue with Missouri's coordinator, Beth Fritz, regarding auditions, scheduling, budgeting, and related logistics. Stafford inquired at both KCDA and the Kansas Music Educators Association before deciding to pursue hosting through the more receptive choral directors association. Stafford understood that honors ensemble registration fees played a major role in KCDA's annual budget, and so he worked to limit proposed expenses to include only compensation for the conductor and a professional rhythm

section, in an effort to capitalize on the vibrant Kansas City jazz scene. All other equipment, including the backline and sound system, would come directly from Stafford's inventory at KCKCC. Given the more intimate size of a vocal jazz ensemble, Stafford's model depended on financial support from KCDA's existing honors ensembles.

Though he expected to face some hesitancy, his initial proposal to then-KCDA president Dwayne Dunn was enthusiastically received, as was his later full proposal to the executive board. In addition to Stafford's own thorough preparation, his proposal got a boost when veteran vocal jazz educator Neal Allsup of Hutchinson Community College promoted the effort at a KMEA convention. And at the suggestion of the KCDA president, Stafford's own group was slated to perform at the 2020 summer convention in an effort to inspire the students in the existing honors choirs, with the first all-state jazz choir to perform the following year. Unfortunately, COVID restrictions delayed both events for a year, and since then, Stafford ascended to the national ACDA vocal jazz chair. But with Taryn Gervais of Blue Valley Southwest High School now jazz chair at the state level, and with Stafford's KCKCC colleague Justin Binek hired as the first conductor, the inaugural all-state jazz choir in Kansas is expected to convene at the 2022 summer convention.

#### Florida

Though there is no all-state vocal jazz ensemble in Florida at present, Kate Reid of the University of Miami and other vocal jazz educators in the state are working together to create one. Their discussions with the Florida Music Educators Association are ongoing (K. Reid, personal communication, February 23, 2022).



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### Observations

The diverse backgrounds of the educators who helped create each of the all-state vocal jazz ensembles and who shared their stories with me reflect the breadth and intersectionality of the vocal jazz idiom. More than two-thirds of them were teaching in a high school setting while they worked to create the all-state ensembles in their respective states. The remaining founders taught at the college level (though some had previous high school teaching experience), and most of those did so at two-year institutions. A majority of the founders were trained primarily as choral/vocal musicians, though six of them—DeWeese, Dohrmann, Gatchell, Hansen, Lassman, and Van Paeppegem—came to the idiom as jazz instrumentalists first. Most were introduced to the vocal jazz idiom after high school, with several discovering it only after they had begun teaching.

With the exception of Delaware and Rhode Island, the ACDA-hosted all-state jazz choirs are located in a nearly contiguous region in the middle of the country. In both Indiana and Wisconsin, these ensembles were reestablished through ACDA after MEA-sponsored ensembles were discontinued. Only the ensembles in Iowa and Oklahoma were established prior to the separation of vocal jazz from show choirs at the national ACDA level, with all other ACDA-hosted all-state jazz choirs established after 2004. In fact, the only ensembles established since 2004 *not* hosted by a state ACDA chapter were those in Idaho (through the MEA) and Michigan (through the Michigan School Vocal Music Association, a proudly independent organization that predates the founding of ACDA). Each of the all-state jazz choirs established through a state IAJE chapter were created within a six-year span around the turn of the 21st century. As such—

very generally speaking—the timeline of all-state vocal jazz host organizations can be split into an MEA-dominated period from 1978 to 1993, a period where state ACDA and IAJE chapters also began to host from 1998 to 2004, and a period since 2004 dominated by ACDA-sponsored ensembles.

## Emergent Themes

### Regarding Motivations

Each of the educators I interviewed attributed their pursuit of an all-state vocal jazz ensemble to their desire to expand the scope of the field. Cline and Spradling each framed their efforts as a move toward greater legitimacy for the vocal jazz idiom, perhaps reflecting dismissive attitudes toward vocal jazz among the choral music education mainstream in its nascency. Then again, Scott framed his efforts over twenty years later in similar language, perhaps suggesting that views on the legitimacy of the idiom have been slow to change.

Vanderpool, Lassman, and Shannon sought more broadly to increase opportunities for vocal jazz education in their respective states. They used the platform of their ensembles to build networks of interested teachers and students, even as few had dedicated opportunities for vocal jazz in their schools. Conversely, Ritter and Plunkett were both closely integrated in statewide networks of vocal jazz educators at the time of their proposals. Their efforts aimed to recognize and unify existing vocal jazz communities in their respective states, and to improve the visibility of the art form.

Gatchell, Hansen, Van Paepeghem, and Kerr each embodied the belief that all-state ensembles should naturally reflect the full spectrum of music education activity in a given state. Therefore, since jazz merits inclusion in high school music curricula, jazz choirs (and bands) should exist at the statewide level. Schreck, Buchanan, and DeWeese had each witnessed the

value of such ensembles first-hand, having sent their own students to participate before their respective all-state jazz choirs were discontinued. Each took on the challenge of resurrecting all-state vocal jazz to serve the students in their state—including, of course, their own.

Still others pursued the creation of all-state vocal jazz ensembles by leveraging their positions in statewide music educators associations. Both Lawrence and Stafford served as ACDA vocal jazz R&S chairs in states without honors jazz choirs, and both wanted to create opportunities that would continue to foster vocal jazz education long after their terms expired. Taylor, on the other hand, had only just reached statewide leadership when he inherited the charge of the outgoing generation to take the next step in the development of vocal jazz education in Colorado. Then again, authority in a field is rarely confined to those in official positions of leadership: both Perry and Dohrmann were sought out for their expertise by others whose vision for an all-state vocal jazz ensemble needed the guidance of experienced educators in the field.

#### Regarding Models

Though their specific sources of inspiration vary, every educator I interviewed expressed deep gratitude for the mentorship of those whose expertise informed their own. As vocal jazz education evolved and spread across the country, future all-state ensemble founders could draw from a wider array of models and mentors. With neither Frank DeMiero nor Walter Lamble available to participate in this study, Gatchell's recollections describe the earliest creation of an all-state jazz choir. Prior to our interview, Gatchell was unaware that any state had an older such ensemble, and accordingly, the ensemble he helped establish in New Hampshire was not directly modeled on the existing all-state jazz choirs in either Washington or Illinois. However, while Perry prepared his proposal for the inaugural all-state jazz choir in Arizona he consulted with

more experienced vocal jazz educators, most notably Doug Anderson, who had served as a founding member of the national ACDA R&S committee on jazz and show choirs and had chaired the committee from 1980 to 1984. As such, Anderson would likely have had ample opportunity to learn about existing all-state ensembles, the oldest of which having already convened for a decade before Arizona's first. Cline, as a direct protégé of Hal Malcolm and a pioneer of the idiom himself, eschewed consideration of other all-state ensembles when developing his model for Oregon.

Though the origins of the first all-state vocal jazz ensembles in California and Wisconsin have yet to be documented, the latter provided a critical source of inspiration for Spradling following her direction of the ensemble in 1992. But Spradling's approach in New York was pervasively shaped by NYSSMA's existing protocols for the all-state traditional choirs and jazz bands. She later spread this systematic model while advising Vanderpool on her efforts in Iowa; in turn, the Iowa all-state jazz choir was cited by many subsequent founders as an influential model.

It becomes difficult to determine specific patterns of influence for most of the ensembles formed after 1998. A majority of the remaining study participants described their efforts to learn from existing models according to a more generalized approach, hybridizing elements from multiple sources. Perhaps this approach allowed those educators to adopt or adapt whichever ideas most appealed in their unique cases. Then again, when Stafford drew specific inspiration from the ensemble in Missouri it was not for lack of other models, but for the many similarities he perceived in the environments of both states and the subsequent suitability of their solutions to similar problems.

## Regarding Festivals

The role of festivals as both incubators and disseminators of vocal jazz education has been noted by several scholars (Amerind, 2013; Hamilton, 2017; Letson, 2010; Monkeliën, 2001; Perea, 2012; Pisciotta, 1992; Venesile, 2011), and is among the clearest themes to emerge from the interview data. Some of the educators I interviewed were first introduced to the idiom while attending a jazz festival for another purpose, as was the case for both Gatchell and Dohrmann. For Ritter, Lawrence, Perry, Hansen, and Vanderpool, choral festivals and music educator conferences that included a vocal jazz component also served this role. Taken together, these cases help illustrate the extent to which festival performance can increase visibility for the art form and inspire educators to pursue vocal jazz. Festivals also provided a proving ground for several of the educators I interviewed, including Cline, Dohrmann, Hansen, Ritter, Buchanan, and Kerr, and served as nexus points that strengthened vocal jazz education communities, as was true for Plunkett, Spradling, DeMiero, Vanderpool, and Schreck. Moreover, the all-state jazz choirs in both Nebraska and Michigan were formed as a direct outgrowth of vocal jazz festival activities.

Though many of the educators I interviewed would likely agree that festivals play an important role within vocal jazz education, their views on the specific nature of that role differ. Several participants asserted that vocal jazz festivals should be noncompetitive, highlighting their capacity for networking and mentorship. Some specifically espoused the view that jazz—as an inherently creative paradigm—resists many objective assessments, and therefore should not appear in competitively-ranked festivals. This sentiment appears to be strongest among those directly influenced by Zegree. When Buchanan was consulted to develop a state-level festival for Indiana high schools she insisted on an unranked format. But competitive evaluation also appears

to have played an important role in the motivations of some all-state vocal jazz founders, with many honing their craft as ensemble directors and measuring their growth through festival rankings. Indeed, von Kampen maintains that competitively ranked festivals are a powerful motivator for participation in the show choir community and believes that adopting such practices could similarly increase participation in vocal jazz.

#### Regarding Preparedness to Teach Vocal Jazz

Though the educators I interviewed faced a variety of challenges as they worked to establish all-state jazz choirs, a large majority of them cited choral educators' reservations about vocal jazz as a significant hurdle. Dohrmann and Scott each described the paucity of high school vocal jazz ensembles in their respective states: before she established the all-state group in New Jersey, Dohrmann knew of only three high schools with jazz choirs out of around 400 in the state, while Scott couldn't identify a single dedicated high school vocal jazz group in Michigan, curricular or otherwise. Gatchell, Vanderpool, and Stafford framed the lack of vocal jazz education as reflective of a lack of director competency in the idiom.

Taylor and Lawrence believe that most choral educators avoid vocal jazz out of fear. Some suggested that this is reflective of the unique demands of the repertoire. Indeed, Kerr described his own initial relationship to the art form as one of intimidation; though he heard vocal jazz while studying at Ithaca College, he found the rhythmic and harmonic language daunting. Plunkett believes that the prospect of teaching improvisation and directing a rhythm section adds to educator fears. Many of the founders lay the responsibility for choral directors' unpreparedness to teach vocal jazz at the feet of college music education programs, consistent with Amerind's (2013) assessment of the field. Quoting vocal jazz educator Vijay Singh of Central Washington University, Amerind asserts that increased vocal jazz pedagogy within

college music education curricula is key to the future of the art form (p. 53). Fritz and Shannon each underscored the importance of direct instruction as key to changing student attitudes about vocal jazz. They posited that much of the traditional choral canon is also unfamiliar and demanding until students acquire the skill and experience to successfully navigate it. Fritz and Shannon also expressed frustration that while students are expected to study various works of the Western canon regardless of their own aesthetic preference for the music, most students can choose to remain ignorant of jazz simply on the basis of their own tastes.

However, a handful of the educators I interviewed have taken steps to help reverse these pervasive negative attitudes toward vocal jazz. Both von Kampen and Van Paepeghem view their own work as college vocal jazz directors as a vehicle to provide authentic experiences to preservice educators at their institutions. Scott has recently published a theory text specifically designed to demystify jazz harmony for choral educators. Hansen partially attributes a shift in educator attitudes toward vocal jazz in Wyoming to years of participation in a vocal jazz reading session at the state music educator conference. In a similar vein, Lassman has proposed the creation of a statewide jazz choir for educators that would convene in conjunction with the student all-state groups.

The challenges educators face when approaching vocal jazz might be partially explained by the hybrid nature of the paradigm. Though it shares characteristics with both instrumental jazz and traditional choral ensembles, a jazz choir is poorly contained within either parent idiom alone. This appears to put many would-be vocal jazz educators at odds with the prevailing separation of vocal and instrumental music within college curricula and professional organizations. The educators I interviewed expressed a diversity of attitudes toward this divide. Kerr recalled his long frustration with RIMEA's insistence that all-state vocal jazz, as a subset of

choral music, should operate under the auspices of RIACDA. Lassman situates vocal jazz closer to the instrumental end of the continuum, underscoring the importance of instrumental knowledge to successfully direct a rhythm section, while Shannon asserts that jazz choirs are best served by directors who are themselves jazz singers, rather than jazz instrumentalists who might lack understanding of vocal technique and pedagogy. Meanwhile, von Kampen is explicitly suspicious of ‘choir people’ making decisions about vocal jazz and doubts the authenticity of vocal jazz representation within ACDA. Stafford, on the other hand, rejects the narrative of animosity between the vocal jazz and traditional choral communities, and suggests that miscommunication has fostered mistrust and disengagement. As the current national ACDA vocal jazz chair, he remains optimistic about the opportunities for vocal jazz within the organization.

#### Regarding Perceptions of Vocal Jazz

Nevertheless, the experiences of several all-state jazz choir founders seem to reflect persistent perceptions of jazz as inferior to Western classical music within the choral education field. Spradling, Schreck, and Hansen each recalled open hostility to jazz during their own experiences as college students. Though explicit disdain for jazz has become less common in recent years, Fritz described an implicit sense among certain choral educators that jazz is of lower artistic merit than traditional choral music. Dohrmann, too, described the veiled arguments against vocal jazz that obstructed the all-state ensemble’s adoption by NJMEA for two decades. Taylor believes that those who “still look down their noses at jazz” perpetuate a legacy of racial discrimination that categorically dismissed the Black musicians whose works are central to the art form. In doing so, Taylor echoes what McDaniel (1993) termed “the racial dilemma,” describing resistance to jazz within music academia on the basis of its origins as a Black



American art form (p. 117). Taylor recalled the resentment of some members of the CMEA choral board that the all-state jazz choir performed for the traditional all-state choir students: “it was as if the thing that [they’ve] been trying to keep hidden away [was] no longer hidden away.” Scott described his frustration with the decision to convene the Michigan all-state jazz choir at an off-site location at the conference, saying “vocal jazz feels like the ugly stepchild of the choral world.” Similarly, Schreck recalled her outrage when the Wisconsin all-state jazz choir performance was moved from the evening concert to an educators luncheon: “you’re just jazzers [...] you can be dinner music.” Still, many of the founders expressed love and admiration for traditional choral music, and defended its pedagogical value; as Cline stated, “music education is best when you have classical and jazz together.”

#### Regarding Host Events

The decision on where and when to host the all-state vocal jazz ensemble is among the most consequential that any of the founders faced. While most sought the hosting solution they felt would foster the greatest student involvement, the diversity of approaches reflect the unique conditions of the music education landscape in each state. A founder’s prior involvement with a given organization, particularly in a leadership position, often led to that organization’s sponsorship of the ensemble. It should also be noted that ACDA has maintained a dedicated leadership position for the representation and promotion of vocal jazz since 1975 (Grier, 1976), and since 1981 has pursued the establishment of state-level vocal jazz representatives in every state (Erickson, 1981). It is perhaps unsurprising that many of the ACDA-sponsored all-state jazz choirs were founded by educators who had served or were serving in that capacity. NAFME, meanwhile, maintains no dedicated vocal jazz representation at the national level, on either the Council for Jazz Education or the Council for Choral Education. And though IAJE supported

several state chapters, their successor on the national stage—the Jazz Education Network—is still working to establish an equivalent federated structure.

Those whose ensembles meet concurrently with other MEA-sponsored all-state groups were least likely to describe this outcome as a conscious choice. Van Paeppegem and Spradling characterized their respective state music educator associations as exercising a near-monopoly on music education activities in those states; as such, each felt they had no meaningful alternative to host the all-state jazz choir. Others described a critical downside to this hosting approach: students must choose between vocal jazz and other all-state opportunities. DeWeese, Schereck, Scott, and Dohrmann each lamented the effect of this competition for student involvement, as well as that for rehearsal space and performance time in crowded conferences.

Several of the founders who pursued hosting through summer ACDA conferences cited precisely these concerns as motivating their decision. Buchanan and Vanderpool each maintain that their respective summer events give more students the opportunity to pursue all-state vocal jazz and prevent conflicts with MEA-hosted traditional all-state choirs. Moreover, Vanderpool, along with Plunkett, Ritter, Lawrence, Fritz, Kerr, and Stafford each described their respective MEAs as too full and inflexible to accommodate the addition of an all-state jazz choir, and so pursued ACDA hosting at separate events instead.

Then again, others were able to organize their all-state jazz choirs through their state music educator associations, while still avoiding direct competition with all-state traditional choirs. Gatchell established a separate jazz event through NHMEA, allowing both vocalists and instrumentalists to pursue jazz and traditional ensembles at the all-state level. Perry achieved a similar outcome by adding a vocal jazz component to an existing all-state jazz band event. While Taylor wanted to create a wholly-separate event for all-state vocal jazz—an event that would

feature professional vocal jazz groups as well—their performance at the music educators conference still avoids direct conflict with the stand-alone event for all-state traditional choirs.

Taylor’s model shares a key advantage with Plunkett’s. In both cases, students in the all-state jazz choir perform for audiences of students in traditional all-state choirs. Both educators affirm the inspiration these performances provide to other all-state singers and attribute the enthusiasm for vocal jazz among students in Colorado and Oklahoma to this practice.

Meanwhile, Taylor’s original vision shares much with Hansen’s approach in Wyoming. There, the all-state jazz choir is hosted within rotating vocal jazz festivals across the state. This model increases exposure as the all-state jazz choir performs for an audience that includes parents, teachers, and other high school vocal jazz students participating in the festival and provides added inspiration to all through the invitation of professional vocal jazz groups that headline the event.

#### Regarding Auditions

Audition procedures represent another critical dimension that each all-state founder had to navigate; these varied approaches reflect each educator’s specific logistical conditions as well as the differences among their philosophical and pedagogical positions.

A majority of the inaugural ensembles utilized recorded auditions instead of live auditions, allowing a single evaluator (often the founder) or a small group to rate the submissions and select students. Dohrmann was able to conduct live auditions by holding them in a single, geographically central location, aided by the comparatively small size of New Jersey. And though Ritter held no audition the first year—inviting outstanding soloists from the ensembles at his festival—the event continued to serve as a focal point for all-state vocal jazz activity. He later held the auditions at the festival, recognizing that a majority of the strongest vocal jazz students

in Nebraska were often already attending with their high school ensembles. Spradling opted for live auditions and trained a group of hand-selected vocal jazz educators in the application of a rubric in order to provide consistent evaluation across each of several locations in the state.

Spradling's approach was directly modeled on the existing audition procedures for other all-state groups in New York, hybridizing specific elements from the jazz band and traditional vocal rubrics. Taylor, too, modeled his audition procedures on those for existing all-state groups in Colorado. On the other hand, Lawrence's initial audition procedures—though innovative—were so foreign to educators in Missouri that he was unable to form an ensemble until he adapted to existing methods for the following year. These examples reinforce the importance of familiarity when designing auditions, and the ways that comparable selection procedures can help legitimize jazz choirs among all-state ensembles.

Many elements of Spradling's rubric and audition materials were directly adapted by Vanderpool for the auditions in Iowa. These included sight-reading and 'second-chorus' treatments of ballads and up-tempo standards, reflecting a preference for students with demonstrated command over jazz style. In contrast, Perry, Cline, and Gatchell each explained that strong reading combined with solid aural skills, tone, and intonation informed their selection priorities.

When Fritz took over leadership of the ensemble in Missouri, she redesigned the auditions to include evaluation of each student's improvisation skill, in addition to jazz style and tone. Schreck, on the other hand, argued for the reduction of improvisation requirements when she revived the ensemble in Wisconsin, observing that not every student needed strong improvisation skills in order to have a strong ensemble. In Van Paepeghem's model, improvisation is optional, instead focusing on the singing of excerpted repertoire in addition to

the requirements for traditional all-state choirs. Lassman and Shannon switched to teacher recommendation only in their second year, hoping that by eliminating the audition more students would pursue the experience, thereby growing interest in vocal jazz in Delaware.

This tension between auditions as a barrier to entry and the need for enough student turnout to form a balanced ensemble was described as a significant challenge by many of the founders. Cline and Vanderpool both recalled their worry that if too few students auditioned, the initial ensembles would fail; many of the first students in the Iowa all-state jazz choir came directly from Vanderpool's program. In 2012, the ensemble in Wisconsin was canceled due to a lack of student interest. These concerns appear to be well-founded in even the most populous states: DeWeese explained California's record of stopped and re-started all-state jazz choirs as the result of insufficient audition interest. Indeed, perhaps only Plunkett experienced overwhelmingly high initial audition turnout, with over 600 students competing for a spot in the inaugural all-state jazz choir in Oklahoma.

A few of the educators I interviewed described their strategies for targeted recruitment in order to prevent weak audition turnout. Ritter incorporated auditions into his high school jazz festival, even providing audition preparation in a breakout session for students and teachers. Buchanan utilizes a similar approach, sending invitations and audition materials to every school that brings a jazz choir to ISSMA's ensemble festivals, regardless of the choir's score. Hansen underscored the value of his personal knowledge of and relationship with each high school program in the state, allowing him to encourage participation from strong programs. Though Wyoming's small population naturally facilitates Hansen's approach, Van Paepeghem insists that direct recruitment of promising students is essential to the success of Idaho's all-state jazz choir. Moreover, he contends that the practice of attending school concerts to identify and recruit

students across the state reflects an approach practiced by many early vocal jazz educators in the Northwest.

Other educators described the prevalence of post-audition solicitation; Shannon, Fritz, Scott, and Schereck each recounted contacting trusted vocal jazz directors with requests of students to help balance the ensemble. Fritz estimated that approximately 15% to 20% of the all-state jazz choir in Missouri consists of students recruited after the auditions in any given year. And in both Missouri and Wisconsin, the all-state jazz choirs now include a limited number of college students to help reinforce the ensemble. Scott posits that low audition turnout can be partly attributed to the practice of only encouraging students with a perceived 'affinity' for jazz to audition, noting that such considerations of student preference are absent when encouraging students to audition for traditional all-state choirs.

#### Regarding the Rhythm Section

Differences in the role and relationship of the rhythm section among all-state jazz choirs reflect the priorities and philosophies of the founders. Van Paepeghem strongly believes in fully integrated student rhythm sections, as essential to the ensemble as any voice part. He maintains that this view is consistent with practices throughout the Northwest; indeed, both Cline and Hansen also audition rhythm section students for their respective all-state jazz choirs. Dohrmann also pursues this strategy in New Jersey, selecting students from among those who audition for the all-state jazz band. Plunkett took this approach a step further, literally sharing a rhythm section with the all-state jazz band, strengthening those students through experience with the jazz choir a week before their instrumental appearance. And while Lawrence attempted this strategy, he was unsuccessful in persuading the students to perform with both ensembles.

Spradling adopted a hybrid strategy, selecting bassists and drummers from the all-state jazz band auditions, but employing a professional jazz pianist and educator. As such, the pianist is able to effectively support vocal rehearsal, playing parts where needed, and can also act as a *de facto* section leader and mentor to the bassist and drummer. Fritz, too, utilizes a professional jazz pianist/educator, citing the need for strong reading, stylistic fluency in jazz, and skills as a rehearsal accompanist. Perry, meanwhile, preferred jazz educators throughout the rhythm section. And in an effort to capitalize on the vibrant Kansas City jazz scene, Stafford has hired professional freelancers to play with the all-state vocal jazz ensemble, aiming to elevate the quality of the performance and inspire both students and audience members.

#### Regarding Microphones

Among the many logistical considerations each founder faced, perhaps none were more daunting than those regarding the use of microphones. As Kerr and others noted, there are several important elements of the art form that can only be accessed with each singer on their own microphone. This one-to-one mic approach was articulated and strongly promoted by Phil Mattson and has become one of the defining characteristics of the modern vocal jazz idiom (Monkelien, 2001, p. 111). However, this use of microphones introduces a logistical element that separates all-state jazz choirs from their traditional choral counterparts.

Buchanan recalled that other choral educators were deeply worried that singing on mic would dissuade inexperienced students from auditioning. They expressed concerns that not all students would have sung on mic in their home districts and doubted that the benefits would outweigh the additional logistical challenge. Buchanan was ultimately persuasive, arguing that one-to-one miking is essential to vocal jazz, and would enhance the student experience.

Vanderpool was able to secure the skills and equipment of a third-party sound reinforcement company; run by former educators, they were immediately enamored with the all-state jazz choir, leading to many years of reliable collaboration. Vanderpool's solution highlights the need for knowledgeable engineers with vocal jazz experience in addition to inventory. Schereck recalled frustration when a rock engineer was hired to run sound for the all-state jazz band and jazz choir. In Michigan, Scott was able to keep sound equipment and engineering 'in house' by successfully arguing that a microphone is part of a jazz singer's instrument, and therefore beyond the purview of the conference-wide recording services company.

Schereck suggested that the rise of pop a cappella groups across the country has led to many more schools adding mics and a sound system to their inventories and was able to borrow equipment from directors in the area. Several other founders described similar strategies; Lassman, Shannon, Spradling, Stafford, Ritter, and Scott each used sound equipment from high school or college programs—often their own—to support the all-state jazz choir. Ritter and Scott each lamented the need for one-to-one microphones as a major barrier to entry for would-be vocal jazz directors. To this point, Cline defended his use of area mics in the first years of the all-state jazz choir in Oregon. Logistically simpler and enjoying a history back to the movement's earliest days in the Northwest, Cline argues that this older approach to amplification was key to the proliferation of vocal jazz in the region.

#### Regarding Budgets

Funding an all-state vocal jazz ensemble presented a difficult challenge for several of the educators I interviewed. Jazz choirs are uniquely ill-suited to the budgeting strategy employed by many traditional all-state ensembles, whereby expenses are covered through a combination of audition and participation fees. For large traditional all-state choirs, the costs of a guest



conductor, accompanist, or venue can be distributed over many dozens or hundreds of students. Jazz choirs must cover similar expenses—plus those incurred to provide for rhythm sections and sound systems—distributed over only a handful of students.

Faced with this dilemma, and in absence of other sources of income, all-state jazz choirs must either increase in size or charge more per student. Buchanan explained that the ensemble in Indiana consists of no fewer than 30 vocalists—more singers than she would prefer, and twice the size of many other all-state jazz choirs—in an effort to meet their expenses. In Colorado, where fees for vocal jazz are higher to account for the small ensemble sizes, Taylor worries that the practice has erected barriers to entry and reduced equitable access for all students. Likewise, in Michigan, Scott worries that the high participation fee per student dissuades many for whom the cost is prohibitive. Accordingly, he is currently seeking funds to establish an endowment to reduce the per-student fee. In California, DeWeese explained that student fees for all-state are the same across different ensembles, but that they are still high enough to discourage participation for many students.

Lassman and Shannon worked to reduce costs wherever possible, splitting ensemble direction between them, programming from their own libraries, and utilizing equipment from Lassman's inventory, and still they lost money in the inaugural year. However, by the second and third years, they approached a break-even point. Stafford, too, has worked to minimize the budget as much as possible, volunteering his school's sound equipment and rhythm section instruments, and planning to restrict the first three years of clinicians to those within driving distance.

Stafford also successfully persuaded KCDA to merge audition and participation fees across their honors ensembles, effectively subsidizing the vocal jazz ensemble through the larger

traditional choirs. Van Paepegem was able to secure a similar financial arrangement with IMEA, though he continues to aim for self-sufficiency. When Lawrence established the all-state show choir and jazz choir in Missouri, he explicitly planned to leverage the popularity and larger ensemble size of the show choir to cover the costs of the jazz choir, emphasizing the educational value of the smaller group.

Hansen, however, was able to remain entirely self-funded by requiring teachers to join the Wyoming IAJE chapter—and later the Wyoming Jazz Educators—to maintain the eligibility of their students for all-state jazz ensembles. Hansen credited his many years running self-sustaining jazz camps and festivals with honing his financial acumen and worked as Wyoming IAJE treasurer to ensure the all-state ensembles remained solvent.

#### Regarding Show Choirs

The presence and prevalence of show choirs appears to have played a recurring role in the development of all-state vocal jazz ensembles, though the nature of the relationship between the two idioms varies. In Arizona and Missouri, all-state jazz and show choirs emerged in tandem, though under considerably different circumstances. Perry attests that the two idioms enjoy a balanced coexistence in Arizona, though by his own admission, many of the ensembles that performed ‘jazz’ at Northern Arizona University’s festival initially lacked many authentic jazz elements. Meanwhile, Lawrence characterizes Missouri as a “show choir state,” with the all-state jazz choir financially and rhetorically indebted to the more popular all-state show choir.

Indeed, several participants described their respective states as having dominant show choir traditions, notably Ritter and von Kampen in Nebraska, and Schreck in Wisconsin. Spradling described the difficulty many educators had distinguishing between jazz and show choirs prior to the mid-80s, and until 2004, ACDA served jazz and show choirs through a joint

R&S committee. Dohrmann recalled that many high school directors in her state who expressed initial interest in vocal jazz envisioned an ensemble more akin to a show choir. Dohrmann herself directed separate jazz and show choirs, and so was keenly aware of their differences. Scott stated that this tendency to consider vocal jazz and show choirs interchangeably stems from educator perceptions of both idioms as “fun” alternatives to traditional choirs, a stance he fervently rejects. He and many other all-state jazz choir founders position vocal jazz as serious art music, and therefore perceive the idiom as having more in common with traditional choirs than with show choirs.

However, their similarities and shared history appear to have fostered a rivalry between them, wherever jazz and show choirs must compete for limited time and resources. Plunkett, Vanderpool, and Schreck each transformed existing show choirs into vocal jazz ensembles in their respective teaching positions. Ritter embraced vocal jazz after feeling “burned out” on the extramusical elements and competitive traditions of show choir. And while a preference for jazz over show choirs might be implicitly obvious among the educators I interviewed, a few appear to hold show choir in specifically low regard, perhaps none more acutely than von Kampen. Chief among his concerns is the ratio of energy devoted to musical elements versus choreography, costuming, and production. His arguments may be sharply articulated, but his critique of show choirs reflects a pervasive attitude among all-state jazz choir founders that harmonic and rhythmic demands of the repertoire make vocal jazz a superior paradigm for building musicianship. Indeed, Ritter, Spradling, Shannon, Kerr, Gatchell, and von Kampen each frame their motivations as vocal jazz educators partly from this position.

The contemporary need to separate vocal jazz from show choirs by celebrating the artistic purity of the former and renouncing the performative appeal of the latter stands in stark contrast

with the views espoused by a number of the earliest educators in the field. As Amerind (2013) notes, Kirby Shaw has decried this trend in vocal jazz education, lamenting an embrace of high-art intellectualism at the expense of audience connection (p. 50). Amerind cites both Shaw and Bruce Rogers of Mt. San Antonio College as proponents of a more blended approach to the idiom, whereby jazz choirs incorporate some of the performance-oriented ethos of show choirs to build enthusiasm and understanding among non-specialist audience members.

#### Regarding Discontinued Ensembles

While a majority of all-state vocal jazz ensembles have persisted continuously since their founding, a handful of cases demonstrate that this is not a foregone conclusion. Indeed, discontinued all-state jazz choirs illustrate the fragility of such ensembles and the complex array of conditions necessary to sustain them.

In Indiana, the initial all-state jazz choir was struggling to attract enough students, and eventually faded out of existence: “it kind of just fizzled out,” as Buchanan recalled. She suggested that the ensemble’s founder had turned more of her professional energies toward her work with the Indianapolis Children’s Choir in the final years of the first all-state jazz choir, perhaps contributing to its decline.

Schreck attributes the demise of the first all-state jazz choir in Wisconsin to a range of factors, including the loss of several collegiate vocal jazz ensembles, though WSMA leadership cited the costs of professional sound reinforcement as a key factor in their decision to discontinue the ensemble. And over the last decade, Schreck has witnessed a continued decline in vocal jazz education in Wisconsin, following the end of Lawrence University’s vocal jazz festival and the rise of pop a cappella groups across the state. She contends that these ensembles offer an attractive alternative to jazz choirs for the many high school directors who struggle to

work with rhythm sections and to teach jazz harmonies, rhythms, and improvisation. It is also important to note that in both Wisconsin and Indiana, the all-state vocal jazz ensembles were resurrected under the auspices of ACDA chapters, though both predecessors had been hosted by state music educator associations.

In California, DeWeese recalled that the all-state jazz choir was discontinued in 2003 following Dina Humble's departure as the ensemble coordinator. Notably, under DeWeese's leadership the ensemble continued uninterrupted, even as IAJE collapsed and CAJ was created to fill the void. In fact, though the loss of IAJE undeniably dealt a blow to vocal jazz education across the country, in California, Wyoming, and New Jersey—where IAJE chapters had hosted all-state jazz ensembles—DeWeese, Hansen, and Dohrmann were each able to maintain their respective all-state ensembles without interruption. In more recent years, however, DeWeese attributes the decline of the California all-state jazz choir to the loss of key vocal jazz educators to other states and the rise of strong regional honor choirs in both Northern and Southern California. She contends that these ensembles provide students with the opportunity for an advanced jazz choir experience at a lower cost and without a direct conflict with traditional all-state ensembles, thus siphoning student interest away from the all-state jazz choir.

The demise of the ensemble in Nebraska mirrors aspects of similar decline in Wisconsin and Indiana. Both Ritter and von Kampen described NCDA's dissatisfaction with the small number of school districts that provided most of the ensemble's students. With Ritter's vocal jazz festival at the heart of the field in Nebraska, several high schools struggled to maintain their jazz choirs after it was discontinued. Moreover, with the end of the festival, auditions for the all-state jazz choir shifted to a recorded format, a move Ritter believes further atomized student

interest. Particularly following the creation of an all-state show choir in Nebraska, support for the vocal jazz ensemble fell rapidly.

Each of these cases demonstrate the importance of strong networks of vocal jazz educators in maintaining all-state jazz choirs. Though such ensembles can and have served as catalysts to promote the growth of vocal jazz education in a given state, their ability to persist is often dependent on the size, vitality, and interconnectedness of the vocal jazz community there. To the extent to which these cases can provide guidance to current all-state vocal jazz coordinators, they underscore the value of continued direct efforts to expand and promote vocal jazz education in high schools throughout the state.

#### Limitations

This study is marked by several key limitations, principally a kind of confirmation bias for existing ensembles. It is possible that several unsuccessful efforts were undertaken across the country that either predate or ran concurrently—and unknowingly—with those that ultimately led to the successful creation of ensembles. Furthermore, without direct knowledge of their historical existence, additional discontinued all-state jazz choirs might have also gone undetected. Indeed, in several cases I only became aware of discontinued ensembles through my investigation of their successors. A handful of my interviews suggest the historical presence of all-state jazz choirs in additional states, though I have been unable to find supporting evidence of their existence in news and host organization archives, or through direct communication with vocal jazz educators in those states.

This final point demonstrates another key limitation of this study: archival records are not uniformly maintained or readily accessed. In a handful of cases, I was able to corroborate interview data through the records of those ensembles' host organizations, strengthening the

veracity of my narrative. However, several of the earliest ensembles predate widespread digital record keeping, and in the absence of a clear reason to maintain them, some host organizations have since lost or discarded the primary documentation of those ensembles' origins.

However, even excepting these unconfirmed cases, the data I have gathered are not comprehensive and should not be misconstrued as such. Most obviously, I should note that I was simply unable to gather information on the creation of the all-state jazz choir in Maine, despite my correspondence with several leading vocal jazz educators and the state music educators association there. In three cases, the ensemble's founder was no longer available for interview, and I was unable to identify a suitable secondary source willing to participate in this study. And in one case, founders were identified and contacted, but later became non-responsive despite my repeated efforts to re-establish communication. It is possible that these individuals simply decided they were no longer interested in participating.

This study is also limited by imperfections and biases in the recollections of the educators I interviewed. As with any historical study, my understanding of the history reflects the biases of the perspectives I have chosen to represent. For example, a very different narrative might have emerged by conducting interviews with those whose authority in host organizations provided the final approval for each ensemble. Without contradicting or confirming secondary sources in many instances, the details each founder recounted can only be accepted as evidence of that individual's recollections, and not as infallible historical fact. That said, many of the educators I interviewed made substantial efforts to review relevant primary documents and to consult others with first-hand knowledge of the events in question prior to our interview.

#### Directions for Future Research

Several lines of inquiry might yet be drawn from the results of this study. Naturally,

continued research might yet shed light on those ensembles whose origins are incompletely represented here. Alternatively, the existing data set could be considered through a demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, or other lens in an effort to illuminate the underlying conditions that might have facilitated the creation of these ensembles. Follow up studies might seek to generate a more detailed understanding of the history. Such future studies might be dedicated to in-depth explorations of any one of the emergent themes, or of the evolution of one or more of the ensembles over time, or of the impact of these ensembles in the lives of students, parents, and teachers in their respective states. And hopefully, as new all-state vocal jazz ensembles continue to emerge around the country, those stories might be gathered and added to the historical record.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

If the history of the creation of these all-state vocal jazz ensembles demonstrates anything, it is that there are many paths to success. Each of the educators I interviewed brought unique strengths and perspectives to their task, and each faced challenges and employed solutions that reflected the unique conditions of their time and place. Common to each of their stories, though, is a belief in the value of vocal jazz education, a commitment to its expansion and development at the secondary level, and a vision for the role of all-state ensembles in achieving those goals.

In gathering and presenting these stories, I have been inspired and informed many times over, and it is my fervent hope that future vocal jazz educators might be similarly informed and inspired through my retelling. Whether they find themselves tasked with the preservation of existing ensembles or are seeking to establish an all-state ensemble where none exists, may the experiences of those who came before illuminate their path.

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