



PUTTING THE COMMUNITY IN COMMUNITY CHORUSES

KRISTINA NAKAGAWA IS THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF RESOUNDING ACHORD, AND HAS BEEN PERFORMING AND DIRECTING IN THE SILICON VALLEY FOR THE PAST 14 YEARS. SHE PREVIOUSLY CONDUCTED AT PINWOOD SCHOOL IN LOS ALTOS AND SERVED AS ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR FOR THE CHORAL PROJECT IN SAN JOSÉ. BEFORE SETTLING IN THE SAN JOSÉ AREA, SHE CONDUCTED TWO CHOIRS AT UC-IRVINE. SHE HOLDS A BACHELOR OF MUSIC DEGREE IN VOCAL PERFORMANCE FROM UCI, AND A MASTER'S DEGREE IN CHORAL CONDUCTING FROM SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY.

Few things are more important to me or to my community choir than outreach. A successful outreach program doesn't have to be expensive, and it can foster a stronger sense of community among your membership and your audience base.

Before I tell you about some of the successful outreach programs I have experienced, I must provide this disclaimer: nothing that I write here is the "right" way to do outreach. There are endless opportunities and endless ways to serve a community, and I hope that you might be inspired either to continue your current outreach efforts, or to start anew with a program that is tailored to your community and your choir.

When the founding members and I started Resounding Achord in 2012, we decided to begin as a service organization first, and a performing choir second. We wanted to outreach specifically to schools, churches, and other foundational music entities to help maintain, grow, and renew their programs. This framework provided a wonderful opportunity when it came to outreach because it changed our perception very quickly from "What can we do?" to "How do we do it?"

We began by looking at what we could immediately implement for our very first concert. Most of us had sung or participated in organizations that offered free or discounted tickets for students. We all felt strongly that children and teens in our area needed to know that music exists beyond the classroom—that choral singing doesn't have to end when you leave a high school or college campus. IMPACT, or Inspiring Musical Passion Among Children & Teens, was our answer. All children high-school age and younger attend our concerts for free, and we offer a student discount for all

college students. Take a look at your revenue per concert. Are you bringing in a significant number of ticket sales from young people? If not, consider offering discounts or free tickets, and then make sure that all the local teachers know when and where your concerts will be held.

Johnathon Atwood, founding Executive Director of Resounding Achord, and I were involved in honor choirs when we were in school, and the experience for both of us was priceless. We wanted to be able to give the experience of honor choir to students in our area who wouldn't normally be able to afford it, and our board unanimously agreed. In the fall of 2013, we offered eight scholarships to students for their registration fees for the California ACDA Coastal Region Honor Choir. Students were required to fill out a brief application, write a personal statement, and submit a recommendation from their teacher. Afterward, we shared some of the students' personal stories with members of our immediate community, and because of the donors' response, we were able to expand the program in just two years to serve 44 honor-choir students in November 2015. Our donors have been so generous in their contributions that we were also able to give

BELOW: KRISTINA REHEARSES WITH MEMBERS OF RESOUNDING ACHORD'S SUMMER LAB CHOIR



ten scholarships for the 2016 California All-State Choirs.

One of the most important steps in creating an outreach program is to identify the needs of your community. We did a survey of local junior high, high school, and college choir directors, asking one simple question: What do you need? Most often, the needs have been monetary. By earmarking a percentage of each concert's revenue for outreach, we have been able to say, "We can help with that!" nearly every time. We have contributed funds for new instruments, uniforms, and tour costs to more than four different schools in our area. Most of the gifts were small, but they made a big impact on the lives of the students that they helped. Ask the question in your community; I bet you'll be able to say, "We can help," too.

Another option for outreach may be found through collaboration. Simple collaborative projects can easily be limited in cost, and offer fantastic exposure. In our case, we created a summer Lab Choir. Most choirs are off for the summer months for family vacations and the traditional school year schedule.

Part of Resounding Achord's vision for our future when

we began was to be a resource for student conductors to practice their conducting techniques on an actual choir. So we contacted San José State University to see if they might have students who would be interested in doing some summer work to further their study. It turned out that same summer was the first year of the three-summer masters program at the university. We met for six weeks and provided student conductors—both undergraduates and graduate students—with the opportunity to come and conduct an adult choir of intermediate to advanced singers. We chose some standard repertoire for the students, and contacted many of the community and college choirs in our area, inviting as many singers as possible to come and sing along. What resulted was a rich six-week program that gave the students the opportunity for podium time, and gave us more exposure in the community, thus helping with both recruitment of new singers and audience expansion.

The most important thing to remember about outreach programs is that they don't have to cost you anything. And, if you are blessed to have extra funds, a little can go a long way for a choir in need. ■

BELOW: A STANDING OVATION FOR THE 2016 ALL-STATE MIXED CHOIR AT CASMEC IN SAN JOSE

