

TRANSCENDING THE TECHNICAL: AN EXAMINATION OF SPIRITUALITY IN
CHORAL MUSIC MAKING FOR SELECTED PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL CHOIR
CONDUCTORS

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by

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all of my teachers who cultivated within me a passion to be a life-long learner, my music teachers who helped me find my place in the world and furthered my love for music, and especially to all of the choral directors who have taught me to not just sing notes and rhythms, but to make art. I am so grateful for the support of my family, friends, colleagues, and students who have been on this spiritual journey with me, to my mom who taught me how to be a teacher, and especially to my wife and best friend, Kasey, who constantly inspired, encouraged, and supported me along the way.

To my grandfathers:

Thank you for establishing education as a priority in our family.

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Professor of Industrial Technology & Department Chair,
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And

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Dr. Wendy Sims, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenology was to contribute to the examination of the role of spirituality in choral music making for public school choral conductors in the United States. Since the year 2000, the topic of spirituality has been a growing area of interest for researchers, particularly in the fields of nursing, social sciences, and education. To better understand the phenomenon of spirituality within music education, eight public high school choir conductors who were members of the American Choral Directors Association, had taught for at least five years, and had experienced spirituality in choral rehearsals or performances were interviewed face-to-face or via online video-conferencing software, using a self-developed interview guide with open ended questions. Participants included four males and four females from Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, and Florida.

The findings of this study supported previous literature on spirituality by contrasting spirituality from religion, and described spirituality as students engaging in musical experiences that transcended the fundamentals of music, involving the whole person: body, mind, and spirit. Participants shared that a certain level of technicality must be achieved before a spiritual experience would occur, but a flawless performance was not required. The participants expressed the need for vulnerability and authenticity in the classroom modelled by the teacher, but the strongest theme throughout the data was the value placed on various connections. These teachers discussed connection to the music,

particularly the text, connection between the teacher and the students, connection among the students themselves, connection to the divine, and connection to the audience. The teachers suggested those interested in engaging their students in spiritual experiences could cultivate these connections through large/small group discussion, studying the cultural and historical background of the music, use of metaphors and imagination, self-reflection, journaling, sharing personal stories, engaging in ice-breakers and team building activities, mindfulness exercises, in personal interactions, and through the use of inspirational quotes. When asked to define spirituality in the context of choral music, each participant admitted that it was difficult to define, but expressed it as something bigger than themselves, tied to a greater purpose, calling, and/or worldview, and often expressed hope that students would gain this greater perspective on life.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

When discussing his work and rehearsal technique, famous choral conductor Robert Shaw often spoke of the spirit. For example, “If we fracture the tone, we fracture the spirit” (Weill Music Institute, 1990-98). Burnaford (2012) noted that in Shaw’s choruses, “technique is in the service of the spirit” (p. 150). This attention to spirituality is also found in the writings of other respected choral pedagogues. Weston Noble, former Director of Choral Activities at Luther College, said that “anything aesthetic in nature feeds our human spirit, most certainly the arts” (Noble, 2005, p. 17). Perhaps one of the most prolific and influential choral conducting pedagogues of today, due to his extensive textbooks, DVDs, and other resources, is conductor James Jordan, Professor and Senior Conductor at Westminster Choir College. Jordan often includes the topic of spirituality in his writings. Jordan set the tone of his book, *Sound as Teacher: Growing the Conductor’s Perceptual Mind* by stating in the Introduction, “A deep awareness of sound and self-spirit is necessary to allow us each to move to higher ground with each rehearsal, and to hear and react to what sound tells and can teach us” (Jordan, 2015, p. xxvi).

The realm of the spiritual is also acknowledged by leadership of the premier professional organizations in the choral field. The American Choral Directors Association highlights “spiritual experiences” in its purposes as an organization. The first purpose listed on the ACDA website is: “To foster and promote choral singing, which will provide artistic, cultural, and spiritual experiences for the participants” (ACDA, 2017). The strategic planning statement of the National Association for Music

Education (NAfME) acknowledges the spirit, stating, “Comprehensiveness: Uplifting the human spirit and providing opportunities for all students to create, perform, respond, and connect to all styles of music” (NAfME, 2015). Although there is discussion pertaining to spirituality from leaders in the field of choral music, there is ambiguity surrounding the definition of spirituality in this context.

Background of the Problem

Ver Beek (2010) suggested that spirituality is at the center of many daily decisions made by people in the ‘South’ (referring to Central and South America) and that it contributes to a community’s development. He concluded that despite its prevalence in everyday life, developmental literature and practices have avoided the topic of spirituality in the workplace. Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004) explained that this is because of a lack of a clear definition of spirituality in the workplace, leading some to believe workplace spirituality to be “a disguise for ingratiating religion into the workplace, a new age mantra, or a meaningless quest for yet another dead-end employee motivational tool” (p. 130). Although spiritual language is often considered taboo in secular circles, the issue of spirituality in the workplace is a growing interest (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004; Ver Beek (2010). There is also a recognition of spirituality in music settings, with research that supports spiritual engagement being a byproduct of music making. Carr (2008) wrote, “if it is widely assumed that exposure to various arts can have real spiritual benefits, it has often also seemed natural to associate music, of all the different arts on offer, with spiritual experience or growth” (p. 17).

There is a wealth of research surrounding the choral art form, but historically, there has been little literature investigating the role spirituality plays in choral music. However, since 2000 there has been a surge in interest surrounding spirituality in music education. In the December 2011 issue of the *Music Educators Journal*, the Academic Editor stated, “Other than Iris Yob’s feature article in this issue, Harper’s is the only other in MEJ’s ninety-eight years to specifically focus on the spiritual aspects of music teaching and learning” (Freer, 2011, p. 8). Carr (2008) suggested:

Few concerned with educational theory and policy could have failed to notice the recent upsurge of interest— not least in such economically developed democracies as the United Kingdom and the United States—in the notion of spiritual development as a possible aim or goal of public or common schooling. (p. 16)

The Yob (2011) article that Freer referenced is entitled, “If We Knew What Spirituality Was, We Would Teach for It.” Yob, along with numerous other authors who have written about spirituality in music education, identified differences between *spirituality* and *religion*, because questions about whether those are separate ideas might be a contributing factor to the ambiguity in the literature. Palmer (2010) explained the distinction by stating, “Spirituality is an open invitation to extraordinary experience,” while “religion is doctrinal and establishes a worldview that has its source in a codification of beliefs comprising of a closed system” (p. 153). Freeman (2002) differentiated the two by distinguishing between *spirituality* versus *sacredness*, explaining “Spirituality and sacredness, while interrelated, are not synonymous” (Clarifying Spirituality & Sacredness Section, para. 1). Yob explained that experiences of

spirituality could be compared with what psychologist Abraham Maslow identified as *peak experiences*, and that this might be more accepted in secular environments. Yob argued that it is important to engage with spirituality in music making through “teach[ing] the languages of the spirit,” “us[ing] the context of the music to unlock its meaning,” and enabling the students to engage with “awareness” or “mindfulness” to encounter the world around them (p. 45-46).

Another major voice on the topic of spirituality in music education is June Boyce-Tillman, who posited that “music should be intimately bound up with the wider curriculum, particularly in the areas of personal, social, cultural, moral, and spiritual education” (2004, pg. 102). Yob (2010) suggested that instead of viewing spirituality as a byproduct of music, the arts and religion might actually be a byproduct of spirituality. Others describe spirituality as a product of “supreme levels of consciousness” (Palmer, 2006, p. 144). Perhaps the difficulty in studying spirituality and its influence is its transcendent nature. Although Yob compared spirituality in education with Maslow’s theories, Capra (2002), described spiritual experience as:

an experience of aliveness of mind and body as a unity. Moreover, this experience of unity transcends not only the separation of mind and body, but also the separation of self and world. The central awareness in these spiritual moments is a profound sense of oneness with all, a sense of belonging to the universe as a whole. (p. 68)

Palmer (2006) also stated that transcendence is the ultimate aim of flow. The concept of “Flow Theory” was developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) and occurs when “we experience enjoyment when we take on a

project that stretches our skills in new directions, when we recognize and master new challenges” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 175) and when individuals experience “the sense of discovery, the excitement of finding out something new about oneself, or about the possibilities of interacting with the many opportunities for action that the environment offers” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 177). It is possible then that spiritual experiences may also take place when an individual is experiencing flow, because both involve a level of transcendence. Palmer (2006) also believed that spirituality or transcendence can be achieved in music education through mental preparation, skill development and practice, teaching students that higher planes of consciousness can and do exist.

Due to the recent growing interest in spirituality and its role in music education, and the “lack of rigorous research into spirituality,” researchers van der Merwe and Habron (2015) developed a conceptual model of spirituality in music education. They employed a hermeneutic phenomenological theoretical framework based on educator Van Manen’s lifeworld existentials (corporeality, relationality, spatiality, and temporality) to code the themes that emerged from the literature on spirituality in music education. Based on 22 primary academic sources found using the keywords “spirituality in music education,” the researchers noted that all of the literature examined was published after 2000. Not all of these sources were research studies on spirituality in music education, but they were academic sources that referenced the topic. Based on the themes that emerged related to these existentials, the authors provided practical classroom applications related to spirituality in music education. For instance, asking students to connect with the music and with each other is an example of relationality. Encouraging students to reflect inward as they listen fits into corporeality. Prodding the students to

think more critically about where the piece could go explains temporality and using metaphoric language such as “fill the space with your sound” addresses spatiality (van der Merwe & Habron, 2015, p. 64).

Since 2000, many researchers have discussed the presence of spirituality in music making, and in particular music education. Freeman (2002) reflected on the theoretical aspects of spirituality and explained ways teachers can attend to a spiritual classroom environment. She suggested:

A spiritual classroom environment supports three constant ideals of respect, compassion and flexibility:

1. Respect is demonstrated toward one another and toward oneself.
2. A compassionate climate leads to healthier emotional bonds leading to greater educational cooperation between the students and their teacher.
3. Greater flexibility with learning goals nurtures and challenges intellectual complexity. (Freeman, 2002, Defining Spirituality section, para. 7)

Respect, a compassionate climate, and greater flexibility with learning goals are all important classroom ideals that many teachers desire to incorporate in their classroom. These types of ideals can be incorporated into the choral classroom, particularly when engaging in performance-based activities.

Statement of the Problem

Because of the research that has been conducted sparking the discussion about spirituality in education, music educators now have an avenue for clarifying non-tangible concepts and ideals that often get ignored in a data-driven educational environment. However, without rigorous research to give a clearer understanding of spirituality and the

role it plays in successful choral settings, the ideals that make up spirituality will continue to be random descriptors of various directors. Freeman (2002) asserted that as teachers, we must respect our students' understanding of spirituality. She cited research that indicated students have a soul-searching desire to seek the transcendent and that when students feel understood and cared for they often feel inspired to make greater efforts in their musicking (Freeman, 2002, p. 5). I believe that it is our responsibility as choral directors to understand the role spirituality plays in choral music making, comprehend the impact it has on our singers, and provide opportunities for spiritual experiences to exist in our rehearsals and performances. I have often heard the sad testimonies of older adults who share that their music teacher told them not to sing or that they could not sing at all, because they did not sing well. Not only did this segregate them from the talented elite in their younger years, but it fomented an idea that prevented them from engaging in vocal music for the rest of their life. Perhaps if directors and teachers were more aware of the spiritual nature of their students, they could better teach them and encourage life-long musical engagement regardless of their musical ability.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenology is to contribute to the examination of the role of spirituality in choral music making for selected choral conductors in the United States. Merriam stated, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (2016, p. 6). In order to gain an understanding of what is meant by the term *spirituality* in the context of choral music making, researchers must

gain an understanding of those participating in choral music making, their spiritual experiences, and the meaning they place on those experiences.

Merriam also stated that “phenomenological study seeks understanding about the essence and the underlying structure of the phenomenon” (2016, p. 24). Through this research study, I sought to begin to understand the essence of spirituality and to uncover the underlying structure and meaning as experienced and explained by choral conductors in the field of choral music education.

Importance of the Study

With so much recent attention on spirituality within the field of choral music, it is important for research to establish a working definition of the phenomenon in the context of choral music making. Members of the International Society for Music Education have developed a special interest group called “Spirituality and Music Education” (SAME, 2016). This group’s mission is to bring together music education researchers and practitioners with an interest in spirituality, provide tools and methods for integrating spirituality in music education, foster dialogue between a diverse group of individuals and promote “spiritually-sensitive and informed culture in music education practice and research” (SAME, 2016). This particular study would add a voice to this discussion. While some of the members of SAME are from the United States, much of the research in spirituality is being done in the United Kingdom. This study would provide specific feedback from current practitioners teaching in the United States, which operates from a different perspective regarding church and state issues than does Great Britain. Particularly in this educational climate when discussions of diversity and culturally-

responsive teaching are more prevalent, this study is intended to create dialogue to guide choral conductors in understanding how to discuss spirituality with common ground and with cultural sensitivity. It will also become a springboard for future research to be conducted once a clearer understanding has been developed.

Research Questions

The primary research question is, “What does spirituality in the context of choral music making mean to selected public high school choral conductors?” Five sub-questions include: 1) How do public high school choral conductors experience spirituality in choral rehearsals? 2) How do public high school choral conductors experience spirituality in choral performances? 3) To what extent should public high school choral conductors attempt to infuse spirituality into the choral music making process? 4) How do public high school choral conductors infuse spirituality into the choral music making process? 5) To what extent does the high school choral conductor’s gender play a role related to spirituality as experienced or infused by the conductor in the choral music making process?

Conclusion

Developing an understanding of spirituality in choral music making is an important step for future research in the area of spirituality and music education. Although the definition of spirituality may continue to develop over time, this study serves as a starting point for more clear discussions within the topic of spirituality and its role in choral music education. Given that much of the choral music making in the US occurs in high schools, by focusing on public high school choral conductors, I hope to gain a better understanding of the term spirituality as it relates to choral music making in a secular environment.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the examination of the role of spirituality in choral music making. Through this phenomenological study of public high school choral conductors in the United States, I hope to contribute to the spirituality research literature while also providing practical ways to cultivate a spiritual classroom. The topic of spirituality has been studied in various fields including nursing, social work, and education. Within the field of education, particularly music education, several contributing voices have led to the recent surge of interest in spirituality, including June Boyce-Tillman, Iris Yob, and Parker Palmer.

Spirituality in the Literature

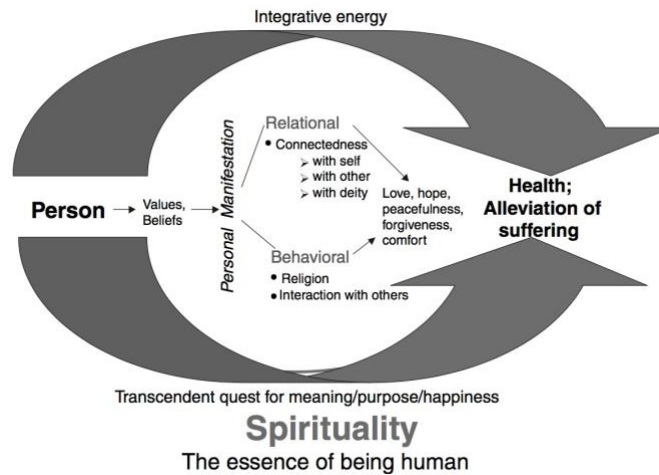
When tracing the origins of the term *spirituality*, an equal amount of ambiguity exists between its original definition and today's confusion surrounding the term. However, since the early 2000s, interest in the term spirituality among researchers has been growing (Tzounis, 2017; van der Merwe & Habron, 2015). Particularly in the fields of Health and Social Sciences, researchers have sought to understand the role spirituality plays in people's everyday lives. For instance, there was a growing presence of writing about spirituality in nursing literature, and although the use of the term was reportedly increasing, the practical understanding of the phenomenon and its use in nursing practices was limited (Miner-Williams, 2005). In 2005, a theoretical framework and six general guidelines that nurses can learn to provide more holistic, ethical, and balanced patient care was developed. As a summary, the following are general guidelines that were developed to assist in making spirituality meaningful in nursing practice:

1. Spirituality in nursing requires a confluence of the two conceptual approaches of providing spiritual care and providing care spiritually. Nurses should acquire competence with both.
2. The meaning in a patient's life is part of their spirituality, which is manifested through connections and behaviours, governed by their values. In seeking to understand and honour these, nurses assist both patients and themselves in their spiritual journeys.
3. Spirituality is related to, but not the same as religion. Offering to make a referral to a chaplain may or may not be enough to meet even a religious person's spiritual needs.
4. Patients may or may not want to have their spiritual needs, particularly religious ones, addressed openly. It is up to the nurse to discern and respond to patients to meet these needs. To ignore them is unethical.
5. Providing care spiritually is caring for the person in addition to caring for the patient. Therefore, most often, it need not take up extra time in a busy day.
6. Nurses are more likely to provide nursing care spiritually when they themselves are comfortable with their own spiritualities. (Miner-Williams, 2005, p. 819)

Miner-Williams provided the following model of spirituality as a theoretical framework to show how one can move toward holistic health and relieve suffering from the patient, through relational and behavioral connectedness (see Figure 1). The findings in the research literature of the relational and behavioral manifestations are consistent

with the findings of spirituality's manifestation in music education (to be described later in this chapter), particularly in the connections between self, others, and deity.

Figure 1. Model of Spirituality in Nursing



As another example a spirituality's growing interest in nursing, in 1996, a new course was offered to prospective doctors at Michigan State University called "Spirituality—A Vital Component of Wellbeing," taught by a Jake Foglio, a Catholic priest who served as the campus minister and as an assistant professor (Foglio, 1996). Foglio communicated that to become a good professional, one must also become a good person. He defined spirituality as "The ability to pursue and practice being a human being" (MSU Alumni Association & Friends, 2018). To honor his work, there is now an endowed Foglio Chair of Spirituality in the College of Arts and Letters at the university.

The phenomenon of spirituality and its engagement with the study of social work has also been an area in which interest has recently grown. The authors of *Spirituality and Social Work* posited that spirituality is "one of the most significant, important and controversial themes to emerge in social work in recent years" (Holloway & Moss, 2010, p. 1). In their text, the authors highlighted the distinction between spirituality and

religion and the overlap that sometimes occurs. The text also covered topics including spiritual needs, spirituality related to quality of life, spiritual care, multidisciplinary implications of spirituality, spirituality related to community, and global and multicultural perspectives on spirituality. Besides Holloway and Moss' text, several other texts on spirituality and social work have recently been published (Canda & Furman, 2009; Crisp, 2016 & 2017; Matthews, 2009).

Also in the social sciences, a researcher who has garnered societal acclaim is Brenè Brown. A research professor at the University of Houston, Brown holds the Huffington Foundation–Brenè Brown Endowed Chair at the Graduate College of Social Work. Since the early 2000's she has researched courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy and is the author of three #1 *New York Times* bestsellers discussing these topics. Although she is best known for her research in vulnerability and shame, spirituality has been a topic of discussion that has emerged from her data. In her text, Brown (2017) defined spirituality as “recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion” (p. 45). She argued that society is in a spiritual crisis because of an individual's lack of connection with another.

Common Themes in the Spirituality Literature

Within the spirituality literature, I have identified several common themes. Even though the discussion of spirituality has been studied in various fields, many of the same topics are mentioned. I have labeled these themes Breath, Spirituality is not religion, and Metaphysical.

Breath. In tracing the background of the term, many sources reference the derivation of the English term spirituality from the Latin term *spirare*, which means *to breath* (Palmer, A.J., 2006, p. 44; Tzounis, 2017, p. 1). This etymology gave way to the understanding that spirituality contributes to the study of the whole person. This is why, particularly in nursing, social work, and education, spirituality has been emerging as an important topic, because each of those fields values holistic practice. Tzounis (2017) explained,

A large body of literature acknowledges the connectedness between spirituality and the Greek word πνεύμα (pneuma) which means spirit, mind, soul, and breathing... Many researchers try to use shortened or narrower definitions in order to decode spirituality. Spirituality has been described as a variable of holism as it involves a sense of connectedness to other people, nature, and life as a whole. (p. 1)

Spirituality is not religion. Another important and common theme among authors is the separation of spirituality and religion (Freeman, 2002; Holloway & Moss, 2010; van der Merwe & Habron, 2015). Yob (2011) specified, “Religion has been shaped by the spiritual experience but does not have exclusive rights to spirituality and in fact must work diligently to prevent losing it” (p. 44). Authors have consistently stated that it is difficult to provide a definition of spirituality and some argue that even defining spirituality is counter-intuitive. Bender (2010) asserted that “studying spirituality appears akin to shoveling fog” (p. 182). Several definitions used phrases like “a search for meaning and purpose,” (Hansen, 2005, ii) “acknowledging something greater than

ourselves,” (English & Gillen, 2000, p.6) and “connectedness with others and nature and connectedness with the transcendent” (Meezenbroek, et al., 2010, p. 338).

Religion, however, has been described as having a particular set of beliefs or specific dogma, most often connected with a divine being. Robert Nash (2002), professor in the College of Education and Social Services at the University of Vermont distinguished religion from spirituality by stating, “Religion...is the institution; spirituality is the personal. Religion is what we do with others; spirituality is what we do within ourselves. Public vs. private faith. Religion is head; spirituality is heart” (p. 166). Anthropologist and Professor of Education, Paul Byers (1992) suggested, “Religions...are particular answers to the universal human questions about the creation and meaning of life. Spirituality refers to the universal personal concern for the questions” (Pg. 6).

Metaphysical. A third major theme is acknowledging “something greater than ourselves” (Jones, 2005, p. 3). Boyce-Tillman (2017) referred to this as the metaphysical: “There is a sense of encounter with the beyond, which can be with mystery” (p. 5). For some, that is the acknowledgment of a divine being, such as God, however others have communicated transcendental experiences that are beyond description. Physicist Fritjof Capra described spiritual experience as:

an experience of aliveness of mind and body as a unity. Moreover, this experience of unity transcends not only the separation of mind and body, but also the separation of self and world. The central awareness in these spiritual moments is a profound sense of oneness with all, a sense of belonging to the universe as a whole. (As cited in Palmer, 2010, p. 144)

Spirituality is also closely associated with what Maslow called *peak experience* (Yob, 2011) and with Csikszentmihalyi's "Flow Theory" (Palmer, 2006), both of which include aspects of transcendence. Transcendence is the ultimate aim of flow. Flow occurs when "we experience enjoyment when we take on a project that stretches our skills in new directions, when we recognize and master new challenges" and when individuals experience "the sense of discovery, the excitement of finding out something new about oneself, or about the possibilities of interacting with the many opportunities for action that the environment offers" (Palmer, 2006, p. 148). Freer (2008) summarized Csikszentmihalyi's requirements to achieve flow by saying,

According to flow theory, individuals are intrinsically motivated to find experiences characterised by high levels of both perceived challenge and perceived skill, a clarity of goals, deep personal involvement and concentration, self-directedness, self-awareness, the receiving of immediate feedback, and a lack of awareness concerning time constraints. When in these situations, people experience a state of flow while the loss of these conditions disrupts the flow experience. (p. 108)

Spirituality in Education

Authors in the field of Education have also taken an interest in examining the role of spirituality in the profession. A prominent writer about spirituality in the United States is teacher and author Parker Palmer. Palmer (2003) defined spirituality as "the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than our own egos" (p. 2). He expressed the belief that teaching required one to go beyond knowledge and facts and to consider that the heart and soul of a person are at the center of the art of teaching. To put

his ideas into practice he created the COURAGE TO TEACH® program, which is a two-year experience for K-12 teachers, who participate in eight weekend retreats with a trained facilitator. The retreats are voluntary experiences where participants form a community to ask honest and open questions, to search deeper within, all while using the motto, “No fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting straight” (p. 10). At the heart of these retreats were honest self-reflections that Palmer believed were required before teachers can adequately expect students to build relational trust in the classroom. When people described their good teachers to Palmer, they reported some form of connectivity from either teacher to students, students to other students, or teacher and students to the subject itself (Palmer, 1997).

In the field of higher education, professors are also discussing spirituality’s role in the classroom. Jones (2005), sought out the definition of spirituality from a higher education perspective. As an assistant professor of Health and Physical Education at Southern Oregon University, she “became increasingly aware that our state of being (another way of saying our health) drives all our behaviors, decisions, and relationships” (p. 1). Reflecting on the writings of teachers and authors like O’Reilly, author of *The Peaceable Classroom* and *Radical Presence*; Tisdell, who specialized in adult learning; and Byers, who contrasted religion and spirituality, Jones’ (2005) assessment was that:

Spirituality in education refers to no more—and no less—than a deep connection between student, teacher, and subject— a connection so honest, vital, and vibrant that it cannot help but be intensely relevant. Nourishment of this spark in the classroom allows it to flourish in the world in the area of politics, medicine, engineering—wherever our students go after graduation. (p. 1)

Along with K-12 teachers and college professors, administrators also have been seeking to better understand spirituality's role in education. In *Classroom Leadership*, a publication of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, McGreevy and Copley (1999), wrote that there is an "equally powerful connection between the spiritual nourishment of teachers and students and the quality of a school's teaching and learning" (n.p.). Citing the work of Parker Palmer, these two authors also acknowledge the scholarship of Maria Harris, Edward Seliner, Robert Coles, and Howard Gardner, all prominent educators in support of spirituality's importance in education. Concluding with a quote from Huebner (1993), they suggested that aspects of spirituality include:

- an awareness of an inner, reflective life;
- attention to what nourishes us, provides balance in our lives and makes us whole;
- a deepening connection to what really matters in our own life, in our relationships, and in our life work;
- a gentle, lively sense of humor;
- an optimistic perspective that highlights the "goodness" in people and one's life circumstances;
- a profound connection with nature—taking deep comfort and inspiration from the natural world;
- a willingness to listen compassionately to the needs and concerns of others;
- a sense of hope, a "moreness that takes us by surprise when we are at the edge and end of knowing." (Huebner, 1993, p.2)

McGreevy and Copley (1998/1999) asked participants in their workshops and presentations what connections they believe existed between education and spirituality.

Responses included a variety of activities from recognizing accomplishments to responding to real life situations, expressing that educators can create an atmosphere where connection is developed. The participants suggested creating a beautiful aesthetic in the classroom, sharing stories, using traditions and rituals to celebrate “beginnings and endings,” engaging in the visual and performing arts, creating quiet moments throughout the day for reflection and response, reflecting and responding to life’s mysteries, involving students in community service, engaging with the natural world, enjoying humor, cultivating an inner life, and mentoring colleagues and peers. (McGreevy & Copley, 1998/1999, n.p.)

Beyond reflecting on the theoretical and philosophical, one author posits a spiritual classroom is built on three ideals: respect, compassion, and flexibility (Freeman, 2002, Defining Spirituality section, para. 7). In order for spiritual moments to occur, Freeman explained that respect must be demonstrated toward oneself and to everyone else in the classroom. She also suggested that a compassionate climate builds greater educational interaction between the student and teachers through healthier emotional bonds and having greater flexibility with learning goals can contribute to nurturing and challenging intellectual complexity.

Spirituality in Education in the United Kingdom is also an issue of note, given that “all schools are legally required to attend to the spiritual development of their pupils and the quality of provision for spiritual education is regularly assessed by OFSTED [Office for Standards in Education—a non-ministerial department of the UK government, reporting to Parliament]” (Wright, 2000). However, even though teachers in the UK are

accountable for attending to the spiritual needs of their students, according to Wright (2000), there is still ambiguity and controversy concerning the topic.

Spirituality in Music Education

As the topic of spirituality is being cultivated in the field of education from K-12 teachers, professors, and administrators, some music educators have begun to examine its role in the music classroom. Yob (2010), consistent with other authors who wrote about spirituality in music education, identified differences between spirituality and religion, indicating that confusion between these ideas may be a contributing factor to the ambiguity regarding spirituality in the literature. Palmer (2010) in his third article of three related to spirituality published between 1995 – 2010 in *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, explained the distinction by saying “Spirituality is an open invitation to extraordinary experience,” while “religion is doctrinal and establishes a worldview that has its source in a codification of beliefs comprising of a closed system” (p. 153). Freeman (2002) differentiated the two by distinguishing the language between *spirituality* versus *sacredness*, explaining “Spirituality and sacredness, while interrelated, are not synonymous” (Clarifying Spirituality & Sacredness Section, para. 1). Yob also compared connotations of spirituality with Maslow’s “Peak Experiences,” which could be more accepted in secular environments because those ideas are less likely to be confused with religious connotations.

An important leading voice contributing to the conversation of spirituality and education is June Boyce-Tillman, a Professor of Music and an Anglican priest from the United Kingdom. Having published widely on the topics of music, education, and spirituality, she collaborated with colleagues from various continents to form the

organization S.A.M.E. (Spirituality and Music Education), a common interest group of the International Society of Music Education. According to their website, their aims are to

- Establish and maintain an international community of music education academics, researchers and practitioners with a particular interest in the role of spirituality in their work;
- Provide music educators with specific tools and methods to integrate spirituality into everyday music education practice;
- Foster inter-cultural and inter-spiritual dialogue, understanding and collaboration among practitioners and researchers in the field of music education, and other relevant fields of music practices with a spiritual component;
- Promote a spiritually sensitive and informed culture in music education practice and research. (S.A.M.E., 2018)

Combining the perspectives of music specialists from the United Kingdom, the United States, and South Africa, Boyce-Tilman edited a book entitled “Spirituality and Music Education: Perspectives from Three Continents” that brings together the research being conducted on spirituality in music education. This seminal text is important to note as it formalizes, perhaps for the first time, the topic of spirituality in music education. Boyce-Tilman organized the research by diving the book into two parts: theory and practice.

Theory. In examining the theory of spirituality in music education, a focus has been placed on the metaphysical (Harris, 2017; McCarthy, 2017; Quindag, 2017). One author reflected on how tradition and narrative in a cultural context is joined with

metaphysical experiences to encourage emotion and a sense of belonging (McCarthy, 2017). She postulated that there will be various approaches to spirituality based on cultural factors. Some music educators believe spiritual experiences in music education are understood through the linking of embodiment, aesthetic, and the spiritual (Froneman, 2017). This holistic approach to education is similar to the literature in other disciplines, such as the holistic nursing practices in health care. Ethical concerns also abound for music educators in dealing with spirituality from a United States perspective. While one music educator expressed that spiritual music must communicate the attributes of God (Quindag, 2017), others viewed spirituality from a secularist viewpoint through intrapersonal musical experiences like improvisation (Sansom, 2017) or interpersonal and communal experiences, such as performing music with others (Sansom, 2017; Heuser, 2017).

Practice. The field of Music Education is wide-spread, as is the literature that is found within it. Because of this, the practical aspects of spirituality, although not researched in depth, have been addressed by some authors in a variety of contexts. Some authors have sought out spirituality in practical ways through interpersonal relationships. One author (Pretorius, 2017) did this through a literature review about spirituality in parent-infant musical communication and found there to be spiritual experiences between parent and child in their everyday, unstructured, musical encounters.

An ethnographic study from South Africa examined the interpersonal effects of music making through the concept of *Ubuntu*. Makaula (2017) explained, “the Bhaca people believe that a person is a person through others (*umntu ngumntu ngabantu*), according to the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, this is the key underlying principle of how and

why Bhaca people make music” (p. 238). While *Ubuntu* is a philosophy, not a religion, its principles guide the Bhaca’s musical expression which are related to their spiritual expressions through religious music making.

Spiritual expression through religious music making is also important to people representing various religions around the world. One researcher studied the intrapersonal effects of spirituality by interviewing Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, and Christians in the United Kingdom and asserted that music educators should embrace the various religious identities as they affect students’ responses to music and self-awareness (Harris, 2017). She posited:

It therefore seems likely that music education has a great responsibility in the area of identity. This makes it all the more crucial that music takes a larger role in helping to establish identity; we as educators should examine our current approach, in order to empower children to find their own response to music, rather than assuming, and supporting, the hegemony of the dominant value system. (Harris, 2017, p. 285)

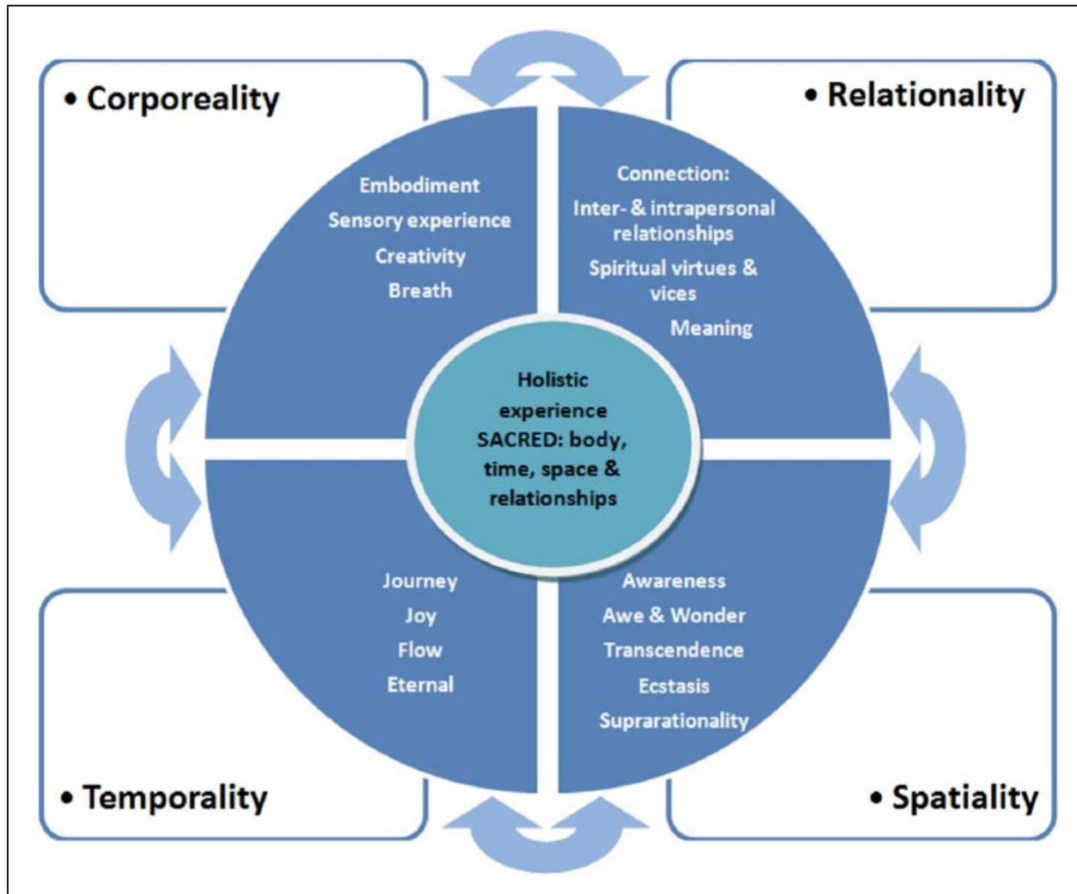
Relating more directly to the performance-driven music education experience, another researcher explored a question asking, “why spiritual connectedness is often lost in competition performances” (van Vuuren, 2017, p. 11). Based on his analysis of interviews with competition judges, music teachers and parents, and questionnaires, van Vurren suggested that it is possible for a performer to experience a spiritual performance in a contest setting, but it must be intentional through the following domains: materials, expression, construction, values, and hospitable space.

Aesthetic Experience in Music. Another topic closely associated with spirituality in the field of music is aesthetics or the aesthetic response. Nelson (1994) wrote, “Aesthetics encompasses the study of or philosophy of beauty and the theory of the fine arts and of people’s responses to them” (p. 24). The term “aesthetic” is derived from the Greek work “aisthanesthai,” meaning “perceive sensuously” (Bowie, 2001). Bassin (1991) explained, “The key to the aesthetic experience is this: there must be a relationship—an actual interaction—between the art object and spectator” (p. 38). The aesthetic response is often associated with strong, positive or peak emotions, sometimes resulting in physiological responses such as “chills” or even tears (Mori & Iwanaga, 2017), which may be similar to feelings associated with spiritual responses. Aesthetic experiences are related to emotional responses evoked by the music, whereas spirituality is more closely related to a feeling or experience of transcendence through music making.

Conceptual model of spirituality in music education. Two years prior to the publication of “Spirituality and Music Education: Perspectives from Three Continents,” two of the contributing authors, van der Merwe (2015) and Habron, (2010) claimed there was a lack of rigorous research in spirituality and developed a conceptual model of spirituality in music education (2015). Using a hermeneutic phenomenological theoretical framework, the authors used Van Manen’s lifeworld existentials (corporeality, relationality, spatiality, and temporality) to code the themes that emerged from the literature on spirituality in music education. Their data collection consisted of finding literature sources through the key words *spirituality in music education*. After analyzing 51 sources, they found saturation and narrowed their sample to 22 primary academic sources. The researchers noted that all of the literature examined was published after

2000. Using the NCT model for analysis (Noticing, Collecting, Thinking), they organized their data into a conceptual map and utilized Creswell's (2013) validation strategies of "prolonged engagement and persistent document analysis; peer review or debriefing, rich thick description of spirituality as described in music education literature; and external audits" (van der Merwe & Habron, 2015, p. 25). Using Van Mannen's lifeworld existentials as their guide, the authors suggested practical classroom application for the emerged data, shown below in Figure 2. For instance, asking students to connect with the music and with each other is an example of *relationality*, further described as "Connection: Inter-&intrapersonal relationships—Spiritual virtues & vices and Meaning." Encouraging students to reflect inward as they listen fits into *corporeality*, which can be understood as "Embodiment; Sensory experience, Creativity, and Breath." Prodding the students to think more critically about where the piece could go musically explains *temporality*, using descriptors like "Journey, joy, flow, and eternal," and using metaphoric language like "fill the space with your sound" addresses *spatiality*, acknowledging "awareness, awe and wonder, transcendence, ecstasis, and suprarationality" (van der Merwe & Habron, 2015, p. 64).

Figure 2. Model for spirituality in music education.



Spirituality in Choral Music Education

In a study designed to investigate people’s motivations to sing in choirs, results indicated that singing in a choir provided both personal and social benefits (Einarsdottir & Gudmundsdottir, 2016). Even those who identify as non-vocalists, but enjoy singing, use the art to meet various emotional, social, existential, and spiritual needs (Chong, 2010). There are certainly many reasons why individuals choose to sing, and many ensembles and organizations exist to encourage the art of choral singing. One such organization, the American Choral Directors Association, functions, “To foster and promote choral singing, which will provide artistic, cultural, and spiritual experiences for the participants” (ACDA, 2017).

The National Association for Music Education (NAfME), is another organization that exists to promote music education and music performance. In the organization's strategic plan, one of the values listed includes, "Uplifting the human spirit and providing opportunities for all students to create, perform, respond, and connect to all styles of music" (NAfME, 2016). For the choral music education classroom, these opportunities to perform, respond, and connect are linked to the musical literature that the teacher uses as learning and performance pieces. One area of concern, pertaining to spirituality, is the use of sacred music in public schools. NAfME's position is that a comprehensive music education requires the study and performance of religious music, as long as it is being used within an appropriate educational context. (NAfME, 2018)

Gender and Spirituality

During the development of the methodology for this particular study, a question was posed regarding whether there was a difference between the way men and women perceive spirituality. In an attempt to answer this, and add rigor to the participant selection process, gender was examined as a potential factor for influencing spirituality. Although the literature addressing the topic is scarce, a few studies pointed to the possibility that women and men may experience spirituality differently. (Bryant, 2007; Krentzman, 2016)

In one study, for example, Caucasian men and women were given the Spiritual Well-Being (SWB) Scale, and the authors concluded that gender shaped the responses; specifically, that women seemed to have a more futuristic perspective than men in questions pertaining to meaning/purpose and life satisfaction. (Miller, Gridley, Chester, Nunn, & Vickers, 2001). Although specific research could not be found identifying

differences between males and females pertaining to how they experience spirituality in daily life, such as in the classroom, perhaps future studies in spirituality will bring greater clarity to the variable.

Conclusion

Even though discussion is growing about the topic of spirituality, there still remains a gap in the literature describing the role spirituality plays in choral music making and the specific teaching strategies for engaging with spirituality in the choral setting. Students have a soul-searching desire to seek the transcendent such that when students feel understood and cared for they often feel inspired to make greater efforts in their music making (Freeman, 2002, p. 5). It is our responsibility as choral directors to understand the role spirituality plays in the choral environment, realize the impact it has on our singers and their learning experiences, and provide opportunities for spiritual experiences to exist in our rehearsals and performances. The teacher is not only the guide in cultivating spirituality, but also a model for the students (McGreevy & Copley, 1998/1999). It may be asserted that before students can make true connections with each other and the material, the teacher must engage in self-reflection and spiritual activity. As Palmer (2010) exhorted, “For students, there is no better path to understanding and appreciation than to be led by superbly qualified teachers who have undergone transformations and now accompany their students on a growth journey” (p. 165).

Chapter 3

METHOD

In this study, I sought to contribute to the examination of spirituality and its role in choral music making by interviewing selected public high school choral conductors in the United States. Because the interview data collected for this study were based on the participants' experiences, a phenomenological design was used (Creswell, 2013).

Research Questions

The primary research question was, "What does spirituality in the context of choral music making mean to public high school choral conductors?" Five sub-questions were developed to guide the creation of the interview questions. Because the two primary categories of music making are rehearsal and performance, the first two sub-questions helped clarify differences between the two should there be any differences between the spiritual experiences experienced in these two different settings:

Research sub-question 1. How do public high school choral conductors experience spirituality in choral rehearsals?

Research sub-question 2. How do public high school choral conductors experience spirituality in choral performances?

Because of the controversy that the use of sacred music elicit in secular institutions, there needed to be a sub-question that would address the potential ethical dilemma of studying spirituality in public schools. Research sub-question three satisfies that need by seeking to understand that teachers' beliefs about the appropriateness of talking about spirituality in public schools and if so, to what extent:

Research sub-question 3. To what extent should public high school choral conductors attempt to infuse spirituality into the choral music making process?

Much of the literature about spirituality in education is theoretical and philosophical. There is a lack of literature specifically addressing practical ways to cultivate a spiritual atmosphere. Sub-question four helped to address this need by asking the interviewees about specific activities that are implemented in rehearsal and/or performance that could lead to spiritual experiences:

Research sub-question 4. How do public high school choral conductors infuse spirituality into the choral music making process?

Based on the research literature in the arena of spirituality, a question was posed about the potential for one gender to be more spiritual than another. Thus four men and four women were interviewed to address a research question regarding any potential biases that the literature suggested might exist:

Research sub-question 5. To what extent does the high school choral conductor's gender play a role related to spirituality as experienced or infused by the conductor in the choral music making process?

Research Method and Design

Methodology. In order to gain an understanding of what is meant by the term *spirituality* in the context of choral music making, researchers must gain an understanding of those participating in choral music making, their spiritual experiences, and the meaning they place on those experiences. Because of this I chose a qualitative research design for this study. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated, "Qualitative

researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 6).

Theoretical Framework

Social constructivism. Within qualitative research there are interpretive frameworks that hold philosophical assumptions for conducting research. Creswell (2013) defined social constructivism as a worldview in which “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (p. 24). Through the varied subjective meanings that participants place on their experiences, the researcher examines a complexity of views that can be narrowed into categories. The goal of research within this worldview is to rely on the views of those participating in the study. These views are often developed from the lived experiences as the individuals interact with others. Researching with this interpretive framework generates broad, open-ended questions in which the researcher can listen to the participants and attempt to interpret or make sense of the meaning they are placing on the world in which they live (Creswell, 2013, p. 24-25). Important to note about social constructivism is the emphasis placed on the participants’ context. Each participant makes meaning of his or her experiences based on the individual’s background and cultural or contextual situation. A social constructivist approach provided an important framework for this particular study because I sought to understand how spirituality was being understood in the context in which choral conductors live, primarily in the public-school setting.

Conceptual framework. Researchers van der Merwe and Habron (2015) employed a hermeneutic phenomenological theoretical framework to describe the phenomenon of spirituality in music education. Collecting all literature addressing

spirituality in music education, they used Seidel's (1998) NCT model (noticing, collecting, and thinking) to engage in qualitative document analysis. After reaching saturation, they organized their data, which included quotes, codes, and categories using Van Manen's lifeworld existentials (corporeality, relationality, spatiality, and temporality). Within corporeality lie the themes of embodiment, sensory experience, creativity, and breath. Under the heading of relationality are themes of connection between others, the world, cosmos, self, and divine. Themes of awareness, awe and wonder, transcendence, ecstasis, and suprarationality are organized under the existential of spatiality and temporality organizes themes of journey, joy, flow, and eternal. Even though this was the framework developed from their analysis of the literature, I was curious to see if the interviews from practitioners in the field would support van der Merwe and Habron's findings. However, I did not want to restrict the findings to Van Manen's life world existentials and therefore used open coding as my initial data collection process.

Phenomenology. Of the various research designs in qualitative research, phenomenology best provides the means for understanding individuals' lived experience with a particular phenomenon. Phenomenology, popular in the social and health sciences, psychology, nursing and the health sciences, and education, was developed from the philosophical ideas of German mathematician Edmund Husserl (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). Based on his assumption that "we can only know what we experience," this type of qualitative research focuses on the experience (or phenomenon) itself. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 25; Creswell, 2013, p. 76; Yin, 2016, p. 20). Researchers and experts in Phenomenology such as Clark Moustakas (1994) and Max van Manen (1990), have

propelled this form of research forward by emphasizing the phenomenological interview as the primary method for data collection, using phenomenological reduction to continually return to the experience itself in data collection, and horizontalization in data analysis to organize data into common themes or groups (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 27). The product then of a phenomenological study is a “composite description that presents the ‘essence’ of the phenomenon, called the essential, invariant structure (or essence)” (Creswell, 2013, p. 82).

The phenomenon of spirituality in choral music education. Two of the leading national organizations providing vision, standards, resources, and professional development for choral music educators in the United States include the National Association for Music Education and the American Choral Directors Association. The National Association for Music Education (NAfME), the premier music education organization that has advocated for and provided resources for music education since 1904 lists “uplifting the human spirit” as a value (2011). The American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) desires to “foster and promote choral singing, which will provide artistic, cultural, and spiritual experiences for the participants” (2015). But outside of the value placed on spirituality by professional organizations, to understand what is meant by spirituality, we must find adequate verbiage and experiences to define the term. Doing so was one of the intended outcomes of this study.

Participants

To answer my research questions, I sought to understand the essence of spirituality based on the meaning placed on these experiences by public high school choir conductors who were members of the American Choral Directors Association, have

taught for at least five years, and feel they have had a spiritual experience in either choral rehearsal or performance.

Setting a criterion of membership in the American Choral Directors Association helped to focus the population in this study to reach accessible participants and to target findings at those holding memberships in this organization in order to contribute to professional research and development in the field of choral music education. According to ACDA.org (2018), there was a recorded membership of 21,000 in 2003. It is to be assumed that members of the American Choral Directors Association are intentional about life-long learning because much of the work of this organization is about disseminating tried and new knowledge in the field. For these reasons, participants were selected by recruiting conductors through the American Choral Directors Association Facebook page, of which there are 14,319 members.

Because the literature made distinctions between spirituality and religion and religious schools have different guiding principles from the secular school systems in the U.S., recruitment was limited to teachers working in public schools. Although there are many children's choirs and middle school choirs performing with high quality, I chose to interview high school conductors assuming that more instructional time was spent on performing, as opposed to other curriculum goals of children's and middle school choirs. While choral conductors of other ages and educational settings can likely experience spirituality as well, for the sake of finding a homogenous sample for this study, in which religion and spirituality are being defined differently, I am focusing on the experiences of public high school choral directors who were members of ACDA (Cozby & Bates, 2015; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

I also sought teachers who have had at least five years of experience so that the participants would have more experiences upon which to reflect and draw data from as opposed to teachers in their first few years of teaching whose focus is likely more on acclimating to the profession. In the early part of a teacher's career there may be many more challenges, including building a program, transitioning from the previous director, and developing skills in classroom management and administration. According to the National Council on Teacher Quality (2011), a teacher must have taught for at least three years before being able to host a student teacher in his/her classroom. In Missouri, an Initial Professional Certificate is valid for four years before enough experience has been accrued for eligibility to upgrade to a Career Continuous Professional Certificate (dese.mo.gov, 2018). Therefore, I added a year of experience beyond the previous two examples in hopes to find more rich examples in the data.

In order to contribute to this study, teachers must claim to have experienced the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2016), which in this case is spirituality in the choral rehearsal and/or performance. In order to better understand the phenomenon of spirituality, I needed to find directors who have experienced spirituality. It was not essential that every participant agreed with a specific definition of spirituality; in fact, having participants with varied connotations of spirituality could result in a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Although the literature speaks of a distinction between spirituality and religion, many people in the United States link the two. There is a wealth of literature that has examined the religiosity of women versus men, finding women to be more religious (Buchko, 2004; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith et al., 2002). However, less literature

could be found discussing whether one gender may be more spiritual than another. One study that examined gender differences in spiritual development for college students found there to be differences between men and women as it pertained to their religiosity and spirituality, suggesting that women were more spiritual than men (Bryant, 2007). Therefore, to account for the possible relevant variable in the phenomenon, I planned for an equal number of men and women as participants. Dukes (1984) recommended 3-10 interviews for a phenomenological study and Patton (2015) suggested determining a minimum sample size “based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study” (p. 314).

Procedures

After gaining IRB approval to recruit via Facebook, I posted a recruitment message to the ACDA Facebook page (see Appendix A.2). Members could volunteer by completing a brief demographic survey via Google Forms to provide contact information and to ensure they met the participant requirements (see Appendix A.3). Respondents who met the criteria were e-mailed a more detailed recruitment message asking for their willingness to participate in this study, including an informed consent form (see Appendix A.1).

Once posted, eight interested participants volunteered to be interviewed. However, one did not meet the criteria and five could not be reached in a follow up e-mail to be interviewed. I then re-posted the call for participants to my home state’s ACDA Facebook Page, consisting of 581 members, gathering three more interested participants and through snowball sampling reached eight participants at which point I achieved saturation (Creswell, 2013, p. 158; Yin, 2016, p. 95). While the seventh and

eighth interview supported the findings in the first six interviews and a few more choral titles were mentioned, nothing new was added to the findings.

Because the “phenomenological interview is the primary method of data collection” for understanding the meaning of an experience, for this phenomenological study, each participant was interviewed in a one-on-one setting, either face-to-face or via Zoom, a free online conferencing program (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 27). While a face-to-face interview was my preferred method of interview, interviews via Zoom allowed me to remove the limitations of geographical location and scheduling from the sampling process. The face-to-face (n = 4) and Zoom (n = 4) interviews all took place in a location of the participant’s choice to ensure comfortability to talk (Creswell, 2013, p. 164).

An interview guide comprised of open-ended questions I had prepared was used for the semi-structured interviews, although occasionally impromptu questions were inserted based on the direction of the responses (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; see Appendix B.1). The interview questions were developed based on criteria by Creswell (2013). He recommended 5-7 questions that should stem from the researcher’s sub-questions of the central question, be easy for the interviewees to understand, and be open ended, encouraging the interviewees to “open up and talk” (p. 164).

Merriam & Tisdell (2016) recommended beginning qualitative interviews with open ended questions that allow the participant to speak comfortably and from experience to get the conversation started. Allowing the participant to speak about themselves will come more naturally as opposed to being asked to provide a definition right away.

Therefore, the first two questions of the interview asked participants to tell of a time in a choral performance and rehearsal that they felt they had a spiritual experience.

After ten to fifteen minutes of interview had passed allowing the participant to share experiences, I then posed the third interview question, asking them to define what spirituality meant to them in the context of choral music making. To provide some context and clarify that this was intentionally not a study about religion, interviewees were given Parker Palmer's definition of spirituality: "spirituality is the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than our own egos" (Palmer, 2003, pg. 377) if the responses were becoming primarily religious by focusing on a specific religion or if the interviewee asked what I meant by spirituality. The participants were allowed to consider whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement or if they thought their students would agree or disagree.

The first three interview questions were planned to answer the first two research sub-questions regarding how public high school choral directors experience spirituality. The fourth interview question asked what ethical and/or culturally-responsive issues should be addressed when implementing spiritual elements into choral music making. This addresses the third research sub-question about the extent to which spirituality should be infused in the rehearsal or performance.

The fourth research sub-question was answered through responses to the fifth interview question, which asked participants for practical ways that spirituality is integrated into choral music making. Although most interviewees included these activities in their responses to earlier questions, participants who had already mentioned

several practical activities were asked if there were any other activities that came to mind during the interview.

The final research sub-question pertained to differences between gender responses. This was answered through the data analysis process, instead of a specific interview question. Data were compared between the male participants and the female participants to examine whether there were any identifiable differences between responses.

I concluded the interview with an open-ended question so that participants had the opportunity to provide any additional thoughts they may have wanted to share. Table 1 illustrates the interview questions, pre-planned probing questions, and which research question each was designed to help answer.

Table 1. Interview & Research Questions

Research Question: What does spirituality in the context of choral music making mean to public high school choral conductors?	
Research Sub-Questions	Interview Questions
1. How do public high school choral conductors experience spirituality in choral rehearsals?	Tell me about a time in a choral rehearsal that you feel you had a spiritual experience. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What made it uniquely spiritual? • What do you think created that moment?
2. How do public high school choral conductors experience spirituality in choral performances?	Tell me about a time in a choral performance that you feel you had a spiritual experience. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What made it uniquely spiritual? • What do you think created that moment?
	What does the term spirituality mean to you in the context of choral music making? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit Parker Palmer's definition of spirituality – do you agree? Disagree? • Does your definition reshape your thoughts from the first two questions?
3. To what extent should public high school choral conductors attempt to infuse spirituality into the choral music making process?	What ethical or culturally-responsive issues should be addressed when considering implementing spiritual elements into choral music making?
4. How do public high school choral conductors infuse spirituality into the choral music making process?	What are some practical ways that you integrate spiritual elements into your music making?
	(If they haven't listed several experiences from question 1 or 2) - What other experiences do you think fall in the category of spirituality?
5. To what extent does the high school choral conductor's gender play a role related to spirituality as experienced or infused by the conductor in the choral music making process?	<i>Answered through data analysis, not questions.</i>
	What should I have asked you that I didn't?

Data Analysis Procedures

Transcription. Because the form of data collection used for this study was through interviews, data analysis began with transcriptions. Both face-to-face and Zoom interviews were recorded using the Voice Memos application on my iPhone 7. Zoom interviews were also recorded using the recording feature in the program as a backup. After the interviews, the recordings were imported into another application called TempoSlowMo which allowed the recording to be slowed down to a speed at which I could transcribe. While listening to the recorded interviews at 45-48% speed, depending on the clarity of the recording, I was able to transcribe the interviews into Microsoft Word. I then reviewed the transcription to fix typographical errors. The process resulted in 113 double spaced typed pages of transcribed responses.

Coding. Each interviewee was assigned a coded alias so that the participants could remain anonymous to the reader. Each transcript was e-mailed to each interviewee for member checking to ensure that the participant's thoughts and meanings were captured accurately (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Zero participants followed up asking to change or modify their interview responses. Transcripts were then printed, and analytical coding was used for the analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I first highlighted key words or phrases from the interviewees responses and wrote memos in the margins that either addressed a research question or prompted a question I needed to answer later (Creswell, 2013). All of the memos and key ideas were compiled on a separate document where all the main ideas from the participant responses could be compared together. I found it useful to fit four interviewee's big ideas from the key words that were highlighted on a page to compare them more closely. When ideas were repeated as

categories, a checkmark was placed next to the category or idea to visually see the common themes to emerge. I then enacted the same procedure on the next four participants.

Simultaneous data collection. I engaged in simultaneous data collection and analysis from the first interview to focus and fine tune the questioning and to identify important concepts early in the data collection to allow new or revised questions to be asked of future participants if warranted. New questions that developed throughout the process asked about the requirement of technically-accurate performances, specific music that sparked spiritual moments, and prodding questions to clarify the interviewee's thoughts about why certain responses were observed from the students.

Trustworthiness

Bracketing. As a teacher, I am continuously interested in understanding the meaning that my students have constructed in their lives through their experiences, particularly in my classroom. Teachers are trained to be reflective practitioners who continually assess the understanding and growth of their students' knowledge and performance in various disciplines. Particularly in my field of choral music education, I am continually formatively assessing my students' tone, intonation, and musicality, along with a host of other elements of music that are essential to good performance. However, in the arts, there is much more to the total experience than just the technical aspects of performance.

In a study about the high school music classroom, particularly social climate, authors Adderly, Kennedy, and Berz (2003) reported that "students are intellectually, psychologically, emotionally, socially, and musically nurtured by membership in

performing ensembles” (p. 204). If this is the case, then as choral conductors, we cannot be solely focused on the technical aspects of directing our choirs but must also consider the social-emotional aspects of our teaching.

When I was teaching high school choir in a public school, I often reflected after the concert that if I had only had another week, perhaps the students could have performed better. While my students could perform with good tone, intonation, diction, and some musicality, I felt as though there was an element of something greater that can happen in the best musical experiences that my students were lacking. They enjoyed performing and received high marks at competitions. However, I knew that I entered into the choral profession because of those special moments I had as a performer that moved me beyond the technical aspects of performing, which were more satisfying than other activities I had participated in. Despite my experiences, I had yet to interpret what was lacking and place meaning on what I have come to call spiritual experiences.

While researching various topics for my graduate studies, my colleagues identified the importance I placed on spirituality, perhaps more than I did. As I read the writings by Iris Yob, Parker Palmer, and David Carr, my heart resonated in agreement with what these educators and researchers were finding because I had experienced their findings to be true in my own teaching. But I also found that writing in this area contained a great deal of philosophy and not as much practicality. I began asking questions about the practical applications of spirituality and if it was even appropriate to discuss spirituality in a secular setting. Prior to this study, I was also unsure if religion and spirituality could be independent concepts. While I began reading the literature being written about spirituality, I also was taking a qualitative methods course that helped

me identify spirituality as a phenomenon. I became convinced that this was an area of study that needed much more attention in the field of choral music education.

To bracket any biases that I might have brought into my study, whether as a public school teacher or a spiritual person, I engaged in phenomenological reduction, horizontalization, and imaginative variation during the construction of the study and in the data analysis stage (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure credibility of the analysis, the initial questions were sent for comment to an expert panel of four scholars whose expertise is in choral music and/or music education. Also, the interview questions were informally presented to peer choral conductors to ensure the questions were clear and made sense to conductors. Revisions were made according to the feedback received. To ensure dependability, I engaged in peer checking by sending a portion of the transcripts to a fellow scholar familiar with qualitative research to code the data and compare agreement in analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I then compared my fellow scholar's codes with my initial codes. While the verbiage varied slightly, we agreed that the codes were similar and a consensus was established. In addition to the participants' checking their own interview transcript as noted previously, upon completion of the initial analysis, member checks were done with interviewees when there was need for further clarification (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Along with IRB approval, a signed letter of consent was received from each interviewee. For many, spirituality can be a sensitive topic. Therefore, anonymity was strictly enforced in hopes of giving interviewees the opportunity to speak freely, and provide the most truthful data, in order for me to get the best understanding of what the

essence of spirituality was to them (Cozby & Bates, 2015). To maintain anonymity, participants names and any revealing information tied to institutions or specific experiences were coded with only the researcher having access to the key. Audio transcriptions were locked on the researcher's phone before being transferred to a secure file on the researcher's password-protected computer. In discussions of the findings, all names and identifiable information were changed to protect the participants. (Creswell, 2013)

Summary

National professional organizations like NAFME and ACDA list spirituality as a value. Many conductors reference spirituality in texts and in memoirs, however, the choral field is lacking a clear definition and understanding of the essence of spirituality. While spirituality in music is being discussed and researched in other countries, such as England and South Africa, there is a gap in the literature from the United States on spirituality in choral music making. The purpose of this phenomenology was to contribute to the examination of the role of spirituality in choral music making for choral conductors in the United States. The primary research question for this study asked, "What does spirituality in the context of choral music making mean?" Through purposive sampling, public high school choral conductors were identified and interviewed through semi-structured interviews face-to-face or via Zoom. Interviews were transcribed and coded using analytical coding. Reliability and validity were ensured through use of an expert panel to support questioning, member checking, peer checking, and providing thick, rich descriptions in the results.

Chapter Four

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the examination of the role of spirituality in choral music making for choral conductors in the United States. I interviewed eight public high school choir conductors who were members of the American Choral Directors Association, had taught for at least five years and expressed that they have had a spiritual experience in either choral rehearsal or performance. From those who expressed interest in being interviewed, I selected the first four men and the first four women to agree to an interview, to account for any possible differences between genders.

Introducing the Participants

Representing the states of Missouri, Illinois, Florida, and Iowa, the participants in this study have approximately 100 years of experience teaching in public high schools. In that time, these teachers have worked with hundreds of choirs at varying levels seeking to educate and make beautiful music with their students. Seven of the eight interviewees described themselves as religious and spiritual. One teacher did not describe himself as religious but did describe himself as spiritual. Descriptions of individual participants are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Participant Demographics

Name (Alias)	Gender	State	Age	Years Teaching	Self- disclosed description	Mode of Interview
Ashley	Female	MO	31	9	Spiritual & Religious	Face-to-Face
Ben	Male	MO	29	7	Spiritual & Religious	Face-to-Face
Connor	Male	IA	29	7	Spiritual, not religious	Zoom
Joy	Female	IL	33	9	Spiritual & Religious	Zoom
Justin	Male	FL	31	9	Spiritual & Religious	Zoom
Nathan	Male	MO	37	15	Spiritual & Religious	Face-to-Face
Sarah	Female	MO	36	13	Spiritual & Religious	Zoom
Tia	Female	MO	49	27	Spiritual & Religious	Face-to-Face

Each interview was conducted in a space convenient and comfortable for the directors. The average interview length was 38.75 minutes and provided an average of 14.38 pages of typed transcripts with size 15 font. The length of the interviews were measured from the start of the initial question and ended with the last thought of the closing question, and did not include casual opening greetings in which I asked more personally about their current teaching experience. I had met all of the participants except one prior to the study and already knew general information about their schools and programs from experience and from their Google Form introducing them to the study. Three interviews were conducted in a hotel dining area at a state choral directors conference and one was held at a coffee shop geographically convenient to both the director and the researcher. The remaining four interviews were held via Zoom, a free

online conferencing service, where the directors and researcher were sitting in their own homes at varying times of day. No discernable difference existed between the amount or quality of data between those interviewed face-to-face versus those interviewed via Zoom. Per the initial call for participants, four of the directors were male and four were female. All were white, ranged in age from 29-49, and had taught between 7 and 27 years.

When asked why they were willing to participate in this study, responses ranged from excitement to curiosity. One director shared her excitement to talk with me because she believed a lot of directors are driven to teach choral music because of spiritual experiences but feel hindered to discuss the topic since they teach in public institutions. Another director shared,

I think the fact that a lot of choral directors feel that but don't, especially in public school, don't feel the freedom to express [spirituality] because we're not able to freely express it in our classroom and so that becomes a part of us that kinda makes us keep it in our pockets—it's very much there and a major reason we all do it, maybe not all, but a lot of us do it, but because we can't talk about it with everybody we just don't talk about it—so unless I know that you're comfortable with this conversation, I'm just not gonna start it—I think tends to be the big thing so I think a lot of people want to be a part of this conversation they just are a little nervous to start it cause nobody wants to be thought that they're pushing their spirituality on public school students or that they're you know not [pause] open and I don't wanna be seen as you know, that kinda stuff, so, we just don't talk about it then and that's a huge part of what I do and what I know that it's

comfortable I'll tell ya all about it—it's nice to have the opportunity to say something. (Ashley)

Others felt that because of their faith, they are driven to have spiritual elements in everything they do, even in their career in a public institution. Tia expressed this sentiment by saying, “Well, I would say [pause] I agreed to this study because that's what I see choral music as being—for me—it's my own personal expression of worship—so I can't see how you can take it out [referring to spirituality].” Another director had his curiosity piqued because a large population of his students identified as very religious. He began by talking about his experience in working with students who are a part of the Burmese Karen refugee population. He explained,

I've had a lot of students from like the broad community of refugees from Burma and they are all, like their religious practice is like the central part of their group identity, particularly in the United States, so, I had some experiences with those students, which for myself would categorize as spiritual, but for me they were not religious, but for my students they certainly were. (Connor)

Research Questions

The literature discussed in Chapter 2 revealed the need for a greater understanding of spirituality in the context of choral music making. To contribute to this discussion, the primary research question for this study asked, “What does spirituality in the context of choral music making mean to public high school choral conductors?” To answer this question, five sub-questions were answered through analysis of the interview questions.

Research sub-question 1. How do public high school choral conductors experience spirituality in choral rehearsals? To answer this question, the participants

were given the prompt, “Tell me about a time in a choral performance that you feel you had a spiritual experience” with prodding questions: “What made it uniquely spiritual” and “What do you think created that moment?” In analyzing the data to answer this question, key concepts or ideas were highlighted from their responses.

Theme 1: Connection with the text. A commonly mentioned form of connection leading to spiritual moments during choral rehearsals and performances was between the musicians (the teacher and students) and the music. Teachers have observed this through student engagement and behavioral and/or emotional responses to the music. One teacher described observing this connection by seeing the “light go off for the joy in their hearts” (Ashley).

Some teachers mentioned times when students cried because of the emotional connection with the text of the piece. Joy told of a time when her students were singing a song from the perspective of someone who had died and was speaking from the grave. Within the ensemble there were about five students who had experienced the loss of a parent and one student found out her grandfather had passed away while they were on a choir tour, with this song being a part of their repertoire. For those students in particular, the song had a much deeper meaning that transcended singing correct pitches and rhythms.

Ashley reflected on a time when she was directing *Lullaby* by Daniel Elder. She said that it was an emotional piece for her because she was unable to have children. She used metaphorical language to her students asking them to sing it like they were singing a lullaby to a baby. Although this was a vulnerable moment for the teacher, she felt that it

was a valuable opportunity to achieve a desired sound, while encouraging a connection to the piece that the students may not have achieved on their own.

Connor referenced a time when his choir sang *The Road Home* by Stephen Paulus as the closing piece for their concert. The director said they discussed the meaning of the text and also engaged in post-concert reflections of the song. His very religious immigrant students expressed that the text of the song caused them to reflect back to their home.

Justin expressed this when he was asked about what creates a spiritual experience by saying, “I think part of it comes from...your understanding and your connection to the text and what that means to you.” Tia also highlighted the importance of text when asked about practical ways to integrate spirituality saying,

Well I think the most obvious is talking about the text and having the students connect with the text, um, in whatever way they want to *connect* with it, whether it’s religious or not religious um, singing “That ever I saw,” you know as they think about whoever they’re thinking about and who that person is to them and um and they’re just standing there crying because it’s so beautiful, you know, that something was touched there, um, so I would say *connecting* with text.

When Connor was prodded about what created the spiritual moment he had just described, he attributed it to the connection to the text, stating,

Um, I think it was the connection to the text, the reflection and the discussion of the text and on the front end thinking about what it really meant to them, and I think that with that piece the musical aspects are...I mean you can go as deep as you want, but it’s simple enough with that piece that you can really dig in to the

musicality of it to a pretty deep level and so I think that because of the relative ease of performance it kind of opens, like when you feel really secure in your performance of a piece I think it opens you to a wider range of experiences as you perform because you're not having to focus on this weird jump or all these words or that kind of thing.

Theme 2: Interaction between the teacher and students. Another major talking point for the participants addressing spirituality was the interaction between the teacher and the students. Each teacher emphasized that they must work to develop trust between the students and themselves for spiritual moments to happen, including sharing vulnerability at times. One teacher mentioned that deeper discussions of the texts, and in turn more spiritual moments, took place in the more advanced ensembles where there was greater connection between the teacher and the students. In these advanced ensembles, more time was spent together. One teacher articulated this saying,

We were just so close and they would come in and eat lunch with us and we would go on trips and be together for whole days and you get to know each other really well and the doors just kind of open to conversations. (Joy)

The same teacher reflected on the connection she had with students saying that because of the open class discussions she knew that when they sang *Majesty and Glory of Your Name* she would think during the performance,

This is Lauren's favorite part of the song and she loves this because it reminds her how small she is compared to God and I knew that's what she was thinking of when I watched her sing that and [accompanied] her.

Connor mentioned one spiritual moment that happened immediately prior to a concert when he allowed his entire choir to wear their traditional cultural formal attire for their concert attire, as opposed to all student wearing concert black, the traditional formal concert attire in the United States. The diversity in his school was great and to see each culture represented physically in their traditional attire was a very moving experience for the director, musicians, and audience. He described the experience saying,

So the first time I had a student who said something like, “aw man, this sucks because I don’t have anything cool to wear because I’m just a white guy” and I was like alright, back up for a second. Truly, tuxedo or all black or black and white IS American white people formal attire and so I was like, so you know not only are you going to get to wear your formal attire, but you always have gotten to wear your cultural attire. And one thing that really illuminated that for me was some of my Asian students after we had done this told me that in their culture, the only time you wear all black is to a funeral. So just thinking for them like, ok, if I was in, pick a country, doesn’t matter, as a white guy where I’m not part of the dominant group and they told me that for a concert which should be celebratory I have to wear something that I only associate with mourning, it would, even though I would be around people dressed the same way, it would be uncomfortable, it would be hard to get myself in the right mindset to perform so that’s kind of where I went with that. I just told them this is your formal white people attire, all black or black and white or whatever. (Connor)

Several teachers emphasized cultivating an atmosphere conducive to open dialogue by modelling authenticity and vulnerability and providing opportunities for

students to reflect and share, particularly about the texts. Sarah recounted a time singing an arrangement of *In The Sweet By and By* that evoked vulnerability:

We were just talking um, we were talking about that point between what is present on earth and what is eternal. Or what is Heaven? And you know for me I had to be a little bit more guarded about how I termed that, but you know that break between and that question and that longing and living in that in between space and so um, I had told the girls about getting to be with my Grandmother as she was passing from this world, you know, and so many of them haven't experienced being at a death bed, some of them had which was interesting, they were nodding their heads at everything I was saying about the strange peace in that moment and that moment when you actually feel like that person is actually gone. You don't have to see, you know even look down, you can feel it in the way, you can feel the presence of their spirit is missing and um, you know just from that story and that discussion about that place right between and then we were singing and then you know we're all in tears. The girls are in tears and I'm in tears and um, you know just I think it's that vulnerability piece again that like what, when you come to point where you are so open in your heart and that is when I really feel the divine in my rehearsals when they're, even when they're all vulnerable and singing from the depths of who they are and touching that spot and doing it together.

Ashley also addressed vulnerability in her interview. She connected vulnerability to emotional connection for the students to the music and to her as the director. She believed that directors will have to model vulnerability to encourage students to be

vulnerable saying, “I feel like when we’re vulnerable enough with ourselves as conductors then that creates a vulnerable experience with them and then when we’re vulnerable we can really be spoken to and spoken through when we’re open.”

The teachers were clear that the connection to music was cultivated through connections between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves. In order to build this connection, an atmosphere of vulnerability and trust had to be cultivated and maintained so that the students would feel safe. Ashley was describing a spiritual experience in a performance and shared,

I needed to experience that with them, they needed to know, but in order for us to have that level of musicality, we needed to have that level of spiritual connection, which required me to be vulnerable. I think it really comes down, in order to have a spiritual experience, I think it comes down to that vulnerability.

Theme 3: Bonding among the students. Nathan shared an experience that he described as spiritual when his choir visited a sick chorus member who had to have emergency surgery and missed the concert. The student was very disappointed to miss the concert, so the choir went and sang to the student at his house. The teacher recounted the story saying,

We sang terribly, we were all tired, we had had pizza, we were all bawling, it sounded dreadful, but it was like this collective spirit of people coming together and connecting like that; those kids will never forget and that’s when I kinda stood back as a teacher and went ‘I’m making a difference for these kids’ and for me, that’s the most rewarding part of what we do is making the difference for those kids. (Nathan)

For Nathan, observing his students bonding together for the benefit of another student not only inspired him, but it brought about a spiritual experience for the students and himself as the director. Nathan also described a spiritual moment at the end of the school year when the students were gathered around the rehearsal room in a circle. Throughout the year the students had bonded and as a result, built relationships that enhanced their music making. One of the songs that bonded the group was a pop song by Pentatonix. Nathan played the opening chord on the piano and without any verbal instruction the students automatically grabbed hands or linked arms with the peer next to them. He described that some were crying and together they sang the song a cappella. The students had developed a connection between one another through their rehearsals, performances, and time together.

One teacher encouraged student connectedness by initiating discussions in small groups where the students can have their own conversations so that they can be “real with each other” (Ashley). Almost every participant described spiritual experiences happening when every single student was engaged and giving 100% effort. Many directors mentioned that those special moments were apt to happen when there was a shared sense of unity and experience of success. One director said,

You can’t force it, but you can create an atmosphere where it can happen. So it can’t happen when this alto’s mad at this tenor and there’s an angst in the choir—there has to be a unity of purpose that the choir has or it’s not gonna happen and so you can have everything technical[ly] [accurate] and everything exactly right and you can make crescendos and decrescendos but if somebody’s own spirit isn’t willing to buy in then it’s not gonna happen. (Tia)

Theme 4: Religious experiences. Another theme that was observed in the data was the interviewee's expressed connection to the divine. One interviewee agreed to participate in the study "because that's what I see choral music as being—for me—it's my own personal expression of worship...it causes me to worship because it's a reflection of the beauty of God" (Tia). Another interviewee recounted a time as a performer singing an arrangement of *Amazing Grace* after a close friend had died. She talked of the music helping her process her grief, saying she found herself crying and feeling "like God was just hugging me through this" (Ashley).

All but one of the participants identified themselves as both spiritual and religious. One teacher identified as spiritual, but not religious. While Connor did not experience a personal connection to the divine through music-making, he did observe the divine connection in his students. He described a time when his students (several of whom were immigrants to the United States) sang Stephen Paulus' *The Road Home*, saying,

It took them back to their home and they felt...they're really, really, really religious. Some of them talked about feeling the presence of God when they were in the performance but like for me watching them I could tell there was a profound feeling. (Connor)

Research sub-question 2. How do public high school choral conductors experience spirituality in choral performances? While the choral art is often viewed primarily in the context of performance, all of the participants spoke more often of the spiritual moments found in rehearsals rather than in performance. Because of this, it took

more probing questions to help them recount spiritual experiences in the performance setting.

Theme 5: Interaction with the audience. Only two of the teachers even mentioned interaction with the audience without me bringing up the topic and when they did they only shared about one sentence addressing the connection expressing that making a connection with the audience is important. Each recounted a time when a parent approached them at the concert having been moved by the impact the teacher was making in the lives of their students.

Previously, vulnerability was discussed as an important element of connection between teachers and their students. Sarah went on to share of a spiritual experience she had while watching her students perform in a public venue. I posted a follow up question asking what cultivated that moment and she recounted,

So often we're just singing for, you know, families and friends and things like that and so it's very easy to be open and um, put yourself out there and know that you're going to receive a favorable response and you know that they're with you. To go into a situation so much [more] vulnerable where you know this is a pretty intense performance, with a whole lot more people, I think the vulnerability my students were feeling going into that, um, you know and then they have to, they are much more exposed in the balcony singing in that way. It's just that vulnerability piece, you know, is really important.

Research sub-question 3. To what extent should public high school choral conductors infuse spirituality into the choral music making process? Because of the potential controversy of discussing spirituality in a secular setting, I was curious about

the participants' views of the ethical concerns of spiritual moments in the public high school choral setting. Therefore, I asked the participants, "What ethical or culturally-responsive issues should be addressed when considering implementing spiritual elements into choral music making?"

Theme 4 revisited: Religious experiences. While a majority of the responses did speak of spirituality in secular terms, the idea of faith and religion was mentioned in each interview to varying extents. In nearly every interview, the teachers addressed this question before being asked what ethical or culturally-responsive issues should be addressed. Religious moments and particular religions were mentioned in the interviews, but each director made clear that they did not seek to teach their students any particular dogma in their classroom. Instead, teachers allowed their students to drive the conversations so as to not encourage any particular religion over another. Ben said that he avoids the term spirituality altogether. When I asked why he thought that term was taboo in our society he said, "I think it's because when someone uses the word spirituality, the non-Christians think I'm thinking about Christianity and the Christians think I'm talking about Eastern religions." Sarah, who teaches in a particularly diverse school, shared that she avoids the term spirituality partly because of fear that a student might feel isolated. She explained,

Yeah, I think there's a lot of misunderstanding just in the public persona of what that is. I don't want to isolate a single student. I want all of the students to have those moments with each other. So, I don't want to use the term spirituality or something similar in a way that's going to make one of my students feel that, that moment is not for them. That they're isolated from that in anyway. That their

version of that is not acceptable with the rest of us collectively. Um, so I think maybe mostly not to isolate anyone. And isolate them in a way that they would have trouble.

But Sarah was also clear that although she avoided the term, she still engages in spiritual experiences. She described this by saying,

When you're talking about spiritual things, I can allow more if they're giving me those anecdotal stories...now I do put in the caveat that the kids and I have an understanding at the beginning of the year that I am calling them to approach music from the depths of who they are as an individual and that I need to bring their honest self to the table every day and that means whatever their faith or spirituality is, they need to bring their honest self to the table with that the way they interpret and perform their music. That being said, I can't ask that of them, if I'm not also allowed to bring my honest self into that conversation as their teacher, so, you know I always tell them when we're performing things that may be sacred, I don't expect that you bring a sacred bent to it, I expect that you bring your interpretation and your bent into that sacred text, but when I'm explaining to you what it can mean, I have to be able to explain what it means to me and you have to be ok with the fact that what it means to me is my Christian perspective. And I want to welcome your perspective, whatever that is and we can all just be who we are together. And experiencing what we're experiencing.

One director who did not describe himself as religious spoke of a spiritual moment in watching his students fully engaged in their own religious customs. He referenced this in this statement:

I've gone to like several celebrations in my students' communities, so like Karen New Year or Chin National Day or whatever, I will say that there's like when I'm in that context and I see them perform, it's not necessarily singing, like I've had some very strong emotional reactions to seeing their cultural performance in the context of their cultural space. (Connor)

Another director who identified as religious and spiritual spoke of these spiritual moments as an act of worship to God. She said she feels as though these spiritual moments are a personal expression of worship.

Research sub-question 4. How do public high school choral conductors infuse spirituality into the choral music making process? Assuming that these teachers believed engaging in spiritual moments was indeed ethical in the secular setting, I asked the teachers "What are some practical ways that you integrate spiritual elements into your music making?" Each of the interviewees mentioned specific activities or cultural elements that they incorporated into their rehearsals and/or performances that helped cultivate a spiritual atmosphere.

These teachers all agreed that they did not always plan for these spiritual moments. In fact, several said spiritual moments could not be planned and were only spontaneous. However, others shared their attempt to plan for these spiritual moments after experiencing the positive results of spiritual moments that had unexpectedly arisen in rehearsal. Many directors described specific instructional activities that helped cultivate an atmosphere of trust and vulnerability that led to these spiritual experiences. For instance, a common strategy mentioned in all of the interviews involved text analysis.

For these choral directors, the text of the musical pieces was the primary spiritual motivator.

In order to understand the message of the song, many directors engaged their students in large and small group discussions about the text. Some also mentioned journaling or other writing activities that prompted students to contemplate the lyrics and connect emotionally with them. Ashley used journaling to encourage students' self-reflection. Tia provided an example, which she used when rehearsing *Even When He is Silent*:

The kids totally bought into that, they understand what it's like to feel like God was silent and whether they believe in God or not and we talked about that—I had them take a piece of paper, they could draw a picture they could write words—they could tell a story—or just write random thoughts and then I wanted them to share and then we all shared and there were tears and the music was always there after that, because we had already done the technical work.

Sharing with the students also provides an opportunity for the teacher to model vulnerability in expressing their own reflections of the text and emotional connections. The teacher can also provide historical background, poetic analysis, and culturally-relevant clues to help the students understand the poetry.

To build connection between the students, many directors allowed students time to engage in various kinds of activities. Several directors mentioned beginning-of-the-year activities to get the students talking and familiar with one another. For instance, one director mentioned playing a version of rock-paper-scissors called dog-fire hydrant-car which encouraged the students to laugh and let down their guard in varying levels. Tia

spoke of the importance of laying a framework for teamwork, acceptance, kindness, hard work, and excellence, which would create a good breeding ground for connectedness within the ensemble. Other directors mentioned individual activities to spark introspective analysis such as guided imagination, mindfulness activities, and drawing, sometimes with the lights off and eyes closed when appropriate.

Nathan, who believed these spiritual moments could be planned, mentioned making meaningful connections with his students each day to accustom them to thinking deeply and critically. He insisted on a high five or hand shake and a greeting with eye contact every day that the students entered his room. He also intentionally placed quotes around the room for students to read and consider.

Many teachers also spoke of the importance of their own understanding of the demographics of their ensembles. Several directors mentioned their knowledge of their students' faith or lack thereof. For instance, Nathan, who identified as a Christian, discussed the deeper relationship he had with some of his students who also attended his church. While he would not bring attention to this relationship in the large group, in one-on-one interactions he could have meaningful conversation that encouraged the students' educational and artistic process. Joy mentioned being sensitive to the Muslim population of her students. She was intentional in not giving special attention to students with her same faith.

Connor, who did not identify as religious, shared spiritual experiences that were based on his students who had a differing faith. This particular group of students was very religious and having them share their perspective in contrast to the more

“mainstream” faiths in his student population was impactful for the diverse group. He shared about this, explaining,

So this year, for our Winter Concert we did a piece of music in one of the languages of one, actually we did two songs in a language that’s spoken by one of the ethnic groups from Burma that I had students from. And there were several points in rehearsal that all of the students just had some like really deep moments of connection I think in that case for those kids who were members of that group it was like for them it was like the first time at school that they really felt like represented and felt like they could be, like they were the only experts in the room. Um, the other kids, I think that they just really grabbed on to that idea of like how meaningful it was to share that with the students who don’t get to express their culture on a daily basis.

Research sub-question 5. To what extent does the high school choral conductor’s gender play a role related to spirituality as experienced or infused by the conductor in the music making process? In determining the methodology of this study, I decided on the criterion that men and women should be represented equally among the participants. This decision was based on literature that suggested men and women experience spirituality differently. However, based on my data analysis, there did not seem to be differences between gender that affected the consistency of responses pertaining to spirituality in choral music making. The themes identified were represented in responses of both the female and male participants. Both male and female participants spoke of emotional and profound connections that created transcendent moments in choral rehearsals and performances. Perhaps further study might reveal more

clarification, but in the context of this study, no discernable differences were found between males and females related to spirituality in the choral music making process.

Characteristics of the Musical Literature Described

One unexpected finding of this study was all of the specific music literature that was mentioned throughout the course of the interviews. A complete listing of the 32 pieces mentioned and their composers may be found in Appendix C.

Although there are some exceptions, most of the literature mentioned is slow in tempo, contains legato melodic lines, has a lot of dissonance and lyrics that are more emotionally or religiously driven. However, there are a few pieces like *Ritmo* and *Dies Irae* that are characterized by driving tempos and rhythmic intensity. Ashley described rehearsing *Dies Irae*:

I mean when we did *Dies Irae* and you have to have the anger and the fear and all of the, that's still the feels, you still need that part too like that's still a part of your soul so you still have to connect with that, but that doesn't happen unless you are still doing that you know, sforzando correctly because I'm gonna stop ya, I'm gonna stop the feels real fast, if it's, not that I don't feel like you have to sacrifice it, I feel like sometimes it can and I think because the culture's established that I don't have to sacrifice for it anymore.

Accomplishing upbeat and rhythmic pieces like *Dies Irae* created spiritual moments out of a sense of success and unity among the students from working diligently to master a difficult piece.

Spiritual moments were discussed in the context of sacred music, but also secular. Tia referenced *Ritmo*, a secular, fast, rhythmic piece featuring 4-hand piano. I mentioned

to her that *Ritmo* was very contrasting to other pieces that had previously been discussed.

Tia commented,

Yes, I wanted to tell you that, just doing that [performing *Ritmo*] and getting all the precision, I mean it was just exhilarating and so yeah, like I mean, music can evoke an emotion and so like “Even When He is Silent” conveys a very spiritual emotion that is, it’s very easy to see that as a spiritual thing, but it can happen with up tempo pieces too.

Nathan shared a similar sentiment when asked if the music had to have that same style [slow, legato, sacred, etc.] in order to evoke a spiritual experience. He quickly retorted, “No, oh no, heaven’s no...I guess there are some elements to pieces that I’ve had that experience with, like typically a sacred, lush text...but like Elijah Rock...Yes!” [referring to a spiritual experience with a rhythmic, up tempo piece].

Each teacher also believed that while a technically accurate performance was preferred and beneficial in any performance, a completely “perfect” performance was not a requirement to a spiritual experience. Connor mentioned that the performance would need to be technically accurate enough for the students to feel comfortable in performing so that their sole focus was not on technical aspects of singing but that they were freed to make more musical decisions. When asked if technical proficiency was required in order to have spiritual experiences he explained,

I don’t think so as long as whatever it is they’re performing, they feel secure in.

But I don’t know that they necessarily, I guess in the sense that they need to be able to perform it comfortably they need the technical, the technique, but I don’t

think that they need a high level of technical ability to perform a piece and have that experience.

Each musician, however, must be giving their absolute best for these moments to happen. The teachers indicated that student engagement was high when these spiritual moments occur. Tia provided a more emotional response than Connor saying, “it’s when the music is prepared and it’s ready and it’s happening and the kids are feeling, ‘AAHHHH’ and you know we just know that it’s bigger than...we’re all giving our best and it’s just a beautiful thing.”

Summary

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the examination of the role of spirituality in choral music making for choral conductors in the United States. For these directors, spirituality was distinct from religion and was about engaging in a musical experience that transcended the fundamentals of music, but also involved the whole person: body, mind, and spirit. They also spoke of a certain level of technicality being achieved before a spiritual experience would occur, but a flawless performance was not required. The participants expressed the need for vulnerability and authenticity in the classroom modelled by the teacher, but the greatest theme throughout the data was the value placed on various connections. These teachers discussed connection to the music, particularly the text, connection between the teacher and the students, connection among the students themselves, connection to the divine, and connection to the audience.

When asked to define spirituality in the context of choral music, each participant admitted that it was difficult to define, but expressed it as something bigger than themselves, tied to a greater purpose, calling, and/or worldview, and often expressed

hope that students would gain this greater perspective on life. When Tia was asked to describe a time when she experienced spirituality in choral performance, she laughed and responded,

It's easier to say when it doesn't happen [laughs] because it happens a lot. Um, I would say that's the goal...to have an experience where it transcends my own time and space, my own experiences, and so that's the goal and I want to bring my students to that same place whether they're thinking spiritually or not, but to be able to have that feeling of this is bigger than I am.

Every person interviewed mentioned the term connection at least once as they each gave descriptions of spiritual moments in choral rehearsals or performances. This term was used to describe personal relationships, relationships to the choral texts, relationships with and among the students, a connection with the divine, and with the audience. When asked to give a definition of spirituality in the context of choral music making Nathan responded, "spirituality in music – I think it's a personal connection of a singer and a group of musicians that goes above and beyond what's called for in the performance."

Chapter Five

DISCUSSION

Since the year 2000, interest has been growing among researchers in the area of spirituality (Tzounis, 2017; van der Merwe & Habron, 2015). However, despite the discussions, understanding this phenomenon and its practical implications in the profession of music education remains ambiguous. Miner-Williams (2005) identified the ambiguity of spirituality in the field of nursing that led to the development of a theoretical framework and guidelines for nurses to provide a more holistic, ethical, and balanced patient care. Holloway & Moss (2010) suggested that spirituality is “one of the most significant, important, and controversial themes to emerge in social work in recent years” (p. 1). In the field of education, there is a powerful connection between teaching and learning and the “spiritual nourishment” of teachers and students (McGreevy and Copley, 1999, n.p.). In choral music education there is an acknowledgement of the presence of spirituality and some teachers work to cultivate spiritual moments, but there is a gap in the literature that helps to understand the phenomenon and its practical implications the way that Miner-Williams’ work contributed to the field of nursing.

To help fill this gap, I developed this study with the purpose of contributing to the examination of the role of spirituality in choral music making for public high school choir directors in the United States. Eight public high school choral conductors who were members of the American Choral Directors Association, had taught for at least five years, and felt they have had a spiritual experience in choral rehearsal or performance were interviewed in face-to-face or virtual meetings. The primary research question was, “What does spirituality in the context of choral music making mean to public high school

choral conductors?” There were five sub-questions used to contribute to answering this question, each of which will be addressed in the sections that follow.

Research Sub-Question 1

How do public high school choral conductors experience spirituality in choral rehearsals? The findings revealed that these high school directors experienced spirituality primarily in the rehearsal setting. It is in rehearsals where the teachers and students have the most interactions, and this is where the music sparked many spiritual moments.

Theme 1: Connection with the text. The directors interviewed spoke often of spiritual moments that took place through the students’ interaction with the text of the music. In many cases, the students had emotional reactions to the text. As documented in Chapter 4, for example, one participant noted that singing a song about death led to spiritual experiences for her choral students. Other students resonated with texts about longing for home, fulfilling a want or need, and sacred topics connecting them to religious experiences. Students’ engagement with the text is what sparked memories, empathy, and inspiration. It is the text that reaches into each individual to stir feelings of presence, significance, and community with the world around them. Teachers used strategies such as class discussions, small group discussions, journaling, and self-reflection to analyze, understand, and communicate effectively the text they were singing. Because of the lack of literature addressing spirituality in choral music education, there is little support from research addressing the connection to text. However, famous choral conductor Robert Shaw did include text in his statement that, “I am amazed time and again how attention to minute mechanical details of pitch, rhythm, text, and dynamics

releases floods of spiritual understanding” (Shaw, as cited in Scott, 2015, p. 59). It is possible that this connection to the text is reflective of Jones’ (2005) assertion, noted in Chapter Two, that spirituality is best realized in the connection between student, teacher, and subject.

Theme 2: Interaction between the teacher and students. Another major connection leading to spiritual moments was between the teacher and the students, again supporting Jones’ (2005) findings. Teachers spoke of the amount of time they spent with students in a choral setting. From students hanging out in the choir room during free time, such as before school, after school, and during lunch, to tours and travel experiences in which the directors and students spent days together, the teachers and students developed a bond that allowed for more authentic and vulnerable moments to take place in the music making process. Because the students had spent more time with the choir director than with the average classroom teacher, a certain level of trust was able to be cultivated that nurtured the teacher-student relationship. Reflecting on the humanistic research of Dr. Robert Coles and the philosophies of Parker Palmer, Freeman (2002) summarized, “When students know that their music teacher/conductor truly cares about them as complete human beings, they are inspired to make greater efforts in their music making” (p. 7).

Relationships are the driving force of the connection between students and teacher. These teachers were involved in cultivating an atmosphere conducive to open dialogue by modelling authenticity and vulnerability and providing opportunities for students to reflect and share, particularly on the texts of the songs being rehearsed. While each teacher shared varying levels of personal insights and experiences to their students,

all of them also acknowledged certain boundaries indicating that a teacher could overshare or be too personal. Most of the teachers indicated that their wisdom in navigating these conversations was based on their years of experience, their place in the community, and the students' level of maturity.

Theme 3: Bonding among the students. Other spiritual moments took place because of the interaction and connection among the students. One teacher encouraged connectedness between the students by initiating discussions in small groups where the students can have their own interaction without the teacher present so that they can be “real with each other” (Ashley). Almost every participant described spiritual experiences happening when every single student was engaged and giving 100% effort. Many directors mentioned that those special moments are apt to happen when there is a shared sense of unity and experience of success. One director shared that spiritual moments could not happen when there was conflict among the group. Anthony Palmer (2006) explained this by writing:

Violins out of tune with the basses will not produce the desired resonance characteristic of a perfectly tuned chord. Complementary passages in a fugue will not render the same vibrancy if balances are not properly attended. And all for what? For tuning into the larger fabric of a universe that is itself in vibration. To be connected not only to each other in the orchestra, but to be connected to a larger sense of humanity. (p. 155)

Vulnerability and authenticity were important markers for developing connection between teacher and students. But they are also essential for developing trust and connection among the students themselves. Most seasoned teachers, including me, recall

special classes that they have had over the years that made a stronger impact personally than others. Often it is because these classes bonded with each other which ignited a sense of unity and comradery that enhanced the learning process, and in the case of choir, the performance process.

Theme 4: Religious experiences. Another theme that occurred throughout the data was the interviewee's connection to the divine. One interviewee agreed to participate in the study because she felt her job as a choral conductor was an offering to God. Another interviewee talked about feeling God's presence during a particular song because of the emotions and memories it evoked. All but one of the participants identified as both spiritual and religious. However, the teacher who identified as spiritual but not religious also referenced a connection to the divine when he spoke of his students who were very religious.

Naturally, this area of connection also involves a needed conversation about the distinction between religion and spirituality. The literature, and these teachers, made a distinction between these two terms. The literature on spirituality described religion as a particular set of beliefs or specific dogma most often connected with a divine being. For example, Nash (2002) distinguished religion from spirituality stating, "Religion...is the institution; spirituality is the personal. Religion is what we do with others; spirituality is what we do within ourselves. Public vs. private faith. Religion is head; spirituality is heart" (p. 166). Anthropologist and Professor of Education, Paul Byers (1992) suggested, "Religions...are particular answers to the universal human questions about the creation and meaning of life. Spirituality refers to the universal personal concern for the questions" (p. 6). This distinction resonated throughout nearly all of the research in the

area of spirituality. In my study, the participants expressed that spirituality and religion could influence each other and, for some, were closely linked. But for others, descriptions of spiritual experiences could be devoid of a particular deity or religion. For instance, several described as spiritual experiences watching their students perform in a way that moved them emotionally.

Based on these definitions from Nash and Byers and the experience of my participants, public school teachers are given more clarity in their role as facilitators of spiritual experiences without crossing religious boundaries. Because spirituality is a matter of individual placement within the greater world, each student has the ability to hold differing beliefs and truths without compromising another.

The National Association for Music Education has also provided support in how to properly integrate sacred music in public schools by providing this position statement:

It is the position of the National Association for Music Education that the study and performance of religious music within an educational context is a vital and appropriate part of a comprehensive music education. The omission of sacred music from the school curriculum would result in an incomplete educational experience. (NAfME, 1996)

Following this statement, the National Association for Music Education provided background and legal history of the First Amendment and its precedent for sacred music in schools. The organization suggested exercising “caution and good judgement in selecting sacred music” and provides seven questions to assist teachers in ensuring that the musical program is religiously neutral. They emphasize when selecting literature to consider the educational value, keeping the focus on musical and artistic elements,

representing diverse perspectives and having respect and sensitivity for various traditions, not promoting or inhibiting religious views, abiding by local district and school policies, and the avoiding religious symbols, scenery, and devotional settings.

Research Sub-Question 2

How do public high school choral conductors experience spirituality in choral performances? While it was not surprising to hear directors recount spiritual experiences in the rehearsal setting, I did not expect to find such little data from the teachers regarding their experiences of spiritual moments in a performance setting. In the field of choral music education, many would naturally think of the performance as the focus of all discussion. However, for these teachers, it was in the rehearsals that the greatest spiritual connections were being made, although some directors did still mention, albeit briefly, moments of spirituality in the performance setting.

Palmer's (2006) philosophy on music education and spirituality is consistent with this finding that the process of rehearsal is equally as important, if not more so, than the product—the performance—referring to the performance, when it comes to experiencing spiritual moments. Palmer (2006) argued that music education's focus as a product has given the subject "subservient status" (p. 150). He suggested,

... a redefinition of product is imperative. While there is a product in the sense of a score, recording, and so on, it is not the product and its directions for performance that are paramount but rather the process that achieves preeminence. (p. 150)

Theme 5: Interaction with the audience. Interestingly, even though the choral art is focused on performance and rehearsing in preparation for performances, the least

frequently mentioned form of spiritual connection was between the musicians and audience. Only two of the teachers even mentioned this connection and when they did, only shared one thought addressing it, even while saying that making a connection with the audience is important. Directors spoke of moments when parents would approach them after a concert to thank them for teaching and inspiring their children. Two directors described spiritual moments they had when watching their students perform. But even in these cases, that revealed more of the connection between the director and the students than the act of performing.

But, I would argue that this level of connection is still important to the art of choral music. In order for the art of choral singing to continue for future generations, choirs must effectively connect to their audiences through communicating the text in a technically proficient performance that encourages the audience to reflect and be affected by the art. While the students and director have the great benefit of living with the music for several weeks through rehearsal, the audience only has the single performance to connect with the music either through the text, technical proficiency, or the singers' ability to effectively communicate the essence of the music.

Another discussion topic found in the data that influenced the connection with the audience, as well as within the rehearsal, was the level of technical proficiency with which the music was performed. While all teachers agreed a flawless performance does not guarantee a spiritual experience, a certain level of proficiency must be acquired before the students can stop focusing solely on the technical aspects of singing and move to a deeper level of musicality and performance. As participant Connor explained, the technical proficiency does not have to be perfect, but the students must be secure enough

in the music to perform with musicality instead of just focusing on the fundamentals like pitches and rhythms. Because I interviewed directors in this study and not audience members it is difficult to say if audiences could still experience spiritual moments based on the level of technical proficiency. But it is likely, based on my experience, that if the students were having a spiritual experience in their performance, the audience would likely experience a certain level of transcendence as well. Future research on the audiences' engagement with spiritual experiences in choral concerts would be compelling to support the findings in this study.

Research Sub-Question 3

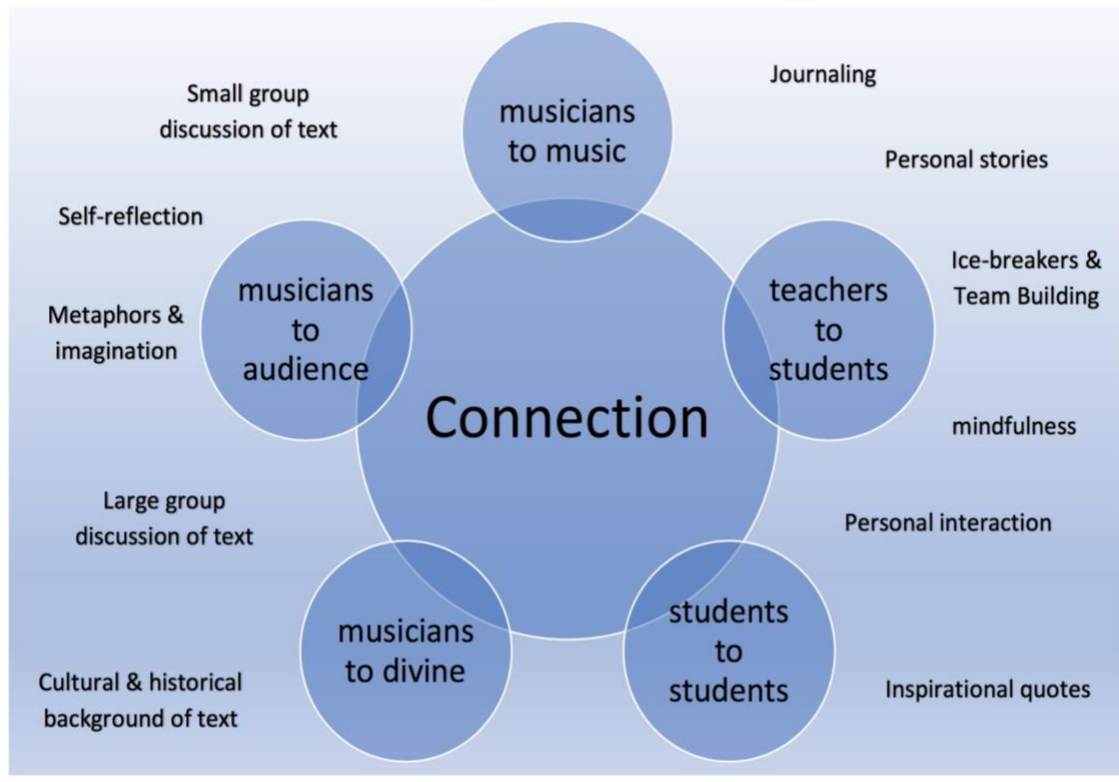
To what extent should public high school choral conductors infuse spirituality into the choral music making process? The purpose of this question was to better understand what teachers believe to be their ethical responsibility as it pertains to spirituality. As referenced previously with the connection between teacher and students, the participants agreed that while they sought to inspire and work toward special moments, they did not want to ever indoctrinate or even give the illusion of doing so. These teachers cared deeply for their students and did not want to offend, make them feel uncomfortable, or isolate one student from another. This is when being authentic toward the students was important to the directors. Directors discussed having boundaries and being sensitive to not cross the line from being honest and vulnerable to oversharing. This is also where the position statement from the National Association of Music Education can provide guidelines to ensure ethical educational decisions are being made.

Research Sub-Question 4

How do public high school choral conductors infuse spirituality into the choral music making process? The directors infused spirituality in their choral music making in a variety of ways. Several participants identified strategies even before being asked to share how they infuse spirituality in their classroom. The teachers agreed that spiritual moments could not be forced, but an atmosphere could be cultivated to encourage spiritual moments to occur. Palmer (2006) suggested, “To achieve a heightened consciousness, that is, what I am calling a spiritual experience, supreme attention must be given to the conditions under which music making occurs” (p. 151). Therefore, listed below are instructional strategies that were shared from the participants that created an atmosphere for spiritual moments to occur in the music making process in their classrooms.

Creating the atmosphere. Most of the teachers interviewed for this study agreed that most spiritual moments were spontaneous, but many agreed that you could plan for them, or at least create a conducive atmosphere for them to happen. Figure 3 depicts five areas of connection that I drew from the themes found in the data: musicians to music, teachers to students, students to students, musicians to divine, musicians to audience. Surrounding these five connections are activities that teachers indicated helped cultivate an atmosphere conducive to spiritual experiences, which will be explained in the sections that follow.

Figure 3. Creating an Atmosphere for Spirituality in Choral Music



Large/small group discussion of the text. One of the most frequently mentioned activities from all of the teachers was large group and small group discussion of the choral text. Because text is a driving force toward understanding a song, communicating it effectively, and experiencing it in a way that goes beyond the technical, rehearsal time was intentionally planned for students to gain an understanding of the lyricist's intent and what he or she wants to communicate. Many teachers led this discussion in a whole-group format, but some allowed students to gather in small groups (often in their voice sections) to discuss these things on their own.

Cultural and historical background of text. In conjunction with discussing the text, teachers mentioned explaining to the students the cultural and historical background of the text and composer. This aided them with understanding the vocabulary, references, and worldviews associated with the text. This also assisted in creating

empathy for the narrator of the text, which helped students in proper communication of the lyrics.

Metaphors & imagination. The use of metaphors and imagination were also highly referenced by the directors in connecting with the music and communicating a message. Participants reported that they would prompt the students in rehearsal by saying, “Imagine if...” or “Sing this like...” to elicit a musical response that is not always achievable through traditional musical terminology. This also placed the singers in the role of an actor which encouraged them to draw from their emotions and experiences, engaging the vulnerability that the directors described as leading to spiritual experiences.

Self-reflection. Self-reflection is a natural activity for individuals to use to connect with a piece of music without disrupting the physical structure of the class. Because some public-school choirs may have up to 40 to 100 or more students enrolled, it is helpful to have some activities that do not require excessive movement on the risers or around the room. Using self-reflection as a strategy allowed the students to engage right where they were sitting or standing. Since some texts of songs could be controversial due to social or religious issues, self-reflection also prevented the risk of some students offending others which could happen in large group discussion with certain topics. Self-reflection is also an activity easily modelled by the teacher and many teachers expressed the importance of the teacher guiding, not only the activities, but the process of being a reflective practitioner.

Journaling. Journaling added a writing component to self-reflection. One director encouraged the use of journals by the students in her choir. Sometimes she would have students turn these in to the teacher, while other times they remained private to the

student. This was also a non-disruptive way to encourage reflection and stirring of the emotions which allowed students to connect with the music, the text, and their positioning in the world.

Personal stories. Sharing personal stories was also an activity often modelled by the teacher. When a director shared what he or she thought the poet was saying or related the text to a personal experience, relationships and trust were being formed between the director and the students. This also sparked stories for the students to recall and then use to connect their lives with the music. Several of the teachers also noted that sharing an appropriate amount will help the students view the director as a real person instead of just an authoritarian figure in the classroom. This also helped lower walls of isolation and potential barriers to vulnerability and authenticity.

Ice-breakers & team building. Ice-breakers and team building activities were also common activities mentioned by the teachers to encourage the students to build connections with one another. Unlike many courses in which individual achievement is the goal, choral music making is a group effort that requires each individual to contribute to the group performance. The ensemble then is working as a unit to communicate a message with successes and failures being attributed to the ensemble, not the individual. It has been my experience that students may enter a choral rehearsal apprehensive to trust each other and that bond must be cultivated to succeed in an artistic endeavor.

Mindfulness. Mindfulness is not a term that was used by the teachers, but activities were described that fall into this category. Mindfulness is the concept of focusing one's attention to experiences in the present moment. Where self-reflection and journaling might conjure experiences from the past, mindfulness is more about the

experience of the moment. In a choral classroom, this might look like students focusing on their breath and developing an awareness of how the song makes them feel in the moment, a feeling that can be used for future performances of the piece.

Personal interaction. Another crucial element used by these directors to develop connections between themselves and the students was the personal interactions between them. One director mentioned how he required each student to greet him upon entering his room. Whether it was through a high-five, handshake, or hello, each student's presence was acknowledged upon entering the rehearsal space. Participants spoke of times students would hang out in the rehearsal room before or after class, during lunch, or after school. These moments of relationship-building between the director and students built a foundation for trust which encouraged vocal and musical risks to be taken in the rehearsal and/or performance.

Inspirational quotes. The same director that talked about the importance of personal interaction also explained his use of inspirational quotes around his room. These were displayed as decorations, and a rotating quote was written on the white board, so students were surrounded by positive thoughts and time was taken to reflect on the meaning of these quotes. Not only did this stir good conversation and creative and critical thinking, but it got the students in the habit of thinking critically about text of the songs they were singing. This director claimed this to be a useful skill when passing out new music because the students were already familiar with the idea of digging deeply into the meaning of text, instead of just taking it at face value.

Conceptual model of spirituality in music education. In chapter two I shared van der Merwe and Habron's (2015) research, from which they developed a conceptual

model of spirituality in music education based on a hermeneutic phenomenological study examining 22 primary sources addressing spirituality in music education. In Chapter Three I referenced their work again as the conceptual framework for this study. I sought to discover if the data from interviewing public high school choir directors would support their findings from the emerging literature on spirituality within the field. They used Van Mannen's lifeworld existentials to organize their data: relationality, corporeality, temporality, and spatiality. Much of the data from my interviews could be categorized within these four existentials as well. The students' connection with each other and with the teacher, along with strategies listed above like large/small group discussions and personal interactions would support the descriptors found in relationality. Activities requiring the students to connect to the text through reflection, journaling, and mindfulness are examples of corporeality. Temporality and spatiality are a little less obvious, however I believe the moments of awe and transcendence fit into temporality and much of the metaphoric language used by the directors to achieve a sound or to paint a picture for the students can be found supporting spatiality. Although the responses from the directors do not seem clearly communicated using the four existentials, they certainly reinforce and are consistent with what van der Merwe and Habron found in their hermeneutic phenomenological approach to understanding spirituality within music education.

Research Sub-Question 5

To what extent does the high school choral conductor's gender play a role related to spirituality as experienced or infused by the conductor in the music making process? During the development of the methodology of this study, a question was posed as to

whether gender would influence the responses about spirituality from the directors. Although there was non-music literature that suggested women were more spiritual than men, there was no discernable difference found between the data of male or female participants in this study. Perhaps further investigation through classroom observations, or a different methodology would reveal differences between teachers based on genders, but there was nothing in the data gathered to indicate that.

Implications of Findings

The teachers interviewed in this study participated because they indicated they had experienced spirituality in choral rehearsals and/or performance. They defined spirituality as emotional moments of transcendence that were sparked because of connection to the music, particularly with the text, connections between teacher and student, connection among the students, connection to the divine, and connection to the audience. Spiritual moments are usually spontaneous, but with experience, the participants believed that spiritual moments could be planned. Teachers cannot force these moments to happen, but they can create an atmosphere conducive to spiritual experiences. They suggested activities of self-reflection like journaling and mindfulness, but also community building activities like large and small group discussion, ice-breakers, and other song-specific activities to enhance these non-measurable attributes desirable in students and their performances. Many teachers also discussed their own spiritual journey and modelling attention to spirituality in rehearsal. One director did this through individually acknowledging each student each day. For choir directors who are seeking to help their students experience transcendental moments in their music making, I would recommend utilizing some of these strategies in their rehearsals.

As pre-service teachers prepare for the professional field of choral conducting, there are some ideas that could be gleaned from this study if they wish to help their students more readily engage in spiritual experiences. Music teacher educators could help pre-service teachers take note of the instructional strategies and activities mentioned by the participants and learn best practices for implementing these in their classroom. For instance, by posting inspirational quotes around their room when setting up their new classroom and planning their décor, they can make steps toward a more inspiring environment that encourages critical thinking, while also cultivating an atmosphere in which spirituality can occur. Pre-service teachers should also learn about literature selection as it pertains to sacred music and be aware of the position statements of organizations like the National Association for Music Education that can protect them and guide their curricular choices in the classroom.

Of all of the forms of connection found in the data, connection to the audience was the weakest mentioned. This was surprising since choral music making is often a performance-driven culture. This study might lead pre-service and inservice teachers to consider ways to build connection with the audience. For young singers, performing in front of an audience can be a terrifying activity. The data suggested that connection, and thus spiritual experiences, are often formed through vulnerability and authenticity. Providing the students numerous opportunities to perform so that they can practice this and develop trust with an audience could help cultivate spiritual experiences with an audience. It's also likely that it's difficult to build connection with audience members who are hearing the music for the first time, and only one time. It is probably easier to

experience spiritual moments in rehearsal because the musicians have a longer period of time to engage with the music and with each other.

Limitations of the Study

Because this is a phenomenological study, we cannot generalize these findings to all public high school choral directors. These findings represent how a selected eight participants understand spirituality in choral music making. Seven of the eight participants described themselves as both spiritual and religious, leaving one participant to describe himself as spiritual and not religious. It is possible that many of the conductors agreed to participate were because of the importance of their religious beliefs, and that the majority of the data they shared may reflect this. With only one self-described “non-religious” conductor to compare the data to, it is uncertain if or how the the participant’s religious beliefs influenced the findings of the study.

Another limitation to the study was the short amount of time spent with the participants. While I initially desired 45-60 minute interviews, the participants only provided, on average, 38 minutes of data. Perhaps a greater understanding of the phenomenon could be obtained with longer or more frequent interaction with the participants.

Contribution to the Literature

The idea of connections emphasized in the findings is a theme consistent with the literature. In the nursing literature, holistic health was driven by relational and behavioral connection. Perhaps in the choral context the holistic health of a singer, and thus the

choral performance, might benefit from spiritual connections. Connection was also at the crux of Brown's research that defined spirituality as "recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion" (Brown, 2017, p. 45). The findings of this study are also consistent with what educators McGreevy and Copley (1998/1999) reported. Their participants suggested creating a beautiful aesthetic in the classroom, sharing stories, using traditions and rituals to celebrate "beginnings and endings," engaging in the visual and performing arts, creating quiet moments throughout the day for reflection and response, reflecting and responding to life's mysteries, involving students in community service, engaging with the natural world, enjoying humor, cultivating an inner life, and mentoring colleagues and peers mimics the findings of this study. These strategies are very similar to the ones described by the participants of my study, particularly reflection and relationship building. But like Miner-Williams pointed out in the field of nursing, although the acknowledgement of spirituality within the subject existed, writing and research about the practical understanding of this phenomenon and its use in choral music education practices has thus far been limited.

This study contributes to the literature on spirituality in music education by providing more insight into understanding spirituality in the choral setting, and by providing practical strategies to create an atmosphere in which spiritual moments could occur. Much of the literature pertaining to spirituality in choral music education is linked to participation in the arts, sensitivity to the holistic learning process, flow theory, and mindfulness. Because of this study, we now have a better understanding of how

spirituality is experienced in the lives of public high school teachers and their students, how a spiritual culture can be cultivated, and ways for teachers to develop this culture specifically in a choral music education classroom. With Yob's (2011) sentiment in mind—"if we knew what spirituality was, we could teach for it" (p.41)—the findings of this study provide a clearer picture of how spirituality is understood and experienced in choral music education and ways in which teachers create an atmosphere more conducive to spiritual experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study of spirituality continues to grow as an area of interest for researchers. In education, particularly music education, there is much more research to be done. I would like to replicate this study changing the sample from public school teachers to other groups like private school teachers, worship and church music leaders, and university professors, to see if there is consistency in the findings or new understanding to be gained. It would also be interesting to gather quantitative data to better understand spirituality's role in choral music classrooms and determine whether implementing particular activities would consistently create a desired result. This study's findings, although not generalizable, can certainly be transferable to other educational situations. This is seen most clearly through the consistency in findings from this study to authors' conclusions about spirituality in education and other people-oriented fields.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the examination of the role of spirituality in choral music making for choral conductors in the United States. Based on interviews with eight public high school conductors who were members of the American Choral Directors Association, had taught for at least five years, and felt they had a spiritual experience in choral rehearsal or performance, it now seems clear that spiritual moments are possible in school choirs. Additionally, insights have been gained into the cultivation of an atmosphere conducive to these experiences. Based on my analysis of the teachers' interviews, I concluded that spirituality is about connection, particularly connecting musicians to music (especially the text), teachers to students, students to each other, musicians to the divine, and musicians to an audience. These connections can be cultivated through large/small group discussion, cultural and historical background, metaphors and imagination, self-reflection, journaling, personal stories, ice-breakers and team building activities, mindfulness, personal interactions, and inspirational quotes. By engaging in activities such as these, I believe that teachers can tend to the whole student (body, mind, and spirit), and transcend the technical aspects of performing to create uplifting spiritual experiences for students, even within secular environments, that contribute to their choral music making.

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APPENDIX A
RESEARCH FORMS

1. Research Participant Informed Consent
2. Facebook Recruitment Message
3. Google Participant Demographic Form

1. Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Jordan Cox and I am a PhD candidate in Music Education at the University of Missouri. For my dissertation, I am working on a research study to define spirituality in choral music called “An Examination of the Role of Spirituality in Choral Music Making from the Public High School Choral Conductor’s Perspective.” My study involves interviewing practicing public high school choral conductors who have had at least 5 years of teaching experience. The interview will focus on interviewees’ personal definitions of and experiences with “spirituality” related to conducting choral music. I hope that you will agree to participate.

Data will be collected through approximately 45-60-minute interviews, at a time and location convenient for you, potentially via Skype if more convenient. Later, I will ask you to review the transcript of your interview to be sure it captures your thoughts and meanings accurately. Interviews will be audio-recorded, but only pseudonyms will be used. Recordings and transcript files will be stored on password-protected devices. Your responses will remain strictly confidential. Should you participate, you may be contacted after the initial interview for follow up questions that might arise.

I hope that the findings of this study will help further the profession’s understanding of the choral music experience. An expected benefit associated with your participation is the opportunity for your own reflection about spirituality in choral music making. I will be happy to share my findings with you after the research is completed.

You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher or the University of Missouri. Potential risks will be an hour of time given up by the interviewees, but there will be no risks outside of what is encountered in normal daily life.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) at XXX-XXX-XXXX. Feel free to contact me, or my advisor Dr. Wendy Sims (xxxxxx@missouri.edu), if you have any questions about this research project.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research study,

Jordan L. Cox

PhD Candidate in LTC - Music Education, University of Missouri
Director of Choral Activities, Missouri Baptist University

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Date: _____

Printed Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

2. Facebook Recruitment Message

Dear Choral Conductor,

If you are a practicing public high school choral director, have at least 5 years of public high school teaching experience, and have had what you consider to be a spiritual experience in either choral rehearsal or performance, I hope you will consider being interviewed for my study. I am a former high school choir director and am currently a collegiate choral conductor and doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri, working on a research project entitled "An Examination of the Role of Spirituality in Choral Music Making from the Public High School Choral Conductor's Perspective." From those who respond to this post with a willingness to participate, I will contact individuals who meet the study's demographic criteria to serve as participants. Participants will respond to a 45-60-minute interview either face-to-face or via online technology such as Skype. Follow-up questions may be asked at a later date, and the interviewee will have the opportunity to review their transcripts and clarify if desired. Each interviewee will be assigned a coded alias so that he/she may remain anonymous to the readers of the study.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the profession's understanding of the choral music experience. Findings of this study may be published and presented at professional conferences.

Should you have any questions, please contact me at xxxxxx@mail.missouri.edu. If you know of any colleagues who are not a member of this Facebook page and might be a good candidate to interview, please feel free to send me their contact information or forward this message to them.

To volunteer as a potential participant, please click the link below to provide some basic demographic data and contact information.

[CLICK THIS LINK TO PARTICIPATE](#)

Thank you so much for your consideration,

Jordan Cox
Ph.D. Candidate
University of Missouri, Columbia, MO
Director of Choral Activities
Missouri Baptist University, St. Louis, MO
xxxxxx@mail.missouri.edu

3. Google Participant Demographic Form



An Examination of the Role of Spirituality in Choral Music Making from the Public High School Choral Conductor's Perspective

To volunteer as a potential participant, please provide some basic demographic data and contact information.

*** Required**

1. Name (First, Last) *

2. Gender *

3. I am currently a public high school choral director. *

Check all that apply.

☐ Yes

☐ No

4. I have taught for at least 5 years. *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. What school/organization is your choir associated with? *

6. Please provide your phone number. *

7. Please provide your e-mail address. *

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APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWS

1. Interview Guide
2. Interview One Transcription: Connor
3. Interview Two Transcription: Ben
4. Interview Three Transcription: Nathan
5. Interview Four Transcription: Justin
6. Interview Five Transcription: Ashley
7. Interview Six Transcription: Joy
8. Interview Seven Transcription: Sarah
9. Interview Eight Transcription: Tia

1. Interview Guide

Name:

Date:

Place:

Time:

Participants will be asked/prompted to:

1. Tell me about a time in a choral performance that you feel you had a spiritual experience.
 - a. What made it uniquely spiritual?
 - b. What do you think created that moment?
2. Tell me about a time in a choral rehearsal that you feel you had a spiritual experience.
 - a. What made it uniquely spiritual?
 - b. What do you think created that moment?
3. What does the term spirituality mean to you in the context of choral music making?
 - a. Revisit Parker Palmer's definition of spirituality – do you agree? Disagree?
 - b. Does your definition reshape your thoughts from the first two questions?
4. What ethical or culturally-responsive issues should be addressed when considering implementing spiritual elements into choral music making?
5. (If they haven't listed several experiences from question 1 or 2) - What other experiences do you think fall in the category of spirituality?
6. What are some practical ways that you integrate spiritual elements into your music making?
7. What should I have asked you that I didn't?

Transcript #1: Connor

- Male, Iowa
- Tuesday, July 10, 2:00-2:35p.
- Online via Zoom

Introductory Welcome.

C: Have you only taught in MO?

J: Yeah

C: Um, so have you ever worked in any schools with a Karen refugee population?

J: No

C: Ok, so like they're from Burma originally.

J: Ok

C: And I know in some parts of MO there's a big population, in fact there's a guy at central Mo university, his specialty is researching Karen resettlement, but at Hoover, I've had a lot of students from like the broad community of refugees from Burma and they are all, like their religious practice is like the central part of their group identity, particularly in the United States, so, I had some experiences with those students, which for myself would categorize as spiritual, but for me they were not religious, but for my students they certainly were.

J: That's interesting, one of the big questions that I have for people is to tell me of a time in a choral performance that you feel you had a spiritual experience.

C: Yeah so, I probably....

Technology problems

C: Yeah, so every spring at our last concert my auditioned choir does the Stephen Paulus, *The Road Home*, for the last piece of the concert, so we always discuss the meaning and text before and we also have reflections after the concert and I've had several, probably 4 or 5 of my students who are refugees from Burma now, afterwards when they've been reflecting on it, and I could see this in the performance, but I don't know that I would have been able to describe it without them telling me, after that concert explain that the performance of that song for them...it took them back to their home and they felt...they're really, really, really religious. Some of them talked about feeling the presence of God when they were in the performance but like for me watching them I could tell there was a profound feeling and there are a couple of them who even when we performed it for most of it they would have their eyes closed for the performance. So, they described it as like they felt like they were home again. Some of them hadn't been home, back to their country, for the last 10 or 12 years, so.

J: So what do you think it was about that song in particular that created that moment?

C: Um, I think it was the connection to the text, the reflection and the discussion of the text and on the front end thinking about what it really meant to them, and I think that with that piece the musical aspects are... I mean you can go as deep as you want, but it's simple enough with that piece that you can really dig in to the musicality of it to a pretty deep level and so I think that because of the relative ease of performance it kind of opens, like when you feel really secure in your performance of a piece I think it opens you to a wider range of experiences as you perform because you're not having to focus on this weird jump or all these words or that kind of thing.

J: So do you think that the technical proficiency is required in order to have that experience?

C: Um, I don't think so as long as whatever it is they're performing, they feel secure in. But I don't know that they necessarily, I guess in the sense that they need to be able to perform it comfortably they need the technical, the technique, but I don't think that they need a high level of technical ability to perform a piece and have that experience.

J: Yeah, cool, ok. Tell me about a time in a choral rehearsal that you feel you had a spiritual experience.

C: Um...long pause...

Technical Difficulties

C: So this year, for our Winter Concert we did a piece of music in one of the languages of one, actually we did two songs in a language that's spoken of one of the ethnic groups from Burma that I had students from. And there were several points in rehearsal that all of the students just had some like really deep moments of connection I think in that case for those kids who were members of that group it was like for them it was like the first time at school that they really felt like represented and felt like they could be, like they were the only experts in the room. Um, the other kids, I think that they just really grabbed on to that idea of like how meaningful it was to share that with the students who don't get to express their culture on a daily basis.

J: Cool, So, we've kind of brought up some ideas about spiritual experiences what does the term spirituality mean to you then in the context of choral music making?

C: Um, I think, for me it means...like really just connectedness between members of the ensemble. Um, yeah it's just an indescribable feeling like connecting with other people or...that's a hard question...um,

J: Hints the dissertation...hahaha

C: Yeah, so I guess it's, we talk about a sense of belonging in ensembles and trying to build a sense of community and belonging, but I think that like that actual feeling of being in a place where like you're unconditionally accepted is like a fleeting thing,

so for me, like....that's how I would describe....it's those moments of feeling like...everybody's meant to be in that place doing that thing and there's just something like that's not quantifiable that happens.

J: Yeah, Yeah...cool...I think this will be an interesting, I'm interested in what you have to say, particularly because you've been talking about your students and the specific cultural issues that you interact with. The question is, what ethical or cultural responsive issues should be addressed when considering how to implement spiritual elements in the choral music making.

C: Um...ok for that one....sorry, my cat is hitting the computer.

J: That's ok

C: What do YOU mean when you say spiritual elements?

J: So, I guess part of what posed this question is that a lot of people connect spirituality with religion – some people do, some people don't and of course in the U.S. there's a lot of issues with talking about spiritual things, particularly if too closely tied to religion in public schools. So do you feel like there are any ethical issues that you have to be aware of as a public school teacher as far as involving these spiritual elements or teaching for these spiritual elements?

C: Um, yeah, so like for me personally, I would say that the...I mean I think it's good practice to avoid specifically religious discussions in that context. But I think that

doing that for me anyways actually it makes discussion elements in a public setting about religious works easier because um....gosh...trying to think of a religious, something with religious texts we did this year, which of course there are a bunch of, but of course I can't think of any off the top of my head, but so if we're singing a piece talking about God or whatever what I would do is kind of direct their attention to, you know, let's forget like an explicitly religious construct for a moment and in the context of this text you know what is like the broader meaning that God is standing for? And how can we draw that to our universal human experience? So, like then for *The Road Home* the kids who are really religious they have the license to make a Heaven connection with *The Road Home* where as my kids who are not religious you know they may be focused on what is home feel like and that just you know the feeling of being loved and accepted.

J: Do you bring those options to them or do you try to keep it open ended that they might latch on to them themselves?

C: Um, so like with *The Road Home* I leave it pretty open ended, those are ideas that kids have come up with for what the meaning is for them. I do if we're talking about a piece that is explicitly religious then I'll put down a little bit of a framework just so that the kids who are not religious don't feel uncomfortable talking about it.

J: Yeah

C: They don't feel like they're being made to be talking about a specific religious...but we will talk about if we're doing a piece that the actual religious backing is important for the performance or the understanding, we will talk about that when it comes to interpreting the text is when I'll lay down some of those things.

J: Do you feel like there's a difference in your approach between your Burmese students and your American students?

C: Um, so, one quick thing...just so that you're aware, cause this is really confusing is that Burma is like the only country in the world that I know of where they don't have a national identity, so the country of Burma is actually a conglomeration of ethnic states that got drawn together.

J: Ok

C: The biggest group of people were ethnically Burmese, um, so the people like who are here in the United States are not Burmese because, the Burmese are the ones that caused them to be refugees, so they just identify like, earlier when I said Karen, if you ask them you know, like, if you were, if you just said What are you? Which you wouldn't do. They would say I'm Karen, the three big ones are Karen, Kachin, and Chin.

J: Ok

C: Just so that you know, um, so I would say that in general they tie like they just approach things for a more religious standpoint because culturally they're so religious, and because of being divorced from their home setting like they're church right now kind of provides them like the only homogenous community that they have. So, I mean it's not uncommon for my kids to tell me that they have to go practice music at church on Friday night and then they have to teach kids their native language on Saturdays and then all day Sunday is church. So, they're doing so much that they definitely, approach things like from that standpoint more so than even my religious white students.

J: Ok, you talked about particularly with the music *The Road Home* and some text analysis and finding connection there, are there any other moments in whether rehearsal or performance that you felt like spiritual experiences have happened?

C: Um, I mean yeah, with various pieces, I think it all a lot of times comes back to like it seems like now that I'm thinking about it, the common theme is that those experiences seem to happen when every kid has some kind of connection so that whatever it is we're doing. So another example I thought of is, we did the piece, *Earth Song* by Frank Ticheli a couple of years ago.

J: Yeah, I love that

C: Yeah, and so one of my students, she didn't share in front of the whole class herself, but she shared with me and then told me that I could talk about it with the class as

long as I didn't identify her, but like explained her whole refugee experience and how it related to the text of that piece. So again I would say that there were some of those moments, particularly the day we had that class discussion, but then like going forward as well just because, you know every kid kind of was given C deeper connection with the piece because of that sharing.

J: mmhmm. So, they definitely spur it on in each other you think?

C: Yeah, I think so, well maybe not everywhere, but I guess something I've noticed at Hoover just because, so our school is like, well it's 40% ELL, but then it's roughly 35% white, and then 20ish% Asian, 20ish% black, and then like 15% Latino and I think I'm at 90% so I'm not sure where the rest of are, but so, it's just this insanely diverse school and I think we have, they give a number every year of kids speak this many different languages. I think it was like 49 this year.

J: Wow

C: So I've noticed that my kids at Hoover have, they just have this incredible ability to empathize because they've been constantly exposed to so many types of people and they've just been able to hear about so many life experiences from their peers already as 15/16 year olds, so I think it might be different in a different setting, but from my kids, they're so deeply emotionally affected when my kids share those types of things with them that it comes through then when they perform.

J: That's awesome – outside of the textual elements and discussing the context of the piece are there any other practical ways and maybe should even say, the question was what are some practical ways you integrate spiritual music making...I'm kind of curious now, do you think you go into the year purposefully wanting to include these elements or do you think they 're just natural by-products of things you're doing?

C: Um, I would not say that I've ever planned for it. But I also I think it's one of those things you really can't plan for. Like you might have a year without many of those experiences and even if you taught the exact same way, and you did that year over again, you might have a bunch more because of some thing. So, no I wouldn't say that I plan for it, but I think I noticed that the deeper I can get kids to personally connect the more likely it is to happen. Um, one thing though that this is not specific to a performance but not this last year school, yeah, but the previous school year I started having my students for concerts they could wear their traditional cultural clothing for their concert attire.

J: That is really cool.

C: Yeah and like it was just a comment a kid made to me made to think, holy crap, that's a great idea, and so I would say that the first time we did it, I had like several moments in our warm-up where I was like overwhelmed emotionally seeing it. Um and I think that aspect now of our performances does enhance that spiritual element because I'm not sure the tangible reason why, but I think part of it is because

everybody can show their identity, but they can also see how many of their classmates have these different identities that they don't see on a daily basis.

J: Hmm...so is that something you've continued to do since then?

C: Yeah, so my first time I did it was Spring of 2017 and then this last school year I did it for every concert.

J: Cool. Will you do that the same when you go to the next high school?

C: Um, so I'm not sure what it will look like, but so I'll be the Assistant Director at Lincoln because it's quite a bit bigger school, so there's two full time directors and the director actually with one or two of his choirs did it for his spring concert this year so I think it went well. I'll just have to figure that out when I'm on the ground in the fall and kind of see the lay of the land.

J: Sure

C: But I'd love to, I mean a) it's way easier than dealing with robes or other concert attire stuff as you well know, and it's just like they just have beautiful clothing. Like it's just amazing to see them dressed up like that.

J: Yeah – what do your white students wear?

C: So they typically wear, so I've had this discussion actually, I'll talk about explicitly that...let me put my words together real quick...so the first time I had a student who

said something like, “aw man, this sucks because I don’t have anything cool to wear because I’m just a white guy” and I was like alright, back up for a second. Truly, tuxedo or all black or black and white IS American white people formal attire and so I was like, so you know not only are you going to get to wear your formal attire, but you always have gotten to wear your cultural attire. And one thing that really illuminated that for me was some of my Asian students after we had done this told me that in their culture, the only time you wear all black is to a funeral. So just thinking for them like, ok, if I was in...pick a country, doesn’t matter...as a white guy where I’m not part of the dominate group and they told me that for a concert which should be celebratory I have to wear something that I only associate with mourning, it would, even though I would be around people dressed the same way, it would be uncomfortable, it would be hard to get myself in the right mindset to perform so that’s kind of where I went with that. I just told them this is your formal white people attire, all black or black and white or whatever.

J: That’s interesting. I think you should write something about that somewhere – it’s an interesting thing you’ve done. Um, what should I have asked you about spirituality that I didn’t?

C: So you’re talking to public school teachers right?

J: Yeah

C: So this wouldn't apply to me, but it might be interesting if...a lot of people have church jobs too...if there's a difference in how they perceive those experiences with their public school choir versus their church choir. I don't have a church job.

J: You do or you don't?

C: I don't, but I guess I will say when I've gone to like several celebrations in my students' communities, so like Karen New Year or Chin National Day or whatever, I will say that there's like when I'm in that context and I see them perform, it's not necessarily singing, like I've had some very strong emotional reactions to seeing their cultural performance in the context of their cultural space. So I don't know if that's what I thought maybe somebody who also directs a church choir might have a similar experience.

J: I think you mentioned it earlier, but I didn't catch what you said, you said you would describe yourself as a spiritual person, would you describe yourself as a religious person?

C: No, I wouldn't.

J: Ok, cool. Alright, well I think that's all the questions I have...

Closing comments

Transcript #2: Ben

- Male, Missouri
- Tuesday, August 7, 2018 – 1:30-1:51p
- Face to Face – Coffee Shop, MO

J: Why were you willing to have a conversation about spirituality in the choral music making context?

B: I think, uh, ya know if we remove our spiritual lives from our teaching I don't think that we're gonna be the best teachers we can be and we need to be able to tap into that in order to provide the experiences that we want to provide for our students.

J: Cool – so think of a time in a choral performance that you feel you had a spiritual experience

B: Um, as a teacher or a performer?

J: Either one

B: Um, as a performer, I was singing um, senior year of high school at contest I was singing The Awakening with a quartet and we had, I don't think it could have been a more stellar performance, I wish I had a recording of it, like all of us just left it and were like, I don't, we couldn't have sung that any better than what we just did and it was just an experience, um, I think as far as teaching, um, I think that um, you know having that moment of like you know my arms are moving, but I'm more of being a part of the music and making eye contact with my students not just the few that like work the hardest, but just looking at my students and seeing the face of someone who is putting work into something that isn't going to benefit just themselves is an incredible thing to see.

J: So with um, you mentioned The Awakening....what was it specifically about that that made it spiritual?

B: Um, just not thinking about it, just singing, um, letting the music move our voices and that unity of sound, um, to where we weren't just 4 guys, we were one unit of music

J: Cool, are there any other specific moments that you can think of that have replicated that same feeling?

B: Um, let me think – moments like that typically, um, for me, um, have been in honor choir situations or festival choir situations, I don't know why, but, I think that we're more passionate in those situations and the, the I don't know, it's hard to describe

J: Yeah, it's a difficult thing to define and that's kind of what I' looking at it – I'm trying to gather an understanding based on experiences of choral directors – so, um, ok you mentioned as a conductor, kind of what you were describing to me is Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory where you are conducting and you're almost a part of something else – something bigger – can you think of any other specific moments whether it be in rehearsal or performance with your students – maybe it wasn't completely ethereal, but it was glimpses of that.

B: Yeah, um, for a while there it was coinciding with me overcoming self-doubt and being ok with me and I remember one instance in particular, my pastor had just given a really great sermon on just um, being at rest with who you are, like you don't have to approve who you are because Jesus already approved it, like, we're good here, and just

being at rest with that I remember going on a Monday, which you know everybody knows like Monday's that day...and like um, just teaching better than I thought I had taught previously because I was good with it, like I didn't have to prove myself to anybody, I didn't have to prove anything I just went in there and did my thing I did it better than what I had thought I had done before.

J: What do you think, what were some of the indicators of those moments, like where you felt freedom, what do you think cultivated that?

B: Um,

J: I mean security with yourself,

B: Yeah - The knuckleheads didn't get to me, the kids that just I always had to have the thumb on =- hey. Stop doing this, stop doing that stop doing this, just act like you're supposed to act and like those kids would do something and I was like, "oh, ok, cool, alright, back to..."

J: You could move past it –

B: Year

J: Cool – ok, so in thinking about this, in kind of stirring up these ideas, what kind of definition would you give to spirituality in that context of choral music making?

B: I think that's hard because um, while you, that connection to music does not feel like a Christ-forward connection at all times and that's something that I've had like had to think about and I haven't come to a conclusion yet, like I, it almost sometimes feel like I'm putting myself first or music first and you know I know that's not what I'm supposed to

do, but at the same time since Christ is everything that there is an element of ok-ness with that

J: So would you say that in the context of choral music making, for you, spirituality is very much something tied to faith?

B: Um, ... yes because of what I've felt during a music in worship experience, um, there's this weird sensation that I've never been able to describe of...um, in certain times, not all the time, but certain times in congregational singing I will have this feeling like my mouth is filled more, more sound than I have in myself and it's and like that's the only description I can put to it, it feels like I've taken a huge bite of delicious food and it's just sittin in there and like it's a feeling that's not describable and so that's what my, my definition of spirituality in music has come to be and I...I'm just gonna say that it's the Holy Spirit because that's the only thing...

J: You think there can be a secular form of that for maybe who aren't Christians?

B: I think there can be, yeah, I think that they, I think that everybody's capable of feeling the Holy Spirit whether they think it's a thing or not, so yeah, I do believe they are capable of feeling that

J: Um, so especially, you've described a lot of, when you've had these spiritual experiences, I'm gonna go back to one thing when you mentioned the Awakening, you've just said you really felt like all of you as musicians were really, it's the best you've ever sung it, do you think that the technicality has come before that spiritual

experience can happen – does it have to be a perfect performance in order to experience that?

B: That's a hard question to answer because I, I've spent so much time at the technical level performing that well that I don't know what it's like at a non-technical level because I've been singing in choir since 1998 and it's all I've ever known

J: For you with intonation and perfect pitch, it's a ya know, it's one aspect that for you as a performer is secure

B: But I think that there, it is a possibility because you know the dedicated community choir singers, um, you know people don't, people don't keep coming to a community choir because it's the tip top level of performance, they come back because they feel something, they get something from it, they provide something to it, there's a reason they're there

J: Yeah, um, have you ever planned for or been intentional about incorporating spiritual experiences for your students

B: No

J: So do you think that they can be planned or do you think that they're just unplanned experiences that happened

B: Never thought about it – I, I think that it would be hard to provide an experience that wouldn't feel artificial to me and if something feels artificial to me then I feel like my body language is gonna give that away

J: Do you think there's ways you can cultivate those kind of experiences in your classroom

B: Um, through Social-Emotional learning

J: Ok, be more specific

B: Through methods of connecting them to the music, um, being able to um, to connect them to the music emotionally through writing, through discussion, through peer discussion, and giving them the emotional tools to process something that they're teenage minds really don't...I don't think that they're fully capable of grasping at 15 years old, maybe by 18 years old, like the seniors, yes, they can handle that, but I think that it's important to equip our students with those emotional tools to process what they're going through

J: That's been a common thread that I've found is that connection to the music and the lot of the ways you mentioned, um, what other forms of connection might be important, uh, or if any in cultivating these types of experiences?

B: I think that um, that life connection, um, connecting through the text of a piece of music, um, like Dickenson writes beautiful texts that can easily connect to a teenage student, you know I think it's important to choose the text wisely to provide that um, that...otherwise I can't really think of anything...

J: Um, so in some of your definition of talking about spirituality there has been an element of connecting with, you said it probably doesn't have to be sacred, what type of

ethical issues do you think you need to be aware of in engaging with this idea of spirituality in public schools?

B: I think that I have benefited from teaching in two communities where I really don't have to worry about that too much, just as long as I'm not standing there reading scripture to where I don't, this is hard to say, I don't feel like I have to hide any part of my Christianity for fear of parental backlash or administrative backlash, um, to where I have felt supported enough by the community and the students...and the administration that I could kind of broach that without feeling like I was gonna upset anybody

J: Um, do you every see yourself using the term spirituality?

B: I think that's where I play it a little safer is that once the lingo gets started I think that's like, toothpaste, trying to put toothpaste into the tube

J: Why do you think that word is taboo?

B: I think it's because when someone uses the word spirituality, the non-Christians think I'm thinking about Christianity and the Christians think I'm talking about Eastern religions

J: Oh, that's interesting, I hadn't thought about that, but I could see that – kind of New Agey

B: Right

J: Huh – in an attempt to avoid that word and maybe get at some of the same ideas, what are some of the words you might use instead?

B: Um, I like to let students define that, and if a student says spiritual, that's cool I can be like ok, so let's talk about that kind of stuff, what, they must feel that and we'll take those conversations, um, I guess it's a cop out, but it's, it's one that works, um, and so I, yeah

J: Yeah, no I think that makes sense, without climate...um, ok, any other experiences that come to mind whether it be as a performer, conductor, rehearsal, performance, anything like that you've experienced um, that maybe as we've been talking about you thought of some other instances or songs or other moments with honor choirs that you think, that was a spiritual experience

B: Um, I played the collegiate orchestra, um, when I was in college and we played Finlandia by Sibelius and that was a spiritual experience and really it's been orchestral-wise where like there's more than 3 or 4 Fs in a row on a page, I can play as loud as I want to and have a little liberty, playing that and then Pictures at an Exhibition, the 12th movement of that, the last one, whichever one it is, I definitely felt something there and it's kinda, I thought being a singer and a trombonist it was hard sometimes to have the emotional connection with my trombone because there's no words and you know I have to worry about my intonation a little more, but I felt in those instances of, wow, there's a lot going on, there's. a lot around me, I'm a part of this I'm providing my sound toward this, like that tip top level

J: Do you think that ties in to the choral experience as well, that same idea of if I'm contributing with this other group of people, we're all giving our best...that sort of thing

B: Yeah

J: I think it's interesting you mention that because in one of my other interviews the other person is also a trombone player and they are one of the only other ones who has mentioned a spiritual experiences so I'm wondering if there's something about the nature of that instrument, too, being for a spiritual experience

B: It is, it's the best legato instrument

J: Ok, um, what should I have asked you that I didn't, maybe things you expected me to ask or that you think need to be said about spirituality in public school?

B: I really think that the student led discussion on that is really important, um, and that they can use more words than we can as public school teachers, um, because you know ...hey this kid said this, what are you going to do about it, it was that kids words, there's a lot more freedom there that otherwise...

J: Right, I'm gonna end with Parker Palmer who gives a definition of spirituality, he's an educational guys, he says, spirituality is the eternal human yearning to be connected to something larger than our own egos....the eternal human yearning to be connected to something larger than our own egos...do you agree with that?

B: Yeah, I would, um, just cause in those instances that I described before it wasn't about me performing, it was about we performing, so yeah, I do agree with that

J: Is there anything you would change or add?

B: Read it again

J: Spirituality is the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than our own egos

B: No, I think that's beautifully said

J: When you think of those most pivotal moments, those experiences you've had as a choral musician that were just the very top, maybe you didn't think of them as spiritual , but they were like, one of the best experiences you've had, what was it about that, that made it so memorable

B: I think the feeling of, it doesn't matter how other people perceive the performance, all that mattered was that we thought as a performing ensemble that we couldn't have done any better than what we just put out there, whether it was perfect or not, I think that's a really important feeling.

J: Cool, good – that's all I have – thank you so much!

Transcript #3: Nathan

- Male, Missouri
- Thursday, July 19, 2018 – 1:30-2:01p
- Face to Face – Hotel Dining Area, MO

J: What about spirituality sparked your interest enough to say, yeah I'll talk to you about that?

N: Ok, yeah, so for a long time, especially, I just made the move to high school and so I see one of the reasons that I'm doing that is for the kids to develop them as people, like I love the music part but the part I like more is watching kids grow up to be confident, quality adults and the kids that I stayed connected with in my school that I've had them in 5th and 6th grade and they've grown up, many of them seek out a connection with me, um, outside of school through my church because I'm at the church too and for some of them it's been a way that like they're in 5th and 6th grade and they missed me as a person in their life and so their families start coming to my church and I've connected now with their families and there's a deep connection now with these families because I was perhaps the first, maybe the only adult that they looked up to that wasn't their parent – if that makes sense...at the 5th and 6th grade level and so I have those deep connections with those kids now that they're older, um, now that they're high school members, but I am very much an open book when it comes to my classes and if I, I'll talk about, I don't necessarily go into huge detail with personal details but when it comes to a text of the music I'll say what it means to me and the connection I've found and really doing it to encourage them to find their own connection with the text and oftentimes that in, in the

discussions it turns spiritual and I allow those conversations to happen not with me leading them, but with the students themselves, um, leading that discussion.

J: And when you say spiritual, what do you mean by that?

N: Faith based, faith, what faith is – the fact that,..

J: Like a specific dogma, or specific beliefs, religions?

N: Maybe

J: Or outside of that?

N: Possibly – or maybe the idea that we're not alone in this universe more so I think more of a general spirituality I guess than, but not pushing a particular dogma that a student that wasn't of faith would feel ostracized, you know just the idea that we're all connected in some way, perhaps I believe there's something more to that than just um, that we're here, we die and it's over – I don't believe that, um, and I feel like that develops the, develops the understanding that you develop the character of the individual as well when they understand spirituality, I think they become better people because they're living for more than just tomorrow today, what's next, punch the card – is that what you're looking for?

J: Year totally exactly – yeah, so think of a time when you've experienced um, spirituality in a choral performance.

N: Yeah ok, spirituality in a choral performance – ok this last year, um, I'm back at my home high school – hometown kid, came back, directing at the high school that I graduated from – it's a different place from when I was there, but I'm home so , so our first concert was #home – that was the name of our concert and all the songs in some way

either they were for example, one of the examples I did was a piece with my women's choir that the women did my senior year of high school and it was the first time I cliniced the choir – Mr. O let me come in and work with the girls because he knew I was gonna go in to that and so one of the after school rehearsals I was turning pages for the accompanist – what would you do with that? – I got to try it for the first time you know, we did that piece and I got to share that with the girls and we did other texts that were about home and the piece that stuck out with the kids the most was the piece called The Road Home by Stephen Paulus – everybody knows it - a line of text “there's no such beauty as where you belong” – right, it's such a stunning text, well the concert happened and the concert was good, but we all know that the at least I know, I'm sure you can share this, it's not always the performance that is most musically satisfying or spiritually satisfying - what ended up happening the night of that concert, one of the young men in my choirs – senior this year, and he was not in choir 9-10-11, he wasn't, he was in my choir in 6th grade, 7th and 8th grade, stopped in 9th grade I think, he was in this thing, he wouldn't connect with those teachers – I was coming back – he was coming back cause Mr. Nathan's there – he's a kid I've known, in fact I taught him some voice lessons freshman and sophomore years because he was wanting to do musicals but he didn't, choir wasn't his thing – he was going more academic route – and his name's Will and Will that night he had said that that afternoon, Mr. Nathan I just don't feel very well – I don't feel well, I said “oh you gonna be ok?” - we've got the concert – “I'll make it through the concert, I'll be there”...well anyway come to find out, I get a message from his mom, like it's waiting on my phone when I wake up the next morning – she had sent it at 1 the next morning – I'm at the ER with Will, he's got a bowel obstruction they're

taking him in to an emergency surgery – this is happening now and I wanted to let you know he’s not gonna be at school – he’ll probably be out for a while and so he misses 6 weeks of school - he made it through the concert and you know I went and visited him at the hospital cause this kid I’ve known since the 5th grade and we got to chatting on the phone and he shared with me, you know I’ve been thinking about the text of that song – “there’s no such beauty as that where you belong” and he’s like staring at the road – I’ve never had you know the deep conversation with him before, but we’re on the phone talking about this about how much it means to him, um that weekend the chamber choir was going to sing at the UMKC choral festival and one of the pieces we were gonna sing was The Road Home and so we stopped the bus on the way home to his house, got on his lawn, and he had just gotten home that morning from the hospital and knocked on the door, and he came out and we sang for him – you talk about a spiritual experience, it’s that, we sang terribly, we were all tired, we had had pizza, we were all bawling, it sounded dreadful, but it was like this collective spirit of people coming together and connecting like that that those kids will never forget and that’s when I kinda stood back as a teacher and went “I’m making a difference for these kids” and for me, that’s the most rewarding part of what we do is making the difference for those kids.

J: Definity – awesome

N: Yeah, I feel like I am in ministry – that’s where I feel the spirituality – but I can relate to someone as a performer too...It was the rehearsals leading up to in junior year of hs and I’m singing uh Sing Me to Heaven for the first time and there’s that moment where the, that stupid chord that we know now and it sounds consonant to me for some reason, there’s that dissonant chord where it makes me go, “oh” – but that’s a hokey song now

that everybody's done it a billion times, but back then it was fresh and new and singing the Awakening with my men's choir senior year.

J: Do you feel like you still can have those spiritual experiences with those songs? For you, even though they've been performed so much.

N: I haven't again, but I haven't programmed them either – you know what I mean

J: Right

N: So maybe I would, but I haven't yet – but after that moment, I mean, directing my women's choir, my women's choir – dear God, they were so good at contest, I mean it was just – I mean a judge wrote – I mean we got 1s, but the judge wrote – this is everything a women's choir should be on the bottom of our sheet – I mean we sang the crap out of I Am Not Yours by David Childs and it was just stunning, they were just stunning, phrasing was just perfect and we worked our butts off and we never got that measure right, but gosh darn it we got on that stage and did it.

J: Several of the pieces you've mentioned, I think are all – they have a lot of similarities.

N: Sure

J: Right – so um, this could be a two part question – but one part would be, does it have to that style to have a spiritual experience?

N: No, oh no, heaven's no – we actually programmed, I guess there are some elements to pieces that I've had that experience with like typically a sacred, a lush text, for me, but like Elijah Rock, we programmed that as well and I would say not our performance at contest, in fact our performance at contest with that group was ok, we did that and Eric

Whitacre's – oh one of the Whitacrey pieces – Sleep – we did Sleep which was they did great – they did great – but it was rehearsals, you know, [imitates song] – YES – you know what I mean?

J: Right

N: There were moments we just...

J: So what created the YES moment?

N: When you finally get it right – right and when everybody – it takes every single person in the room being focused on one singular thing, but 100% focus, 100% effort for you to get to that moment and you work and work, you work to recreate that performance and to be honest, I don't have the magic pill to make that happen in a performance every time, but the fact that you get to that point in rehearsal once with a piece – I'm good! I'm good. And the kids remember those moments.

J: Yeah

N: You know what I mean, like, our last day with the seniors, and these are kids like, these are my 5th and 6th graders that have now grown up and are seniors, they're leaving, it's a scary world and you know these are kids that have you know, you realize you made an impact and you love them as much as you can despite all of their things, but then you get a note that says, "Did you know that you saved my life?" and you're like, what do you mean I saved your life, you know and you were just being you and interacting with them, but they were gonna go home and...but you know that, those kids are leavin and their last day we didn't talk, we warmed up and just made a big circle – and I played the chord and they knew exactly what song it was and you know we sang the Road Home or

we closed with this hokey, we did a pops concert to close our year and we did um, that stupid little Pentatonix...[sings *You light up the dark*]...you know and they're just standing around and I start snapping my fingers....you...you didn't have to ask them to grab the hand of the kid next to them, they just like, arms around them, and they're bawling and they're not singing perfect they're making that memory that they're not going to forget – not once – it's not, what we do is a lot about singing the right notes and rhythms, but really it's about people interacting with one another in a positive way that they don't have in the hallways, they don't have on social media – it's the one time of day when someone's gonna look them in the eye and sing and feel better, it's such a cathartic experience.

J: So, what do you think you *do* practically to prepare for that, like you talked about having being musically accurate, being technically accurate and then you know connecting maybe with the piece or the text or something, but what are some things you plan in your lessons that you think have led to that?

N: Ok so that was a big deal when I was doing this year, um, I'm authentic, all the time, I and I set the tone for that, I own my mistakes, if I make one I'm apologetic and I will not always do the right thing or I'll get upset, but I will always pull back and think I'm stupid for letting that happen and will publicly do that in front of the choir – I was upset – I also try to model for them what a leader looks like, what it looks to be humble and confident, and have high expectations – it's a hard, I mean, high expectations, but I'm also gonna be there for them when they need me – whatever. Um, I will tell you structurally some things I did this first year was I was very, they knew exactly what was gonna happen

every day and the first thing I'd tell them the first day, you know, the first thing you do when you walk in to my room each day is say hi to me, so get used to it, cause you're not coming in the room unless you greet me and it doesn't have to look the same every day, but you have to look me in the eye, the men's choir it's a handshake, because as they're teacher I'm gonna teach them how to shake a man's hand and that's how it's gonna happen or you're not gonna come in the room so be prepared because for some kids its eventually a hug, "Mr. Nathan how ya doing" or I'll be stuck in my office and I can't get to the door and they're waking in saying "hey," looking for me to say hi because that's the culture that we've created. I also am cognizant with the staff. Moving in to the new staff, something I did with my previous staff – I was there the last year 8 years but the last 3 years when I stepped up to the building leadership team on our um grade book software I figured out a hack where I could put like when you log I it'll pop up with a message I learned that they could do it like put the kids that were in trouble – this kid has ISS today and it popped up on your screen and I was like, there are people who can do that? They can pop it up – yeah it's a new feature, I said, can I have access to that, I said, I promise it'll be fine and to my principal ' said it I'll be fine so every day when the teacher logs in a positive message will pop up first and I take those and put it on my screen and every day when a kid walks in the door, there's a positive something – a quote from every corner of the earth – sometimes it's about music, sometimes it's about just life in general – sometimes it's a little funny, but always it makes them think, and I imbed it in my lesson, sometimes I'll say Johnny would you read the quote for the day and we talk about it – what do you think that it meant? – it preps them 1) for looking for deeper meaning in stuff and I can apply that to the music and they're automatically looking what

is this text about? What are we really singing about? On the surface – you, we talked about “I am not Yours,” the girls found, found a stunning, like one of my girls she started crying and I go, when one of my seniors says “I think I can understand this text for me”, and going back to the spirituality it says “I am not yours, not lost in you, although I long to be,” “I was raised in a Christian church, but the last couple years I’ve – I want to believe, but I don’t – I’m not lost in you, but I *long* to be – lost as a light is lost, I want to be but I can’t find myself there right now, I want...” and she’s like (bawling) and I was like dang girl, right, and we took it deep that I, cause I was thinking like a relationship or, but she took it to be so much deeper than I would have ever found and I think part of it is, it’s second semester and I’ve prepped them for looking at the text and finding a depth and so that’s part of the way we build the culture, but I also try to be playful in the way that I teach, encouraging them to play with one another and they don’t get to do that – kids don’t get to play anymore, grow up, stand where you’re supposed to stand, and then my men’s choir stand where you’re supposed to stand for the love of God keep your hands off each other, why’d you fall, but you know with the women’s choir especially my freshman women, we were able to go really in depth and they became like a family, like for real, and um you know they lost one of their classmates and we just, we pretty much stood there and cried together that day and it was just it was ok, you know it was the place where they could be ok and that’s what we did, um....now what was your question, did I even answer it?

J: You are, you are answering it

N: So the culture, something about how did I built that culture –

J: Practical things – but you mentioned several

N: You have, you have to imbed, you have to be thoughtful, kids are not, like I feel like when we were in school Jordan, that I was connected with my classmates and the teachers didn't have to do that, we did it ourselves, but I feel like anymore our culture or whatever it is, I don't want to put it on our culture, but we divide ourselves into groups way more than we used to, maybe my high school was more homogenous that it is now, but here's like little groups – I never felt that way when I was in school like there were the jocks, and the l...I mean there were the guys who played sports and they were in the choir with me too, and I was in the theater stuff, but I wasn't only in the theater stuff, I was buddies with the guys that did all of that stuff...maybe it was my own naivety and maybe I wasn't as shy as talking to people – maybe it was my experience – maybe sometimes kids felt ostracized, but now I see oftentimes a kid feeling alone with a large group of people and you have to put in things, even in music to connect with one another or they won't do it for themselves, so be purposeful about activities – this comes from my elementary teaching – I never let kids find a partner – you will never in my room hear me say go find a partner and come over here and my first couple years I noticed *that* kid never has a partner – how do I get that kid to have a partner so instead I do a mixer, something stupid – like, totally dumb, put yourself in alpha order starting in this door to this door, this is a, this is z, alphabetical by your middle name and you can't talk, ready set go. How do I do this without talking, you know they figure it out pretty quick and end up in a straight line and then you go, you guys are partners, you guys are partners, and then I use them as a way to teach, why is this hard, well you couldn't talk, well how did you get around this, well there was the one kid who grabbed a piece of paper and put his name on it and then there was the other kid, you know we had the same middle name

because we talked about in 3rd grade or whatever and it becomes, I don't know, fun, and then they say about in class, there's gonna be times I have to communicate with you without talking. I'm gonna look at you and you're gonna know it means stop doing that or I'm gonna go, and you're gonna know without me even having to say it and that stops the dialogue because there will be the kid that goes WHAT, well you didn't say anything, but we've already established the nonverbal stuff happens too, and that counts and it doesn't give the kid that cop out and when you I guess prep them for that there's less that can go wrong later, yeah, that had nothing to do with spirituality, but if it's good classroom management

J: It ties in more than you think, um, ok so now that we've talked about lots of spiritual experiences, in rehearsal and performance and parts of your classroom, so now that you would have had time to think about this, what definition would you give to spirituality in the context of choral music making?

N: Oo, ok, so that's a loaded question – spirituality in music – I think it's a personal connection of a singer and a group of musicians above and beyond what's called for in the performance. How's that?

J: I like it

N: I just came up with that on the top...I'm glad you recorded it...But like that extra step - But I will tell you, anybody that comes and hears my choirs will say, I have never had the group that's the most technically perfect, I hope to one day, but when I was at the 5th and 6th grade, I wanted them to play more I wanted them to have fun and I think at the high school I'm building to that because it's gonna take me a few years, but they will

always say, those kids sing with such passion, heart, connected to what and that is what the spirituality piece is, it's that the music matters more than just a performance, we've always been a part of those groups when it's been about the detail, that's not who I am as a person. I'm very detail-oriented, but I'm not, not a drill sergeant and part of that I think the part of the reason is I'm that way is because I've never really enjoyed singing with those directors when that's all it was when there was no extra – I found it tedious and I didn't love and I need to love or I don't want to do it – does that make sense?

J: Yes

N: Ok – so whatever that definition is, put it in the book, haha

J: Um, ok, you teach public school, um but would you describe yourself as a spiritual person

N: Yes

J: would you describe yourself as a religious person

N: Yes

J: So when you find yourself in a public school setting, what kind of ethical or cultural responsive issues do you keep at the forefront of your mind because of being in that setting?

N: I said I'm an open book for my students and that's always gonna be the truth, um, often I find if the door is opened by the student, I can respond, so if a kid, for example, Riley, Riley is one of my student right now, um, she's not one that I had when she was younger, she went to the other school and in 5th and 6th kid, I directed her in a musical a couple years ago when I was at Eagle Glenn, but I've never had her as a student until this last year so she's not one of my kids, but she's always known who I was, respected me

from afar, very talented singer, in fact her father is a well-known professional musician who won the X Factor –

J: That's cool

N: Like he's a big deal and so that happened when she was in her formative years and so to the other kids she is, well she must be, they assume she's stuck up because her dad's famous. Does that make sense? They assume, she's not, she's a super sweet kid, and um, well she's coming to my church, door's open, so now we talk about our faith at school. One on one, and she knows when she comes in, if you ever wanna talk about stuff, we do, and if the student opens that door, we'll talk about that stuff, and if they need to talk about it, they wanna come to me and ask if I will pray for them and I will do that and I will pray for them with my hand on their shoulder right there in that moment if they want me to and I don't feel like I'm stepping over any lines, I'm very aware, I never want anybody to every feel uncomfortable in my room. There are atheists in my choir and I will often say, I will talk to them about it, and I've never had one [complain], and I feel like the culture I have that they would they would come and talk to me if they felt uncomfortable that's never happened, so um, one of our closing activities for my seniors is that I have them, I have this tool in my room, actually I got a new one in my room this year that was given to me by my students because he saw my stool with signatures on it, used to when I was at the middle school when they were leaving and I did it with my select group and intermediate that they, our last rehearsal, they sat on the stool and they got to call out three people that just to tell them like appreciation, thank you for or I remember the time, share some story, and then I got to share and then they got to sign the stool. Well, with seniors we did that this last year and the kids I have the connection with

faith-wise, just because I was in a an emotional state, there was lot of love going on in the room, it was very moving experience and um, I shared that your faith astounds me, how faithful you are and how much you helped some of my younger students get through some struggling things, your faith I respect that so much, the fact that you are able to live that out -it's not easy and I shared that with a couple of kids and I had no less than 3 kids come to me, you know I've never talked to you about my faith, but I'd like, to, and to me I was like, let's do that you know, you know one-on-one they wanted to talk with me about it and I was like ok, I'm fine with that, let's do that, I don't' know, I have had parents come to my first concert, a parent came to me and said you have the most beautiful ministry here – thank you, the fact that she said ministry I was like, she got it. She gets what I'm doing, and I don't know, do you think I'll get burned on that at some point? I don't, because I feel like my heart's in the right place because it's not like I'm saying there's only one way, I'm not like....I want my kids to be, to be devoted to something I think we all know that believing in something more than yourself whether it's God or other people I think that makes you a better human. I don't know of any, no one in my life, one of my dear friends is agnostic, but he believes so whole heartedly in other people. He's a fantastic human being, but his faith is in, people as opposed to God does that make sense?

J: We're all created in the image of God –

N: That's my belief - He's actually one of those most moral people - he's running for senate – he's in the primary his name is Austin Peterson, you should vote for him, he's a great guy -I've known him since grade school.

J: Ok, almost done here, um, you've given me lots of examples and lots of things um, we bounced around so much you pretty much have answered everything. What should I have asked you that didn't?

N: I don't know, I mean, I don't know what your end goal is for what you're doing, you're just gathering data

J: I'm just trying to understand it from your perspective

N: My perspective – I do think it matters where you are in the country and the like, does that make sense, like one of the reasons I feel like I can be effective as I am is because I know literally, I know where these kids are coming from. I know every street that they might grow up on, I've been around the community forever, I know their parents, I know the school board, I know these people, does that make sense, I know them and so I can I know that I'm not crossing lines because I know the way they were raised but if you transplanted my style to somewhere where I didn't have that understanding, boy howdy, that could be really difficult, but I think if you know, the more you can know your kids, the more difference you can make for your kids because you know what they need and you can be that. Gosh when I was at the 5th and 6th grade level I didn't realize, I guess I didn't realize I came back after my masters and I was a different teacher – I was a good teacher but I was teacher for myself – hey everybody look at me, look how good I am and then I came back and was like, what am I doing? That's when I figured out my servant's heart and it's about the kids and it's not about me and I make kids say that all the time, it's not about you it's about us. I know Raynard says the thing about it's not about you, it's up to you, I don't know if that's where I stole it from, but one day I said in rehearsal,

it's not about you, it's about us, what can you give to the collective of the people and um I had a parent come to me my first year 5th and 6th grade after doing my masters and I was like, parent teacher conference time so like 2 months into school and she came up to me and she said, you're the first man, male teacher that my son really looks to as a father figure and I found out later, dad wasn't in the picture, dad's not, dad's never has been, dad left when Cole was a baby and this kid's now in my high school school and guess what, I'm kind of his dad, he looks up to me like that. And boy howdy is that a scary proposition for your own kids let alone one that's not really yours, but I'm gonna do my best to not let him down you know what I mean?

J: Cool – thank you!

N: Yeah man, my pleasure.

Transcript #4: Justin

- Male, Florida
- Monday, September 10, 2018 – 3:30-4:03p
- Online - Zoom

J: What inspired to you allow me to interview you today?

JU: Well, I mean I think that when we take our place in front of the podium and uh, you know we're rehearsing with students, I think part of what draws us into being a Choral Director um are those moments that we've had on the opposite side. You know, singing a piece and really connecting with it and having those really "high on the mountain top" experiences and so your goal as a director is to recreate that, but the neat thing as a director too is also getting to live in that moment with them as well, um, and I feel like it's a little bit different for the director to experience that because they come in like moments and you know it may not be a concert experience it may just be a moment in a phrase or in a rehearsal so when you had posted that I thought I would love to, if I can, share what that's like from my experience so

J: Awesome, that sounds great. Tell me about a specific time in a choral performance that you feel you had a spiritual experience.

Ju: Like where I was performing?

J: Either, performing or conducting, whichever

JU: ok, so I can think of one that comes to mind was when I was in college and singing with Chorale we had toured to Austria, no this was Italy, and we were doing Samuel Barber's *Agnus Dei* and we had strived so much to get this transition from the climax

chord right back down to the Bb I think it's Bb minor chord that follows it and we couldn't get it and I remember it was a concert and we were rehearsing for it and Dr. Starr looked at us and said, "You know, we may just have to go with this and we'll splice the recordings together" and I remember the deep sagging feeling of like "no that's not what I want to do, I want it to be perfect" and we had this concert and gosh I don't even remember what concert it was, but it was perfect. It was monumental I remember the feeling of like wow we accomplished that...it was beautiful and you just felt the surge of energy and connection, especially like in a cathedral, um, and I don't know as far as a director...I don't know if those things happen like as a consistent thing for me standing in front of an ensemble like in a festival or concert experience, but it's those lightbulb moments that shimmer, they happen in small waves. Um, the other day I took my groups to sing, we have this rotunda, and it was the first time we had really sung through all the way through, um, *Ave verum corpus* by Byrd, and just hearing the "misereres" and coming in one at a time and the students were feeling that build and it was just a good feeling. I'm still watching out for the spiritual experiences, but I feel like they're different for the director. For me, they just come in bursts.

J: Cool: Can you, you've alluded to this a little bit, working on the Byrd, can you think of another time in a choral rehearsal that you felt a spiritual experience?

JU: Another time with the Byrd, in the rehearsal...

J: in that rehearsal or any rehearsal you had a spiritual experience like you referenced with the Byrd

JU: Um...Michael Barrett's *Indodana*, um, you know just I think every time I rehearsed that piece there was always this little, little, uh, shimmer, um, after the altos have delivered the melody and everyone comes in, just this moment, the room kind of zeros in, I don't know like that's a kind of generic, not very specific, you know every time that we'd sing that piece it would kind of lock in right there. Now that spiritual experience may not continue depending on the rehearsal, just kind of that opening really set for me.

J: What do you think it is about that, that creates that moment?

JU: You know, I think, I think part of it comes from you know *your* understanding and your connection to the text and what that means to you. Ok, we have to go back. The piece *Music in My Mother's House*, just I think, I think when I find something that I personally connect to and that I'm emotional about, I think that really drives it, I remember the group that I had doing that really wasn't amazing, you know they were my beginning women's chorus and there were some really nice moments but I remembered times we were all kind of teary eyed in the room rehearsing it and talking about the meaning of that piece and remembering a lost one and how music was connected to that and I think when we drive home the connection, um, which I know sounds kind of like a textbook answer, when you drive home that connection to the text it really evokes those experiences, especially consistently.

J: You um, when you were referencing the time singing with Dr. Starr, um, you know I think you kind of described that being spiritual when technically everything came together, you were talking about a time with your beginning women's group, would you say that you have a spiritual experience it has to all be technically accurate?

JU: I don't think so, I think it kind of depends because like as the performer I'm thinking of the technical aspects a lot, but then I'm connecting as an individual, when I'm directing, I'm thinking of the technical aspect as the whole and the connection of the whole and so when I see that those students in front of me are creating this bond together, um, through the sharing of the text and the piece and there is that, that engagement from each other it's like a unit, I feel like that kind of supersedes the technical, um for me, so...

J: cool, cool – um, ok so now that you've been thinking about these experiences and you have them in your mind, what does the term spirituality mean to you in the context of choral music making? What kind of definition would you give it?

JU: Ok, so - I feel like spirituality is like how we're connected to God, like how we are invoking, how we are inviting Him in to the process and I think that can sometimes be tough for us as public school educators because there's so much um, I wouldn't say negativity, but maybe we have to tread carefully on how we introduce that and how we make that a part of our, um, teaching process, so when I think of spirituality I think of it more as giving yourself to something that's bigger, um, giving your, handing over, what you think is yours to what's rightfully someone else's. So, trying to make the experience not about me, but about something bigger than me so that's, I'm being very vague because in a teaching situation I try to make sure that I understand that not everyone is a believer and we have to talk about that, I mean we have to, I try to be pretty blunt that we can't just, we can't shuffle around what's there, like we're gonna look at this and say that a lot of people believe that God is the higher power and this is the default but you may

believe or not believe anything but you're still responsible for the text and responsible for the delivery of art so, what can you believe and what can you connect with as the performer, as the musician, as the artist, so that you are giving people who are expecting that the same sort of attention without, without treading on your beliefs and so I think that spirituality is just more of giving yourself to something bigger and for those of us who are followers of Christ, we know what that bigger is, but we have to allow students to be more creative with what they're giving that up to and who they're giving that up to.

J: What are some specific ways that you feel like you navigate those waters?

JU: Well, I think especially like coming here to Florida I was very up front like even when I met with parents, when I met with students I was like, you know there's a couple of things really important to me. Like my faith is important to me so I would mention that and I said if that makes you uncomfortable please come talk to me personally because that's not the goal, it's a part of my life so I was very up front with like as a part of me as a person but how that integrates to me as an educator um, you know I talk to them how you know that I pray for them daily, like they are a part of my, of my daily walk as you know in talking with the Father and His plans for them and how I can be a part and how I can help them and I think that if we treat, if we treat our own spirituality just as much as we have someone who, like I have a student, who has a place now dedicated on my board that he tells us about the USF Bulls, just as much as that is a part of his passion as my faith is mine, I'm not doing it to make someone uncomfortable, but it's a part of my fabric and I don't expect any of them keep part of their fabric from me, um, and so far in my 8 years of teaching, that has not come to be a problem as long as, I feel as long as

we're inviting as much on the opposite side and we're accepting then I think we're ok.
Does that make sense?

J: Totally – also earlier, I kind want to go back to something you mentioned in talking about connecting to the text. Um, I agree that is probably one of the primary common themes that everybody has mentioned a lot is connecting to the text. What are some ways that you cultivate that connection?

JU: Well, I think uh there's, so I think you have to lay some groundwork. Um, first of all like I kind of mentioned this in our conversation that I focus a lot on relationships. Um, and I know, I know like it's kind of like a Jesus answer in Sunday school: Jesus, God's love, the Bible...

J: Go to church

JU: What did you say, haha

J: Go to church

JU: Go to church, yeah, so when I came into this position, I had a new challenge that I had not had before when I had switched. Before I already had relationships formed from when I taught them in elementary school so when I was here it was kind of like, how do you start from ground zero with a group of individuals that have had a wonderful choral experience with a wonderful director, left on no poor terms, great program, like there's really nothing that you're going in – you're not saving anything, does that makes sense, so you don't have this stigma of being superman, now you're just the person that's supposed to, you're supposed to maintain and keep excelling so I didn't even have the benefit of like, I'm gonna turn this in to something better, it's like, I just don't need to

mess this up, so you go in to that and then so you have to start thinking about relationships, like how do you go in and start building connections with students because the only way you're gonna get them to do anything is if you have those connections, those commonalities and so um, I think it's about being up front and honest, I mean luckily I was, the former director and I became friends and she connected me with parents who connected with me more parents and those parents connected me with students and so I started doing a lot of work through that, but like hitting the classroom learning names, um, finding out their interests, talking to them, trying to like hang around before and after school so you get to know them, um, and just trying to throw yourself into a lot of opportunities so you have those relationships, so once you have those relationships, um, then you can start like, because the notes are still notes, like if you don't have relationships with the students then you can't help forge a bond between the students and if the students don't have a bond then you can't create a bond to the music – it's just 26 singers, 36, 47 singers trying to put something together, so then I feel like once you have the bond between the students, between the director, then the connection to the text can actually start taking place so I like to, I like to invite student conversation. What do you think this piece means to you? How would you look at the text? What kind of words does this evoke? What kind of emotions surge through here for you? Trying to have them have conversations because otherwise it's just me telling them only how I want them to feel – sorry that was a lot.

J: no that was great – um, the fun part now is since I've interviewed several times, it's interesting, I'm kind of reaching that saturation point where I'm starting to hear a lot of the same, which is good, because that means that I'm finding what I've found, so what

you're saying is excellent, it's good. Let's see, um, ok, so you've talked about building relationships especially between you and your students. What are some other ways that you build connection for the students directly to the music? You mentioned asking them, prodding about emotions that drive them, is there anything else practically, um...

JU: yeah ok I see where you're going, so how do I, how do I facilitate connecting them to the music? So, I think a lot of what we do is almost you're a salesman, so selling the music to the students. Because um, that's the first thing like, if the students are excited about the pieces they're doing or if they like the pieces, regardless of the text, they're going to connect more to it and sometimes it's, you know, like my men's chorus is uh, a mix of experienced and new singers um, and they're doing Braeden Ayres, *Frobisher Bay*, it's very simple, but to hear them sing it, they really connect to it because day 1 it was the melodic content, it was, it was, the structure of the melody against the harmony and uh, even though it's very simple for them, the connection was already kind of put out there because they bought into the piece already, um, but you know I think that's where you, you just have to keep having conversations and getting them to be more invested in the literature itself and be a part of the artistic process, so , sometimes I'll ask them like, what do you think needs to happen here? Do you think we need to crescendo? Or do should we decrescendo? And actually, in that group we would try different things and I invite feedback? What do you think sounds better? Why do we need to do that, oh well because this is you know what happens to the wailers when they've lost this or when the families are missing out on this person, so when they start it's not just about um, them connecting spiritually but mentally to the piece as an artist as a musician? Does that make sense?

J: Yeah, totally, um, ok, any other um, specific moments as a performer or conductor that have come to mind since we've been talking that you were like that was a spiritual moment?

JU: Um, so ok, last year my women's chorus did Daniel Hughes' *Sto mi e milo* and it was, it wasn't like, I mean that's where it's good you've defined spiritual because it's not always like a piece that's connected like to religious content, like in fact that piece is just women talking together, like that's what it was, it was really nice harmonically just open tertian chords and but we really invoked this, gosh my mind's drawing a blank now, I'm trying to think of the area – oh, it's Meso – Macedonian, that's it, Macedonian, a Macedonian text, it was very bright forward sound and I remember just the process of teaching it was getting these girls who had worked so hard to develop this full tone to bring it all right in front and I remember when that kind of sunk in for them and they finally enjoyed the piece like it was supposed to happen – you could see them celebrating each other and they had these trios that would alternate back and forth and I remember it was one of those pieces where you just stepped back as a conductor and when you step back and you're just watching your students take it on, you know, um, that's really cool, that's one of those spiritual experiences that came up.

J: Cool, very cool – this is not necessarily even tied to the study per se, but might have some impact on it – you've not been in FL too long now, but do you feel like there are any major differences between your students from MO vs. FL?

JU: Um, well, I mean so...in general, like MO verses FL. MO is very choral driven, you know we can think about all the regions of our state and there's always choral music going and so what's really odd to me is that here in my county that I'm in and by county it's the same as you working for a district so like you worked in Jackson? So I work for Lake County and that encompasses 8 high schools, but out of the 8 high schools, only 3 or 4 of us actually have choral programs, which is odd, so, and the funny thing is we're all, we all have different strengths, so there's a school that their focus is popular/acappella music and he doesn't involve himself with um, the solo/ensemble, choral adjudication stuff, that's not his thing, um, and then I have another school where like the director is also the theatre teacher and so he's just trying to get the choir back up to where it was and then I have another director who's, she's new, and she's trying to build up and then you have my school which is kind of a mecca of both, all of the fine arts, and our students, like I'm used to in MO, I was sharing my students as athletes and academics and here it's pretty much, they are choir/theatre, um, the majority of them are split between that, so that's different from my school in Lebanon, but just as a state, there's just a different saturation, it isn't like there's good choral music going on, it's not as consistent through the entire state, does that makes sense?

J: Yeah – definitely – do you feel like you're having to change many of your teaching strategies, or do you feel like it's pretty consistent?

JU: Um, so the interesting thing I guess here is that there is a strong love for barbershop music.

J: Oh yeah, I saw you had that group of boys...

JU: Yeah and so um, it's a love shared by a lot of them in this area but especially in my choir and so some of the tone qualities I deal with makes it a lot easier, um, in some ways, but then you know I have to get on to them, "well that's that barbershop sound, we have to adjust it" and so whereas more of in my area of the state it was getting a certain type of tone quality to go one direction, I'm having to do the opposite, but it makes them very good at certain chord clusters, you know, there's no problem with that, so it's different.

J: That's interesting – cool – well is there anything about spirituality that you feel like I've should of asked you?

JU: Well, something that I didn't touch on, or talking about bonding and uh, something that's a little bit different down here is, and it probably, wouldn't say it's native to FL, you know I was smack dab in the Bible Belt, and here and I've heard this from students, like it's not as common to see a lot of kids who are not going to church, um, it's not as focused, and every Friday I have had a retreat, like an extended practice basically and um, we usually do something, we talk about, uh, like what's on a penny and it's funny because like they don't know everything that's on a penny and so we talk about how we look at someone, we can take them at face value, but we really don't know everything about them so we do the thing that's like "my name is so and so" and if you really knew me and we have some people who would go pretty in depth and you have others that are pretty vague but in particular there was one retreat and I was really surprised by this, but my men's group they're called Vocal Corp, and they um, they were sitting there and I started having these guys, there's only 20 something of them, some of them started

coming out, I don't know if they had been out before, but they were just really open, they were just like "I'm so and so and I'm bi" and as a teacher you sit there and you're thinking "what am I gonna have to manage, what's gonna happen here, are these guys gonna ridicule, is it gonna be awkward?" These guys started clapping and then another did it and then another kid said he was gay and then what was probably more powerful coming back around was this one kid, he didn't know what to say, um, and then he came back and he started crying, and he's like, I just always feel alone, and I don't like feeling alone and left out and just these guys I mean they didn't move around him, but you could see them all turn and it's like if they would have gotten up, they would have been having this bear hug, this one guy, a freshman, this was to a senior, he was like you're not alone here, we got you, we love you man, and they like clapped for him, that was a spiritual moment

J: Sure

JU: That was a moment where like those guys became something different and not saying that every ensemble has to have people share like what their sexual preference is, but when you start unleashing these inner feelings and these kids start connecting, these spiritual experiences happen more, so yeah.

J: I kind of got goosebumps, just listening to that

JU: Yeah it was crazy to be in it, just crazy

J: One definition I did come across by Parker Palmer, I don't know if you're familiar with him, he, um, is a very inspirational researcher on education and he defines

spirituality as this, “spirituality is the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than our own egos.” Do you agree with that?

JU: YES – that’s perfect – yes

J: As you were talking earlier about that whole transcending, something bigger than ourselves

JU: Yeah

J: I was kind of drawn to that –

JU: You can just, uh, like adopt his definition for what I said

J: Ok

JU: That’s exactly it –

J: That pinpoints it, huh?

JU: Yes,

J: Awesome, good. Alright, well that’s pretty much everything I was wanting to ask you.

Thank you.

Transcript #5: Ashley

- Female, Missouri
- Thursday, July 19 – 5:00-5:46p
- Hotel Dining Area, MO

J: What would give you interest in talking with me about the topic of spirituality?

A: I think the fact that a lot of choral directors feel that but don't, especially in public school, don't feel the freedom to express it because we're not able to freely express it in our classroom and so that becomes a part of us that kinda makes us keep it in our pockets – it's very much there and a major reason we all do it, maybe not all, but a lot of us do it, but because we can't talk about it with everybody we just don't talk about it – so unless I know that you're comfortable with this conversation, I'm just not gonna start it - I think tends to be the big thing so I think a lot of people are they want to be a part of this conversation they just are a little nervous to start it cause nobody wants to be thought that they're pushing their spirituality on public school students or that they're you know not....open and I don't wanna be seen as you know, that kinda stuff, so, we just don't talk about it then and that's a huge part of what I do and what I know that it's comfortable I'll tell ya all about it – it's nice to have the opportunity to say something.

J: Cool, good. Tell me about a time in a choral performance where you feel you've had a spiritual experience.

A: As a conductor as a performer?

J: Either

A: Well, I would say probably my first one and one of the experiences that made me want to teach choir was a spiritual response at my alma mater. Um, we were, I cannot find the song, I've asked you and Dr. Man what this piece was and we can't find it. Um, but it's some version of Amazing Grace, but it's not called Amazing Grace and that's the problem, but the text has Amazing grace in it, but then the composer wrote another verse in it so it's one of those, but at the time, um, a close family friend of ours past away suddenly at 30 years old from an aneurism and it was crazy and hadn't seen him in a couple years cause he had moved and I didn't know how to deal with that – I'm 18, I'm a freshman in college and I don't, you know I don't feel safe, I'm new to this choir and all of these things, but then I'm dealing with all of this grief on top of it, but then I didn't know how to deal with it, so um, we'd done this piece for a while and he was just kind of picking it apart and then we did a final run through and I ended up just crying, it just hit me and I really felt like God was just like hugging me through this and kind of um, oh, his name, the guy who passed away, his name was Po Ching and he really encouraged me to follow my music and I remember I had a lot of experiences singing with him and everything and so in this moment when we were singing I remember feeling the grief and then feeling the release too if that makes sense and I remember Dr. Man looking at me like, "you ok? Do you need to step out?" and I was like no, I really want to stay, and by the end of the song, which it's a 6 minute song, um, I felt so, so much differently and I just went, "I can do that all the time" and I felt like there was, I don't see, you know hindsight, I don't see another experience where I could of processed that at that time in my life as a new isolated freshman with all these – like I didn't have any relationships in that kinda of experience and I didn't need to talk it out – I needed to feel it out and that's

what that music experience created in me. On the other side as a conductor, um, without getting into a lot, um, I can't have kids and so I have been married for nine/ten years at the time when this happened and I wanted to do Lullaby with my women's choir and it says in there like – I kept trying to get them to envision, you're singing this to your baby and I had this frustration that I was so angry through this time and it was the same kind of thing where it was this processing through teaching through the process of the whole 3 month period of doing this song it like I got to go through all of the things and then there were a couple of times in the rehearsal, I had to step away and I had to just, sit in my office for a second and pull myself together because I was going through a lot and they don't know, you know, I had told them that this song was just really hard for me because I would love to be able to have a lullaby to sing to a baby – they know I don't have kids, but you know I would love to have this lullaby and you don't know what it feels like because you don't have kids either so let's put ourselves in that spot and imagine that and then through the process of teaching that song and that's not spiritual song, by a non-spiritual composer, I was able to still find healing and process and I really did feel so many times through that process like he was really speaking through me through this process and then I thought that I was really able to relay speak that to my students in a different way so those are like personal things I think I've had some connections with students where it's touched them on a spiritual level too where I didn't really think it was gonna be that way and then they've come to me and said you know this is something that I've really been struggling with and the way presented that let me know that it was ok that this was the deal and that kind of thing so I use music a lot for that I'm known by my peers that I'm making my students cry because it's all about that emotional connection –

I feel like when we're vulnerable enough with ourselves as conductors then that creates a vulnerable experience with them and then when we're vulnerable we can really be spoken to and spoken through when we're open – so that's my soapbox.

J: Do you think it was Grace by Mark Hayes?

A: I don't think so, it was...

J: That one has the tune of Water is Wide to the text of Amazing Grace.

A: It had the text, I mean it had the melody in it...

Continues discussion on what arrangement piece it was...

A: I could remember where I was standing in the room. Like when I see pictures of you and your kids in the room I can put myself in these different experiences – every time I think about Anne Marie I really have the whole image.

Continues conversation about Anne Marie

J: Ok, well, you gave me a really great example of a time where you felt a spiritual experience in rehearsal, and you also mentioned...

A: And the performance

J: Yeah can you think of a time in a performance

A: Yeah, sorry I strayed, um,...trying to think of a specific one...I did Echo last year by...Shelton, Tom Shelton, gorgeous piece, love it and it's about the, what's left after you leave, it's the echo of the person still there... through the process of when I picked it, my grandfather died and um, had to decide, can I physically do this piece or not, um, went ahead and pushed it through and um, it was not our best performance of that piece but it was the most meaningful, um, I told the kids that my grandma was gonna be there

um, cause she moved to town because of that, my dad was gonna be there and I said I really want to sing this for them to know that they have that echo and that you know it's such a special thing that we're able to have that and it was not the best performance that they had had the whole year, but it was definitely the most moving for me through that similarly again, it's not a spiritual text, not a spiritual composer, I feel like a lot of times God uses me through that, that it's you know it's the hug, if that makes sense, more than anything else, it's the um, it's those moments in performance when you see the light go off for the joy in their hearts and all of a sudden you realize that you got to be a part of this and then it's the reassurance that He put you here and that this is right and there's been a lot of times when I've questioned what I'm doing this is not what I thought I was gonna be doing – my life is not where I thought it was gonna be 15 years ago, but again, again, He shows me that this is where I'm supposed to be and I think through all of those moments – I had a dad come up to me at my last concert and we didn't do that many spiritual pieces, but I did talk a little bit, you know it's all vague.

J: When you say spiritual do you mean religious?

A: Yes. We probably do maybe one or two per group you know times 5 groups that ends up being a decent amount, but he came up to me and said you are being worked, you are being used so much, do you even know the impact you are having on these kids and their spiritual lives and I was like yeah I do because in those moments you see the that's more of a collective performance experience, it wasn't a one song thing, but through that whole concert and seeing them come together and seeing their relational and you know them growing and being people I am that example for them to when and that kind of thing but it's nice to have like he saw, an outsider, just a parent came to me and I don't think that

he knows that I'm a believer, I mean hopefully they do, but I don't know that, but that was through the collective, the whole concert, an hour and 30 minutes long and he you know, you could see it through them so it wasn't specific...

J: Cool,

A: Is that specific enough?

J: Yeah, um, in this I'm not trying to prove any points, I don't have a hypothesis, I'm just looking, so the pieces you've mentioned Lullaby, Amazing Grace, and I'm not familiar with Echo, from the way you described it all of these pieces sound like they probably have some similarities in their...maybe they're slower, they're....do you feel like there were some similarities in those songs or...?

A: Maybe, yes, I mean there are, I feel like a lot of it is, it's not about the style, it's about the text more than anything. I think that beautiful music moves me, my first amazing musical experience was in band in freshman year and that's at the end of freshman year and that's when I decided I was gonna do music and it was playing 2nd trombone in the symphonic band and it was not a slow, sweet piece, so music can move you, but I am very textually based, so if the, I feel like a lot of times, it's the text and it's the picture that I feel like makes me reflect, I've always been that person, um, you know a poem can touch me just as much as a beautiful piece of music, but when a poem is set to a beautiful piece of music, um, then it has just that so much greater potential, but we did, I Sing Because I'm Happy, I think it's Rollo.

J: *Mimics song*

A: Yeah, Super simple, easy, the middle school did it, for, was that the year you did it?

J: No

A: It was an honor choir piece, then the middle school decided they were gonna do that for their winter concert, they wanted it to be the joint piece for the high schoolers and the middle schoolers – they LOST it – they LOVED it so much.

J: I'm thinking about doing it with my college kids

A: It's a blast, super quick easy, got to teach them many things, it was wonderful, but, you can step back from that and you watch 24 kids from different lots of life singing because they're happy because His eye is on the sparrow and that's them – I feel like that's a moment for me when I have to step out of the picture and realize what I just taught them- and they don't know it and some of them they do, they have the joy of the spirit. In them and some of them have joy because it's a fun piece, but I, you step out of that and you go, they got something they're gonna remember that piece and as public school you know you gotta talk about you know, I'm not trying to push anything on you or whatever you can say you know if I always say, this is my speech, if you can connect to this personally with a personal experience or a personal relationship, connect with it, if you can't, imagine you are on a stage as a person who is – I don't know – I'm not from the land of Oz, but I can pretend that I'm from the land of Oz if I was actually from the land of Oz how much more of a convincing performance would that be, but if I can't I can do my best to play the part and that's always kinda how I take it with that, but I've seen a lot of them just kinda stop and go "oh" maybe maybe there's something, I don't...and if nothing else I'm planting everyday so...

J: That led right in to my next question which was about the ethical and culturally responsive issues that you feel like you face

A: I am lucky because in my school district we have extra things to protect us, we, it says in the somewhere in the charter of the district that Francis Howell celebrates Christmas, we have Easter Break, we have Christmas Break as a district and um, so there's not as much um, rigidity with that...

J: Interesting

A: And um, now that's the way it *has* been and it was that way when I started, however, um, I have been called out on it a couple times, I had a parent on my second year teaching at the middle school, she called the principal to tell him how fantastic the concert was and she was kinda giving him a dig cause he wasn't there, like you missed it, it was incredible, they did such great things and I loved this and I loved this and I loved this and he came to me and said if parents are acknowledging that you have Christian music in your program it's too Christian and I just went "so are you telling me it's too Christian" – no, no that's not what I'm saying, I'm just saying you might need to sprinkle in some more non-religious Christian texts – ok, so things like that, um...

J: Non-religious Christmas things?

A: Winter texts and you can do Santa Clause – I don't do Santa Clause songs – I used to do a Christmas concert but I've shied away from that to avoid the conflict – my winter concert is in November now so I don't have to mess it with it – so half my library is moot now so but that's one way to get around it – I've never had anybody complain at the high

school level, I've had multiple people point out that it's there, but again I feel like the text is what drives me

J: Meaning you have sacred music

A: Correct, the text is what drives me and a lot of times I, it's not sacred texts that's directing me so I don't, I don't specifically choose non sacred texts I don't specifically choose sacred texts – I just choose texts and it seems to lay right – it's probably bad that it's that way – I usually try to do styles more than anything and so that kinda puts it in there um I've had some students tell me that they feel uncomfortable with it and that's usually when I say my speech – I did a song, Allen Kaplan Let it Shine, the SSAA one and I did that with the freshman group one time and I had a student come up to me and told me that she felt uncomfortable because it said Jesus, it says um, it was like a call/response and the sopranos go “Jesus” and then she said she felt uncomfortable with that and so I go into my normal speech and she said no, I feel uncomfortable because you shouldn't say God's name in vain and so she was on the opposite side, she felt like it was disrespectful so I said NO it doesn't have to be that, you can call out, go for it, you know, but, I've never been brought with anything intense, I don't see it as unethical, I think that it's very important for Christian people to be in a public school, I think that's an important part of who I am, I've been called to public school, I've never been called to teach privately because I really feel like that's where I'm supposed to be and He shows me that on a regular basis, but I think that doing spiritual music, even if it's in Latin you still have to teach it, that there's this historical stuff and we talk about that with the students when we talk about programming music, um, I always say you know if they question me about any piece of music I'm super snotty and say you know I took a class

on this and I not only passed I got an A, I know what I'm doing, and then when I got my masters I'll pull it out again, oh my gosh, I took another one, I got an A in that one too, oh my gosh you should probably trust me, because there's that element, we have to teach the whole history and that's what I tell them, if you take out all sacred texts, you are limiting your educational experience to half of not even half a third of the literature that's out there and sure society's horrible that we didn't allow non-spiritual music to exist past from the past, but that's what we have so if I'm gonna teach music from 1500s it's gonna be sacred because that's what we have, but I can't just eliminate music from that century, purely because it's sacred, you still need to know that, so if I ever come into question, I say that, I usually I have my same little speech every time, I think it is unethical and inappropriate to push an agenda and so and I know directors that do and so I'm careful to make sure that I don't do that if a student asks me what my beliefs are I'm very open, if the student asks me um, you know if I say, if you have a connection to this, connect with it if someone says do you have a connection this, I'm gonna tell you and I'm gonna be really open and honest about it

J: This is my interpretation, what is yours

A: Exactly, but I'm not going to um, I had a colleague at one point, he was teaching a sacred text that was very meaningful to him and he sat on a stool in front of his class and gave his testimony – I feel like that's inappropriate because well that's great that's he's open enough to share, that's not your platform, so I there's a touchy, there's a line there and it's a line that we have to dance on, but I think it can be navigated

J: Ok - So now that you've been thinking about this here with me the last few minutes and um, thinking of these experiences, what kind of definition would you give to spirituality in the context of choral music making?

A: I feel like the term spirituality – I don't love that term because I feel like and maybe that's why you chose that term – I feel like it's too broad, I feel like I'm being you know spiritual could be, I'm feeling nature, or I'm feeling internally connected or those kinds of things and that can exist for some people, I take it differently, I take it as a connection to the spirit and that includes my soul

J: Holy Spirit?

A: Well I take it as my soul and the Holy Spirit within and so I think it's a combination of both – so some of my experiences I shared are more connections to my own soul – when I am angry, that's my soul that's struggling with that – that's my spirit and I feel like that's an element of choral music that can be touched – choral music can touch my soul and I can touch other people's soul, my audience, my student through the music where they have the “ahhh” moment or they you know feel that overwhelming joy, I'm touching their spirit – that's spirituality, but then there's the also the element of the spirit where I feel like the Holy Spirit is guiding me to teach it this way or to process things this way while that music is there or while I'm working on it or while I'm analyzing it and I feel like the Holy spirit can use me to connect with other people and draw others towards Him so there's two different takes to that word so, does that answer your question? Ask it again

J: What definition would you give to spirituality in the context of choral music making?

A: I don't know – that's hard because ...

J: I sense from you...it's directly linked to faith

A: For me yes

J: For you yes

A: I think for other people it's not

J: For you Elisabeth as a choral conductor, spirituality still is connected to faith? Or not?

A: Well I think everything's connected to faith because of my faith I am a choral director, if it wasn't for my faith I would not be because that was not the plan, I didn't make this plan, God made this plan and my faith has led me to this point, so I feel like it is, I feel like, um, I feel like spirituality in a non-faith realm, I feel like I also do that as I help students connect with that inner soul, their spirit, in a non-religious way, non-faith based way, I'm still affecting their spirituality and I'm still, we do a lot of introspective analysis and um, and sharing and group work and that's still spirituality and I feel like choral music lends itself to that more than anything else probably because of the text, but also because of the vulnerability that's required in order to communicate choral music correctly, so I think spirituality defined in choral music can go both way – it has two definitions – it's my spirituality of who I am in my faith and how that affects me as a choral director – that's my spirituality there, but it's also how I can connect spiritually with my students chorally and through the music, so I think it has two separate definitions.

J: Do you think you need to use a different term to use it in a secular setting or do you think that's still an ok term?

A: Hmm....maybe??...I feel like saying the word spirituality makes people think more faith based, so if I was to ask a student um, an agnostic student, how does this music connect with you spiritually, they're gonna say it doesn't, um, but it does because I can see it in you and you just said what this did to you, so I don't think that um, people outside of faith based communities would see spirituality as a term of what they do in the class, but maybe that's because of my faith based lens.

J: Um, are there any other experiences, uh, that have come to mind other than the ones you've mentioned with rehearsal or performance, um, that you feel like you've had as a choir director that you would label as spiritual.

A: In which definition?

J: Yours

A: That's that's sneaky, um, not that I can think of off hand, we have a lot of emotional moments which would be that one definition of spirituality of connecting with their spirit to my spirit, we do that a lot, a lot, a lot, in my class, um...

J: What do you do to initiate those or do you feel like you initiate those

A: I do, I do, it's a conscious decision,

J: Is it something you plan in your lesson?

A: Sometimes, um, we do through my masters, um, research, I had to do um, mine was on the motivation behind being in the choir with all of the things that you can take, why do you take choir in high school and so I, we did, journals through my research and we had to ask the same question you know because you have to be authentic and so I

shouldn't say that sarcastically in yours, haha, and so I the question was what was meaningful about today's rehearsal? And so they would say something about their emotions or their social, I just want to be around friends, or something about like, we hit that beautiful chord and it was...whatever...so we found that those were the main three things, the students really enjoyed journaling they just didn't like it was the same prompt so after the research was done we continued to do the prompts. This year we are expanding it a little bit, journaling I think is a lost art and I think that high schoolers need to experience and are wanting, they ask me, can we journal today? We call it talk to me Tuesdays, can we do a talk to me Tuesday? Sure, and they just write what's on their heart that day and then they turn in their journal and I read it and sometimes I respond and sometimes I don't. sometimes I just put a smiley face at the end or I just say "that sounds awful!" and that's all I write but they feel like their voice is heard and sometimes it's just hey, I'm super stressed out about my biology test or sometimes they say I'm doing good – I'm going to the lake this weekend sometimes it's nothing, but it helps me connect to my students – that's an intentional one – sometimes, ah, there's another experiences. I Loved All Lovely Things, gorgeous piece, um, I did it at state with um, a mixed group so I think I put something stupid, I think I put 3 choirs together for that one so I think had over 100 kids on the stage for that one and I was not getting the music that I wanted out of it and so we stopped and it was completely spontaneous I was not planning on doing this, it was a joint rehearsal and I was frustrated – we had gotten the music in other rehearsals, but it was not together – the level of vulnerability was no longer there – so I needed to establish vulnerability and fast so we can make music. We stop rehearsal, everyone closes their eyes – ok, imagine YOU are HER and your life is meaningless,

you're stuck in a room, and I gave them the whole story of what that felt like to be a recluse who just sits at the window and sees the sun but she can't experience it, but then the second half of the song says I hope that people will remember me as a person who loved all lovely things – that's the poem, they all closed their eyes, and thought about it and were like "yeah" and then we sang it and right now there, that was a created experience unplanned and then they all to that day, that was the best, that was the best performance of that piece and it was in my choir room dang it, but it was there – it was incredible at state and they did wonderfully, but it was not the same, because they didn't have that same, and if you feel, if you try to create that again in the warm up room, it's not going to be authentic, because it was their first, they can remember it, but they're not experiencing it for the second time so I think that in that moment my heart, their heart, the poet's heart, their hearts as collectively as all of those choirs from freshmen to senior coming together, all of that was together and that was a seriously spiritual moment whether they were faith based or not, so in that moment I think that's definitely spirituality for some of them they saw that as I needed to do something better with my life because God has something more – they saw it as faith based, I think the majority of them just felt this overwhelming, "ok, here we go, let's make music" so it's different, sometimes it's, sometimes it's planned, I know that I'm doing this song, I'm choosing this song because of the text, um, I'm doing *That Which Remains* by Andrea Ramsey this fall, we're gonna have some, some text analysis, but we're also gonna have some journaling on what does it mean to you and where are you in this moment and then we'll just have some conversations I'm sure as things come out, you know I wasn't expecting

my grandfather to die in *Echo*, but I needed to share that with them, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer two days after I introduced the song and he died a month later

J: Wow

A: I needed to experience that with them, they needed to know, but in order for us to have that level of musicality, we needed to have that level of spirituality connection, which required me to be vulnerable. I think it really comes down, in order to have a spiritual experience, I think it comes down to that vulnerability.

J: You mentioned, a lot about the textual emphasis and vulnerability and trust and connection with each other, um, what about the level of technicality with your students to have those spiritual moments

A: Yeah – if you, you can have all the intention in the world, but if it's not executed, it's not gonna happen. I am not willing to sacrifice, and this is where I differ from some of my colleagues, I am not willing to sacrifice the text for the music. If a piece is beautiful, but they're not connected, I'm not doing it. If they can connect the text and because of the emotion in it, it's not gorgeous I'm ok with that, um, for instance, we did, um, *Tell My Father*, gorgeous piece. Men's Choir. I did all my guys in the whole program. And when they sang that four or five of them are crying, while they're singing it, is it gonna be the best performance if you're crying on stage – NO – is it worth it – Absolutely – totally worth it. Now I'm not gonna choose bad literature just to make the connection, literature done poorly is going to distract from the music so, I think you have to have the expectation musically, but I've had some kids that are musically very competent, but they refuse to be vulnerable, it's not gonna be a great performance. So you have to have both,

um, and I don't feel now that the... I feel like at the beginning I might have sacrificed some of the musicality for that, the kids were moved, but the judges were not, how about that, um, I feel like now that the culture has been established that that's what we do here, we cry in choir, we do that, that's the culture, they know this, now I can have crazy high expectations and demand and receive beautiful musicality and technicality and all of that stuff and get them to feel the feels and that's all the feels, it's the joy and it's the anger, I mean when we did Dies Irae and you have to have the anger and the fear and all of the, that's still the feels, you still need that part too like that's still a part of your soul so you still have to connect with that, but that doesn't happen unless you are still doing that you know, sforzando correctly because I'm gonna stop ya, I'm gonna stop the feels real fast, if it's, not that I don't feel like you have to sacrifice it, I feel like sometimes it can and I think because the culture's established that I don't have to sacrifice for it anymore.

J: Cool, I think you've hit on some of these – what are some practical ways that you integrate spiritual elements in to your music making, you mentioned journaling, you mentioned discussions about text

A: Discussions and groups and sometimes I let them have their own discussions and I'm not even in the room, I'll send the sections into their practice rooms, I stay in the main room and sometimes they just need to be real with each other and I don't know sometimes what happens, but those sopranos come back crying every time because they need to connect on that level, um, so that's a part, but I facilitate the conversation by sending them by creating time for that, um, sometimes other things are just mindfulness, again, as a society we don't give them time to think about where they are in their life and

so um, quiet breathing, um, we do rehearsals in the dark sometimes, I've taken my chamber choir into my, I have one practice room that doesn't have any windows in it, so you turn the lights off, it's pitch black dark, we'll go sing in there and it creates that freedom and um, and awareness you know self-awareness because you don't have to focus on anything else so we do a lot things to create that mindfulness which then I feel like if you, you will allow yourself to stop thinking everything else, that's really when those spiritual moments happen. I can have a spiritual moment in a large crowd, but most of the time it's in the stillness, so I have to create opportunities for them to be still and introspective.

J: How do you get and maybe by... you've talked about creating an atmosphere for that, how do you get a high school kid to be vulnerable with another high school kid

A: I usually start lighter, so um, on the first day of school, I'm playing a different stupid ice breaker game, that the whole point is that I'm gonna get you to look ridiculous and to be free and goofy when you're terrified on your first day of school. Especially my freshman class cause they're all terrified so we're gonna play Dog, Fire hydrant, Car which is Rock, Paper, Scissors but with motions and so um, and it's ridiculous but you have to commit, so if you're really too nervous you can always just do car (motions), but fire hydrant you're going all the way, and dog you're lifting the whole leg, now you're all goofy, and what you do is if you play, so you cheer on whoever beats you and then it continues to grow so you end up with half the class cheering on one person and you so you just everyone's just excited and you're all in this together cause you're playing dog, fire hydrant, car, it doesn't matter, but you've created that unity simply four minutes,

mass chaos, it's the loudest thing you've ever done in your room before, but it's a blast, but then they realize, it's ok, um, I talk a lot about how um, you know especially in that first week, I know you're really nervous but guess what you have something in common with every person in this room, you like to sing, so let's do that and I'll start us, shared experience of success, so if you can, you know that first breath, oh that was! Let's do that again, and they're like yeah we did that together, that creates that togetherness, the conversations, um, in my upper groups it becomes, it's a lot deeper, because they're safer, um, and they know that culture better so with my freshmen and sophomore choirs, those tend to be a little more superficial at the beginning of the year, um, or I'll do a lot more introspective things and not as much hold discussions with the group, but I lay myself out there all the time. If I'm struggling, you know within the limit, because some people are over-sharers, I'm not gonna do that, but I'm gonna be real with you, that's what I always say, I'm gonna be real, im struggling today I'm having a hard time and I always tell them I'm gonna ask for a 100% of what they've got that day, if you don't have 100%, give me a 100% of what you got. Some days I'm not at 100%, if I've got a migraine that day, we're rehearsing in the dark that day, but we're gonna rehearse cause that's what I've got or if um, they came to me and told me that um, my program was being cut smaller in between class periods and I was shredded, I felt so devalued and then I had to go in to my next class and I'm gonna teach, I'm not gonna stop the day, but I'm gonna tell ya, I'm not gonna tell them what's going on yet, because I don't know 100%, but I can say I just got some really bad news and I'm kinda struggling, can we just make some music together? Can we just do that, I need to make some music and they're like yeah, let's do that, let's do that together, so that creates that I have to be that vulnerable

first, I cannot ask them for anything I'm not willing to give. There's an activity that uses the emotions from that Inside Out movie and you have them say just in a couple words to remind you of the story, a time when you were joyful...not just happy, not oh it's pizza day, but IT'S A PUPPY....that moment and then they do that and then you do anger, those are easy ones and then um, then you go into fear, well then you do disgust, what's the other one, what's the other one, oh, sadness, so then you do fear, disgust, and sadness last so you start with the easiest to share and then my baby groups we'll share those, might share the anger one, I'm not gonna go further, they're establishing emotions that everybody's comfortable with and then it gets them to say, I was so angry when Ms. B did this and they're like yeah I hate Ms. B too and like yea me too and now they have a connection, it's a connection over a negative emotion, but it works, you have a joyful one same thing, but in my upper groups we're gonna share disgust and fear and I always tell them, I'm not talking about, oh there's a ghost in my room or sadness is the other one, it's not I'm sad, it's I'm crying in the shower so hard I can't tell if it's my tears or the shower...that amount of sadness and they all go, yeah...I've done that and then they have that and then you know if we get to the level of comfort that they can share that then I win, but you gotta feel the room with it too but once you can establish the vulnerability the whole rest of the year becomes those beautiful spiritual moments of that connection and that realness and you know, but it it's a process, they have to know that that's what's coming.

J: Last thing I was just gonna ask you...anything else that I should of asked that I didn't

A: I'm a really wordy person, this is probably way longer than you expected

J: No it's ok, my pilot studies were about this long too

A: It's seriously something I'm really passionate about, it's easy for me to talk about, so I'm sure that there's more that I could say, but I think you answered, or you asked all the aspects, I feel comfortable.

J: Cool

Transcript #6: Joy

Female, Illinois
Tuesday, August 7 – 5:15 – 5:57p
Online – Zoom

J: What encouraged you to have this conversation with me about spirituality in choral music making

JOY: Obviously when you mentioned I thought about some experiences that I've had in my previous classroom and working with Joann definitely, just some experiences that just seem to transcend time and space a little bit whenever you really get to that level of music and um and yeah certainly with sacred texts and I also thought it would be a good chance to reflect on that as I am starting a new job because I could take some of that in with me as much as is appropriate for where I am, but ...

J: Definitely – cool, well that's great that you've thought of some of those experiences because that's what I want to talk about next, tell me about a time in a choral performance that you feel you've had a spiritual experience

JOY: Trying to think of a good example, several come to mind, but I'm trying to think of one...I would say, um, the first one that came to mind when we were at Smithville and we did *He Never Failed me yet* and we had some wonderful little soloists that I knew were believers and I knew that they were worshipping when they performed those solos and kind of gave me an opportunity to do that alongside them as more than just as an accompanist, but um, you know fellow believers kind of allowed me to cut lose and do that a little bit more and think of it a little bit more in those terms than just a performance,

um, and then that particular senior class we had that year was more of them had grown up in church and had kind of claimed Christian faith more than an average class normally had and so it was kind of a unique experience there...

J: What do you think it was about those performances that made you think they're really worshipping, this is more than just singing, but this is transcending into that other place

JOY: Um, previous conversations I'd had with them about their faith and the way um, you know as a teacher you're kind of limited on what you can do, but if you start, we had situations with that particular class where we had started just an open discussion about the text and like share maybe what your favorite part of this text is and why it's special to you and they would take that and run with that as an opportunity to maybe share their faith or expound upon the gospel themselves without any prompting from us to do that, but just to like we're just gonna have a classroom discussion about this text and they just laid it all out a couple times with very little, like no encouragement from us to do that other than opening the discussion so I knew um that was a year we did *Majesty and Glory of your name*, that was the same class, they did that song in Madrigals and so they had had lots of discussions about their favorite lyrics of that song and so I knew when they sang that song that this is Lauren's favorite part of the song and she loves this because it reminds her how small she is compared to God and I knew that's what she was thinking of when I watched her sing that and played along with her so, that discussion kind of opened that up and then also, just the way that *He Never Failed Me Yet* the way they were able to just cut loose and enjoy singing it together um, and their interactions with each other as they were singing it, I think Christina, she soloed on that and she just every

time we did it, she did something a little bit different that kind of kept it fresh and I mean she was genuinely singing it because of how she emoted and all that so, it was really cool

J: What do you think about your students who wouldn't necessarily proclaim to be Christians, um, do you think that they still had a spiritual experience in that song

JOY: Um, yes, and that honestly, Joann and I talked about this several times over the last couple of years, um, she, and I totally agree with what she's saying so I'm kind of stealing this from her but we talked several times about how when we were students we would experience that through songs that made us feel like we're part of something bigger than just ourselves and the small ensemble and this moment, like musical moments that kind of made you feel like there was something bigger out there and so even if you have students that aren't believers in any religion that if you get them to arrive at an experience like that through a choral piece or anything um, it just makes them question life in a different way, hopefully, and even if you're in a public school and you can't share your faith openly and you never have a time to lay the gospel out that if you give kids an experience like there's something bigger out there than just themselves then prompting them to question that hopefully plant some kind of seed where they just start questioning...

J: Yeah, definitely, ok great – ok, so you mentioned with *He Never Failed Me Yet* and with *Majesty and Glory* and you hinted at this just a little bit but can you think of a time in a choral rehearsal that you've had these spiritual experiences?

JOY: Um, through discussion of the text we did a song what was it called, ... oh, *Cum Esem Parvulus* was what it was called and it's a Latin setting of 1 Corinthians 13, the Love passages and it's all when I was a child I thought like a child, I act like a child, I reasoned like a child, when I became a man I gave up childish things, that was an example of a song where a lot of the kids, um, misinterpreted that as like, cause we were singing it at the end of the school year so a lot of the seniors interpreted like oh it was a coming of age song and so we started talking about the text and a lot of the kids were talking about oh it's about growing up and becoming a man and someone else piped in and said actually no, it's not about becoming a man, it's about looking dimly at God's grand plan now on earth and thinking oh this is all there is, but then going to heaven or like the new heaven and the new earth, THIS is actually what things are about so, we had some kids interpret without a biblical worldview and other kids that were like no, if you look at it like a biblical worldview this is really what it's talking about, this is what the biblical passage is actually talking about and really with no prompting from us other than, let's talk about this so that was cool

J: I think that is interesting too because of where you were located, because it, I mean it's still a city school district, I mean you would expect that in rural town, you would expect that in the southern part of the state in some schools probably, but um I think that that is really interesting that in the city suburb you had kids that were that specific.

JOY: Mmhmm

J: Good, so you've talked a lot about having these class discussions and then being very student led, are there any other ways that you feel like those spiritual experiences were cultivated?

JOY: mmm...let me think...I don't know, I think, a choir is like going to church I just think, haha, like you all have, it's just kind of a spiritual experience in my opinion anyway because you all contribute in different ways and you all have to work together in order to make something happen out of it, I mean choir just reminds me of where would the body be without, what would be an eye without the body and an what would the body be without the foot and all this stuff I just think choir is representative of that you can't just be the bass section of the choir, you can't just be a soloist, and I think that there are some of the parallels there too, that kind of parallel the body of Christ in sort of a way, I don't know that that's as obvious to students as it is to teachers, but, I don't know, I kind of see that parallel there in just the way that you have to work together and um, serve each other with your talents, I guess is kind of I don't know a spiritual experience too that's the only type of thing I can think of off the top of my head, I don't know, I feel like even secular texts you know, you can draw whatever interpretation you want from them, and certainly make that a spiritual thing too. We did a text about someone passing away and I know a lot of our students that were Christians took that to the next step in their head I don't know and I was able to when I taught I was able to have one on one conversations with kids every once in a while with stuff like that because we were just so close and they would come in and eat lunch with us and we would go on trips and be together for whole days and you get to know each other really well and the doors just kind of open to conversations like that so, yeah,

J: do you think you as a teacher planned for those experiences or do you think the....

JOY: I didn't plan on them, hahaha, um, I don't think they were unplanned but I didn't plan on them, hahaha, I did very little to like, I didn't like tell people I was a believer, well kids that had me several years, they knew we attended church regularly and my husband was a pastor, but I didn't do anything like, pray in class, or pray before concerts or like explicitly share anything really in hopes of opening a door, but I don't know, I guess in 1 on 1 conversations especially outside of the school day if I had the opportunity to throw my foot in somewhere and I feel like a good relationship with the students to do that then I would take advantage of that, but I can think of very few times that I inserted that unless explicitly asked to.

J: What about even a secular point of view of just lesson planning with your choir, of I want them to have this spiritual experience so I'm gonna do XYZ to let that happen or is that possible

JOY: I think so, I think so, um, I think lots of times I tend to be very detail oriented about like lesson planning where I don't leave a whole lot of space for just being spontaneous so um, that's one thing over the last few years where I've reflected going into this new job where I don't want to plan our schedule so tightly that there's just not any time to have these spontaneous experiences of having fun singing with each other and um, so I think um, if you just have an opportunity like I can think of a couple times when it wasn't very structured rehearsal but we were just having a good time together and maybe like dancing around or walking around the room or something like that where it wasn't , it was a secular piece or something but were just enjoying being together, um, and those are

lots of times the memories that I look back on and I'm like oh yeah that was a really good time but it wasn't something that was planned for or structured for necessarily so I think those things and just the whole um, I think Smithville was kind of unique because it was just a family there too, um, give kids that didn't have anywhere else to fit in a place to thrive um, it's kind of a spiritual experience for them too, I hope, but..

J: What caused that?

JOY: Um, I, Cindy created a really just safe place for all kinds of different um, I don't know, um, I don't know, I've thought about this a lot, cause I'm like how did she do that, haha, cause I definitely want to do that, I want to have that kind of vibe in my classroom for sure, but I think it was just, everybody had a job and she was very explicit about like, bass section, back row, sing, we need you to sing, we need you to sing more, if you're not pulling your weight, we need everybody in this room to participate in what's going on so I think there was a good feeling of like, everybody has to do their best or this is not going to get off the ground and so you give kids that maybe are misfits or don't fit in anywhere else, they have this sense of purpose, I have a purpose in this room, and maybe I can sleep through my other classes, I can't in here because everybody else needs me um, and originally I think for most of the kids and first it was like, I have to do this or she's not gonna stop bothering me, but then eventually they came back to I just have to because everybody else is depending on me to do this. I think that was part of it and then a lot of the kids, um, they just spent a lot of time with us, they spent a lot of time just, they were in our room before school, after school, at lunch, between school, they were just around all the time so I think they felt pretty comfortable with the two of us and think especially the kids who had been there for 3 or 4 kids and I think that's the unique thing about choir

too, because you have them for many years. Like at my new job there might be some kids that I see 6, well like every year in my room so that offers the unique relationship that you wouldn't have if you were teaching something else too, so, I don't know

J: Do you happen to remember the name of the piece that you mentioned about someone dying...

Try to figure out name of piece – Remember No 2 from Two Rossetti Songs by Stephen Chatman

JOY: We had in that particular group, because it's about remembering, it's like the way they interpreted it, it was somebody writing from the grave like I know I've died but remember me and Cindy had, this is just extra, but Cindy had them, probably about 5 kids in that group who had lost a parent so it was like a really emotional thing and one of our girls, we went to NY that year and her grandpa passed like literally the day before we left for NYC and so she's singing this know she's gonna have to go home and do the wake and everything when she gets home from the trip and so watching them was just so emotional and I just lost a grandparent on that trip before we went too so every time they sang it I was like sobbing from the piano, It was a cappella thankfully and I could just have a moment but it was like all of us cried every time they did that song and it was so emotional, yeah so that was one that was definitely like and she had them write notes to whoever they were thinking about um,

J: Wow,

JOY: They had like a whole class period where it was dedicated to writing these notes and then she had like this ornate treasure box kind of thing and so she had all of them fold them up and put them in the box and then she put the box up on a shelf to look at while they were singing the song and stuff

J: Wow that was cool

JOY: So it was like super emotional, but it gave them hopefully a chance to process a lot of that, yeah, I'm like Paula, you're killing me,

J: Cool

JOY: I think she wrote a note for the box too, she's really good at stuff like that, I tend to think more stuff like nuts and bolts, this is how the rhythm goes and it says to go forte here but I'm not gonna give you an emotional reason for that to - Joann is really good at that too, ok you can get them there that way but perhaps a better way would be just to think about it on an emotional level and they'll just , it's better for them emotionally also, you tend to get a better musical result, I mean that's not the main motivation, but you do get a good musical result from that sometimes.

J: Well I'm glad to hear you say that too, because one of the things I've been reflecting about in these interviews is how you know like I'm a pastor and I'm like, you were a PK and you're married to a pastor you and I are both Christians who are very strong in our faith and that's at the forefront of what we do but it's kind of funny, things like this should be very natural for us, you know we do church camp, haha, but and maybe it's tied into this next question, what ethical or maybe even culturally responsive issues do

you think you need to be aware of when addressing spirituality in the public school setting?

JOY: I think it helps to know like if for instance, we had a large Muslim population there so, maybe to know kind of just the demographics of their religions there, um, I think too you have to cultivate um, an environment where it's safe for kids to talk about that, without fear of like fall out from that so like when we talked about stuff like that, there was never, not that I know of, there was never any after school discussions where kids were ticked at each for talking about spiritual things in the classroom, but if you make it a safe space for your Christian students, you have to make it a safe space for everybody else to share too, so I think that um I don't know you have a student that's maybe more combative toward discussions like that or defensive, like you have to be aware of that and know ok this is probably not gonna fly with this particular group because you know the student may not um, cooperate with it or it may not be safe with this particular person in the room and sometimes you just have to be ok with that I think I don't know, can you say the question again.

J: Yeah,

JOY: what do you mean to be aware of...

J: What ethical or culturally responsive issues should be addressed when considering implementing spiritual elements in choral music making?

JOY: I don't know you can't, you can't, you can't, I don't think as a teacher I can drive, I can drive the conversation toward explicitly Christian things, you can drive it toward

spiritual and like the kids can take it to whatever place they want, but at this point in my career at least I need to work for a lot of years, haha, um,

J: This is a random question that popped up along those lines, do you feel like, I haven't asked anybody else this, are there particular groups that you are able to have these conversations or maybe I should say these experiences with more than others?

JOY: I think so, I think there are groups that are, that are, I don't want to say safer, but um, trying to think of an example, like I said that particular group at Oakville but the senior class there was, they were super active in their church on the leadership level with um, their youth group, these were kids coming in, half of them would come in our room once a week in the mornings for like a Bible study, so that particular group and the kids that weren't Christians, they were open to spiritual things still, it wasn't like if we started talking about, oh we can't talk about that in school, they were open that discussion and we knew that

JOY: What about like you're training choirs verses your more advanced choirs, do you think there was a difference there?

J: Um, I think we I was more comfortable having those conversations with the more advanced kids because we knew them better and there was more of a relationship built there, I was trying to think of CCT, our women's choir, sometimes those women's choirs girls were in tune to spiritual things, my beginning, beginning choir because culturally they had grown up in church um, CCT, I'm trying to think if we did any, had any good conversations about that um, I don't know, I know we talked about spiritual things

sometimes, we did a couple sacred pieces, um, but it was probably less in depth because their maturity level was lower and I didn't feel like I had as deep a relationship with them because a lot of them was just their first year in my classroom.

J: Were you in with the men's choir much

JOY: I don't think hardly ever, I don't know, those kids generally were freshmen and sophomores and so I don't know that their maturity level and ability to have deeper conversation really wasn't the greatest sometimes, um, trying to think, like I know we did *And Miriam Sang* which is about Moses but that's like it wasn't super deep, it was like Oh they crossed over on dry land and they're just having a party afterward I was trying to think of, we did some sacred things in Latin that we just had to talk about what the text meant, but as far as like really deep heavy hitting text, it was probably less in those classes because of the maturity level, I guess, I don't know

J: Sure, maybe that's a follow up study – haha – ok so now that you've been thinking about these experiences and getting those memories back in your mind – what does the term spirituality mean to you in the context of choral music making?

JOY: I think just um, I mean I talked about a lot in relationship to Christian faith but I think if you're just talking about an open ended spiritual experiences that it doesn't really have to be tied in to religion but having an experience that makes you connect with other people that you maybe wouldn't connect with in just a regular classroom, like I don't know there's something to singing with other people that just binds you together, you see kids that I had in class forever ago and it's like, it's like seeing, I don't know an old friend, ya know, because you had so many cool experiences together and got to process

so much together so I think when you're in a choir particularly, you, you're forced to ...that you maybe wouldn't and you and there's opportunity there for experiences that kind of transcending, I don't know, transcend in some ways that you just don't get other places, I don't know, maybe I'm biased, haha, but I just don't think you get them other places, um, I don't know, so I guess I think of it generally as just giving them an experience that makes them feel small in the grand scheme of life or giving them an experience that makes them feel like there's something out there than just me trying to get through school or just me trying to get good grades, there's something out there for people. And I would hope that would cause them down the road to remember, I remember that experience in choir where I had this really cool experience and um, question what that was about a little more to lead them to some kind of discovery of the gospel in my particular situation, but I don't know, that's the hope.

J: I think I know the answer to this, but just so that I have it recorded. Would you describe yourself as a spiritual person?

JOY: Yes, I guess, that kind of sounds touchy feel to me but I guess I am

J: Would you describe yourself as a religious person

JOY: Yeah, I would, I would put myself in that category yeah

J: With spirituality, being a public-school teacher, do you see yourself using that term?

JOY: Like with my kids?

J: Yeah

JOY: I guess, yeah, I guess, depending on how they would react to it the first couple of times, depending on how they would react the first couple times – maybe, maybe not

J: Why do you think they would be averse to it?

JOY: Um, I wouldn't want to turn off any kids who maybe have an aversion toward religion, from me as a person or my classroom, I wouldn't want them to feel like, Mrs. Joy's a Christian, you know... I'm... gay, or an atheist, or bisexual or something and so she's probably not gonna like me, ya know, I just want it to be like a safe space and I'd be afraid if I came in and said, I'm a Christian, I believe the Bible, my husbands a pastor, we're really active in our church, we're Baptist or whatever that they would be like, oh Baptists don't like people like me, that would be my hesitation, once I got to know them a little better to where they see that she's open to people like me or she's not gonna like make my life any different, she's gonna treat me just like everybody else then I'd be more open to...but that would be my hesitation I guess, or the other thing is I pick, I would want to be able to pick sacred literature without raising any eyebrows and them understanding like, like I'll pick sacred literature, but not for the reason of like trying to convert my choir into being Christian, like I'll pick sacred music from an educational standpoint because I think it's important choral students study sacred literature but the other hesitation I have is being really open about being a Christian in classroom and then someone being like she's just picking this song because she wants us all to convert and that would be my other hesitation and then them going to admin and saying Ms. Joy talks about Jesus all the time and then she picks this song and then especially being a new teacher and not really having a reputation yet..so

J: Sure, um, ok, what should I have asked you that I didn't?

JOY: Um, I don't know, mmm...wait time, um...haha...it's very important...um, I don't know I think those experiences are valuable like I know that probably goes without being

said, saying that I think you should work to create those experiences for your kids too and not be afraid of stuff like that and I think it should be like you said and I said before I tend to get really caught up in the nuts and bolts and like logistical planning of my rep and not being like in terms of spirituality or like the bigger picture with the texts that I'm choosing and when I'm teaching it I get really caught up in the technical aspects of it so don't always get the big overhead view for them so that's something I, Cindy we depended on each other for that because I was more of the nuts and bolts person and she's more of the now pretend your laying on a field looking at the clouds and I'm like what does that mean...that works for some kids and yeah, close your eyes and we're gonna turn the lights off and sing this in the dark and I was like ok...and she would get the sound she wanted and the kids would have an awesome experiences and so I'm gonna have to counterbalance myself a little bit more now that I'm the only person...you know why turn off the lights when there's a crescendo, just have them...haha, you know, they can't even sing the rhythm correctly...why are we doing this?

J: Do you think that the performance has to be technically accurate or maybe even perfect to have these experiences?

JOY: No, and I have to remind myself of that all the time, um, I don't know, I keep talking about my colleagues, Joann was really good at that because like um, she would take music away before the kids were really ready to sing it without the music because she wanted to make sure the kids had an experiences and she was really big on, one thing we haven't talked about it as choral musicians, our kids, teaching them that they want to give those experiences to their audience too, um, so like she was really big on like if you

are buried in your music and your audience might be really impressed with your technical performance, but they're not gonna feel anything from that so she talked a lot about giving the audience an experience and maybe there's somebody coming into our concert this week who has had a rotten run, and they need you to speak some life into their heart right now with this performance and um, so I think that was, I thought that was really awesome because I think I only thought about getting my kids an amazing experience before, but she talked a lot about giving your audience an amazing spiritual experience when they come to your concerts too and I think the kids really um, they a lot of times did that and their performances were not as technically good as Smithville, um, cause she's just, she's got different a different situation that she's working with and she hasn't taught as many years, um, I think they're on a really good path there, um, to be more technical, but when they sang man oh man, they made me cry like every concert, they just moved me because you knew that they were really feeling and connected to what they were singing and so that's what I learned from watching her, was not to get so bogged down with... was everything perfectly in tune, were all the cut offs together no, but I felt something when those kids sang, like all the time, even her beginning kids...

J: Was it something you saw or because you had the background?

JOY: Both, well part of it, because I knew the kids and I knew some of them had really major baggage happening in their life and watching them sing was just emotional and then, I think those kids Robinson kids, compared to Smithville kids, they just felt things more, I don't know, I hate to say this, but it's like they needed music MORE, like they needed to have that experience more, I feel like some of them than Smithville kids

because they had like, I don't know, I don't know they had more rotten home situations...

J: Lower SES

JOY: Yeah, more poverty, more broken homes, more single parent families, I mean kids who left school and had 40 hour jobs, I just think they needed that experience more so they just ate it up I don't know, such an emotional experience working with them too and in a different way and they could, her higher groups, they could hash out deep texts and things just as good as Smithville kids they were very intelligent and very emotionally intelligent, um, but it was just a different experience to watch them sing a gospel piece as compared to Smithville kids, they did *He Never Failed Me Yet* this last year too and they just...I was crying while I was playing that one, it was ridiculous, they were just feeling it so much. And in rehearsal they were able to cut loose and do stuff like that too...

J: And that's a piece that's very blatant, I mean it's almost really more of a church piece than it is a cross over

JOY: Yeah, she got a little of bit of push back from a couple kids about doing that, we're not supposed to do songs like this at school, why are we doing this, I mean, it was unfounded because they literally sang the entire Vivaldi *Gloria* at Christmas time, which is sacred the whole way through, they just didn't realize it because it was Latin and she told them than, she told them what the song was about, but she got a little bit of push back from student son that, her admin understood, she's not programming this because she's a Christian, she's programming it because they haven't sung a gospel piece this year ya know, and her singers and her soloists were spot on for what this piece needed

and she wanted to give them and that particular song by Robert Ray is a St. Louisan and so she could lean on that a lot, this guy is from St. Louis and that's why we're doing this...I don't think we every did with Smithville with sacred stuff, but there was a long history of singing sacred music there...

J: Ok, anything else you want to share before we rap up?

JOY: Nothing I can think of...

J: Well thank you so much!

Interview #7: Sarah

- Female, Missouri
- Saturday, September 15, 2018 – 3:15 – 3:50p
- Online - Zoom

J: What encouraged you to have this conversation with me about spirituality in choral music

S: I feel like spirituality is at the crux of choral music and what I do in the public school I don't always get to speak about it in that way. I always I have to be kind of cagey and getting to actually just speak about it very openly and honestly was exciting.

J: Cool, Tell me about a time in a choral performance that you felt you had a spiritual experience.

S: For me as a performer or a conductor?

J: Either way,

S: Ok, um, so I actually even the one conducting. My students were singing, we were doing the antiphonal *Ave Maria* at Symphony Hall and it was acappella, the Holiday Festival Chorus and my students were the antiphonal part and they were all up in the balcony and so, um, getting to hear a room full of people the size of Powell Hall, um, getting to hear those people listen to my students, um, you know performing from their hearts and just you could feel in the room the air was very charged that um, the hearts were just, my students' hearts singing that music were reaching out and touching people's hearts. People were emotionally responding to what they were hearing and um, I think for me one of the places that we really feel Heaven here on earth is when we can be honest in

community and touch each other's hearts in that way and so in that moment with all of those strangers hearing my students sing and them getting to touch those hearts and then a standing ovation, obviously, afterwards, laughs....I think knowing that I had a part in preparing them for that, just it was just a really neat moment to get to be there and just to feel the divine presence with us in that moment.

J: What do you think helped create that moment? You kind of expressed, you described the situation, but what do you think led to that that allowed those, the spirituality to come out, the connection to happen?

S: Um, I think that time of year people are very much more open in their hearts, it's just a very, you know, the season of joy, whatever, people tend to be a little bit more open and um, you know we have something in common in that season so often, so it helps people be more open with each other. I think that the acoustics in the space, obviously, play a big part because you know you don't get to sing with that type of acoustic every day and so just hearing sound in that way plays a big part in that, um, the antiphonal arrangement of the students was something different that they don't always experience, so they were gaining so much excitement and energy from the sound in that place and being the antiphonal choir in the balcony and then I think that it's, it's strangers that they're performing for. So often we're just singing for, you know, families and friends and things like that and so it's very easy to be open and um, put yourself out there and know that you're going to receive a favorable response and you know that they're with you. To go into a situation so much vulnerable where you know this is a pretty intense performance, with a whole lot more people, I think the vulnerability my students were feeling going

into that, um, you know and then they have to, they are much more exposed in the balcony singing in that way. It's just that vulnerability piece, you know, is really important.

J: Cool, do you happen to remember the composer of that *Ave Maria*?

S: I don't know if you say Bieble or Bible.

J: Oh, yeah, I think I've heard Bieble, I think that's what I've heard before. Jane Doe really loves that version and I've heard her girls do that before. Yeah, that's really pretty. One of the cool things about these interviews is compiling the literature, the pieces that the people bring to the table. That's just been an unexpected gift people have been bringing to the interview process.

S: I think that piece for me, being you know, saying you had a spiritual experience – I'm not Catholic, so for me that piece being an *Ave Maria*, it doesn't have to do with the text, it doesn't have to do with the text in that moment, it was about community and vulnerability and those type of things.

J: yeah, that's cool, that's an interesting point you bring up because *Ave Maria* you think, it's sacred too, and there's been lots of discussions about sacred and secular, but it's a sacred piece that doesn't fully align with your beliefs, so it's not even that you're singing this prayer to Mary.

S: We're singing it that day,

J: Yeah, that's cool. Think of a time in a choral rehearsal that you feel you have had a spiritual experience.

S: hmmm...so we were rehearsing *In the Sweet By and By*, I don't remember who that arrangement is, it's one of Jane's favorite arrangements as well. And we were just talking um, we were talking about that point between what is present on earth and what is eternal. Or what is Heaven? And you know for me I had to be a little bit more guarded about how I termed that, but you know that break between and that question and that longing and living in that in between space and so um, I had told the girls about getting to be with my Grandmother as she was passing from this world, you know, on, and so many of them haven't experienced being at a death bed, some of them had which was interesting, they were nodding their heads at everything I was saying about the strange peace in that moment and that moment when you actually feel like that person is actually gone. You don't have to see, you know even look down, you can feel it in the way, you can feel the presence of their spirit is missing and um, you know just from that story and that discussion about that place right between and then we were singing and then you know we're all in tears. The girls are in tears and I'm in tears and um, you know just I think it's that vulnerability piece again that like what, when you come to point where you are so open in your heart and that is when I really feel the divine in my rehearsals when they're, even when they're all vulnerable and singing from the depths of who they are and touching that spot and doing it together.

J: That's cool. Um, What do you think practically, technically, needed to be in place, if anything, for those moments to occur?

S: Well, it's really important that we're in the place where they have a really good understanding musically of what we're singing. It's hard to achieve those moments when

they're worrying so much about the notes and um, creating those. I think often when we have those moments, we're at, we're either memorized or we're at the point right before memorization. We are not really needing to use our music, but we're at the point we can get off the page. I think those moments really happen for me in music that's really complex too. There's a high level of achievement that goes with that and the knowledge that you're performing something, that you've really had to reach for and you're achieving that and the satisfaction that comes with that, so, you know all the background things that go in to that. Learning how to sight reading, learning about good technique that's free so you're not struggling physically to make that singing happen, but it's, um, you know you're just able to sing with good technique as second nature. You're able to learn difficult music more comfortably and not still be struggling with those notes.

J: So, would it be safe to say that it wouldn't have to be technically perfect for those moments to happen?

S: Yeah, absolutely, um, but I feel like the singers need to be at the point where they're even ok with those mistakes happening so that maybe you've, maybe you've said, "ok, this time it's not important that we're making those mistakes. I know that we have some mistakes. But right now, those aren't important, you can let those go. We want to focus on this other element. We want to focus on text. If you make note mistakes, it's no big deal. Or we want to focus on the feeling of the phrasing." Um, so allowing them permission to make mistakes and if they make them, they're not jarred out of the emotional connection to what's happening.

J: Do you think the students have to be directed to that level of thinking or is it something that just happens spontaneously?

S: Maybe really, it can be either one. It can be, it also depends on the group and the level of the group. So, my lower level students, I think they're more easily able to let go of the worry about making a mistake and really get into the music, but my upper level students, they're really focused on making it correct and I need to allow them the permission that it's ok. There're also the kids that really want to please me, so they have to let go of the peace of wanting to please me in that performance, be able to achieve that.

J: That's interesting. Um, there's one other question along that train of thought that I wanted to ask you, but it eluded me, um, maybe it'll come back, um, oh, what was it, it is right on the tip of my tongue. Oh, I know what it was, um, do you plan for these moments, like even in lesson planning wise, do you think "I want to have these particular moments happen" or are they just organic, something that's unplanned.

S: Sometimes I plan that we are going to, today we are really, I really want to delve into the text, or I want them to delve in to themselves. The meaning of this song, even the meaning musically. And sometimes I think that's planned, but there's a lot of variables that derail that plan. You know if something happens in the school that day or the world that day that makes it where they're not able to focus in the way that you have to be able to have those moments. Sometimes they're organic, sometimes they just happen.

Sometimes I go off my plan and we go one of those, I lead them into it. I think frequently I lead them into those moments. There are occasions when they just happen.

More often I think it's when I planned it originally or it's a teachable moment thing and I went there.

J: What are some specific activities that you might do to encourage that?

S: Ooo, um, I think one of the things that I do is I speak the text poetically to them, um, with a theatre degree I'm not just reading the words, so um, I think them hearing the words spoken as text out of context of the music sometimes really helps. Them to really feel the poetry, sometimes having them repeat the phrases the way they would maybe say them help. Anecdotal stories and things sometimes um, to bring in sometimes asking them to talk about what the text means to them. You know will help spark each of their imaginations and hearts in different ways.

J: cool

S: and I, when you're talking about spiritual things, I can allow more if they're giving me those anecdotal stories that if I um, now I do put in the caveat that the kids and I have an understanding at the beginning of the year that I am calling them to approach music from the depths of who they are as an individual and that I need to bring their honest self to the table every day and that means whatever their faith or spirituality is, they need to bring their honest self to the table with that the way they interpret and perform their music. That being said, I can't ask that of them, if I'm not also allowed to bring my honest self into that conversation as their teacher, so, you know I always tell them when we're performing things that may be sacred, I don't expect that you bring a sacred bent to it, I expect that you bring your interpretation and your bend into that sacred text, but when I'm explaining to you what it can mean, I have to be able to explain what it means to me

and you have to be ok with the fact that what it means to me is my Christian perspective. And I want to welcome your perspective, whatever that is and we can all just be who we are together. And experiencing what we're experiencing.

J: Do you ever feel like you run into roadblocks with that, particularly with your Christian perspective?

S: Um, I mean I obviously have to tone it down. I really try not to pick stuff that says Jesus too much. God is really easy for kids to say, Ok, I can make God be science, you know, and they're ok with me, when you get baby Jesus in there, sometimes it gets more difficult. Um, you know a lot of my, a lot of my students who maybe are Muslim, they know Abraham. They know creation, they know some of those things so if I can speak, my Jewish students, they know, you know, um, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, they know Abraham, so the more I can put it back to Oooooolder Bible stuff, the little bit better we can be, um, so I mean I try to connect as much as I can. We're doing a *Dies Irae* text right now, so you know it talks about saying the prophet, so I know one of my kids has Mythology the hour before so we're talking about when I say the prophet I don't always the prophets, I'll say it's like the soothsayer who says this is coming or whatever so, the more different things I can connect it to, the more the kids give me freedom to kind of talk about it when I can talk about it from many angles.

J: Sure, cool. Um, ok so now that we've been talking about these experiences and you've been recalling these thoughts and it's a little bit fresher in your mind here, what does the term spirituality mean to you in the context of choral music making?

S: Um, so spirituality I would say that's, whenever you know, connecting to the spirit and for me that's gonna be the Holy Spirit as a Christian musician, the Holy Spirit that lives within me and I you know, want to make room for that in my heart and in my life and in my rehearsal, so allowing that to kind of lead and releasing who I am to the Spirit in those moments in rehearsal where I feel like it's less me when I'm singing or when I'm teaching. Um, connecting to, the center of who those students are and allowing them to connect to the center of who they are collectively. So, everyone individually and there's an energy in that, that charges the room and you can kind of feel. You know for me I would say that's the presence of the Holy Spirit was in that moment, but um, it's not that to the students always, but they feel that, they feel that presence of connectivity, of the center of who everyone is. They don't maybe know what to call it, um, but that, you know, I would call it, the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of those students individually as well, being honest and open and free.

J: Do you feel comfortable using the word spirituality in your class?

S: Hmmm...I don't know that I do. I'll say things like depth of feeling and the heart of who you are, and you know what you believe, what you...I don't tend to use the word in spiritually in general though, as a person, it's not a term I tend to use.

J: Why do you think we avoid that term?

S: We want to keep our job. ☺

J: laughs, sure, so in a public setting, do you feel like it's misunderstood or creates bias?

S: Yeah, I think there's a lot of misunderstanding just in the public persona of what that is. I don't want to isolate a single student. I want all of the students to have those

moments with each other. So, I don't want to use the term spirituality or something similar in a way that's going to make one of my students feel that, that moment is not for them. That they're isolated from that in anyway. That their version of that is not acceptable with the rest of us collectively. Um, so I think maybe mostly not to isolate anyone. And isolate them in a way that they would have trouble.

J: Yeah, that's very fair.

S: I feel like you've definitely included this next question in a lot of your responses. The question was what ethical or culturally responsive issues should be addressed when considering implementing spiritual elements in choral music making and I think you've definitely addressed some of that. Is there anything else that comes to mind?

S: So Robinson, where I teach, is the number one most diverse school in the state of MO and in the top of the most diverse in the nation. Um, we may be top 10 actually, top 10 or top 100 most diverse in the nation and so that includes demographic as far as ethnicity, that includes um, like country of origin, languages that are spoken and socio-economic, so anything that you can think would make up diversity is included in that and we are that. So, I am ever constantly aware of that diversity within my classroom, um, you know I have students who are Christian, I have a lot of Catholics, a lot of evangelical, um, students, I have had Mormon students, I don't know where to put them in that, um, yeah, they're their own thing. I've had atheists. I had an atheist student send me an email after she graduated about, thanking you for always making sure I felt included in what was happening, so, I've had Jewish students, I have had Muslim students, and students with religions that I don't even know what they are, um, some tribal, African, religion that

reminds me of Native American kind of, religion, um, so like I don't even, she tells me about it and I'm ok, I don't...sure...um, even my Christian students really vary um, they'll say I go to a Baptist church and I'm like Black Baptist or ?? It's very different situations. I've had Jehovah's Witnesses which becomes interesting. I think if you can think of Hindu, if you can think of it, I have had and do have those students in the classroom. We really are dealing with a lot of those different issues, um, my students who tend to be like Black Baptist, they have trouble when things start to get spiritual, not starting to get preachy themselves and really where I have to tone them down because other students may be uncomfortable with that, so I do have to tone that down a bit. The one piece I have found really super interesting, um, this is probably really off topic here, Jordan, when we do songs like, we did um, a piece about Jonah, so it's "This is the story about Jonah..." whenever it talks about Jonah's story.

J: Rollo's

S: Yeah, Rollo's, a lot of my students who say I'm a Christian or I go to church or whatever, they don't know that story

J: Really

S: um, my kids didn't know how to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in a song we were singing, um, they didn't know how to say that and I have a lot of church kids you know, um, they are like who's that, I don't know that story and I would have one or two and that's it, so, the spiritual experience of my students even the ones who they say, they're Christians or they go to church, isn't what you would expect, if you asked me from my

background, we would say I'm Christian, I go to church, there's a difference, that is not true...

J: Talks to kids (sorry) – Any other experiences that come to mind that you'd like to share that you've had in rehearsals or performances that you think, oh I do want to mention that experience that happened?

S: I feel like as a director I don't get to lose myself in those moments the way I used to get to do as a performer. And I miss that a lot. Um, you know when you asked the first thing that came to mind, I wasn't directing, it was my kids, but someone else was directing. So, I think there's a certain element of controlling those moments, controlling that within my classroom that I'm very aware of that I have to be careful about. I'm not able to lose myself in those moments like I used to be able to. You know as a singer, as a student, so. As a student and as a performer, I say often those moment are so much more driven by music than text.

J: Hmmm

S: So, the actual writing, now wonderful text does inspire fantastic music, but I'm also an instrumentalist, so maybe that's part of that.

J: What do you think it is about the music? Is it a certain style, or a specific compositional technique that cultivates that?

S: Maybe it's not, like if it's very singable, so as a soprano you know, if I find it hard to get lost in Bach because it's high. Laughs. There's so much you have to be on your guard constantly, you can't get lost in that. Um, maybe it's just my preference, I don't, um,

music is so, it's written often to elicit that emotional response with modulations and things like that, so music that's written in that way, they write it to heighten that emotion and I think that, that's sometimes helps create that, um. Music where the chords are just really lovely and able to really you know be present, also music that meets me where I am in my life and that can change, you know. So, I think having a variety of music for my students is really important because we're gonna find stuff that meets them at different points.

J: When you talk about chords that are lovely, do you mean, like, lots of divisi, or consonance or dissonance or...

S: It can be simple, it can be so simple with just a suspension and then a resolution. Or it can be something very complex it creates, you know, sometimes it's in the instrumentation that accompanies, it you're singing something with the orchestra and something is written just perfect for the oboe line, you know music that's so, when it's written to be so appropriate for whatever it is, when the music says what the feeling is, just so exactly, you know in a way, they say like "where words fails, music speaks" well sometimes music is speaking what the feeling actually is.

J: Awesome, ok, what should I have asked you that I didn't?

S: um, I mean does it matter to you, are you keeping track of like, what faith the people you're talking to are or like my college was a Christian college at all.

J: I mean, um, it doesn't not matter, haha – would you describe yourself as a spiritual person?

S: Oh yes, absolutely

J: would you describe yourself as a religious person?

S: I mean, depends on what that means, yes, I guess, other people would describe me as a religious person.

J: You would describe yourself as a Christian

S: yeah

J: Cool – well, unless there's something else you'd like to add then I'm good.

S: I don't think so

J: Well thank you so much.

Transcript #8: Tia

- Female, Missouri
- Wednesday, July 17, 2018 – 4:30-5:00p
- Hotel Dining Area, MO

J: What sparked your interest in participating in my study on spirituality?

T: Well, I would say....I agreed to this study because that's what I see choral music as being – for me – it's my own personal expression of worship – so I can't see how you can take it out.

J: By worship you mean, worshipping God?

T: Yes – I mean worshipping God particularly

J: And that's even in a secular setting?

T: Absolutely – that's how I respond to music personally and it may not even be a religious piece, but the beauty of it and the harmonies coming together and the ring and the lushness or whatever it is, or the rhythm, it's justit causes me to worship because it's a reflection of the beauty of God in my opinion.

J: Cool - Well tell me about a time in a choral performance that you had a spiritual experience.

T: It's easier to say when it doesn't happen – *laughs* – because it happens a lot...um, I would say that's the goal is to have an experience where it transcends my own time and space, my own experiences, and so that's the goal and I want to bring my students to that same place whether they're thinking spiritually or not, but to be able to have that feeling of this is bigger than I am.

J: How do you know when you've gotten there?

T: Ok, so if I can finish what I was thinking first – *ha ha* – No, I want to answer that question, but I want to answer when it's not first... It's when the music isn't technically there – you just can't have that – you have to have some basic musical, and it doesn't have to be a perfect performance – it doesn't necessarily mean everything is exactly gonna happen but it has to be a level of preparation and you can let go and let the music happen and let the spirituality happen – does that makes sense?

J: Year

T: Ok so to answer to your question how do you know it's happening. Ok well, it's a dumb answer – but you just know – but how do you know? You see it in the kids' faces – the pleasure that they have – the pleasure that I have – it's a feeling of joy, of contentment, of triumph even – does that help?

J: Yeah – there's no wrong answer.

T: It's hard to explain

J: Yeah

T: Because it is spiritual, so it is hard to put into words – but I would say, I would say, when you are able to let go of the technical because it's just there already and you can go into the place of just presenting the music as music and, in my opinion, it's a form of worship and you forget about – I've gotta make sure there's a t there and an "ah" vowel there – it's already there, I've worked those and the breathings – everything's worked so I can just make music and I don't know, relax in it and enjoy.

J: You mentioned earlier, “that’s the goal” – do you feel like spirituality is something you plan for as a teacher? Do you set out at the beginning of the year and think “I want them to have these spiritual experiences so I’m gonna attempt to plan for it?”

T: Ok that’s a good question because you can’t force it, but you can create an atmosphere where it can happen. So it can’t happen when this alto’s mad at this tenor and there’s an angst in the choir – there has to be a unity of purpose that the choir has – or it’s not gonna happen – and so you can have everything technical and everything exactly right and you can make crescendos and decrescendos but if somebody’s own spirit isn’t willing to buy in then it’s not gonna happen, um, maybe I chose the wrong piece and the choir’s just not buying in and it’s one my favorite it pieces and I sung it in high school or college and they’re just like...they just can’t even – like what is this – like “The Cloths of Heaven” by Clausen I think – I love the piece I had a very spiritual experience performing that piece in college and I was like, we’re gonna do this , this is great lit for you, and they were like...it was just fighting the whole time and there’s nothing wrong with that piece of music.

J: Right, what do you think it was that was different for them than you?

T: Well I didn’t push past the point of this because at that time I just thought ok this is this isn’t working, this isn’t working, I think that was earlier on in my career, I would say, um, now I could bring it and I could probably present it to them a little bit differently. Instead I would even say to them, this piece, when I was in college when I sang this, I had a spiritual experience – look at the text and see if you could think of what could this mean to you? Who comes to mind? Not that I would tell them what I thought

because I wouldn't tell them everything I thought because that would be guiding them into something that maybe they don't wanna go into or can't relate to but if I can guide them to open their hearts to it, I think that could actually be a phenomenal experience – so now I think I might actually do that piece again – like pull it back out because I bought it and could use it - *haha* – because you can't make it happen, but you can create an atmosphere where it can happen – so like, introducing the piece – you know this is a little more challenging than what you're used to and but there're some beautiful harmonies in there and there are some pieces, like “Even When He is Silent” – the text just makes you go there – I mean it's just an amazing text and it's amazing writing and it's all just packaged beautifully and the kids love that style of writing and um...

J: How would you describe that style of writing?

T: It's kind of ethereal a little bit um....the dissonances and the resolutions...and you just hang into those dissonances a little longer than you would normally in a lot of music, um, and when they resolve you still have the dissonance there and that resolution, and I think, I think the kids relate to that – I think, I can relate to that because there is kinda that in our earthly bodies here on earth, yes, you have peace and you, but you don't have peace without conflict – you don't have the beach without the sand. *Haha*.

J: I love that, *haha*.

T: Um, I...so I don't know if that's answering that question or not, but I would say all the music like that has this, you know, that Eric Whitacre-ishness, the kids absolutely love that and when they love that I mean honestly they have to love it and they have to have a relationship with the music itself on their own before the spiritual can happen for any of

us and so there's a huge responsibility and a huge burden, *ha*, as the person picking out the literature because just because I buy in to it doesn't mean I can force everybody to buy into it, now in English class you all have to read whatever you have to read – you can't say "I'm not gonna read Romeo and Juliet" and in choir, sometimes that happens...

J: What do you look for when you're thinking I could get my kids to buy into this – I could get them to have some special significance?

T: Well I think the text, um, like for example "Even When He is Silent", the kids totally bought into that, they understand what it's like to feel like God was silent and whether they believe in God or not and we talked about that – I had them take a piece of paper, they could draw a pic they could write words – they could tell a story – or just write random thoughts and then I wanted them to share and then we all shared and there were tears and the music was always there after that, because we had already done the technical work, and then we were like , what are we doing, what are we doing there and sometimes it comes early, but sometimes it comes late and we just kinda have to...

J: So do you feel like the spiritual experience of these performances are tied to one special piece in the program? I mean, you spent some significant time to think about "Even when he is silent" and to talk about...

T: Right, and we couldn't actually do that with every piece.

J: Right

T: I think so sometimes yes, I would say that in my humble experience, *laughs*, I would say, I don't know that I've had an entire program that has been a spiritual experience –

yet – there’s been a specific song that is the glue. Sometimes it’s 2 or 3 over the course of a concert, but it’s not usually...or maybe it’s one per choir because I have 5 choirs, you know, so um, yeah and when that, I would say usually is one per choir for sure, but I haven’t had that whole program, I don’t know, I don’t know how to do that yet, I need to learn how to do that, *haha*.

J: Me too, *haha* you hit on this a little bit because the first question was about choral performance, and this is about rehearsal and you mentioned about the text in “Even when He is silent” and you mentioned there were tears so would you say that was a spiritual experience that you had?

T: Absolutely, absolutely – I would say that, I mean you know, I mean, I was letting them interpret the song as they saw fit because you know a public school situation, I wasn’t gonna tell them what to believe, but many of them share some really deep things and were very vulnerable and I think, I think you have to have that vulnerability before you can have the spiritual, but before you can have the vulnerable you have to have the trust with each other and it takes a lot to build that and as you start a new choir every year you know it’s ok, we’re starting again and some kids are still there, and they know, they know the drill, but some kids have never had that, they’re coming in and they don’t know how to handle that- I don’t know if I answered the question - I don’t remember the question.

J: A time in a choral *rehearsal* that you had a spiritual experience.

T: Ok yeah, I would say talking about it, but in the moment...

J: Were there any other moments that come to mind besides that one with “Even when He is silent”?

T: Oh, um, ... when you when you hear the chords ring and you know you just hear the chords just solid you know there are moments of that all the time, you know and um...

J: By solid you mean...

T: In tune, clear, perfectly balanced.

J: Technically accurate

T: Technically accurate, but there's also heart in there as well and you know it's, with teenagers, it's difficult to get them to touch that part of themselves because as open as they think they are, *laughs*, with their technology and everything, they're really not, and um, so um, so um, yeah, it's happened, it's why I love what I do, like, oh today was a great rehearsal everybody's in and um, I think that's exciting to get to that place and I *try* to be in 100% of the time, but it's I mean it's draining, *laughs*.

J: So do you think it's required for the *teacher* to be...

T: I think so

J: A propellant of that

T: I think so, I think the unity that happens when everybody's in, teachers, students, is a beautiful thing, and if I'm not in, how can I expect them to be in, so I do think the teacher needs to guide that or direct that in some way because, I have to lead by example by putting my personal self aside and going to the music to see what it has to offer us and if I can do that then I can ask them to do that, but If I'm not willing to put aside my own ego or.... My distractions of the day then I can't expect them to do that, but I am not saying I'm perfect at it because it's really hard for everybody to be 100% all the time, *laughs*, I don't know if that answers any of your questions.

J: You are you are – so now that we’ve talked about some of these experiences, what does the term spiritually mean to you in the context of choral music making?

T: I feel like it’s a connection between me and God, but...

J: You as the director?

T: Me, in the spiritual experiences, I can’t speak for the kids, I can I guess, but I feel like in my experience, I’ll start there anyway, my experience, I feel, it’s a feeling of being connected with God and I might say to my students, when you feel that, do you feel that it’s bigger than you are? You know, *laughs*, I can’t, I might not say this is Jesus, the Holy Spirit is in this room because they might not be receptive to that, but I think that’s, that’s what I am describing, is just knowing that, knowing, that I’m connecting with God and I’m appreciating His beauty and I feel His pleasure to quote...Eric...whatever his name is...*laughs*...

J: Parker Palmer gives a definition of spirituality as “spirituality is the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than our own egos.” Do you agree with that definition?

T: Yes

J: And for you there’s definitely more specificity

T: Right

J: Toward religion, toward God?

T: Right

J: What about for your students?

T: Would my students agree with that – I would believe they would agree with that – say it again –

J: “Spirituality is the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than our own egos.”

T: Yes, I would say my students would agree with that, even my atheist students, who don’t wanna acknowledge that, I think they would have a hard time...

J: You talked about “something bigger than themselves”.

T: Right, right

J: Um, you’ve touched on this a little bit – what ethical or maybe culturally responsive issues should be addressed when considering implementing these spiritual elements in your music making?

T: Well, I am a Christian and I hold to a Christian worldview and I have a child and I understand that not everybody does have that same viewpoint, however, if my daughter is in a classroom with a choir director who is an opposite religion Christian worldview – say Hindu or something...paganism...or something I would not want them, who disagree with me, to tell my daughter how to feel or believe, so as I treat others how I want to be treated – I will not do that in the classroom – I’m willing to share my experiences on a one-on-one basis and would do that if asked of me but I’m not going to preach for lack of a better word – on specifics in the classroom because of that. I would not want the opposite to be done to my daughter – does that makes sense?

J: Sure

T: So ethically, I feel that we can talk about spirituality because I think human beings have spirits and we can talk about that and I think we can talk about that with freedom and I think when we get specific or insist on someone else believing what we believe then we're going to come to a place of crossing that line, you know, um, as a Christian I do believe mine is the best and the only way, but I also respect other people's views as their views and I would hope that they would want to know more about what I truly believe – does that make sense?

J: Sure - Do you actually use the term *spirituality* or *spiritual* in your classroom?

T: I don't think so....like...just thinking back to the...I mean the big one is "Even when He is silent," I think we went as deep as we have ever gone with that and we did not use that, I means we talked about, it's bigger than us and thinking about hope and words like that without using the word spiritual and um, because I think, I don't know, it might be crossing, it might be getting into treading into some water that might be perceived as dangerous, *laughs*, and so um, I did talk a lot about hope and that you are never alone and I would use things that relate to my spiritual walk as an encouragement to my students without telling them where that's coming from. Does that make sense?

J: Yeah

T: So um, and if you know, and if, and I have had the opportunity to talk to students one-on-one after class – that my hope is in Jesus Christ, you know and I know that I will see my family again or whatever it is – or I have the strength because of Him to go through this horrible thing or had strength in this situation that I had in my life and I've been able

to share that with my students on a one-on-one basis when I say would you like to hear...you know I make sure I have that open door before I run it down...

J: Right...

T: And so in the classroom I think as a teacher you have responsibility...I mean we are employed by the state and so um, it's not the state's job to tell you what to believe and in that case I have to be a representative of that and not tell people what to believe...and then but as a Christian I can't take who I am from who I am and so it's going to come out and the kids know, you don't have to tell, they all know, and I didn't tell them, *laughs* ... so ... *laughs*.

J: Cool - Ok we've mentioned several types of experiences that you've had, um, that we described this spirituality so specifically we talked about "Cloths of Heaven" and "Even when He is silent" and discussing the meaning of the song, are there any other experiences that come to mind, in your choral teaching that you felt like, man, that was a spiritual experience I had?

T: There was a song, it was with my women's choirs, I don't know maybe Amy Bernon song, I think that's her name, it's been a while, about a pebble on the water and how kind words, just as a pebble has ripples, kind words have ripples, it was kinda schmaltzy, you know, beginning choir-ish, and um, but, just talking to my students about being kind, I mean these are kind of spiritual things, you know it isn't this kind of transcendent...but there's that connection we make with each other when the kids get the text, they *get* it, and then you feel like they're communicating that back to you, um, during *Ritmo* with 4 hand piano and percussion.

J: That's contrasting with anything else we've talked about

T: Yes, I wanted to tell you that, just doing that and getting all the precision, I mean it was just exhilarating and so yeah, like I mean music, can evoke an emotion and so like "Even when he is silent" is very spiritual emotion that is, very easy to see that as a spiritual thing, but it can happen with up tempo pieces too, but it's the same thing, it's when the music is prepared and it's ready and it's happening and the kids are feeling, "AAAHHHH" and you know we just know that it's bigger than...we're all giving our best and it's just a beautiful thing.

J: Yeah, cool...what are some practical ways then as we've talked about this and you start to collect your thoughts about all of this, what are some practical ways that you integrate spiritual elements into your music making?

T: Well I think the most obvious is talking about the text and having the students connect with the text, um, in whatever way they want to connect with it, whether it's religious or not religious um, singing "That ever I saw," you know as they think about whoever they're thinking about and who that person is to them and um and they're just standing there crying because it's so beautiful, know you know that something touched there, um, so I would say connecting with text, um, I think we have to lay the framework of teamwork because we all have to come into, we have to be on the same page together, if we are not on the same page, it's not gonna happen, and so the fact that you can get 40 or 50 or 60 teenagers and then 1 adult or 2 adults on the same page is...*laughs*...

J: Yes, I agree

T: Because that's huge, so I think laying the groundwork and the framework of acceptance and kindness and hard work and excellence and then laying the groundwork of the text and the technical aspects then we can take it to the next level, ok, we've got the technique, let's make music, let's make this something that people with cry over, something that we can connect with and maybe I can start to say, there's something spiritual that's beyond what we can explain, I think I can say that and it wouldn't offend anybody.

J: Right - Um, you're not communicating a specific dogma or belief system, right, what should I have asked you today that I didn't?

T: *Laughs* – I don't know – I don't know that you didn't ask me anything, anything that I want to share that I haven't shared...I think it's good to think about this, I think, that's why I come to MCDA, I feel like MCDA is a spiritual experience for me, *laughs*, it helps to get the shot I need to teach the next year and reminds me the calling I have to do this and the music that we share and that when the drama in the classroom and we have to have a pow-wow and we have to lay our feelings on the floor and have a bonfire...*laughs*

J: *Haha*

T: Um, or whatever happens in the year or they hate whatever song I picked out and spent thousands of dollars to buy, *laughs*, and you're like you're gonna sing it, dog-gone it! Um, it's just wonderful because you are around so many people who are like minded, who are called to the same thing as you are and maybe for whom it's a spiritual calling for that as well as me and it's I mean, and to hear the choir directors sing the doxology

for dinner day day after tomorrow that's my favorite thing in the world and it's just a taste of heaven, so, I don't know –

J: Thank you.

APPENDIX C
LITERATURE LIST

Literature List

The following is list of choral pieces that were mentioned or referenced by the participants during the interview process while they were describing spiritual experiences.

Agnus Dei – Samuel Barber
Amazing Grace – Jackson Berkey
Ave Maria – Franz Biebl
Ave verum corpus – William Byrd
The Awakening – Joseph Martin
The Cloths of Heaven – Rene Clausen
Cum Essem Parvulus – Richard Burchard
Dies Irae – W.A. Mozart, arr. Liebergen
Earth Song, Frank Ticheli
Echo – Tom Shelton
Elijah Rock – arr. Moses Hogan
Even When He Is Silent – Kim Andre Arnesen
Frobisher Bay – Braeden Ayres
He Never Failed Me Yet – Ray Robinson
I Am Not Yours – David Childs
I Loved All Lovely Things – Andrea Ramsey
I Sing Because I'm Happy – Rollo Dilworth
In the Sweet By and By – arr. Daniel J. Hall
Indodana – Michael Barrett and Ralf Schmitt
Lullaby – Daniel Elder
Majesty and Glory of Your Name – Tom Fettke
Music in My Mother's House – Stuart Stotts, arr. J. David Moore
Remember (No. 2 from Two Rossetti Songs) – Stephen Chatman
Ritmo – Dan Davison
The Road Home – Stephen Paulus
Sing Me to Heaven – Daniel Gawthrop
Sleep – Eric Whitacre
Sto mi e milo – Daniel Hughes
Take Me Home – arr. Roger Emerson
Tell My Father – Andrea Ramsey
That Ever I Saw – Darmon Meader
That Which Remains – Andrea Ramsey

Vita

Jordan Cox was born April 3, 1987 in Cape Girardeau County, Missouri. After graduating in 2005 from Jackson High School in Jackson, Missouri, he studied vocal music education and music ministry at Missouri Baptist University in St. Louis, Missouri graduating with a B.M.E. with K-12 vocal certification and a minor in music ministry in 2010. Jordan taught in the Jackson R2 School District from 2010-2012 directing choirs and teaching general music courses for grades six through twelve. During that time, he also attended Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary online earning his Master of Arts in Religion with an emphasis in Worship Studies. From 2012-2015 he served as Director of Vocal Music and Department Chair at Cape Central High School directing numerous choirs and musicals and taught AP Music Theory and Music Appreciation. In 2015, Mr. Cox began his doctoral studies at the University of Missouri and served as a graduate instructor in music education. Also in 2015, he began teaching as an adjunct instructor at Missouri Baptist University directing their premier contemporary worship ensemble, Spirit Wing, and in 2016 became an Assistant Professor of Music and Director of Choral Activities, specializing in music education and worship leadership courses. Over the last 15 years he has also served co-vocationally as a worship pastor in several churches in Jackson and St. Louis. He is married to Kasey Cox and they have two children, Noah and Jobi.