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Preparing a Surpassing Moral Force: The Dynamics of the Brigham University Singers

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PREPARING A SURPASSING MORAL FORCE: THE DYNAMICS OF THE
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY SINGERS

by

David Ray Burton

Presented to the faculty of
Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

Master of Science

Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology
Brigham Young University

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GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Of a Thesis submitted by

David Ray Burton

This project has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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Date

Ronald Staheli

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of this candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of David R. Burton in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable to fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

PREPARING A SURPASSING MORAL FORCE: THE DYNAMICS OF THE
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This is a qualitative study that takes a close look at an exemplary performing group, the Brigham Young University Singers. Using the methods of phenomenology and naturalistic inquiry, the author presents a rich, thick description of the daily activities and unique culture of the choir. Both strengths and weaknesses of the group are identified so that others can have an authentic, vicarious experience through reading the Singers' story. The author also identifies seven principles that contribute to the success of the group so that other choral conductors can adapt them to their own unique situations. Educators in all disciplines can benefit from a deeper understanding of this model community of learners.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

John Paul Johnson, director of choral activities at the University of Kansas, recently attended a performance of the Brigham Young University Singers and said:

In all of my 50 years of life, I cannot remember being as fed and blessed as I was at your performance. Your concert has challenged me to find the words to describe what it has meant to me. Your voices are beautiful yet you are humble and disciplined. You have such sense of ensemble. You are respectful of each other and the music. You are sincere, profound, meaningful and worshipful. In short, it was an intimate gift that I felt unworthy to have been invited to share, but glad to be a part of. I've been blessed to hear many fine concerts in my life. Easily this has been the best my mind, ears, heart, soul and faith have witnessed. (personal communication, November, 2004)

Dr. Johnson was not the only one who felt this way. Another admirer who attended the same performance, Matt Faerber, from the University of Wisconsin, described his experience.

When the BYU Singers came out on the stage, their very countenances shone with light. This was the most powerful beginning to a concert that I have ever experienced, and they had not yet sung a note. Then the music! It was transcendent. I couldn't take my eyes off Dr. Staheli or the choir. The music was living, breathing, flowing, mournful, ecstatic, awesome, wrenching, peaceful, technically brilliant but so moving that the difficulty of the music was swallowed up by its intense expression. The text and the musical phrases were living and vibrant—poetry, musical poetry. What an experience to watch and feel. Thank you for sharing your music. (personal communication, December, 2004)

After the performance and throughout the remainder of the convention, Dr. Staheli was approached by several people with similar compliments. He accepted each gracefully, taking little responsibility for himself and giving the credit to the wonderful young people who did the actual singing. “I just wave my arms and cheer them on” he would demurely respond.

Problem

On more than one occasion, an inquisitive conductor would press Dr. Staheli further. “How can I get my choir to express emotion the way yours does? My singers are talented, but they lack a certain spark. What is the key to your success?”

Dr. Staheli would answer,

The only way to fully answer your question is for you to come to Provo with us. You would need to know not only how we rehearse, but how we live our lives—what we care passionately about and how we treat each other. You would need to know something about our deep religious convictions. You would need to know some of our weaknesses and what we do to overcome them. You would not be able to replicate exactly what goes on, but you would see that your people are not that different from ours. With what you learned from us, you could get them to express their voice in a truly beautiful way that is unique to them. (personal communication, December, 2004)

But very few people would be able to do as Dr. Staheli suggests—mostly because of other commitments and lack of the necessary time. Even if a visiting conductor had a week with the Singers, the full scope of their story would not yet be grasped.

Purpose

This thesis is an attempt to tell the story of the BYU Singers in a rich, holistic way so that others may learn from the experiences of participants in as direct a way as possible. It is also a summary of seven guiding principles drawn from those experiences that can be adapted to the needs of other choirs in different settings. In essence, it is an attempt to make Dr. Staheli’s suggestion a reality by allowing others to vicariously live the BYU Singers through reading their story. It is a qualitative study utilizing the concepts and methods of phenomenology and naturalistic inquiry.

In addition to being a student of this branch of educational research, I am a former member of the BYU Singers. Having sung with the choir for two years I have been exposed to

the process of taking 43 or so individual voices and transforming them into one unified sound. It is an intense process and is multi-faceted. I hope to be able to expose the qualities of preparation that contribute to this process.

Dr. Ronald Staheli, director of the choir, explains the process in a mission statement he calls “the ideal review we hope to receive some day:”

The power of the BYU Singers’ performance derives from a purpose so pure, so profound, so focused, that they consciously risk total commitment. They personify a tact—the consequence of thorough preparation, and a confidence resulting from faith and trust in each other and in Heavenly Power. Such tact and confidence allow the singers to perform their art at a tempo sufficiently serene to allow an inherent, glorious beauty to emerge eloquently. Such beauty becomes a statement so astonishingly precise and assertive as to lend their every action a surpassing moral force. (personal communication, September, 2003)

This statement shows the progression from preparation to performance to achieving a surpassing moral force. I believe the moral force is what left such an impact on those at the convention. Such a moral force is worthy of emulation. Choirs cannot just reproduce a carbon copy and try to imitate all that they do. But they can learn to identify the qualities that make the BYU Singers effective. These qualities can be used to give other directors ideas they can adapt to their unique situations based on principles that work. In pursuing this goal of presenting these principles, I want to get to the heart of the experience, to the core of what is really going on.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Although much has been written on how to train choir conductors, I have found nothing that presents a complete look into the dynamics of a specific choir. Dr. Staheli explained that a study exposing the specific qualities of a single exemplary group would benefit the development of other choirs as well as help the BYU Singers reach their full potential.

There is a vast collection of literature available to those who wish to learn how to lead and organize a choir. Green (1969) takes the stance that “the art of conducting is the highest, most complete synthesis of all facets of the musical activity” (p. 2). Agreeing with this, Moe (1972) presents each of those individual facets he feels are necessary to synthesize in choral conducting in outline form. This outline organizes such choral facets as *rhythm, tempo, phrasing, text, diction, melody, harmony and tone*.

Moe’s book (1972) states that it is possible to synthesize these choral concepts and then bring life’s experience and understanding into giving the music life. He shows how this could be done by expounding on each of these points in greater detail, then ending with a sample of pre-concert remarks given to University of Iowa choral ensembles. In this passage, Moe draws on examples from literature to illustrate what he refers to as “meaning of spirit.” He urges the singers to “sharpen their capacity for ecstatic experience” (p. 30). If the singers are to provide such an experience for the audience then they themselves must have a heightened awareness of that quality. This is something in which Dr. Staheli believes quite strongly. Throughout the rehearsal and touring process he tries to provide experiences where the Singers can sharpen that capacity. Moe’s remarks are similar to what Dr. Staheli gives

before concerts and inspired me to include some of Dr. Staheli's pre-concert "pep talks" at the end of this study (See Appendix D: Sample Staheli pep talks).

Lewis Gordon (1989) takes these concepts a little further than Moe. His book, *Choral Director's Rehearsal and Performance Guide*, is meant to be a complete guide to anyone beginning a choral program or seeking to improve an existing one. It includes not only the rudiments of conducting, but chapters on surveying the choral program, planning and managing the business aspects of a program such as public relations and fundraising. It also treats the performance aspect as well as how to work with individual singers and motivate an ensemble. There is a rehearsal guide that discusses how to polish and interpret music and a planning guide that gives suggestions on everything from choosing the right outfits to wear to writing up a printed program. It concludes with a section on evaluating choral programs and its participants. Here the author treats the question, "how do you measure success in choral singing?" He suggests that there are many more measures than simply "the choir sounds good."

Gordon's thorough guide (1989) also includes brief examples throughout the text. They serve to set up a problem in context as well as exemplify the applied principle. But these examples are disparate from one another. One long example, a story from which readers could draw the conclusions themselves, a cohesive example that is multifaceted and incorporates these principles is needed.

Archibald Davison (1940) exemplified this need for learning from the example of a story by presenting concepts as absolutes that define the role of the conductor. While these concepts may very well be absolutes and highly applicable, they would be more useful with a

story showing how they could be used. Here are some quotations that give a flavor for the tone of the text:

Consistently intelligible pronunciation is of the first importance because without it the listener has no clue to the animating source of the music. (p. 48)

The best practice in dealing with 's' as with other consonants, is to attach the letter to the second of two syllables even when it belongs to the first. (p. 54)

The conductor's task is to bring every singer into conformity with his idea of what good tone is. Whatever the ideal may be, homogeneity must be its watchword, for without homogeneous tone there cannot be effective singing. (p. 57)

More valuable learning will take place from allowing readers to draw their own conclusions by reading rich examples and then guiding them to principles backed by those examples rather than simply relying on authoritative statements.

Decker and Herford (1973) give a broad perspective from five different conductors. They emphasize the importance of taking a musicological approach by incorporating a deeper understanding of meaning of text and music from literary and historical perspectives. They also depict the responsibility of the conductor:

As conductor-teachers and as custodians of the choral art, we are responsible for developing the taste and musical sensitivity of our singers, our audiences and our congregations. Art feeds the soul and stimulates a search for beauty in all things. An effective choral program at any level will contain the following ingredients: (1) A conductor with high ideals who elicits the very best from his singers. (2) Carefully selected music that combines poetry and music at the highest levels of sensitivity. (3) An understanding of and enthusiasm for the music. (4) An emphasis on the communicative powers inherent in the choral art. (p. 3)

Angell (1978) encourages his singers to be full of life and expressive rather than simply singing the music. He teaches that there are four levels or stages of learning as singers strive for perfection in choral singing. He gives suggestions to help choirs move from level one learning, to incorporate all four aspects. His levels are as follows:

1. Basic essentials of music reading—do re mi etc., rhythm, pitch, forming syllables etc.
2. Singing with authority—confidence assured by adherence to scientifically proven proper methods of singing.
3. Finding musical meaning—expressive phrasing that leads beyond the mechanical.
4. Projecting the message to the listener—transform spoken word to living substance.(p. 7)

In reviewing this literature and consulting with Dr. Ronald Staheli we have concluded that a major element missing from the literature is a case study that shows in depth examples of these principles in action. He was very excited to see this study done because, “there has never been a project like this before” (personal communication, May, 2005). According to Staheli, he knows of no study that brings out the dynamics of a particular vocal ensemble. There are several books and articles that teach how to conduct and organize a choir (Ehmann, 1968; Boyd, 1970; Heffernan, 1982; Stanton, 1971) but not a case study that exposes the interactions of a group dynamic. Dr. Staheli agreed that a case study of these principles in action would be very useful. It would give power to the authors' message by putting a living seal on their writings.

Chapter 3: Method

The object of educational connoisseurship is to pay close attention to a subject and be exposed long enough to it that you are aware of subtle nuances and the interaction of certain characteristics (Eisner, 1991). You then become a credible authority on the subject.

To be a connoisseur of wine is to be intimately familiar with many details of the wine—the barrel it came from, the season in which the grapes were harvested, the year, the country the climate, the aging process etc. To be a connoisseur of music is to be very knowledgeable of the interactions of characteristics of dynamic, blend etc. It is my task to expose those qualities of the BYU Singers, a performing group I have judged through connoisseurship to be worthy of emulation.

Procedures

The following is a discussion of how I conducted this study through data collection, data analysis and reporting results.

Data Collection

The four main data collection activities used for this project were observation of rehearsals, interviews with individual Singers and others involved with the process, analysis of documents such as training materials, feedback in emails and personal journal entries, and protocol writing based on group email forums.

Observations of the rehearsal process were carefully recorded in a series of descriptive and reflective field notes. I have recorded physical settings, direct quotations, personal thoughts, reflections and interpretations. Since I was participating in the choir when I gathered the information, I relied heavily on audio and video recordings of rehearsals. I kept a small

card in my pocket where during each rehearsal I could quickly jot down a phrase that would help guide reflection afterward. I reflected on and wrote about my experiences immediately following each rehearsal, then reviewed the tapes for in depth information.

The interviews helped me compare what I observed with what others were experiencing. I conducted these interviews face to face with both current and former members of the choir. I formulated interview questions based on what I felt were key aspects I observed from my own experience (See Appendix A: Interview Questions). But I did not limit myself to the questions I drafted at the outset of the project. This was a dynamic process. For example, if I asked one person a broad question such as, “what makes a good conductor?” and that person responded, “someone who can run a productive rehearsal,” then I would ask, “what makes a productive rehearsal?” I would start at that point with the next person and ask things like, “What things does Dr. Staheli do to have a productive rehearsal?” and then, “How do the choir members respond to (a specific technique)?” So the questions would get progressively specific and focused. Sometimes they were not even questions at all. I might simply say, “tell me about the workshop we just had.” From there, new topics and questions could be formulated. This became a flowing process of specifying, then backing up to make sure we were on the right path.

Another important activity was document analysis. I obtained several documents from Dr. Staheli that gave me insights into how others both outside and within experienced the choir. Correspondence with other directors, notes from presentations, newspaper reviews, articles written about the choir and compiled histories from past years etc. gave me further insight. Official choir documents such as the written mission statement audition information sheet and tour participant guidebook were also very helpful.

I also greatly benefited from a technique called protocol writing (van Manen, 1990). I had an e-mail question topic of the week where choir members responded to questions like “What's something you learned from the text of one of our pieces this week?” or “what do you do to prepare yourself for rehearsal each day?”

A detailed audit trail of each of these four processes used was kept so that others will be able to follow how I reached my conclusions (See Appendix B: Sample from Audit Trail).

Data Analysis

Eisner's educational connoisseurship helped me identify themes from which I developed the “plot” of my study. He says that to be a connoisseur one must achieve a level of awareness that goes beyond what is happening on the surface (Eisner, 1991). By examining multiple sources of data and taking notes on them I was able to gain a basic understanding of what was going on. But deeper insights came when I engaged in an intense reflective process as I reviewed my notes and expanded on them. The writing process helped me make sense of my ideas as I began to see themes emerge. I would group them into categories such as, “traits of a good conductor” or “traits of good singers.” Using my word processing program, I would cut and paste chunks of text and organize them into these categories.

Spradley's (1980) domain and taxonomic analysis helped give my themes structure. I organized the themes using these ideas and developed them with further analysis.

I organized a taxonomy from these themes as information came in from data collection activities. Each level of that taxonomy was analyzed with componential analysis. Each of these themes and domains generated sub themes and sub domains.

Taxonomical analysis. I will give an example to illustrate my taxonomical analysis.

While observing the choir rehearse I identified five aspects or themes that explain why they are successful: Hard Work and Persistence, Musical Talent and Technical Expertise, Spiritual Insight, Love and Friendship and Professionalism. I created a taxonomy with these themes and listed their components or sub themes with each:

1. Hard Work and Persistence
 - They come prepared knowing their music.
 - They stay standing and focused throughout the rehearsal.
 - They have a pencil and actively mark notes given by the director.
 - They listen intently and respond well to direction.
2. Musical Talent and Technical Expertise
 - They sound beautiful and blend well together.
 - They sight-read difficult music with great proficiency.
3. Spiritual Insight
 - The director takes time to recognize spiritual messages in the text.
 - The director uses insights from a shared belief to motivate the choir.
 - They share their spiritual feelings with each other in formal and casual settings.
4. Love and Friendship
 - There is a general feeling of camaraderie and respect.
 - The director tells the choir of his love for each individual openly and refers to them as friends.
 - They express their fondness for each other with appropriate physical gestures such as hugs, high fives, pats on the shoulder etc.
5. Professionalism
 - They arrive on time and seldom miss rehearsals.
 - They are well behaved and do not get rowdy or talkative.
 - They maintain high standards of dress and grooming.

I expanded upon this taxonomy by dividing each component into further sub-components. Here is an example from the component “Spiritual Insight:”

They share their spiritual feelings with each other in formal and casual settings etc.

- Formal settings
 - Weekly devotionals
 - Firesides
 - Prayers
- Informal settings

- Open discussions about music
- In outside interaction
- As topics of casual conversation

I then formulated interview questions from these specific areas such as:

“Why do we have weekly devotionals in choir?”

“How does the prayer help prepare you for the rehearsal?”

“What kind of things do the Singers talk about when they are away from rehearsal?”

Iterative process. Someone responded to the first question, “Devotionals help us to increase our spirituality. When we are more receptive to the spirit, we will be better prepared to communicate the meaning of the pieces we sing which are spiritual in nature.” Using that response I asked further questions to understand how spirituality is linked with good singing and so forth.

I also examined the written mission statement which each choir member receives a copy of which states, “They personify... a confidence resulting from faith and trust in each other and in Heavenly Power.” That told me that the individual interviewed was in harmony with the mission of the choir and that it was understood and accepted that confidence, a vital key to beautiful singing, can be strengthened in the weekly devotional. It is an activity that helps Singers gain trust in each other as the person giving the devotional shares sacred thoughts deep within his or her soul. It also helps them gain trust in Heavenly Power as they see examples of that power working in the life of the individual giving the devotional.

Rationale for qualitative research. The beauty of this type of qualitative analysis is that it is generative rather than reductive. If I had taken a more traditional approach to the question, “What is the key to the success of the BYU Singers?” I would have worked to eliminate all

other possibilities until I came to the correct conclusion. This would work well in a question regarding natural science. The answer to, “What is the key to the success of the vulcanization of rubber?” could be understood through experimentation where multiple possibilities are eliminated until one discovered the precise temperature and conditions required to make the physical transformation.

But the question of the BYU Singers is so multifaceted and dynamic that a qualitative approach seemed necessary. Answering one question did not eliminate options but rather led to more questions. At first the study went in several directions from what I originally proposed. I enjoyed the freedom to explore many different ideas as they emerged.

At first I thought understanding the rehearsal process was the key to understanding the effectiveness of the choir so that is where I started. I then discovered through collecting data that there were many outside factors that contributed to the success of the group. I even explored the definition of success in terms of choral singing and found there were many different ideas being considered. The possibilities and categories began to seem endless. I came to the conclusion that I could never adequately describe every facet of the BYU Singers experience.

It was quite exciting to have a rich and diverse palate of colorful ideas to paint with on the canvas of this educational portrait. But there finally came a point when I put restraints on this explorative process and attempted to make sense of a limited amount of questions. I keyed in on seven guiding principles and sought to explain them sufficiently so that others could use them to become better singers and choral directors. I also felt people would understand those principles better in context by first spending time with the group vicariously through reading their story.

Reporting

I present the analysis of my data in the form of a story that is the Singers' experience in the chapters that follow. Throughout the chapter, block quotes with citations indicate a direct quote. Block quotes without citations indicate either a paraphrasing or combining of quotations from actual sources. Long passages of quotes not appearing in blocks, but separated by headings, are an indication of a blending of multiple sources that combine to represent the experience of the group.

Chapter 4 tells the story in four segments that are rich with quotations and paraphrases of direct experiences with the choir. The first section is the story of two Singers who are composite characters based on actual Singers. They tell what they experienced joining the choir and beginning the first few weeks of class. It also includes Dr. Staheli's perspective as he prepares over the summer, auditions his choir and begins a new school year. In this section, as in all other sections, I have changed the names of the people depicted in the story (with the exception of Dr. Staheli) to preserve anonymity.

The second section is "A Day in the Life of a Singers rehearsal." I chose to present this information in a narrative style that shows all the observations and paraphrased quotations occurring in only one day, although they actually occurred over the course of many days. I have taken some license in consolidating these events for the sake of flow. Because I was a member of the choir at the time, my first-person voice is present in the description.

The third section is "A Day in the Life of Singers on tour." Again I have compiled events into one day although these experiences occurred over the course of a five-week tour. There are some paraphrased examples of devotionals and other presentations. My voice is also present.

The final section includes valuable information gained from a trip to Rexburg, Idaho where three past members of BYU Singers now work as directors at BYU-Idaho. They shared valuable insights into what they learned from their participation in BYU Singers and how they have adapted their experiences to new situations. The actual names of these conductors are used with their consent.

A valuable contribution of qualitative research is that, rather than testing existing theory, it generates new knowledge. From my research I have come up with seven guiding principles that should help any choir conductor increase his or her effectiveness in organizing, motivating and leading a choir. These are presented in Chapter 5.

The final section is a group of appendices. These include more detailed information that would distract from the flow of the narrative, but will give deeper insight to what was presented in chapters four and five. They are referred to in various places throughout the text.

There are a few books and articles that show how information gained from qualitative research can be presented as a story to portray a rich description of a situation. I used these sources as inspiration in telling this story.

A dissertation by Jared Anderson (2000) is such a study. He interviewed Dale Warland, conductor of the famed “Dale Warland Singers.” He tells the story of how a renowned professor goes about selecting music for his choir. The writing is insightful.

Covey (1989) took his observations from years of experiences and developed seven principles or “habits” of effective people. He goes in to detail about each and uses examples from his lives and his observations of others to illustrate the point.

Dixon (1995) researched her own piano students to learn how to best adapt to their individual needs.

Kempton (2002) explored the choirs at BYU-Idaho. His qualitative study portrayed the sense of family and mission in a music department very similar to BYU. He found a group of people that were not only dedicated to music, but to finding greater meaning and purpose in their lives.

Standards for Qualitative research

Lincoln and Guba (1989) proposed four standards for judging qualitative studies: credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. As this thesis neared completion, I went through each standard as a kind of checklist to make sure it could be held up to scrutiny. In the following section I will discuss how my thesis adheres to each standard.

Credibility

In order to meet this standard, my study must be believable to critical readers and be approved by the persons who provided the information gathered during the study (Williams, 1992, ch. 5, para. 6).

Prolonged engagement. Researchers must be “present in the site where the study is being done long enough to build trust with the participants, experience the breadth of variation and to overcome distortions due to the presence of researchers in the site” (Williams, 1992, ch. 5, para. 7).

I have sung in the choir for two years and have spent almost two months on tour with them. They are my friends and respect me as a valued member of the ensemble. This makes me a participant observer that has become a connoisseur of the nuances of the choir. It has given me the breadth of experience needed.

Persistent observation. To be persistent, the inquirer must explore details of the phenomena under study to a deep enough level that he or she can decide what is important and what is irrelevant and focus on the most relevant aspects.” Persistent observation “insures depth of experience and understanding” (Williams, 1992, ch. 5, para. 8).

Over the course of the two years I have sung with the choir I have formulated many ideas about the relevant aspects of the group and have discussed them with many others. In over a year of formal research, I continued to dive deeper into what was really going on in the group. In checking my ideas with other choir members I have discovered which issues are relevant and which should be discarded.

Triangulation. Information must be verified using multiple sources of information (including the literature) and multiple methods of data collection (Williams, 1992, ch. 5, para. 9). I have triangulated with observation notes, interviews with many different students, reading of documents and written responses to my email forum queries. The literature I reviewed seems to suggest a need for the information I have gathered.

Peer debriefing. The inquirer meets with “a disinterested peer (someone who is willing to ask probing questions but who is not a participant in the setting where the study is being conducted) in which the peer can question the methods, emerging conclusions, biases” and other aspects of the study (Williams, 1992, ch. 5, para. 10).

Dr. Williams was my chief debriefer. We met many times throughout the course of this study to make sure things were on the right track.

Negative case analysis. In order to refine conclusions and account for all known cases after developing a hypothesis, the inquirer should search for all instances which contradict that

hypothesis and then refine the hypothesis until it fits all known cases (Williams, 1992, ch. 5, para. 11).

This type of analysis was done during debriefing periods, during reflection and throughout the writing process. Throughout the process the theme kept recurring that this is a perfect choir that everyone should attempt to be like. Applying negative case analysis, I decided to start asking people what is not perfect about the choir. As a result of the responses I got, I adapted my thinking such that I now feel it is not perfect but still worthy of emulation. Valuable insights were gained by this line of thinking. I was able to include sections that include warnings of possible pitfalls based on the negative experiences of the BYU Singers.

Member checks. Various parts of the study such as recorded data, interpretations and reports by the inquirer should be reviewed by those who participated in the study.

During the valuable hours on the bus together on the choir tour and over the course of the past year I have checked my conclusions with many I have interviewed, especially Dr. Staheli. Several people have looked over my notes to see if it reflects their experience. I have made corrections where there have been inaccuracies so that now this study represents the majority of the Singers' experience. Sandefur Schmidt, a founding member of the BYU Singers and an active volunteer with the group looked over the manuscript multiple times and gave many helpful suggestions.

Emic or folk perspectives. One of the most important characteristics of a qualitative study is that the perspectives given reflect the perspectives held by the people being studied (Williams, 1992, ch. 5, para. 13).

My perspective is very much like that of my fellow choir members so I feel I reflect their perspective. Through member checking I learned that our perspectives indeed were very

much the same. It was important, however, that I reflect the perspective of an outsider coming to observe the choir. I have attempted to bring the two together by being true to what the choir members are experiencing and interpreting the experience in a way that would be understandable to an outsider.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the applicability of findings in one research context to other settings where the information may be used (Williams, 1992, ch. 5, para. 15). While the question of whether a qualitative study is transferable is more up to the reader than the inquirer, the inquirer can conduct his or her study in such a way that it allows the reader to make connections to his own experience.

The use of *thick description* (detailed descriptions of events) concerning the subject being studied was used to allow readers to determine if circumstances are similar enough to their own circumstances for the results of this study to be transferable to their settings (Geertz, 1973).

The section entitled “Three Past Members of BYU Singers, now working as choir directors themselves, speak about their experience with the choir,” shows how this information is transferable. These directors have transferred the lessons they learned as members of the BYU Singers and have adapted them to their new situations to improve their own choirs.

Dependability

Another standard for determining the strength of a qualitative study is that of dependability. This refers to the consistency or stability of the inquiry processes over time (Lincoln Y& Guba, 1989). Dependability is determined by looking at the logic and the care

with which the study was conducted. How and for what reasons were the interviews conducted? Why did the inquirer follow this line of reasoning?

An audit trail and field notes were kept so anyone can conduct an audit of the study and determine its dependability. (See Appendix B: Sample from the audit trail) It shows in detail how I came to certain conclusions and what evidence led me to ask certain questions.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the quality of the results, “how well they are supported by informants (members) who are involved in the study,” and by events, such as the literature or the findings of other inquirers, which are independent of the inquirer (Williams, 1992, ch.5, para. 18). As in the standard of dependability, Confirmability of this study was supported by a well-kept audit trail. If the audit trail supports the interpretations of data and there is internal coherence, then the study is more likely to be confirmable.

Chapter 4: The Story of the BYU Singers

Part 1: Beginning a Successful Year

Lisa and Daniel are two composite characters that represent the feelings of many of the people I interviewed. Though they are not real, their respective stories are based on actual feelings expressed, events observed, documents reviewed, and quotes really are statements of people interviewed. Lisa is a young sophomore who is excited to make it in to the choir. Daniel is a graduate student who is experienced in choral singing, but discovers what a unique opportunity it is to be a part of this choir for the first time.

The first section will trade off back and forth from the voice of Lisa to that of Daniel as they progress through the beginning events of the year. In the next section Dr. Staheli will explain his logic behind these events and practices, giving the reasons he does them and what he hopes to achieve in the process.

I hope to convey a sense of the diverse backgrounds people bring to the choir and how the events of the first few weeks of rehearsals help to mold the individuals into a unified ensemble.

Two Singers Reflect on Getting Into the Choir

Lisa and Daniel are a composite reflection of most of the members of the BYU Singers. They will trade off telling their story, which I have paraphrased in this section, so that the reader will see the progression from their background experience to auditioning for the choir, their first day of rehearsal and their participation in the choir retreat.

Lisa. I have always loved to sing. My happiest memories of my childhood had to do with music. My six brothers and sisters and I would gather around the piano and sing while Mom played. We would sing songs out of the hymn book or show tunes.

The neighborhood kids loved to come over to our house because it was a cheery place. I think that was because Mom was always singing. I felt a sense of security as a child when I saw my parents doing dishes together and singing Rodgers and Hammerstein love duets. And of course there was the occasional cheesy Air Supply tune. We knew they were in love when we heard “You light up my life” accompanied by an orchestra of running water and banging pots!

My parents encouraged me in my musical talents. They paid for piano lessons and then later voice lessons. Dad loved to show off his musical family. Whenever we had guests over he would have us put on a little show. My sister would play the piano and several of us would sing. I guess we were always putting on little concerts.

I sang in the middle school and high school choirs and soon grew very confident in my ability to quickly learn harmony parts and blend with the other members of the choir. By the time I was a senior my choir director even had me conduct a few pieces.

Most of my older siblings attended BYU and sang in several different choirs there. I remember attending a Christmas concert with all of the choirs and combined orchestra. What an amazing experience! It sent chills up my spine! I knew right then that I had to be a part of that choir!

Daniel. I had heard about BYU Singers when I was at school at USU. Our institute choir director was in BYU Singers when he was at BYU and we had done several arrangements by Ronald Staheli in that choir. I knew very little; all I knew was it

was the top choir at BYU and it was supposed to be very good. So that kind of sparked the interest.

Then when I first came down to Provo I looked at the BYU website. I thought about auditioning for the Young Ambassadors or BYU Singers. I listened to clips of both of them on the website. The Young Ambassadors looked fun, but then I went to the BYU Singers website and they had a video clip showing part of a rehearsal with Dr. Staheli and I watched just part of that rehearsal that was in that clip and the decision was pretty much made at that point.

The sound was awesome. It was incredible! They were so unified and it was such a powerful sound. And watching the clip showed me Dr. Staheli and his charisma, his power in directing and also just his drive—it all came through there, and then the sound on top of it was just, ahh!

So I decided I had to be in the choir. The blend was awesome. I just remember kind of being washed by the sound and thinking, “I want to be a part of that!”

Lisa. One of the first things I did as I arrived at BYU my freshman year was sign up for a choir audition. There was a long list of names already posted in the hall. When my time came I sang an Italian art song I prepared with my voice teacher from back home. I first sang for a girl who was getting her master’s degree in choral conducting. She then had me sing for Sister Hall. I was thrilled when I made it into the Concert Choir!

I had a fabulous year and met so many wonderful people. This time I got to be on the stage for the huge Christmas concert. It was an even greater feeling to be singing with the group.

At the beginning of my sophomore year I got to sing for Dr. Staheli. He was so warm and friendly. He asked me about my family and my love for music. I felt that I could open up and share some feelings about life and music and God that were very tender and close to my heart.

When I found out I was in the BYU Singers I was overjoyed. Several of my friends from Concert Choir were on the list as well. I knew this would be a very good year.

Daniel. One of the first things I did upon arriving at BYU was contact Dr. Staheli. I was a little bit timid and hesitant to express interest in singing with the choir. I knew it was a big commitment and as a graduate student I wasn't sure if I would be able to commit to it. But I called up Dr. Staheli and told him I was interested in voice lessons. I asked if he could recommend a good teacher. I told him my experience and said that I might be interested in singing with the choir but I wasn't really sure. He said, "Why don't you come in and just sing three notes for me and I'll tell you where I think we should go with your voice."

So I did that. He turned this three note singing experience into a full blown audition. He had me sing a song for him; it kind of caught me by surprise because it was becoming an audition. He was very complimentary. He gave me a few tips on posture and a couple of things. It was all very comfortable; he made me feel very at ease. He answered all of my questions about the commitment and what was expected.

I told him, "I'm just not sure if I can give the commitment, I want to make sure." He said, "Why don't you come to call backs and we'll see from there." So I said OK. I wasn't sure if I wanted to commit to it then, but having had the experience I would have

come crawling on my hands and knees begging for the experience. I went to call-backs, had a great experience, I had a really good feeling from everybody there. That's when I decided I wanted to be a part of this.

Lisa. It was exciting to come to my first rehearsal of BYU Singers. There were many people there that I knew, many others that I didn't. I was a little unsure of how I would fit in vocally. I have always been very confident in my singing voice, but this was the BYU Singers! I couldn't believe I was in the same room with these people. Everyone around me in the soprano section sang so beautifully and so in tune.

Daniel. I remember the first few days of rehearsal being flabbergasted that I was a part of this group. Because all the people there were such good people, genuine, honest, good people in character. I've never been a part of a group of people that were so good and I'm not talking about talent, I'm talking about individual character. I could tell that from the first couple of days from the feeling that was there.

And then the second part of it came when the talent, and everybody looking at music for the first time and here we are sight reading and it's better than any other group I have sung with—polished on the first time through. I remember thinking, Why am I here?

But the funny thing is, I think, in talking to people, just about everybody feels that way. It's like this synergistic sense of humility that brings out this power. I get tingles just thinking about my first day.

Lisa. We had a little get together with the choir the first weekend of school at a lodge up Provo Canyon. It was a large building with a common area downstairs where we

could all gather, and stairs going off in two directions leading to bedrooms upstairs—one side for the boys and one side for the girls.

There were basketball and volleyball courts outside, foosball and pool tables inside. We played and socialized as people arrived in groups. When everyone was there we had dinner all together. It was fun to see everyone in an informal setting outside of class.

After dinner we began a rotation where the sopranos and tenors played games while the altos were with themselves bonding and the basses were with Dr. Staheli. The games were meant to help us to all work together as a team. I remember it was some kind of relay where we all had to work together to achieve a goal.

We then switched and met together with just the sopranos. Our section leader led this meeting, but each of us got to introduce ourselves and tell a little about what we wanted to achieve as a section. We talked about some of our strengths and weakness, but mostly opened the door to some very open and effective communication.

The last rotation was with Dr. Staheli. He had us sing individually and in various combinations with the other girls. He arranged us in an order that would help blend and balance. We identified which of us had bright voices and which of us had darker voices. This proved to be a useful reference we would continue to use throughout the year.

We then gathered all together for a rehearsal. After the rehearsal we had a very spiritual meeting or fireside. I loved being together with all these people that feel the same way I do.

The next morning we had breakfast and then another morning devotional. We rehearsed again, had lunch and then went our separate ways.

Daniel. The retreat is a really good opportunity for everyone to get to know each other, and a lot of fun too! It's where you build that initial relationship with each other. You don't really get that anywhere else during the year—certainly not in class because class is work, work, work. You have to seek it out. You build that neat bond in your singing relationship and there's nothing that replaces that either. But on more of just a personal, informal kind of basis you don't build that relationship except for at retreat or if you get together with them in an informal setting and just hang out.

Dr. Staheli's Secrets to Starting the Year Right

According to Dr. Ronald Staheli, an effective year begins long before the first rehearsal begins. In this section Dr. Staheli describes how he prepares himself over the summer, how he conducts auditions, and what he does the first few weeks of the school year to bring the group closer together and motivate them for success throughout the year. The following quotations were given to me over the course of several interviews and have been arranged according to categories.

Summer preparation. Before the Singers begin rehearsing in the fall, Dr. Staheli spends his summers reflecting, researching and preparing.

There are a number of things I do over the summer to prepare for the upcoming year. First of all, I'm always looking for ways to build stronger unity, a stronger sense of purpose, a stronger sense of commitment to what we are doing.

Second, I'm always looking for more efficient ways to accomplish what we do in less time.

Third, I'm looking for the right literature for our group. I don't want to be different from all other choirs just for the sake of being different. I just want to have our own voice and I feel like if we are singing literature that is off the beaten track that is not that thin slice of literature that is performed by most choirs, but a little bit more removed, which is a little bit harder to find for sure; if we can find those pieces then their ears are going to perk up. Especially for choral musicians and for the last several years we have been singing for a convention. And I

wanted their ears to perk up and I wanted them to hear more than just new music. I wanted them to hear our take on the music. I wanted them to feel and see our take on that music.

I've always felt that the most important thing to do first off is for me to find literature that is exciting, interesting and hopefully accessible to most audiences, realizing that some of the things we do will not be immediately accessible to most audiences but we have to do that because that's part of our training. We are a university ensemble after all. So I want different, unusual literature, not just to be different and not just to be unusual, but for a greater purpose.

Fourth, I want to discover more about myself and the more I know about myself the better leader I can be. So I like to do lots of personal resourceful kinds of readings, kinds of thinking, kinds of writing. I carry a big notebook with me all summer and I write like crazy. I was in the eye doctor's office this morning and was waiting for him to get to me so I was just thinking and writing things down. That's really important to me.

I like to do that because as I look backward I can see a lot of personal growth that has taken place over the years and I'm really happy about that. It makes me feel happy that I can see personal growth. I'm better at doing certain things more than I used to be. I think I even have more patience now than I used to, rather than less—which is good for me because I've never had very much. (personal communication, February, 2006)

Auditions. Dr. Staheli chooses each member by means of an intense audition process. He does not base his decision solely on vocal ability, but looks at many other factors such as emotional maturity and ability to work well with others.

In the audition I'm looking for a person with a smooth, clear, clean voice and by clean I mean no rough edges, no brassy edge, no force in the sound but just an even, free sound that can sing in tune. Once that's established I quickly switch to the other side of it and that is what's the spirit in this person? Are they cooperative? Are they flexible? Are they a people person? Do they love working hard with other people? Can they focus their attention? Are they a person who loves excellence?

Because those things are so crucial if we are going to have a good choir! And ultimately if I have a really superb voice without such strong skills or a less superb voice with stronger skills, I will take the less good voice with the stronger skills.

They've still got to have a smooth, clean enough voice, a blendable voice, but for me those issues are not so important. We can make up for that. We'll work hard. We'll do what we need to raise the level of that person's ability whatever it takes.

But it's so hard to build in those skills at the same time. We don't have enough time to do that. So I want that person who already knows that.

I ask first about their family. Is their family musical? Do they enjoy being with their family? Do they feel the love from their parents and from their family? That tells me a lot about them. Things like that are really important to me. And I think that is my business to know. I don't think that is an unfair question to ask.

I love the fire in the eyes that come[s] from people who really have a sense of what they are about, what they want and what they are doing. I really look for that fire in their eyes when they come in here and if that's evident to me, then wow! Sometimes I can tell even before they open their mouth what they are going to sound like. Just from the way they act, from the way they look. Then I look for ways—and I always coach them. If they sing it one way, just to pose problems, I'll ask them to sing it a different way just to see how they react—you know, he wants me to sing this, I don't know why, sounds like a pretty dumb thing to do, but I'll do it anyway just because he asked me to do it. So they try. They are open to that kind of thing. I want to see how receptive they are to coaching.

So these are things that I have learned by experience through the years. I have learned how to quickly find the important information because I don't have as much time with everyone as I would like. (personal communication, August, 2006)

Retreat. Within the first week of school, the choir gets together at a mountain lodge, not far from the school. In addition to being a social experience, it is an opportunity for Dr. Staheli to learn some important things about each member and how the group will perform together throughout the year.

When I finally have the group that I feel is BYU Singers for the year, I want to break the ice with everybody and I want to throw away as many defenses as possible right off the bat. The best way I have found to do this is to hold a retreat. It is definitely a social experience for the choir, but it is much more than that. It is a time to really get things going and get the choir working hard from the get-go. This year it's the first weekend of school.

I want to hear everyone singing with everybody else and I want to say “this is not a right or wrong. Your position in singers is now secure, you're on the list, here we are. Sing. Sing your normal voice. We're going to talk about your voice. We're going to talk about how we are going to work together as a section and we're going to make this all fit.”

This just gets better as I get better, better equipped to run that sort of a thing so that you can put eight tenors together and say, “Can you hear your voice is just a little darker than this? When we say ‘tenors brighter,’ you be careful. You brighten and when I say darker, don’t you darken very much and you have to darken a lot.” That sort of thing.

So we’re talking about a voice in the tenor section that is sticking out, who is it likely to be here? Who are the blenders? All of those issues. I want to do that as a section.

I want to talk about commitment. This year I really want to talk about the day to day kinds of things of my expectation. For example in the past I just sort of assumed that everybody would be in Singers every day. And if not then I assumed that there was a fantastic excuse, a really strong excuse why they were not there. Last year a couple of people rather took advantage of that. And I just want to say upfront, in fact I’m going to write everybody on the call back list right this summer and tell them this. I expect this and this is the expectation and if you can’t meet that expectation then you have to withdraw now. Because you miss twice without good excuse, we’ll say goodbye to you, as much as that will make things really difficult for us to survive without you. That’s the choir and if we have to do without you then that makes it really tough. (personal communication, September, 2005)

Part 2: A Day in the Life of a BYU Singers Rehearsal

On a Thursday afternoon in March I head towards the Madsen Recital Hall in the Harris Fine Arts Center on BYU campus, just before a rehearsal of BYU Singers.

Walking into the recital hall I enter a foyer where several of my fellow Singers are seated around tables or along a row of seats on the side. It being 12:15, some are eating lunch, others are reviewing musical scores or talking to each other. After exchanging some friendly greetings, I walk into the large room and take my seat in the tenor section: the first few rows of the stadium style seats where the choir stands for our rehearsal.

Dr. Ronald Staheli is quickly writing on a green chalk board his rehearsal schedule. He doesn’t list times, but writes which pieces he wants to rehearse. He does not write the title of the song, but by the composer—Brahms, Distler, etc. On this board are

also written some brief announcements, “tour forms due March 15th” and “7:30 tabernacle.” Several students have questions for him in between his rounds of writing. He stops to address them with a happy, yet intense expression on his face.

A few students are sitting in their places now. Some are reviewing music, getting warmed up or speaking with friends. They make sure their black folders are in order and that they have a pencil and water bottle readily available.

As 12:30 approaches most of the choir is here. A few straggle in and make it just on time. They quickly pull off their coats and retrieve their music from their black folders.

Precisely at 12:30, Dr. Staheli begins to play a piece on the piano and the Singers follow. There is no official announcement, “We are starting now,” or “Welcome to rehearsal.” Every moment is precious and Dr. Staheli will not wait until we are ready. From this point on the hour and half takes the course of a giant ocean wave. It doesn’t let up, and it comes crashing with great force. Many people would be overwhelmed and crushed by this wave, but we members of the BYU Singers seem prepared to ride the wave to success.

Dr. Staheli leads us through about 5 minutes of warming up. We sing a piece that is not too difficult, and then do a little bit of vocal exercise. This includes scales and arpeggios of different varieties sung to various vowels.

Dr. Staheli now addresses us as we take our seats:

The power of concentration was riveting yesterday. It was so focused, that was phenomenal. And the desire to be open and communicate was really strong. I felt that didn't you? There were some lapses in concentration though in some important areas. I think we sang the Brahms well enough that we shifted a bit into automatic and the Brahms was kind of iffy intonation most of the way. We would come into cadences and there it was out of tune, but nobody did much. Like we

didn't hear that it was so out of tune. I wish we wouldn't leave it for a moment. In fact I hope that we have enough of the Spirit with us that it's just jarring to us when we sing out of tune like that. That it immediately awakens our ears and that we really seek and find the center of pitch as a choir. And how that often works sometimes is a bit of black magic I'm afraid. Who gives? We all have to give, we all have to take. Lead, follow and somehow we have to come to a unity of the faith. But it does work as we listen, and especially as you listen ahead to the coming cadence. Hear it coming. Know your factor in that. Where does it fit? Even before we get there make sure you hear that coming and make sure you put your pitch right on the money.

In many ways that should be the easiest piece that we do. And maybe that's why we checked out a little bit yesterday. One day we sang it here; maybe it was the day we revived it after not touching it for a long time. It was terrific. It was so beautiful and in tune and placed so well. You felt that too. Yesterday it wasn't that at all. And with that our experience from the past tells us that that's a very easy piece to crash and burn if we check out a bit. The other side of that issue is—be careful that you save vocally something for 'Peace Like a River.' Cause I felt like we got to the edge and then we had to maybe push just a little bit to make the big sound in peace like a river that we wanted to. Watch that. Let's have our devotional.

We now give our attention to Mary as she stands up to give her five minute spiritual message. She speaks on what it means to have a testimony and how that testimony can carry us through difficult challenges. She quotes the text of one of our pieces, Shakespeare Sonnet 76 "For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings... that then I scorn to change my state with kings." She tells us that she loves us and is excited to share this message with those who come to our concert. Looking into the faces of the rest the group at this time I can tell we all feel the same way. There are nods of approval and silent glimmers of understanding in their eyes. Dr. Staheli listens intently with his eyes closed, savoring every word. There is an electrifying feeling in the air. From the looks in the eyes of the Singers you can tell they are ready to give everything for the next eighty minutes.

At the conclusion of the devotional a prayer is offered that includes the following:

- An expression of gratitude for our talents and the opportunity to sing to share them

- Gratitude for blessings of the gospel
- Asking for support for those that are ill and need special blessings
- Plea for strength to focus on the rehearsal and to do our best singing

Prayer is a very sacred thing to us members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church). We believe that this prayer represents the feelings of each member of the choir and that it will be answered according to our faith. At the very beginning of the year Dr. Staheli reminded us of the importance of keeping the prayers sincere and meaningful. “If it ever gets to the point where this becomes a meaningless exercise,” he cautions, “we will just do away with it in rehearsal.”

Dr. Staheli now moves into a brief announcement period. He first talks about the upcoming concert at the Provo Tabernacle and a few things we must do to prepare for it. He then gives an update on a few people who are in poor health and asks us to remember them in our prayers. Others in the group tell about upcoming events, performances of other choirs, recitals of individuals, etc.

An excited soprano raises her hand and announces, “I just wanted to let everyone know that Fred and I are engaged!” We all applaud her as the girls around her give her hugs. Dr. Staheli is beaming like a proud father.

When the applause dies down Dr. Staheli’s office assistant tells us about some recordings that are now available. Dr. Staheli continues, “This is a recording of the November concert for us to listen to on the bus so that we can get this back into our heads. We put some of these things away for a few months, but I expect you to be able to revive this on short notice.”

We then dive into the music. We sing through passages several times, sometimes not going very long before Dr. Staheli stops us to point out some way of improving or to give his interpretation of what needs to happen. He is very complimentary when it sounds right to him. When suggestions need to be made he gets straight to the point.

What is the first sound in the capital 'I'? It's 'ahh'. Give it a real 'AHH' before moving to the 'ii.'

Be careful of the vowel here. Match the vowel. Listen to the vowel. In ensemble singing, the vowel is the secret. It is the secret to resonating in the same place, which means the sounds then become more similar. And intonation—you can't have two different vowels and have them be absolutely in tune.

Sometimes our problem is intonation, but more often than not it's a vowel problem, especially in Singers where people are used to singing in tune more than the average Joe. Intonation is an issue but it isn't so much of matching pitch as it is matching vowel and pitch and hearing the slight discrepancy between an 'ahh' and an 'oahh'

The 'oah' sounds slightly flat to the 'ahh.' That is a darker sound and will sound flat compared to the 'ahh.' "What is the target vowel on the word thou? 'Ah-oh.'

Some more time goes by when suddenly Dr. Staheli is disappointed in the altos.

Their sound was a little timid in a certain section.

Come on ladies. Plant your feet on the terra firma and go for it! Don't pull in your horns here. Pulling in your horns is shrinking. Sometimes we get in to our own little world. We have to be really aware. Your antennae, your feelers, need to always be out there sensing everything that is going on around you.

Be so aware! The Singers Psyche that I like says that you feel. Don't just touch, feel. Don't just listen, really hear what is going on. A lot of people pull in their horns and barrel their way through. Don't be timid, don't shrink! Leave your horns out there and go for it! Sometimes the bull gets timid and doesn't want to charge the matador. But you must!

A few minutes later he wasn't very happy with the tenor sound on a particular line. He singled out a tenor.

OK, Greg, let me hear you sing it." Greg sings the several measures while Dr. Staheli looks deep in thought. "Now, Anthony sing it." "John." OK, John has the

best sound for this. Think John's sound, where John is resonating. Make your sound work like that.

Now I would never say to you 'Joel, sound like John,' because then you would do all sorts of this funny stuff that adds tension to the voice.

There is a whole school of choral thought in this country that started with voices trying to sound the same. You pick out your four model voices, your soprano, alto, tenor, bass. You put them right in the center of the choir. OK, here is Jane, she is the best soprano, she is the model according to your sound idea. Then Jill and Jenny, and all the sopranos try to sound like Jane and you position them according to who sounds the closest for a while and then you start from the back in so your weakest people are right in here.

I don't subscribe to that at all. You sing in your best voice and you sing to complement the people around you and their responsibility is to complement you as well. And you work together to come to kind of a unity of the faith. If the voice is free and beautiful and really listening to what is going on, then you can resonate, you can brighten, darken, do all sorts of that minutiae with the incredible complexities of your resonator to make the sound fit with what you are hearing around, all the while not adding any tension to the basic instrument. One of the things we like to say in the choir is, 'lead follow, follow lead.' You have got to be together but you have got to do your full part. You have got to be so aware of what other people are doing so that you are following and you are leading all at the same time. That is really crucial.

Sometimes in our church society we are not so used to this. We are either leading or following most of the time. We follow our leaders and we are obedient but often we don't stop and say, 'are they right?' We just follow and go along. But in Singers everyone is an important link in this chain. We are a whole group of people and as we move together you must lead and you must follow so that you are always moving with, your contribution is being felt all the way around and you are feeling everyone else's contribution. That is another reason the antennae have to stay out to be able to follow. Not just to match but to complement the sound going around.

After a particular passage the choir runs out of breath. The sound is not to Dr.

Staheli's liking.

Don't feel like you have to go all the way through this line without a breath. Make sure the breath is connected. Don't take it away from the breath. Don't sing so soft that you feel like you have to take it away from the breath. The breath is what provides a beautiful sound. I would rather have a breath and have a beautiful sound in the choir, than have it all fit together without a beautiful sound.

In larger choirs it is easier to go on because when voices come back in you really hear it. You have to rehearse a lot to make the staggered breathing really work very well. My problem with that whole concept is that—music is so directional. The articulation tells you the direction of the music. So if there is a subtle lift somewhere, that gives it shape and a sense of relationship of this fitting to that. Sometimes two notes, sometimes two phrases. Sometimes silence can be the most eloquent music possible. I like silences in music a lot. It tells me where I have been and where I am going. The breath becomes a highly communicative and dramatic factor both textually and musically and then both together which is the whole art.

When we try to go on too long, we lose breath connection and the sound gets wispy and not very beautiful at all. We can find a natural break before a preposition or someplace where that really works and everybody can take a breath together. Sometimes we go on a long distance because the thought just has to go through and the musical line must go on until we get to the very end.

My wife does not like listening to Bach, especially on the organ. She says, ‘The monster never breathes!’ The breath gives you a sense of direction. It tells you when you are done with a thought and you are ready to move on. I think that if musical lines just go on and on and on it is like a speaker that runs on sentences and does not breathe at the end of a thought. Then you are left to sort it out for yourself. You run out of breath yourself just listening!

As I look around the room during this intense time I notice a few things happening consistently:

- Each Singer stays standing with good posture for the duration of the rehearsal.
- Each has a pencil on hand ready to make notes in the music.
- When someone needs to leave for an emergency, he or she does so quietly as to minimize distraction.
- Each Singer smiles and enjoys him or herself appropriately in the rehearsal.
- People are swaying with the music or otherwise bodily expressing their connection with the music.
- Singers often make helpful suggestions to those around them as they think of them.
- Some tap difficult rhythms on his or her chest or leg.
- Others have their hands up to faces trying to get proper jaw tension and lift in the

face.

- Shoulders are back in an effort to expand the chest and to facilitate proper breathing.
- There is nothing casual about these singers. They are fully engaged.
- Dr. Staheli never has to remind us to stand up straight. He occasionally reminds us to expand more in the chest and to breathe better, but most of this is enforced by every individual I see.

After about thirty minutes of this, Dr. Staheli changes gears and grows reflective.

Many of the Singers take their seats but keep their attention riveted on our director. Without losing momentum he instructs the group:

Here is the thought from Elder Holland on strengthening each other I wanted to write on the board, but it was too long and there were other things I needed to do. *“It is no small thing to sustain another person. When we sustain a friend or a neighbor even a stranger in the street we give support, we share strength, we provide help. If we hold each other up under the weight of present circumstances, we bear one another’s burdens.”*

We can apply that on so many levels but I would like you to think of it just in terms of how, when we're standing in formation, how we support, sustain one another. We bear each other up. Some places where I sing, I can do something a lot better than you can. And then there are those places that you can do a lot better than I can. And we sustain, support each other and then we get the best of all worlds. If the total effect is greater than the sum of all the parts, we've got to play our full part as best as we can, and then that synergy can take place it seems to me.

He then instructs us to pull out a new song from our folders. He shows his excitement for this new piece and says, “This writing is delicious.” The same vigorous process ensues with this piece. He is anxious to get this quickly into our memory so he instructs us to look at the piece for thirty seconds and memorize as much as possible. We then put down the piece and do as much of one passage from memory as we can, which we do fairly well. “The faster we get out of our score and trust our memory the closer we will

be to mastery. I believe we really know pieces sooner than we think we do,” he says. “Your homework is to spend two minutes in this piece tonight and come close to memory for tomorrow.”

We now pull out a new piece. He has us speak the difficult rhythm out loud to clarify it without singing. We sing through it and in one particular section we begin to rush. “Boy, you had ants in your pants!” he exclaims. “I love the excitement but make sure you don't push that tempo!”

Another moment of reflection ensues, “Singing gives us an opportunity to express in an appropriate way what could easily be expressed inappropriately. Allow yourself to trust and sublimate yourself to give voice to those feelings, yearnings and passions. Trust yourselves in this expression.”

We continue to rehearse up until twenty minutes before two o'clock when Rosalind Hall comes in the room to observe us. Sister Hall is the director of the Men's Chorus and Concert Choir. The Concert Choir rehearses at two o'clock, but today she came in early to offer a set of professional listening ears and give some advice. We regroup on the stage of the recital hall and perform our whole set for an upcoming performance at the American Choral Directors Association National Convention in LA.

Upon completion of the set, she offers these words:

When a piece is close to perfection it is like a glass window that is mostly clean. When it is filthy you can't quite identify what needs to be cleaned specifically because the whole window is dirty. But as you refine it, a few streaks and spots are easily discernable. We can afford to be very specific to iron out the wrinkles in the sound. But today I stopped looking at those wrinkles after the first page of the first piece. I put down the music and enjoyed the sound. You shouldn't be worried that all of these professional listeners are going to criticize us for every tiny flaw. They have learned to appreciate art and craft and splendid tone and will come to hear that, not the imperfections.

The rehearsal now comes to an end. The clock shows we have gone over about five minutes. Members of the Concert Choir began to trickle in as we Singers gather together our belongings and begin heading for the door. The noise level in the room grows loud as friends began to greet, giving hugs, recognizing new hair styles, and making weekend plans.

I leave the room fulfilled. I have just given my all for over ninety minutes. Tom, the tenor section leader pats me on the shoulder as we walk back through the foyer together. “You sounded great today bro!”

One passage of “Peace Like a River” runs through my head as I head toward the education building for my next class: “I’ve got joy like a fountain.” I have felt that joy today.

Part 3: A Day in the Life of the BYU Singers on Tour

The process described in the previous section repeats over and over again on a daily basis. The intensity and focus of rehearsals prepares the Singers to present a series of concerts throughout the school year—about 8-13, depending on the year.

All this effort culminates in the end of the year tour where Singers travel by plane and bus, stay mostly with host families, and perform an additional 20-25 concerts. Every year is different. This particular year it was to New England and Eastern Canada. The following is an example of a typical day on tour. Again, the day is a composite showing the typical events of a day on tour and not necessarily the log of exact events of any specific day. The names of the Singers have been changed.

Traveling

At 8:00 a.m. our touring bus pulls into the church parking lot in New Hampshire. The luggage hatches soon open underneath and some of the more strapping choir members who have arrived early begin loading in duffle bags and suitcases.

SUVs and station wagons driven by the local members pull up one at a time to drop off pairs of Singers. We have spent the night with local families, some in twos, fours, sixes. We are all wearing our matching tour clothes: blue polo shirts and khaki pants for the boys, pink and khakis for the girls.

As each group is dropped off, the host mother or father hands them their sack lunch for the day. The Singers tell their families goodbye and thank them for a wonderful evening and their hospitality. Some even give hugs. They have only spent one night together, but they feel like family. They have welcomed us into their homes, given them a place to sleep, a nice breakfast. The Singers give them a thank you card and swap email addresses.

The bags are now organized under the bus and we begin to board. Stepping up on to the bus, some take their usual places. Some people always sit in the same spot, a few husband and wife pairs. Others are more adventurous and move to a new spot every day. The last four rows of the bus have twice as much legroom so the long-legged tenors camp out there. A few ingenious ones have placed postcards of each city visited on the wall. They have water bottle holders fashioned out of metal coat hangers and even a small potted plant.

Section leaders count to make sure everyone is there. Finally, with everyone in place, the bus rolls out for the day's journey. When we have been going a while, long enough for people to socialize and get situated, the morning ritual begins. A few announcements are made for the day—the day's itinerary, the lunch schedule, etc.

We have a morning scriptural thought and then a prayer. This is followed by about an hour of quiet time. We are encouraged to be silent and talk in a low voice only if

we need to do so. This quiet time is important for each Singer to reflect, meditate, write in their journals and read their scriptures. We are encouraged as members of the LDS Church to make this a part of our everyday experience and this same opportunity is available to each Singer on the tour as well.

When the quiet hour ends, often there is a round of “open mic” where anyone can speak to the group. This is usually to tell funny stories of the night before.

They pass it back to Tom Wickman. “Very simple. I woke up this morning to a six-year-old boy standing in his superman underwear and he very bluntly looked at me and said, ‘You’re chubby.’”

They then pass the microphone to Jim. “So after humiliating Tom he comes over to me as I’m sitting down reading my scriptures and he tries to grab a handful of my hair and he says “why don’t you have any hair?”

Looking out the window, I notice we have entered Maine. I move my ingeniously fashioned coat hanger water bottle holder aside to gain access the seat pocket where my tour book is. The BYU touring program provided us this book so we all know what is going on. The book includes a general mapped out tour route and a page of interesting information for each area.

Later in the day someone will tell us more about the area. A Singer is assigned to speak about each location. On this tour we have some who have served missions in the different cities or are from the area so they are qualified to give a little more insight than the book provides.

The quiet chatter on the bus is interrupted by an announcement. “Now we have a special present for Joan.” Joan, who had to say goodbye to her husband and four children for five weeks began smiling very big. “This is a video her husband Andrew sent her!” The tape showed her family seated on stools in the backyard, saying what they loved about their mommy. Andrew looked very tired as he attempted to maintain control. They sang a song for mom and ended the tape with well wishes. Joan, teary eyed, expressed her thanks.

It is a difficult thing to commit to such a group that requires sacrifice like that. But it shows that for each dedicated singer, there are many others who offer support and love and make it all possible.

Birthdays

Since we have a few more hours until we reach our evening concert destination, Bangor, Maine, we decide we should do our birthday ritual. Sally, the birthday leader, takes the microphone and announces, “We’re going to talk about Brandon, Rob and Ellen today. Jim already told me he wanted to speak about Brandon so send this over to him.”

Jim takes the mic and begins speaking in his rich, baritone voice:

In the baritone section we’ve gotten really, really close and we’ve been able to be really open with one another. We are able to give each other constructive criticism and what not which is fantastic because Brandon is just so attentive and so observant. He knows exactly what is going on around in the section and what’s going on in life as well. Brandon is a genius about a lot of things as I think we well know. He knows all the plants and flowers that grow on this earth and reads the dictionary for fun I’m sure.

But besides being that, Brandon is never condescending in any way. He’s always so willing to share his ideas and he’s able to do that and express his opinions in a way that never puts you down. But only lifts you up to where he is which is very high. He is a fantastic person. Happy Birthday, Brandon.

Another Singer offers a concise, but heartfelt tribute: “Brandon is Mr. Wonderful. I found in him a very companionable friend and I just want to say thank you!”

We all break into thunderous applause for Brandon. We usually do this in class whenever it is someone’s birthday. On tour we celebrate everyone who has a birthday over the summer, so we try to do two or three a day on the bus. It is time to talk about Rob.

OK, I remember the first time meeting Rob, like really meeting him, was at the Singer’s retreat. He was so open and friendly to me—and I had a hard time in the beginning—I don’t know, for some reason I wanted to be really quiet in Singers. Whenever Rob was around I couldn’t help smiling and being myself. He just brings that out in everyone. You have such a way of wanting to explore life and to have fun. There is a childlike-ness in that. Even though you are very mature, you want to discover the things around you. I just love being able to explore the world with you.

“Rob and I met when we were freshmen together at Ricks College back in 1996. And yes, we are still in college in 2005!”

“Lots of people go to college for 10 years. It’s OK Jim!” blurts a heckling tenor from the back of the bus.

“They’re doctors!” calls out his seat mate.

“Anyway, I think that we all know Rob’s funny side, but Rob has incredible depth and insight and warmth. I can’t think of a warmer, gentler, more humble person than Rob. Happy Birthday.”

“Who wants to speak for Ellen?” calls out the birthday leader. “I’ll just start passing this around and the four of you who raised your hands can go.”

“Ellen is completely pure in heart!”

Ellen, I just thought she was a ball of energy when I first met her. Like I really did think she was just one of those people who never had a bad day, and I was wrong. And I’m kind of glad to be wrong because like she’s got this really sweet side to

her that is concerned with people and things. And she knows a lot about the gospel and is very in tune with good things.

I love being around her because she has an infectious smile so I don't feel like a loser when I'm smiling my horse smile! I just love her spirit, she makes me happy all around. Thank you for sharing this birthday with me, Ellen!

I admire her so much because of her amazing relationship with the Lord. She is so in tune with the Spirit and with what her needs are. I told her this last night. We were talking and I told her that I just admire how every decision she makes she feels good about. Even if it's a hard thing or something that most people wouldn't expect, she does it with her whole heart and she says, OK, I feel really good about this and I'm just going to do it. It's great and I really admire that. And she is so happy and wonderful and she is a great section leader. And happy birthday!

We applaud again as the microphone is put back in its holder at the front of the bus. Across the row, Allen is heard telling the story of what they did for Dr. Staheli's birthday one year.

My first year in University Singers, back in 2001, with Dr. Staheli's birthday right around the corner, we had all made this decision that we were going to sing to him. But we wanted it to be a bit of a surprise. So we were going to wait until he played the first chord of whatever piece we happened to start working with that day. And he kept talking and talking and talking and giving us points on things he wanted us to work on in this piece. I think we were working on Eric Whitacre's "Sleep." And it kind of has this open fifths action going on between the basses and the baritones, they're moving up and staying on parallel fifths the whole time and the other parts are kind of in this open harmony chord. So he plays this chord and he cues us and we start singing happy birthday. And of course like any good choir we came in on the notes that he gave us! And so we had these very interesting parallel fifths going on between the basses and baritones and everyone else. Everyone stayed on the notes he gave us so we had this weird almost quintal-sounding happy birthday sung to him and while we were all singing we brought out six packs and two liter bottles of Diet Dr. Pepper and piled them on the piano so there was this massive mound. It was quite humorous!

"Did he keep conducting you through happy birthday?"

"He stopped because he was surprised. But we just kept singing!"

After spending a good portion of the day on the bus we arrive at the high school for a workshop. This is also our concert venue for the evening.

High School Workshop

We are greeted warmly by Mr. Johnson, the high school choir director. He shows us in to the choir room where the chamber choir is eagerly awaiting us. They are sharp looking high school students, full of enthusiasm. We introduce ourselves briefly and then officially begin the workshop. Dr. Staheli explains that this is to be a process of sharing. We will sing for them and they will sing for us. We will tell each other what we think and give constructive criticism. At first the high school choir is hesitant. They are not as confident when they sing their first piece. Members of BYU Singers give warm encouragement in their comments. We are careful not to be too critical but suggest ways that will help them sound even better. By the end of this interchange the high school choir indeed sounds better and we have reminded ourselves of what we need to do to improve our own performance.

We say goodbye to our new friends and then head to the concert hall for a sound check.

Sound Check

No two concert halls are identical. As traveling performers we have learned to adapt for the differences; some are subtle, others very obvious. Sometimes there are stagehands present to help us set up the sound shell and risers. The shell is designed to send as much sound out to the hall as possible. We politely refuse the risers. We do better with our small group on the floor of the stage.

Tonight we are left to figure out the shell ourselves. The men of the group adapt and work together to get it in place, taking instruction from Dr. Staheli at the front. When this is completed, we perform the ritual of “the string.” Dr. Staheli pulls out a long piece

of string and measures an exact distance from him. He likes to have his Singers in a nice semicircle, more like a semi-ellipse, curved, yet still open to the audience. This way we could project our sound out, but still be able to hear each other sing. With the choir being so small, we don't need risers. We just form our semi-ellipse near the front of the stage. The string is to make sure each Signer on the front row is the perfect distance from him.

We now sing through some of the pieces to get used to our new environment. We don't sing through an entire piece here; just enough to get a feel for the hall. There is a particular spot in "What Stood Will Stand" that needs some work, so we iron out a few rough spots.

Dr. Staheli gives a few words of motivation and instruction, but saves most of his thoughts for our pre-concert pep talk.

We then break for dinner and to get ready for the concert. We loaded our gear in to the dressing room.

Tonight we join the choir with whom we had our workshop for dinner in their cafeteria. The local LDS ward has provided a sumptuous buffet. There are salads, casseroles, chips with dip, a vegetable tray, and for dessert, brownies and cookies. Dr. Staheli encourages us to go easy on these. Being on the road over a month with little chance for exercise, coupled with nightly brownies, cookies or pie proves to be a dangerous combination. We have to fit in our tuxedos and dresses each night! Good thing my tux pants have an adjustable band!

Evening Devotional

After dinner we squeeze ourselves into these outfits and gather in the high school choir room for the evening festivities. Each person enters the room, one at a time or in

small groups with a sense of purpose. We try to have our “game faces” on from this point on. There is some quiet conversation as the Singers gather. Some seem deep in thought while others continue to warm up their voices. Those who have solos tonight are running through the words in their mind or out loud. By the end of the tour individual singers were announcing sets of pieces. Others who are helping to announce the program are rehearsing in their minds what they will say. Others are listening to their iPods while a few “old fashioned” types are still hanging on to portable CD players. These Singers find relaxing music soothing. It helps them focus on the task at hand. Some are listening to recordings of our pieces from earlier concerts to get tricky passages in their heads.

Dr. Staheli tries to use this time to prepare at this time as well. Our tour leader takes care of all the housekeeping details. This allows Dr. Staheli to stay focused on the music.

When we reach the appointed hour we begin by warming up again. A series of long sighs to open up the voice is followed by the standard, “I like to sing, I like to sing a song,” sung in a descending arpeggio through several keys. Then we sing one section of a piece. He gives some suggestions and reminders for this piece and then a bit of encouragement.

We then say a word of prayer. Praying right before a concert is different than saying a daily prayer as you wake up or retire to bed. Here there is a very specific task at hand and it is essential for everyone in the room to feel united and focused on the effort. As many times as we have performed in the past, it is never a small thing to get up in front of hundreds of people and give your best. Your best just doesn’t emerge without any effort. We have found that prayer is essential to bringing us that unifying element.

We each trust for strength from a higher source, especially those who are feeling ill or have a solo or announcing job that night.

When the “amens” are said, Dr Staheli quietly stands up and takes the podium. For the next 5-10 minutes he provides us with a pep talk. First of all, his demeanor and presence give a sense of both deep love and tremendous respect. His words are backed up by his actions and he speaks “as one having power and authority.” You know he means what he says and that every principle he teaches us has been tried in the battlefield of his experience. He is like General Patton. You could follow him anywhere!

On this particular night we were all eagerly awaiting the announcement of a mission call. Richard, a freshman bass, had heard word earlier in the day that the “white envelope” arrived in his home in Arizona. The plan was that his mother would call him on his cell phone and read it to him in front of the whole choir at this gathering time. Dr. Staheli waited for Richard, but there were some difficulties with reception in this area. While people were helping Richard find a phone that did have reception and finding the perfect spot in the room where he would have to stand (by the window, with one arm extended, leaning slightly to the south to be precise) Dr. Staheli took the podium and began to speak. He told us earlier in the warm-up/sound check that tonight’s message would be about being easily entreated. He asked to come prepared with thoughts on what it means to be easily entreated as Paul spoke of. Because of the uncertain time he would have with this mission call business he modified his remarks:

I’ll give you the abridged version and then part two of easily entreated. You mustn’t be easily entreated by your neighbor if your neighbor takes the false pitch when the pitch sounds. (laughter)

Paul says in Corinthians what happens when the trumpet gives an uncertain sound. Well, the pitch is not uncertain. The pitch may not be in tune with your

sense of what the pitch should be, but that's the pitch. And you put your pitch according to that and if we sing according to that then the trumpet won't have an uncertain sound. It will be certain, as it was last night so many times. We fixed the beginning of "Celia" so much better last night because we did that.

So, you hear the pitch, you are easily entreated by the pitch, you go right to the center of the chord and bingo we come in on that and there is no slip sliding around.

While we still have time, here is the program for tonight.

(In the background Richard is waiting to hear his mission call over the phone.)

We are all waiting in anticipation of Richard's parents calling him with the news of where he is going. He is having trouble getting reception on a phone in that building.

Meanwhile we are taking care of business—discussing who will sing the solo in "Song for the Mira" and in which order to bow.

Finally Richard has connected with his parents. "Mom, Mom... we have a concert in 7 minutes." At this the group burst in to uproarious laughter. "Chile, Santiago Mission!" He announces, receiving thunderous cheering and applause.

Jake now gives his devotional:

You guys! We only have a few short minutes and I'm only going to take like one of those, maybe less. I'm glad to be able to speak to you right now. I hope I can say one thing that will help us have a good concert tonight.

I feel like this, right here, is probably the funnest thing I've ever done. And I want to remind you that when we got called to this tour, if you will, we were *all* called to be missionaries.

And what do missionaries do? They preach with the Spirit. Tonight I want us all to sing with the biggest, brightest, bestest spirit that you have. There are a lot of people out there to touch and it's just really fun when we do it that way. I just want to read one scripture and you can put yourself in this place and apply it to the tour.

My son Orson, hearken and hear and behold what I, the Lord God, shall say unto you, even Jesus Christ your Redeemer; The light and the life of the world, a light which shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not; Who so loved

the world that he gave his own life, that as many as would believe might become the sons of God. Wherefore you are my son; And blessed are you because you have believed; And more blessed are you because you are called of me to preach my gospel—To lift up your voice as with the sound of a trump, both long and loud, and cry repentance unto a crooked and perverse generation, preparing the way of the Lord for his second coming. Wherefore, lift up your voice and spare not, for the Lord God hath spoken; therefore prophesy, and it shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost. (Doctrine and Covenants 34:1 – 6,10)

Lift up your voice and spare not. I feel like we have an opportunity to do this in a powerful way. So whatever you do that helps you sing passionately, helps you sing spiritually, helps you connect with the Lord and with the audience and with yourself, do that and it will be a fun night. Thank you. These things I say in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

We then close with a prayer. One person acts as voice and on behalf of the group expresses gratitude for blessings and asks for help, guidance and additional blessings.

(See Appendix C: Prayer) Tonight the one offering the prayer expresses thanks for the opportunity to sing and the chance to be with such talented people. She asks the Lord for help so that we can come together as a group—focus our minds and hearts, and that the audience will be receptive to the message we bring. She prays for Dr. Staheli to be strengthened and inspired and that we would all remember all we have prepared.

At the end of the prayer Dr. Staheli says, “Let’s do it! OK, sopranos first.... off to the concert!”

The Concert

We are greeted warmly on the stage. It is a good sized crowd that has filled the high school auditorium. Looking out I recognize many of our new high school choir friends and some of the local church members we met at dinner. But there are many others I do not recognize. Some look eager to hear us. Others look as if they were dragged away from the ball game to get some “culture.” Each of these people, regardless

of their preparation for the evening's concert, deserve my very best performance; so I reach deep within me to find a way to make my singing the very best it can be.

We all focus on Dr. Staheli. Our ears perk up to hear those around us and across the choir. We stand with good posture. We smile between numbers and graciously accept and acknowledge applause. While we sing we do not smile with our mouths, but smile with our eyes and faces, letting the beauty that is within our souls shine forth.

As the concert progresses I try not to go on "auto pilot." I have sung these pieces many times but this is the first time this audience has heard them. I find ways to make them fresh in my thinking, while keeping consistent with the instruction I have received. I am pleased with the way it is going. There may have been an occasional mistake here and there. There is no completely flawless performance. But we are doing our best tonight and that is all we can hope for. That isn't always the case, but tonight I sense a focus and rejuvenation from everyone. Maybe it was Richard's mission call? Maybe it is that we can hear much better in this hall than the night before? Whatever it is we are enjoying expressing the feelings of our heart and making beautiful music.

I always wonder at how the music is received. This is intense, deep music. It is not like a rock concert where the crowd is exceptionally vocal. The appreciation is often inward and personal. It helps to look at some letters, paraphrased here, we received later from those in the audience:

Samuel Petersen. The concert last night was fantastic! The first set was one of those "I've died and gone to heaven" experiences. It occurred to me during this entire set that each part in the choir not only sounds like it is being sung by one very rich, full voice, the parts blend together perfectly like they were all being played on the same,

single rank on an organ. Lots of times choirs have a very different sound between parts—the altos and sopranos may have a good section sound but they rarely have a similar sound to one another—which can sometimes obscure the harmonies and add that pesky “junk” to the sound that comes from a poor blend. However, that was not the case with Singers last night. The section to section blend was so good that I believe any two sections would blend perfectly together, even basses and sopranos. The blend and intonation were so good, I wasn’t sure whether to relax and be carried away or remain attentive. It was truly an excellent performance. My only regret that it was not 30-45 minutes longer.

The Beazer Psalm grew on me. I wasn’t immediately sucked in, but as it went on, the structure of the piece and the quality of the performance opened my heart to it and I enjoyed it. It sounds like an extremely difficult piece. There probably aren’t many choirs in the country that could pull it off—even fewer that could draw listeners in through the integrity of their performance like BYU Singers did.

Michael Sampson. I was astounded by the incredible excellence of your choir. I am unable to think of any university choir I have ever heard, in person or on record, that has made a greater impression on me. I found the entire concert to be of unsurpassed choral beauty. In the words of the famous poet, ‘let me count the ways.’ I was struck immediately by the beauty, flexibility and resonance of the choral tone, the unerring accuracy of the intonation, the flawless control of vibrato, the perfect musicianship of the singers, the superb breath control and phrasing, and the conceptual grasp of the music which resulted in totally convincing interpretations. The performance was a model of interpretation, beyond reproach. The choral balance was sheer perfection. Your choir has

set a performance standard to be envied by all of your colleagues, and equaled by only a few.

Kimball Oxford. I came to the concert seriously needing to be fed. My soul has been aching for the kind of music that put me on this path in the first place.

Your music was full of that unity which creates a synergistic expression. It was full of the spirit that expresses so abundantly the things that uplift and enliven the soul and that draw the children of God together. It was a demonstration of the highest craftsmanship and precision that makes such a difference in the heart of a listener.

I could never quite figure out how music could move someone to tears. It has often moved me, but weeping? Surely one can't sincerely be that affected, I thought. But, when I was in need of being fed, and fed so well, I found myself understanding those people whose own life experience is spoken to by music freely expressed, and whose souls resonate so greatly that it causes them to weep. For the first time, music has brought me to tears.

Chris Jameson. I need to tell you how very touched I was by your performance. Your performance was so beautifully shaped and the phrases were artfully expressed. So much care was evident on so many levels and your respect and love for the music was so clear. I was truly touched at 'heart level' and it was a lovely gift.

These are a few responses of those who were deeply moved and took the time to express their feelings. I know there were many others who were touched as well. I'm sure there were also some we just did not get through to. We can't worry about them. All we can do is focus on those we can touch. This music is not for everyone. It is music that

requires deep thought and contemplation. And so much of what you get out of a concert as an audience member depends on what you brought to it.

But we attract the people who are willing to consider deep things. The LDS congregations (wards) in the areas on tour come because they feel a connection to Brigham Young University. Many are alumni of BYU and come to support their alma mater. Even those who are converts and may have never made a pilgrimage to Provo still feel its deep connection to their religion.

The LDS Church leaders, whom these local members sustain and look to for spiritual direction, sit as the board of trustees for this school. So for many reasons they have this connection with the school. Only in the narrow minded hometown rivalries within the Wasatch front do well-meaning Latter-day Saints question the merits of BYU. Moving beyond to a universal mission, BYU signifies everything that is wholesome and uplifting. Non LDS friends have come for that same reason. With only a few exceptions I think it is safe to say that people come to these concerts with more than just entertainment in mind. They expect to be filled, to renew a relationship with the Spirit and to be taught. If people come to be entertained they will find some entertaining value. That's why we have the arsenal of folk songs on hand (last year it was the banjo and spoons 'Auction Cry' set—but that was western Canada—here it's traditional folk and children's songs that lighten the evening.)

We feel we have succeeded if people going away wanting to be better and having contemplated universal truths. We get some feedback as we then gather our bags and report to the stage for our host family assignments.

Host Families

Regina and Bill, the choir presidents, have met with the stake leaders and come up with a housing list for the evening. They have taken consideration the size of the home, number of beds available, distance to and from the next point of departure and anticipated precautions for allergies to dogs, cats and teenage girls.

The names of roommates for the evening are read and matched with a host family. We quickly get with our family and carry our luggage out to the car. We try to travel as lightly as possible. Though there are some things we just can't do without, a separate tux bag being one of these, as well as a backpack to have on board the bus, separate from the larger case that goes underneath. For that reason I got all kinds of comments about my luggage. "Boy you fellas travel light for a month-long trip," to "Didn't your mother teach you how to pack light," and "Are you also packing all the food you'll need the whole time in there as well?" I learned to lightly brush these jabs aside. My final thoughts on the matter were that I took what I took. Nothing more, nothing less—though souvenirs did start to get the overhead bins of the bus a little crowded.

The car ride home with the family is a great way to get to know the families and to hear the reaction to the music. Some families with kids tended to be more interested in learning what it's like out in Utah, or discussing the new *Star Wars* movie. Some car trips though were deep discussions about the meaning of texts. Most were glowing with compliments about our music. There was very little critique, except if you happened to be billeted with a music professor. But general people said, "I wish you could be in our ward choir or I wish my boys would take an interest in singing."

At times it was quite difficult to stay up and chat with these families. Singing a concert takes so much out of you. But we know the family is excited to have us in their home and are very gracious. We are offered cookies or brownies again. Look out waistline! I loved being treated as the guest of honor. Many of the hosts were older people who had multiple guest rooms. Others had children who vacated their beds and had slumber parties in the basement with their siblings while the guests from BYU enjoyed their nice soft beds. I loved staying in houses with children, especially if they had a guitar. Sometimes we'd have late night jam sessions. Other nights it was, "here's your cookie, now off to bed, mother and I have work in the morning."

Having a different roommate each night allowed me to get to know some remarkable men. I had sung with them for a year in class, in some cases two years. But there is nothing like lying down for the night with the lights off for really getting to know someone. When you're standing next to a guy singing, for some reason it is easier to blend with him when you have talked into the late hours of the night.

*Part 4: Three Past Members of BYU Singers, Now Working as Choir Directors
Themselves, Speak About Their Experience With the Choir*

I traveled to Rexburg, Idaho and sat down with Kevin Brower, Eda Ashby and Randy Kempton, all former BYU Singers who now run the choral program at BYU-Idaho. I wanted to learn how their experience with BYU Singers prepared them for the choirs they now have organized. Each has been able to adapt the principles they learned while at BYU, combine them with their own unique talents and abilities, and produce high quality choral ensembles in a new situation.

Topic headings marked in italics are a mixture of specific questions I posed to each of the directors and general topics or themes we discussed. These include the audition process, choir psyche, traditions, rehearsal techniques and others.

What is Your History with the BYU Singers?

Dr. Brower. I sang with them for two years while I was doing my master's degree in choral conducting. I sang with them for two years even though they wanted me to spend one year with the Concert Choir. But I negotiated with them, or I didn't agree! I came in with the attitude of, "I'm coming here for what I want to get, not what you want me to get." And perhaps meanly, no, I wasn't mean, I wasn't trying to be mean-spirited, but I honestly believed that the reason that I went there was to work with Ron Staheli—that was the reason I was there.

Dr. Ashby. I actually sang with that choir after I had got my doctorate and I didn't have anything better to do. And I was doing some studies there and it just sort of hung on and hung on.

I sang with the choir quite a while, about 8 years. I conduct two choirs right now, Chamber Choir and Women's Glee.

Dr. Kempton. I began singing with Singers in the early nineties, '93-'94 might have been my year. I was doing a choral conducting master's with Dr. Staheli. I was a year and a half in the Concert Choir before I joined Singers and actually I worked with both of Dr. Staheli and Dr. Wilberg. Never the Men's Chorus, but Concert Choir and BYU Singers.

First of all my experience in the choirs at BYU was a formative experience for sure and a lot of what I do and am—that's the foundation. In rehearsal technique, in tonal

concept, in conducting style I'm very much a hybrid of those two men. It's hard for me to separate those two influences sometimes.

Here at BYU-I, I conduct the Men's Chorus and the University Choir.

What Was It About Dr. Staheli That Attracted You To Him?

Dr. Brower. I knew of him by reputation, plus I was a student of conducting. Around the nation I didn't see anybody who was his equal in conducting gesture and technique and I simply wanted to spend my time learning from him, respecting him as the master and me as the apprentice.

What Have You Learned From Dr. Staheli That You Have Applied To Your Own Choirs?

Dr. Ashby. I always think back to what he did. I don't remember all of it but often I know that I am doing things that he did. It just kind of gets ingrained. I absorb that. And—for instance with retreats—I thought back, “OK, now what did he do because he did it so many times and found out what worked. OK, let's remember how he did it and pattern it similarly.”

I'm not prone to speechmaking. I'm not as good at speechmaking so I like to avoid much of that. I am nowhere near as successful as he is. (Laughs) No. I wish we could achieve the same kind of concentration that he does. When he auditions people he goes for that. That's something he really looks for. There is a personality element in the audition. And at this point in time I'm just grateful if I can fill the ranks with people who can decently do it.

How Has This Influenced Your Audition Process?

Dr. Brower. Like Dr. Staheli, I interview every member of the ensemble. Frankly, I'm not interested in how much they sing. My selection process is an interview

in which I ask them questions that, according to my standards, helps me know if they want to be in the ensemble. And I believe it is similar to BYU Singers—I don't know that I adopted it from that, I think it's always been a part of who I am, but I think that really does happen in BYU Singers. He doesn't put up a big sign with posters, round up people on the street and say, "Come and be in the BYU Singers!" He just puts up a list by the door. You'll see the other lists are really long, all the audition lists. His is not that long. He doesn't have hundreds of people. The people that come there really want it.

And then something that Ron Staheli did say to me, again it was one of those moments. I probably asked him the same question, "How do you pick?" And he said, "I can teach a person how to sing but I can't teach them how to think," that's a direct quote from him. So as in his interview process, in my interview process, I ask them questions and I have to make sure they can think and that they want to be there. If I had to talk a person into it—well I just don't—I start and then I check myself and I say, "I don't have the time, if I have to talk you into this, we're not going to get along anyway."

And I don't think everybody has to be in BYU Singers or in Collegiate Singers. I don't go out saying, "If you're not in my ensemble then you are not going to be exalted. And there are choral conductors who have that attitude. "If you don't sing in this choir and you don't have this experience, then your life is meaningless!" How arrogant! On the other hand, if you really wanted, if you want to get into BYU Singers, Ron Staheli is going to make that an experience that you will never forget. It will be life-changing if you really want it.

Dr. Kempton. There's definitely a technical aspect in terms of how he produces the tone with his rehearsal quality—well first of all it starts with the audition. He selects

people that will fit in to that psyche, and not everybody on campus will do, even good singers, some people just won't fit. In BYU Singers particularly there is a very careful element of selection in the audition process. It's not just "can they sing?" There's a certain spirit, a certain psyche that comes with the singer that he is looking for.

Tell Me About The "Choir Psyche."

Dr. Ashby. One of the things that makes a choir work are with the people that carry over, there's a tradition that is established. Under a certain conductor there is sort of a choir psyche. And Dr. Staheli has that and everybody that runs a choir has a choir psyche and the people that come back continue that psyche and the new ones sort of fit in. They absorb this psyche and fit in to it. Every now and then you get one that's a dark horse and won't fit in.

We want them to maintain their individuality. The trick is they have to assimilate while still maintaining their individual musicianship and feeling responsible for the music themselves. Because one of the really frustrating things is people who, because they are in a choir, they're going to sit here and wait for you to tell them everything they need to do. They need to apply their musicianship and bring something to the music interpretively in order for it to work

My goal is to get them to blend together, to work together, become one voice and yet take individual responsibility for what they are doing—to be musical even if their neighbor is not there yet.

Dr. Kempton. There were some particular phrases that were just part of our vocabulary. Of course "BYU Singers Psyche," you've already mentioned that one. What does that mean, BYU Singers Psyche? "Play your full dynamic role, no more than your

role, but your full dynamic role.” That encouraged us to take risks, encouraged us to give what we had, consecrate even. He never said consecrate that I remember, but taking what you have and giving your full role. That was a very important part of what he said.

We were encouraged to take risks. It was safe to take risks. He demanded that we take risks. And there was always that common—the brotherhood, the sisterhood that was there allowed us to take those risks and make a mistake and we were loved anyway. He had the power to demand our very best most of the time. Not all of the time but most of the time we had to give our best.

How Have You Adapted to Your New Setting?

Dr. Ashby. I think what you are able to do with a choir depends on the personality. Brother Brower is similar to Dr. Staheli in so many ways with that charisma, that stance, the posture. But there are a lot of differences as well. But at the outward glance it looks the same. And Brother Kempton and I are more like each other—kind of quiet outside of class, but different in front of the choir.

Dr. Brower. I suppose because of my own goals, my own personality, my own desires and drives—plus I have gone on to do doctoral work—that I had to come to the realization of something that Dr. Staheli tried to teach me, but I didn’t apply until later. And what he tried to teach me is that he was not interested in producing clones. He wasn’t interested in producing other people to be like him. He was interested in helping us achieve our potential and being ourselves.

But I came out being a clone. I came out trying to do things exactly the way he did and I found out it didn’t work. It works for him, but it didn’t work for me. But there are principles, there are guiding principles that work and I hope that’s what your paper

unveils and that's what we really need to talk about, I think, are those very specific principles.

But when I went on to doctoral work, for instance, as I got in with my committee chair and he said, and he found out, "Oh, you worked with Ron Staheli!" The first thing he said was, "Well we don't need to work on your conducting. You've done all that you're going to do for the rest of your life," as far as the skills that you've learned. No, I don't agree with that necessarily, but even by reputation my chair would say, "We don't need to work on your conducting."

But then he started asking me questions and he found where my weaknesses were. And he said, "That's where we're going to go, we're going to focus on your weaknesses and we're going to turn you in to our own person." So that was the whole job.

And I think that's happening. People still come up to me in concerts, even our last concert, and say, "You know, you remind me a lot of Ron Staheli." And I take that as a great compliment. I hope that's always a part of it. Just as I hope I remind people of my father. I hope I remind people of my mother. But one day I want my children to say, "Oh, yeah, I'm like my father, not like my grandfather necessarily."

Ron was trying to teach us to become our own conductor and not an imitation of him, but we had to do things "by the book" so much that we became just like him, the author of the book.

What Traditions Have You Adopted from Singers?

Dr. Ashby. We have devotionals, retreats and occasionally firesides like he did. We've been singing hymns and praying before every rehearsal. I don't remember that we always did that there. I can't remember.

What Have You Learned From The Singers' Rehearsal Process?

Dr. Kempton. When you watch his rehearsal you see what kind of time he spends on tone quality and text. "You're never two steps away from text and tone," is one of his famous dictums. You might be one step away to work on something else, but then you're always right back to text and tone. In terms of text expression, that technical part there, that's a real key to what you're talking about.

You couldn't get away from his ears either. And that's critical. Why does BYU Singers sound the way they do? Well because Dr. Staheli has ears like no one else in the world. He has developed the ability to hear what needs to be fixed and he knows how to fix it.

Dr. Ashby. I would love to have the intensity he has in his rehearsals. He wants every minute because he has so much repertoire. But here we've relaxed that a little bit because it's not so much about doing the repertoire and going out in the world and doing all that stuff.

You have to concentrate. When you get self conscious and start laughing at yourself and that kind of stuff then you've lost it. Dr. Staheli doesn't do that. He's so serious. He may say something that is just off the wall you know but his face is straight and he's on target still. I'm not sure how you get that intensity out of everyone because a lot of people are not prone to giving that.

The intensity is something that I have always remembered and wished for. It's very difficult for me to achieve that in a rehearsal. Every rehearsal with him was so intense and so focused and so refreshing because of it. But here I've had real trouble getting people to get that far. Every now and then we have a rehearsal like that and I say,

“Hurray! We did it!” I wish I could do that. I think it takes a certain kind of person to do that. It’s a talent.

I have come to the conclusion that a lot of things happen when people’s minds are centered and they’re not going off in other directions mentally. That’s really a faith thing. Faith has to do with centering your mind on things that are uplifting, good and true. There are true things that aren’t uplifting, you know. And in choral singing we unite to declare a message that is uplifting, good and true. That can bring tremendous experiences and blessings if you want.

Dr. Staheli will often ask, “How’s your concentration?” And that lack of concentration is probably the biggest deterrent to having these things happen in any choir. The thing that makes it easier here is because we have these things that unify around and people are used to concentrating in those areas. But in the outside world people are so disparate, they don’t have anything to unify around and so it’s harder to get them concentrated on this one focus.

J. Rueben Clark said, “We get nearer to the Lord through music than perhaps anything else except maybe prayer.” That’s because of that concentration.

What Have You Learned About Discipline?

Dr. Ashby. Because people are younger and they don’t have true self discipline; some of them will bend every which way as far as attendance and lateness and talking and all that stuff goes. Grades reflect attendance. I know with Dr. Staheli it’s never been an issue of a grade at all. I think everyone just got an A and he didn’t even deal with things like testing people on their individual parts by having them sing in quartets and counting how many mistakes they make. That is kind of a training wheel or a stepping

stone. In the ideal world if you had a singer that was totally committed you would not have to do that.

You have to give them stepping stones because they can't hop up to the higher level without taking the steps. So sometimes that's necessary in the choir. Outside rehearsals—sometimes you experience that where you're up against it and you've got to learn something and the people just aren't quite there and they need some help—optional outside rehearsals usually.

How Do You Communicate Meaning of Text?

Dr. Brower. I think it is an important factor that you have a conductor—an interested person in music that convinces by either love or persuasion or cajoling or whatever that what we do as musicians is to communicate. So many choral conductors, because of politically correct issues with text, back away and they don't even talk about what you're singing. They simply refer to it as a historical piece and they talk about the music a lot but they don't talk about the text. And it's not because they're dumb, it's because they're afraid. So BYU Singers is in an enviable position of having no fear because no fear is necessary. You can talk about every essence of what you sing. And it's not just the sacred things. It's "*Carmina Burana*." It's understanding what you are singing which is, in *Carmina Burana*'s place, somewhat deviant if not quite deviant from culture and tradition of our day. And yet it is something to be said and why don't we talk about it?

I had this conversation with Ron Staheli. I called him up when I heard that they were doing it and said how? How are you doing this? They had done it years and years and years ago.

One thing is it's all in Latin which is good. But its text or poetry or whatever, was written by wayward or otherwise monks who had too much time on their hands. So they were thinking about things that they were not supposed to be thinking of. So there's sexual innuendo, there's all kinds of things going on.

So I heard they were doing *Carmina Burana* and I just called to say, "How are you doing this?" And I think he was mad at me! His voice level was heightened. I think he was mad at me. Maybe defensive even. Maybe somebody else had already cornered him.

But I wasn't calling to say, "You shouldn't do this." I was just saying, "I would love to do that, tell me how!" Because I love it! I think it's something of great historic value. And anyway he got a little upset and said, "Why should—if we are willing to talk about sacred things then why would we avoid singing about what the human body does?" You see in his mind he had taken what I thought was deviant into something that is a part of our existence, that we have to deal with. And if we put it in a closet and don't deal with it then we are more prone to embrace it as a deviant behavior, as something that is inside us. So, I don't know, five minutes or so, five or six minutes he lectured me. OK, but we're still not going to do it here!

So he's in a situation with the BYU Singers where he has no fear. He has no fear of talking about every issue. He's a person that has no fear and he teaches the ensemble that we don't have to be afraid of true communication. Now this is not necessarily a Staheliism, but I think I may have picked it up from him, I don't recall. Again I think it's been a part of me anyway, you know from my upbringing.

When we sing we are dealing with a communication that through much study and thought and research—that doesn't mean it's conclusive, but a lot of research suggests that when we speak we often communicate using only a small portion of our mental process. When we sing using text and melodic form we tend to use a much greater portion of our communicative process, our mental process of communication. But by doing so we not only go out, we come in. We teach ourselves more. Or in other words, when we speak it's easy to forget what we said. But when we sing a text we remember it for a long time. The process is more involved. Brain scans, whatever. That's your field now. You can take care of that now.

But he would often sit us down and we would just talk about the music. Just as we were sitting and bouncing ideas off each other some of the greatest things I have learned in my life—life changing lessons—have been through discussing meanings of texts. He would say, “What do you think this means to you?” And not necessarily at the beginning, it was after we had chewed on it for a while.

I don't like to do it at the beginning. I think it's a futile exercise because you have to start singing it. Once you start singing it you match the text and the pitches and whatever that mental process of right brain, left brain, all of that connection, and it starts going into you, then you're better able to express those ideas.

So you're in a position at BYU Singers where there is no fear. There is no fear of complete communication to the heart, to the honesty of it. Some might disagree with that. Some would say that's impossible. You can't do that because you always have to reserve. We'd be an emotional basket case wouldn't we? We would have to have therapy to no

end if we gave everything. So understand that side of it. OK, so 98% of your full communication!

We sang “When David Heard” by Eric Whitacre at BYU-I. This is a very long and complex piece that beautifully depicts the suffering that King David felt when he heard the news that his son Absalom had been slain in battle. It was so visceral and taxing on the choir’s emotional energy! I remember looking over at a girl in the choir whose sister had been recently killed in a car accident. She looked like she needed to go to the hospital or something after what she was able to let out, because of her experience with her sister.

What Have You Learned About Song Selection?

Dr. Brower. There are certain songs that you sing in a choir that are lollipop songs. They are like quick sugar and they are satisfying for the moment but they make you tired after a while. And I don’t have a problem with those, I think lollipops are great. On the other hand they don’t satisfy. They may satiate, but they don’t satisfy. They don’t let you go away saying that you have been filled. You may feel like you’re filled—satiated with sugar—but they just make you tired. You give up. You say, “Oh boy, how long was this concert? An hour? An hour and thirty minutes? It was great! Man, they sang all of my favorite songs! How long does this last?”

Last night we had a recital with John Linford; I should have invited you. The man sang for 90 minutes, but I didn’t notice that until the end. In fact I thought, “Wow, it’s been an hour and a half!” And he sang a whole set in German, he sang a whole set in French, and he sang a whole set in Russian. I didn’t understand a word of it. Oh, it was in the program notes so I could see it—no, I did. How dare I say that! I understood every bit

of it. I don't understand the languages but I did understand. I was captivated! I walked away from that so satisfied! So ready to go out and work and do! Where some concerts you go to and you just, "OK, it's time to go home."

And that's what I'm talking about—pieces like "When David Heard" or others. That's another good landmark and I think a distinguishing factor of BYU Singers. There are other groups in the world that do very complicated pieces of music. In some ways—and you'd have to talk to Ron about this—but in some ways Ron is probably aware that he cannot program the most difficult stuff that there is available. There are some things that we still don't do well in our culture. We sing a lot. We've got good hearts. But we don't grow up as musicians very well in our culture. We do OK. But you go over to Sweden or Hungary where they're talking about music theory before they're in grade one. And by grade four they're able to tap independent rhythms with all of their limbs at the same time, simultaneously! They really get excited about the arts. That is core curriculum and math and science are extracurricular.

I see some of these pieces that these Swedes do and think, "OK, next!" Anyway, so having said that—you'd have to talk to Ron more about that. I don't want to speak for him. But it is a place in the United States in which, again, there is no fear of tackling whatever music is necessary to communicate a point. I just love that concept!

Tell Me About the Spiritual Aspect of Singing.

Dr. Kempton. But in the real spiritual psyche of the nature of it—can you duplicate it somewhere else? Well, I don't know. I suppose if you had some place else where the singers all had a unified outlook on life, they all shared a same philosophy, or they're able to together buy into the family concept of BYU Singers. You might be able

to do something like what BYU Singers does, but when you start to add, “Well, what about the influence of the Holy Ghost?”

That’s something that’s difficult to talk about in an academic paper. I struggled with it in my master’s thesis as well and again in my doctorate paper. How do you talk about that element? How do you quantify it? How do you talk about it? That’s difficult to do.

Dr. Brower. We worship a Being, someone we want to be like, Christ. And I think that Dr. Staheli is one of the most Christ-like people I have ever met. Ron and I would go jogging together in the indoor track. There were so many wonderful moments. But in one of those moments we were talking about a piece of music we were doing and we were having, I felt, a very open conversation. It turned into more of, “Let’s really talk about this and get to the issues,” instead of, “I’m the master and you’re the student.” But we were talking about some things and I referred to him—I can’t remember what the sentence was, but I referred to him as the master and he stopped running. And I stopped and he said, “There is only one Master” referring to Christ. “I’m not.”

He was always trying to teach this one principle. It wasn’t about him. BYU Singers becomes who it is because Ron Staheli knows there is one Master and it’s Christ. Everything we do is for Him. And we do our best for Him. We don’t give Him the leftovers. It’s not like a DI [thrift store] drive, it’s not like the DI drive of music where we just pull out whatever we can and get by. We give our best, the rest we leave for other things, I guess, but when we’re in the service of Christ we do the very best we can.

Dr. Ashby. There’s no way the conductor can give everything with their hands or even telling it. There’s this feel thing that they have to do. And that channel has to be

opened. A lot of people shut down because they expect to be entertained or told or something. That has to be opened up again. And I think it's the same channel that the Holy Ghost works through. You just have to be open to it. There are times in choir when everyone is feeling that things happen in the music that you couldn't conduct, you couldn't have rehearsed in. And they're really exciting because it's that Spirit that's working on all of you together.

I think it's a spiritual thing that has to do with people who are committed. And here we're lucky to be committed to the gospel, the [LDS] church and so forth, that makes it really easy because there is one thing that we are committed to. In the outside world sometimes you can get people committed to the music, to the cause of the music or the message that they are dealing with and sometimes that will work.

To Really Understand It Would You Have To Understand How The Spirit Works?

Dr. Ashby. To do it fully, yes, I think so. But people operate by the Spirit outside the Church all the time—good people who are doing a good work and they can have access to it. There is no reason why not. But people have to live in such a way that they are qualified to receive that. And then they have to be willing to come together in that way.

I always hope that it reaches people individually. In a larger choir though you don't think about that as much but you hope that it's happening. When they take responsibility it will happen. So it's connecting with them, having them take responsibility, them creating and having them have this experience together and being totally a better person because of it. And something happens that is greater than the sum of the individuals because of working together.

Joseph Smith said, “The greatest blessings always attend concerted effort—that is, unified group effort, never attended individual exertion or enterprise.” Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. I think it’s 183 in my book, I’m not sure, but I used it.

What Role Do Relationships Play In The Process?

Dr. Kempton. When we were onstage and did for example, “How can I keep from singing?”—well, all of the pieces that we did in the *Thanksgiving of American Folk Hymns* which I was privileged to be a part of—and you watch that video and you see what happens in the circle of that particular piece. There was something powerful there and there was a spirit to spirit connection—a heart to heart sharing that is strengthened by a gospel-centered approach. There’s is no question that the Holy Ghost certainly does amplify the effects.

Dr. Ashby. Every singer has that personal relationship with the director. I guess it has to be professional, but at the same time you feel like, I look to him as kind of a father figure. He is very intense. That helps the music a lot I’m sure. That must be part of the concentration. Because in *The Inner Game of Tennis* it says if you love the ball it is easier to concentrate on it. And so if you have this great relationship with the director then it’s really easy to concentrate.

Dr. Staheli has found a way to have both of those things very strong and that’s part of it. Some of us women tend to err too much on the side of mercy and love and not enough intensity—not enough demand. And men sometimes are on the other side—too much demand and not enough mercy and love. So it’s hard to get the balance. That seems to be something he’s got down pretty well. He’s changed over the years. He used to be

more intense and less personal. But he's been through a lot of experiences that have changed him and softened that.

He's not a person that opens up readily. But every now and then, on tour or something, if he feels like the trust is there it happens and it's kind of neat. Because we all have those vulnerabilities and for me, opening up and singing is a way to vent those. That's when I feel like I am at peace and am my best self. And he helped me with that. I learned to sing because of that.

How Important Is Each Individual?

Dr. Kempton. "Every single person is important." That was an important concept. And this was a powerful lesson to me where I knew that he meant what he said when he said that every single person is important and we can't replace you. The Christmas concert happened and my wife went in to labor a little prematurely with our third child. We did the first show, the Friday show or something and then that night we were in the hospital and she was having the baby. Well I couldn't be in the concert the next day. You know, I was involved in the birth and I couldn't very well say, "Hang on, I'll be back after the concert to catch the baby." That just wasn't going to happen. And I had a solo in the concert. A short solo, you know one verse in "How far is it to Bethlehem?" I was the baritone soloist. Anyway, when I came back and we had a party and I talked about the experience of not being there. And my wife actually went through an emergency C-section so it was a rather traumatic experience. But he said, "Well, we had to use the whole baritone section to replace you as a soloist." And I knew there were other good baritone soloists, but that drove home the point to me that I was that important. Not because of my great voice, but he meant what he said when he said, "Each person is

critical.” You know when he said, “I had to replace you with the entire baritone section.” All of a sudden now I knew how important I was to the choir at least in his perception. And that’s powerful.

If someone sits in a large choir in the back and says, “Well, I’m just one of a hundred voices. I’m not important.” Then they don’t give that full role. They don’t take the risks and they don’t commit. Then if they think “I’m important and Brother Kempton knows my name, or Brother Kempton heard my mistake or my good thing or something and called attention to that particular thing, then all of the sudden I know, ooh, I better do my part.

Tell Me About the Commitment That Is Expected.

Dr. Brower. The commitment to success shows in his singers. Not that he has made them want it. They already wanted it. He’s just capitalizing on it! Now this is a supposition. He hasn’t said this to me. But in my own thoughts, this is me not him, if I were in that situation—I find myself sometimes when I really have a group of people, this year is a good case because we’re going to Brazil and they want to be there. In a Machiavellian way I have them. I can ask them to do anything because I know they want to be there. There’s never a question of, “If I ask too much of them, they’ll quit.” They’ve already made that choice. And I think that Ron goes about it that way. He has them. People sort of self-select themselves, “I’m going to do this, I know it’s going to be hard, we’re doing this tour, it’s a lot of time, I’ve heard these horror stories, where do I sign?” So he’s got you, Dave, he’s got us all. He can ask us to do anything he wants because we wanted to do it!

Chapter 5: Seven Guiding Principles

Although it is impossible to duplicate exactly what occurs with the BYU Singers, I have identified, based on hundreds of hours of observation and interviews, seven principles that make BYU Singers what they are. I believe these principles can be adapted to help any choir.

These principles are as follows:

1. They love what they are doing. They care deeply about the music and the people involved in the process.
2. They have established a distinct “choir psyche.” They have traditions that continue the psyche year after year and participate in activities that incorporate new people in to the tradition.
3. They understand the meaning of the text they sing. They are not afraid of true communication.
4. They are dedicated, hard workers committed to success.
5. Personal growth of the conductor: a teacher can be no better teacher than he or she is a human being.
6. Positive, healthy, appropriate relationships exist in the choir. The relationship with the director and the Singers is loving and nurturing, built on respect and trust. The relationship among the Singers is family-like: supportive, friendly and motivating.
7. They acknowledge their connection to a higher power. They depend upon this as a source of strength. They promote activities that increase the choir member’s faith in this source of power.

The following section, organized in categories by the seven principles, will be presented in my voice, periodically using direct quotes from those interviewed.

Again, the names of all participants, except for Dr. Staheli and the music faculty at BYU- Idaho, have been changed.

Principle 1: They Love What They Are Doing. They Care Deeply About the Music and The People Involved in The Process.

Caring begins with the director. Dr. Staheli is sincerely interested in every member of the choir and everyone they perform for. He is interested in the details of people's lives and how they are feeling, not only about the music, but life in general. Kevin Brower observed, "It is surprising to find people that don't care, but they're all over. They just do not care. That's the first rule of a good choir director. You go in and you talk to Ron Staheli and you find a person that cares about you."

His caring attitude is reflected in the individual Singers as well. This infusion of the attitude of caring is in part because he selects people that care to be in the choir and partly because the attitude is contagious. Dr. Brower summarized the way the BYU Singers look at the world,

This is the tangible that continues. It's not about Ron Staheli. It's not about any person, it's about adopting that principle that says, 'We live what we feel, we live what we think, and what we think and feel is care. We care about things, we care about people, we care about the music, we care about our place in society. We care about what we do.'

This trait of truly caring is what drives everything else they do. The other principles would simply never be put into place if the choir didn't care. Brother Brower describes his experience in a choir that did not follow the first principle:

I call them mercenary choirs. In which, maybe they're getting a scholarship and they have to do it, but they hated every minute of it. They just show up, punch the

clock, do their job and then they're gone. And how horrible it is if you are not that kind of person and you're in the middle of that, because you do care!

Well I believe BYU Singers attracts people who care. It attracts people who—it doesn't matter if they were getting paid to do it. In fact most of them are not getting paid to be there.

Many people make the assumption about BYU Singers, 'Oh that's just all majors'. Yeah, well, they're majors of something! Law, Premed, whatever! Psychology. Where are the music majors? Uh, some of them weren't attracted to it, were they? And the fun part about it is that Ron doesn't go out and try to talk them in to it. You've got this diva up here, he avoids them! He walks away from them!

When you get up on stage you can sense that, the way we feel about each other as we sing. You can just feel it. There are some choirs that sing so well, are precise and very musical. But there is something to be said about looking at a group of singers and just knowing that they care about each other.

A mantra that one of the choir members suggested goes as follows, "I love who I am, I love what I'm doing, I love my Savior and I love you"

In a pre-concert devotional, one Singer observed, "I find the greatest gift we can give anybody that comes to our concert—anybody that chooses to come and give us the opportunity to sing for them is that love that we feel from the Savior."

She then challenged the choir, "Take every ounce of love that we feel and we have felt and give that through our singing, through our eyes, through all our emotion and through our hearts and give that to them as the greatest we can give them."

That sense of love and care comes from the way the members of the choir live their lives every day. They are just the kind of people who live remarkable, intense, meaningful lives. That translates into effective rehearsing and performing. They care about the details of the music enough to produce a very polished product. And they care about each other so that it is a joy to do that rather than a chore. By the time they are on the stage you can tell they love each other and what they are doing.

A choir member describes the care of the other choir members while he was on tour, “I was so impressed with the way my fellow choir members cared about me. It was a simple thing really. I had fallen asleep on the tour bus and suddenly woke up very thirsty. My throat was so sore, but I muttered softly, ‘man, I’m so thirsty.’ I heard the guy across the row from me ask ‘Does anybody have a water bottle for Bill?’ Within five seconds two water bottles were passed towards me and I quenched my thirst.

I don’t believe I have ever performed with a group of people who were so unselfish. They were so observant and aware of the needs of others above their own. That’s why I think we had such a good tour that year. It seems that nobody was stuck carrying all the gear or being left with all the work. Everybody looked around to see what needed to be done and didn’t stop working until it was all done.

That sentiment was echoed by many of the choir members I interviewed. It seems that Dr. Staheli draws people to him that care deeply. He puts them in his choir and amazing things happen.

One choir member was unsure about whether or not to try out for the choir. He was a new graduate student at BYU who had good experiences with the top choirs in other universities, but had decided to focus on graduate studies in another area. He describes his experience:

Something just prompted me to go talk to him. Just knock on the door, and he took me in, and he was so warm and inviting. He was very interested in hearing about my experiences at the other schools I had attended in my undergraduate studies. He knew my former choir directors.

He had me sing some scales and do some other vocal exercises. He listened intently and was very complimentary. ‘Oh, you’ve been well trained.’ But he wasn’t just interested in my voice. He was interested in me as a human being. The only connection I needed with him was that I was another human being, interested in singing and making beautiful music.

Dr. Brower continues,

He's not always nice, but he's a very caring person. And he cares about a lot of things. It's not just about people, it's about the music. It's not just about music, it's about people too. I've experienced that. You probably also have times where you have musicians who care deeply about the music and they don't care how much they have to walk over you to get there.

And it starts with the leader. It starts with the example that is being set. So I agree. That's rule number one. That's the one tangible that carries through. I am not afraid to say, 'I hope I'm just like him.' I hope I'm exactly like him because I don't feel it's him. I think it's a concept that carries through. Dr. Staheli looks to Jesus Christ as his example of caring leadership. His entire life was filled with caring, observing, teaching and leading by example.

There's such an immense amount of concentration and caring, instead of a waste of time, of not caring. And then just trying to emulate Christ. I don't think it's a question of, "Well, what would Christ do?" It just simply is a part of his being. And when the tables need turning, he turns them. If the money changers are in the temple, he doesn't say, "Excuse me, I'm gonna make you mad." He just makes them mad!

Elisabeth Bossard, music teacher at BYU Idaho, friend of Dr. Staheli and

longtime observer of the choir noted, "If a conductor cares deeply about the individual members of the choir, he or she will know them well enough to be able to bring the best out of them and organize that into something truly remarkable. Ron Staheli has a gift for pulling things out of people that you didn't know were there."

She goes on to say,

He has a gift for appreciating all facets of their lives. When someone is working on their doctorate in something, he makes a point in class to recognize them for that. He'll say, 'We want to wish so and so good luck; he's going to go work on this or this. We want to wish so and so luck; they're appearing in blah and blah.' And he makes it possible for people to sing and have a life. So he doesn't take away opportunity, he gives opportunity and he recognizes even teeny accomplishments. I mean things that you wouldn't think. So he knows a lot about each individual and he knows how to build them. Even though he's flawed himself, he cares. And he also knows that everything they're experiencing is going to add to the performance of what he's doing.

I think it also influences him on what he chooses to arrange because I think he's good at going, 'OK, these people, these individuals, need this and this could do it.' I have never felt he did anything to build himself a pedestal. If anything he builds a pedestal for each of the people in his choir.

Many of the people in Singers have multiple talents. Dr. Staheli does not want them to put these other abilities aside to focus only on singing. He figures out ways to use them to complement the choir. For example one year there were five or six guitar players in the group. He had them all accompany a folk song and discovered the rich guitar sound added a unique dimension to the Singers' sound.

One member said to Dr. Staheli once,

I loved what you were able to do with people who play the violin, guitar, flute, French horn etc. - I wouldn't have ever thought of that on my own to volunteer to play the French horn to accompany the choir. You have a vision or a sense of thinking, 'Hey this could work.' It allowed me the chance still develop my talents. I didn't ever feel like I was closing a door. I'm sure other people have too.

He responded, "I just marveled at how well those pieces all folded together." In reference to a particular piece he said, "It sends shivers up your back it is so beautiful."

He is able to do things like this because he knows each individual member of the group so well. At the very beginning of the year at the choir retreat he goes around the circle and introduces each member. He spends a minute or two on them and tells what he has learned about them. In the case of the new members he has only known them for a few days, but he already knows and loves them deeply.

This attitude carries over in to the group as well. They feel their conductor cares for them and in turn they care for their fellow members. One Singer commented,

This was a life-changing experience for me, being around people who were so good and so kind. It's helped me to be changed to be a kinder person, a more loving person. I've learned a lot about what kind of leader I want to be. I have made friendships that are everlasting friendships. But I think for me that is the

most significant life-changing point that has helped me see who I can become and who I want to become.

There are so many people that I thought, ‘I wish I was more like this person. I wish I was more like that person.’ So being with them every day I started becoming like them a little bit every day in some small way.

But it is all based on the fact that you are working hard making music together. You can’t just have good people sitting around being good! ‘We’ll invite 45 good people and we’ll just sit and be good!’ It doesn’t work that way. It doesn’t matter what we are doing. It could be getting together and building a bridge or something. It’s not as much about the music as it is about building lives.

The success in singing comes from Dr. Staheli’s focus. He’s building lives; he’s not just giving a good concert. Another Singer observed, “Part of being such a good choir is that you are performing for your audience. It is the love of the audience and the love of God that comes through in the performance. So you are trying to accomplish something with your singing. It’s not about heralding yourselves as the world’s best choir. It is to relay the message of a song. It is to express. We sing to ‘express’ not to ‘impress.’

He continued,

I have changed because of my experience with the choir. In all aspects of my life I am more consistently thinking about what good is this going to do for these individuals?

This principle is evident when the alumni come to concerts. Dr. Staheli does not forget about his Singers after they come and go. Many alumni attended concerts in last year’s tour to Boston and Washington, DC. He would tell us about them when they came to our concerts. He would say things like, ‘Make sure you get to know this guy, he’s going to be a general authority some day.’ Or, ‘So and so has driven 200 miles to be here, so go up to them and tell them you are glad they are here.’ He’ll still remember them after twenty years or so.’

Sandefur Schmidt, a charter member of the BYU Singers who is still involved in their daily activities, adds an interesting perspective with her take on Dr. Staheli.

Any choir is so much reflective of the personality of whoever conducts. I don’t believe a dishonest person can really produce honest music, because the voice is part of you. You don’t just pick up an instrument and play. You really play with

your heart when you are singing because the instrument is you. He brings such integrity and honesty. It's him, it is who he is. It's not just who he pretends to be in the classroom. It's not just a suit coat he puts on when he leaves the house. This is who he is. I've known him for nearly thirty years and he does not disappoint.

An audience really knows when you are being honest about what you feel about what you are singing and a choir knows when a conductor is being honest with them. That's not just how he feels about the music, it's how he feels about them. It's the preparation he brings to the rehearsal. It's him knowing each choir member. It's knowing so well their strengths and weaknesses and being able to help them make the strengths better and the weaknesses less, and the sharing of love and friendship. There is so much musical that goes into Singers, but there is also so much extra-musical that goes into it. And so it starts with him.

Principle 2: They Have Established a Distinct "Choir Psyche." They Have Traditions That Continue the Psyche Year After Year and Participate in Activities That Incorporate New People into the Tradition.

The collection of attitudes and traditions that carry over year after year is referred to as the BYU Singers Psyche. Dr. Staheli has found a way to carry these traditions on every year with the help of returning Singers; about one half of the choir is new each year, which leaves plenty of people to assume leadership responsibilities and train the new members by example.

The attitude of the choir is reflected in a spirit of cooperation rather than competition and is held together by a common religious bond. This attitude is strengthened by traditions that are passed from one generation of Singers to the next.

Spirit of Cooperation

Dr. Ashby observed this about the choir:

The people that come back continue that psyche and the new ones sort of fit in. They absorb this psyche and fit into it. In BYU Singers there is a desire to help each other as opposed to competing. That's something that has to be established very early. Dr. Staheli always does that by giving a speech at the beginning, about the purpose of the choir and so forth.

This attitude is absorbed by the choir members and becomes a way of thinking. This choir is not about individuals, it's not about competing with each other. It's not about the director definitely. It's about serving the Lord and that's the only reason to do it.

One Singer commented,

Singing here at BYU, it would never even occur me to think competitively with the other singers. After two years of singing with the group I forgot that it could be any other way. But I do remember that feeling of competition at another school that I sang at—we didn't have that sense of mission it seems like as much.

The common religious bond helps bring the choir together this way. A former Singer noted, "The fact that we are serving the Lord kind of eliminates the competition aspect."

Traditions Passed Through Generations

The choir is never the exact same year after year because each individual is unique, but each year there are those consistent elements. There are certain things that are passed down over the years to every new person that comes in to Singers.

Dr. Brower commented,

If someone gets used to the way that something is and they know that that's expected, then they really stick to that. I think it's a reflection of what Dr. Staheli's done to try and make the choir what it is and the reputation that he's really carried on with the choir to make us all feel like this is what we want. (See Appendix A: History of the Choir) We each are a part of the people that taught us—our mentors—and we pass down the heritage as we go.

In the choir there are opportunities for people to share the lessons they have learned and the connections to the music that they have made. There are activities—devotionals, firesides and retreats—that build spirituality and help the Singers to get to know each other.

Dr. Staheli gives the reason for this:

The better we know each other, the better we are going to sing. The mix is always changing and I need to know as much about the ingredients of that mix as I possibly can.

I need to know about the mix; then with what I know, my contribution has to be altered, fixed, tweaked, to complement the mix. Therefore, the better I know you on all levels, the better we'll work together, the more I can complement you. And that's why for me, doing a devotional and just having it some sort of formality, I don't want to do that.

Some of the traditions that reinforce the choir psyche are the act of praying before each rehearsal, concert and activity, firesides, birthday celebration, the choir retreat, devotionals and high school workshops. The choir's alumni also help to perpetuate these traditions.

Praying

Dr. Staheli continued,

I don't even want to say prayers in class if they are going to be a formality. We want to pray for a purpose, we want to get to know that person who is speaking in devotional better and I want that person in devotional to invest a little bit of themselves in us, a little bit more than perhaps their own ward testimony meeting or in a lesson. And if they do that, then that increases our bond with them and it really increases their bond with us because they have trusted us, they have invested something of themselves—more of themselves in us as fellow human beings, as brothers and sisters.

Firesides

We used to have guest speakers. We don't need guest speakers, we've got great speakers in the choir. So it's the same thing. Sometimes the firesides are even better because we're away from the rehearsal area and we are in someone's home. So people can talk. They let us know what is going on. They share with us what is inside them—their hopes, their dreams, their disappointments, their worries, their hurts, their confusions, their whatever. Those help us; those help the health of our group. Then we're better prepared to help that person, we're better prepared to sing with that person and then we'll make great progress together.

Birthdays

Barry was once in charge of organizing the birthday ritual. He reflected,

One of those things that really makes Singers relationships work is doing birthdays. One time when we had high school students visiting our choir and they witnessed that they came up and asked, ‘Do you do that for everybody’s birthday? That is so great!’ When people have been there to observe that, it always amazes people that we know each other that well.

I was the birthday person two or three years ago. And I loved it! I loved making people’s birthdays special, but then on my birthday they did the same for me. That really made my birthday. It was an incredibly touching experience.

But I think that that gives you the idea of people contributing not just musically but who they are as an individual—what their personality is and how it contributes to the choir—what their unique gifts and attributes add to the ensemble and I think a lot of participants in other choirs don’t know that. I think that other people in the choir may feel that about them but they may never know that. I think for a lot of people it is really kind of an epiphany—an awakening—when they hear from other people what they see in them, because sometimes they don’t see it in themselves. They can realize that people really do love them and appreciate them and value them and see a lot beyond their own weaknesses. Sometimes we get so focused on our weaknesses but in that moment they know that, ‘wow, people really do see my attributes!’ I think that one thing does wonders for creating positive relationships. It becomes really important. They really, really look forward to it!

Retreat

One Singer said this about the retreat:

The retreat is a really good opportunity for everyone to get to know each other. It’s where you build that initial relationship with each other. You don’t really get that anywhere else during the year—certainly not in class because class is work, work, work. You have to seek it out. You build that neat bond in your singing relationship and there’s nothing that replaces that either. But on more of just a personal, informal kind of basis you don’t build that relationship except for at retreat or if you get together with them in an informal setting and just hang out.

So the retreat is really neat to be able to do that. One of the most significant things that happens every year at retreat is that Dr. Staheli goes around and calls everyone by name and introduces them to the group. It doesn’t matter if they are new people or seasoned choir members. He knows every one of them and he’ll say something about them. It’s not just a matter of introducing, he’ll also give a specific characteristic or personality trait about them that he finds unique about them.

It was important for us to identify each person’s specific role in the choir. Finding out how you fit into the choir was an interesting self discovery. At my first retreat

he said things about me that I didn't know he was aware of or that he would remember. I was like, 'How do you remember that?' That's cool. I don't remember telling him that. I was amazed.

He knew my name, he knew everybody's name. I remember being kind of nervous too. When it came to me because I thought he's not going to remember my name, but he did. He remembered everybody's name. It was amazing. That's an amazing gift that he has.

So that's a neat experience and that was the first night. We also had a devotional as well and of course you rehearse. But you also just kick back and play games and you get to know people. I had a really good conversation with one of the choir members my first year. At that moment we really bonded and we've been good friends ever since.

And this year at retreat it was the same thing. I was a little more involved because I gave a devotional this year. But I remember that same feeling with the bass section. He also does sectionals at the retreat. You find out about your voice and how you fit in with the other voices. I remember all the basses, when we were done, we were very impressed with each other 'cause everyone was very open. There were a lot of new basses but they were very open to trying whatever. Singing by themselves and saying, 'Now try this.' OK. It was really neat. A neat thing that came out of that was that everyone was very open for the rest of the year and was willing to be open to modification or suggestion where needed.

I've been in other choirs where people would offer suggestions but people wouldn't take it very well. There's always an ego. But in that moment when you have that little meeting with your section you clarify all that. It's a rotation where the sopranos and tenors would go and play games while the altos were with themselves bonding and the basses were with Dr. Staheli.

In our little meeting they said, 'OK, we're just going to tell you when you're bad!' We set the expectation. But it opens it up and all year long we had first-timers who felt free to say, 'I think we need to do this and this,' and we were like OK, and addressed the section leader. Or a lot of times they would just address everyone in the group and we'd all say, 'OK, let's do that.' It became a very open atmosphere where people could give opinions and people would be open to change. It was neat.

High School Workshops

One Singer who is a music education major reflected on the tradition of visiting high school choirs and conducting workshops with them:

We're college students and we have more experience and something that we can offer to the high school kids. We have a lot of things we can offer to them. First of all they can hear our sound. Modeling is a big instructional tool for a choir. So they can hear the sound and hear the clarity of different things, different choral aspects and elements of music. And that's a good thing for them to hear.

I think another thing that we can offer too is—well, in the last workshop we talked way too much about technique specifically using too big of words. But this time I think it wasn't so technical and the comments were shorter. And that's better because I think the point of it was to get across the point that we are coming to work with them, showing that we care about them, we care about music and how there are things that we can offer them that we have learned from our experience to help them.

I think they are expecting to learn something and also expecting to offer something to us. I definitely think this workshop is not only for their benefit but for our benefit too because we make comments to them that we need to fix ourselves. So it's kind of like it's really a give and take.

We talked about postural things—it's not like a brand new thing, but it reaffirmed my need to be able to have good posture and really to use breath energy. A lot of times we talk about basics when we go in and we're talking to people and those are the things sometimes that we start to neglect ourselves. I think that is really interesting. I just think we teach ourselves a lot just by reminding ourselves. I reminded myself, 'Ellen, I need to use more breath pressure and to keep my breath pressure equal.' There are different things that have to do with the basics but I need to reapply them for myself.

It was interesting to see this choir conductor. I learned a lot from watching her conduct, and things for warm-ups for her choir. She was doing a lot of diction things and she does that yawning thing at the beginning which I think is very helpful. I wasn't really sure what the purpose was behind some things she did. I wanted to ask her because that would have been interesting to see the point behind it.

Alumni

Sandefur Schmidt tells of the involvement of the alumni:

The fact that they are still involved says a lot! When I send out the call for their news to be put in our annual newsletter, bearing in mind that there are about four hundred alumni now, I hear back from about half every year. That is a pretty good average. We get about that many to reunions. They want to have more reunions than we do. They say, 'Why can't we have reunions more often! We want to sing together we want to see our friends.' They keep in touch and they keep in touch through me. We lose people. We are a peripatetic bunch. And we move a lot too!

So they get together about every four years; and also this thing we started on the last tour, where we have alumni learn the music and come sing with us when they are in the audience. That is a wonderful thing and I hope we can continue to do that. I don't think we'll run into too many in Brazil, but definitely on the stateside tours.

It is a way of keeping connected. We do it because we want to stay friends and keep it going on a personal level. We do it because we want to sell CDs to them and use them to spread the good word about Singers and help us be the missionaries that we want to be.

We do it so that we can say, 'You know what we are all about, can you contribute to the endowment fund? We have got an alumni who is willing to give this much can you match it? Can you give what you are able to give so that future students can gain more and be able to give more readily themselves? So that we can do a Carnegie Hall again. So that we don't have to charge so much for tour clothes. So that we can make it so that people who don't have any money can still be in Singers and tour if they have got the talent.'

It just breaks my heart that they have to work so hard to put themselves through school when they can't do these things when they have got the talent to do it. But the financial element does draw a line sometimes. We need to fund more PBS productions and produce more CDs and find ways to get us out to more people without having to go bodily ourselves. Tours cost so much money! The amount we pay as students is minimal. It doesn't even cover the flight to get where we are going most of the time, if you look at what airplane tickets are now. That last tour we paid 750 dollars apiece to go. And just the flight to and from would have been two-thirds of that. And then there are the bus and the hotels we stayed in.

It's university money. There is a budget at Performing Arts Management for tours and they have to stay within the budget. Once in a while the School of Music will help out with a special part of the tour. They will give a reception for the choir or give a special treat at a restaurant or something just to say thanks, because touring isn't easy. Dale Monsen and previous directors are well aware that it is hard to go on tour for a month. It's especially difficult when you have so many who leave behind kids and spouses for a month!

Principle 3: They Understand the Meaning of the Text They Sing. They Are Not Afraid of

True Communication.

Unlike instrumental music, choral singing has the ability to convey a specific meaning through the use of text. Anyone who has ever been to a choral concert knows

that the communication of text can be a source of frustration. Even very professional, beautiful sounding choirs sometimes get the rebuke, “I couldn’t understand a single word they said!” It is one thing to hear a beautifully sounding choir, but it is even better when the sound is beautiful and the text is discernable and heartfelt.

But this goes far beyond enunciation and good diction. Sometimes it is obvious a choir has no idea what they are singing about even when the text is understood. In this next section I will discuss how the BYU Singers strive for pure communication from the soul and what they do to get themselves ready for such expression. Often the type of connection they feel to the meaning of text is beyond people’s comprehension. The Singers spend months with the same pieces and are intimately associated with them. Certain pieces grow very dear to the Singers through prolonged exposure in a way not possible for someone listening to them for the first time. Even so, the Singers strive to truly understand many levels of meaning behind every word they sing, and focus on expressing that meaning in various ways throughout their performances.

Communication from the Soul

Dr. Staheli once said,

The greatest compliment you can give a musician is that something they did touched you and you kept going back to it later so that weeks later you’re still thinking about it. The sound was made, but where did the sound end? See, you don’t remember the sound, you remember how you felt.

One Singer explained what he does to connect with the audience during a performance:

If I am not feeling particularly connected to the people, I look out into the audience and make eye contact even if they are not looking at me. I look at particular people and realize who is there, who the audience is and think about who they are and what they were doing before they came there, what they are going to do when they go back home, what kind of problems they have to deal

with that might be similar to my problems and how is the concert going to buoy them up and help them deal with those problems.

If I am feeling a little disconnected then one thing that I think about is people that I really love that I know that I've met around the world and what their life is like and then I look at the people in the audience and think how those people are no different it's just that I don't know them yet. They have the same needs. Then it becomes an experience where I'm not singing to strangers, I'm singing to people that are just like people that I know really well it's just that I haven't met them yet. I'm presenting the same product that I would to people that I love most dearly in my life.

On tour I'm away from my wife and my baby so I'm missing things and I think 'why am I here?' The only reason I am here is to be of service to someone else in the audience. So that helps me to make sure I am doing this and that I'm making a product for the audience not just for myself. The glory of singing is not enough in and of itself to me to be away from my family for so long.

Another Singer's perspective was this:

My brother and sister-in-law came to our concert in the assembly hall and they sat in the balcony right in my line of sight where I could see them and Dr. Staheli. That was one of the coolest concerts ever because I was really singing to people that I know. I could see them. I feel like that was one of my better moments of performing.

Normally I try and really know what the songs are talking about and trying to portray that emotion and if I can find someone in the audience, that triggers some sort of thought.

For instance when we were singing 'Lonesome Road,' I looked out and I saw an elderly person and I just started to think about my grandmother. Her husband's passed away and she's all by herself. She has friends and family still but she is just sort of walking the road alone. So I just started to have associations and it just brought new meaning to the song. Maybe I didn't connect directly to that person but I was able to sing it in a different way with different ideas and hopefully that was apparent.

Another Singer reflected,

I think if I don't connect it's because I am on auto pilot and I'm not really thinking, I'm not really focusing on anybody. My eyes are just glazed over and I have that deer in the headlights look. I'm staring at you but I'm not really seeing you kind of thing.

Auto pilot is when you are not focusing on what the conductor is doing but singing just like you've always sung it, not putting any thought in to it as opposed to trying to sing it like it's for the first time again and put new feeling in to it. If I find myself doing that I try and snap out of it somehow and focus on what I'm singing and what I am saying and what message I want to portray to the audience.

The devotionals and things before hand, the other activities that lead up to it help me to get in to that groove. The topics are really good and what is said but a lot of times it's just the spirit that I feel and the connection and unity that I feel with the choir as we kneel in prayer and are having those quiet moments before the concert where I can really focus on what I'm doing and what I am here to do and really focus on our purpose.

Favorite Pieces

A Singer's response when I asked, "What is your favorite piece" was, "

There's like ten! As far as connection with the audience goes it's probably always 'That Lonesome Road,' just because we do have that opportunity to look at them directly. But otherwise I feel like our sacred pieces are ones that we really connect with just because they are so familiar to us and we are able to sing with real intent and a deeper understanding. But I think that shows and the audience can really feel something. Hopefully that shows with all our music, but maybe with that it's a little stronger.

Another responded, You know I really like 'Pilgrim's Song' because it always seems to be able to bring out a sentiment that I like, which is that we are all children of God. Because we have the opportunity, we sing our verse, the men sing a verse, then the piano increases in volume and momentum a little bit and then the women have a verse where they are singing about who they are and all we have to do is sit there and listen and think about those thoughts and let the music influence us a little bit. So that's why it's one of my favorites because we get to sit and listen and think wholly on what the song is about.

Meaning of Text

One Singer commented,

The music is a means to an end. It is one way to communicate to people those things that we might not be bold enough to say in other settings.

Dr. Staheli will ask the individuals themselves, 'What does this mean to you?' and then there will be an open discussion about meaning. Even something that is pretty evasive and has lots of different meanings. He'll tell us what he is trying to do with it as well, so that we all can have a different perspective about the music.

I felt that going through pieces, I didn't like them at first, and then it took me sixty or seventy times through it before I learned to appreciate it and absolutely loved it as we performed.

And the performances began to matter—not that they didn't matter—but they began to matter less and less to me and the rehearsal time mattered more. Because I thought that it was the process that was the most meaningful to me. The journey that we took with the text was more precious to me than the performance.

And maybe it's a little bit elite and maybe there are only a few can really understand it for what it is. Our audiences were kind of small compared to what you might get with a popular singer or even the Men's Chorus.

I think that that is an important factor that you have a conductor—an interested person in music that convinces by either love or persuasion or cajoling or whatever that what we do as musicians is to communicate. Because we're dealing with text and it's very hard to get around some of the politically correct or incorrect issues with text.

True Communication

Another Singer commented,

You can't find music that doesn't talk about God or doesn't talk about love or tapping in to that higher power. All music is about that. Look at all the music throughout history including contemporary music. We sing because it gets in touch with who we are. It communicates what we are about in a way that words alone can't. And that's what we are here for.

Another faculty member said,

I would observe the BYU Singers and take notes. I mean, how do you learn? You watch somebody and whatever pops into your head is the spark that you are learning. It's not so much you're learning exactly what they are saying but it sparks what you needed to hear and that's all we hope for.

You learn to listen with a purpose and appreciate that whatever pops in to your head is OK to share. That no matter how far out the perception, it's OK. The memory it generated needs to be there, not only for you but perhaps for somebody else.

That's what music does. One piece is not going to hit everybody the same. Because that's what music is about! Oh gee, music is black and white. It's notes and rhythms and about doing things just right—hardly!

Principle 4: They Are Dedicated, Hard Workers Committed to Success.

If someone would sit in on a rehearsal of BYU Singers, they would see a group of dedicated people who definitely want to be there. A Singer observed, “Every once and a while we lose focus, but I feel that in most rehearsals we are very focused and very concentrated on the music and that we love each other and that there is a special dynamic in the choir; everyone is willing to work hard to change and do whatever they can for the good of the group.”

In this section we will deal with the intense work ethic the choir is expected to maintain. We will also look at how leaders encourage and motivate the group and how each member works to be self sufficient in fixing their own problems.

Great Expectations

A Singer observed,

A quality that the director brings is the confidence or the expectation being high. If Dr. Staheli didn't expect us to sing well I don't think we would. Even though we are really good singers, his expectation pulls us where we may not have thought we could have gone. There are some songs that are so high and so soft that I think, ‘we can't do this,’ but he keeps making us do it.

It's like a track coach. I remember running laps and our track coach would make us run a 400, one lap around the track. And he'd make us run it faster each time. So we already started running our fastest, which was pretty tiring. But he made us do it like eight times. And so each time we actually did get faster. Maybe by a second, but he expected that from us even though we didn't think we could do it. Then you feel empowered, ‘Hey, I can do anything!’ And that's kind of like what Dr. Staheli does with us in rehearsal.

Intensity

A Singer noted,

When something needed to be done, he didn't even think about it. And I think that's how he runs his rehearsals. He doesn't want to waste time. He sees a need, he doesn't mince words by saying, ‘Don't be offended by me saying this’. He'll just say it! He senses the urgency of what needs to be done in every aspect.

He wants every minute. And I know why—because he has so much repertoire. He said to us on tour once, ‘Some of you look like you are stoned or something. Don’t look at me like you have no clue what’s going on! Open your eyes! Do you even know the things you are singing about?’

And we would try to be intense with him, but it’s kind of like trying to keep up with someone who is running faster than you. And it’s hard to keep up. Three and a half weeks and our smiles are sore, you know. ‘If you had any idea what you were singing about you wouldn’t look at me that way! Open up your eyes and open up your soul and let the world see what you are singing about!’

Example from Dr. Staheli’s Life: Intensity

Dr. Brower recounted this experience:

We were walking back from the market, our hands full of grocery bags, and there was a blind person. We were talking. We were involved in a very meaningful, caring conversation. Deep! ‘One of those ‘makes-you-sweat’ conversations! And we were walking back and I had noticed this blind person with a stick going down the sidewalk. But this sidewalk was strange because it split into kind of a ‘Y’ where one path led to a dead end. And this blind person was coming and he started to go on the wrong one. And Ron, without saying a word, just went right up to him, grabbed his shoulders and said, ‘You need to go this way.’ He just went up and moved him. And there we went. There was no, ‘Excuse me, sir,’ or ‘Was that helpful?’ He just went, ‘You need to walk over here.’ He has such a perception of what’s going on in the world. And I knew at that point that I was an idiot. Because I saw him but, well what do you do, you know?’

They Don’t Repeat Literature

Sandefur Schmidt said,

I have a database of all the literature Singers have ever performed. There are not a lot of repeats. And that is what puts Singers in the forefront musically; Dr. Staheli challenges himself and the Singers. Each year I think the repertoire gets harder. He just doesn’t tell the choir that! But there are a few of us who are really aware of it. But that Beazer they sang last year, that 18 minute piece. That’s the hardest thing they’ve ever done! I thought the Whitacre ‘Absalom’ was difficult, but this beat it. And they took the whole year to learn it!

Sometimes he does repeat a piece if it is really worthwhile. But looking through the database there are not a lot of repetitions—just some of the ones that are kind of ‘Singers pieces.’ They are ‘ours’ and they have such a story and so much emotion and memories behind them. With ‘Peace Like a River’ being tied in the way it was with his son’s death, it will never be just a song to me. That’s the kind

of piece that gets repeated. It's kind of like a little worm that burrows its way in to our hearts and stays. And it's great when the alumni come to the concerts on tour. We can invite them up to join us in those songs.

There are choirs around that kind of sing everything Singers did, only a year or two later. One of the fun things about Dr. Staheli is that he is on such a look-out for new repertoire. Usually he is singing things I don't know, except when he is back in the old standards. Brahms, I've heard of, and most people know who those composers are, Bach and Handel. It is only when he is doing standard choral literature that he does known music.

But when he was doing Eric Whitacre music, he was among the first to be performing it. And then it gets done and done and done. Dr. Staheli helped put that composer on the choral map. I compiled a monograph of all the music that has been performed at all the different ACDA conventions from 1960-2000 that was published by the American Choral Directors Association. You can watch the trends in what is performed. It was performed here for the first time, then the next year it gets performed at five divisional conventions, and then it gets performed at six the next year, and then it starts petering out because everyone has performed it. He never gets caught in over-performance of popular music. If it is a piece that is in style he doesn't sing it because that is not what Singers is about. He doesn't want to be just another choir doing the same thing. That is another reason he doesn't repeat music very much, unless it is a piece that he has written that is kind of a Singers signature. 'How can I keep from Singing,' 'Peace Like a River,' and 'Come unto Him' have been performed several times through the years.

The funny thing is at the reunions, so many people from the first years come up to me after they have heard the current choir sing to say, 'I'm glad I was in it when I was in it because I don't think I would make it now!' Because the literature gets harder and the choir becomes better in response to the more difficult literature and the higher expectations he has of them and of himself. That is one of the greatest keys to everything—he doesn't ride on his success. There is no Lazyboy® in his life! Well his office chair is very comfortable and it does recline a little bit! But there is no lazy bone in his body!

Encouraging Each Other in Work Ethic

A Singer commented,

Some people might get turned off to it a little bit just because it is so intense. I'm not sure how you get that intensity out of everyone because a lot of people are not prone to giving that.

There are a lot down there in Provo that are used to giving that intensity. I had to shape up a little bit to run with them. Another interesting dynamic is that you've got the leaders that say, 'We don't accept being late.' If you're not there they as,

‘Hey where were you’. And it doesn’t come from him. If I walk in five minutes late he may not even notice because he’s so focused on something that we are doing.

But the people in the section sure do and they say we need you to be on time. I got this feeling from them, ‘OK, they are counting on me.’ That was good for me.

Leaders

Dr. Staheli gave this tribute to the leaders in the choir once:

The thing I wanted to say very first of all is, we have had an incredible list of officers in our choir this year. They have taken so much pressure off of me by being so diligent and organizing and staying with so many of the issues that need to be done. So I wish that you would express, as you wish, your gratitude to them as I do openly for the wonderful way they have led us and all of the work and effort they have given this year especially in a big tour year—it’s a huge effort on their parts, especially our presidents. It’s just so demanding, the preparation from our end for the tour. And the other officers as well; of course our vice presidents for sure, others as well. I wish you would express your feelings about that to them.

We didn’t do a tour this year because of the heavy commitment throughout the year. I missed that tour experience because that’s another chance to bond with people in the choir and the people you sing for and your host families.

We sang at ACDA, at MENC. They were all in Salt Lake. So the world came on tour to us. People came from all over the world and heard the BYU Singers. We did exactly what we needed to do and that was to get this out to the world and say, ‘this is what we are doing and maybe you want to do that too.’

Motivation

Dr. Staheli continued,

Most people see that when I come down hard, it’s because in order for us to survive as a group, these things have to happen. If you are going to work as a group you are going to have to give up a little bit of your own individuality—a little bit of your own penchant for things that infringe on the good of the group.

For example one particular choir member never likes to be hurried. He likes to do things in his own time. He likes to get up lazily, he likes to take his time and he doesn’t mind if we all wait for him while he gets ready. And we’ve had a few little solemn talks about that very issue. That’s just the way he is and that’s not going to change. But if he’s going to be in BYU Singers then he needs to have respect for the group and for everybody and get himself up, get himself out and get himself there on time. Do you see my point? But he doesn’t want to live life

like that. He wants to live life laid back and until he does that he's never going to be a real solid part of the group, totally. There are so many aspects of him that make our group so much better. So I will willingly put up with that and work with him and try to get him to be a little better. But if he would change that one aspect about him then that will make all the difference in the world in terms of his work with groups of people. Now he's preparing to be just one on one which will work really well. Laid back at his pace will work super well. But he'll drive the ward choir director crazy. If he's executive secretary to a bishop he will drive the bishop crazy!

Singers Fix Their Own Problems

A very common phenomenon is to see the section leaders and others in the section take on problems of their own without relying on the director. That frees him to explore greater issues. A Singer noted,

We become more and more self reliant as a section as we learn to listen to solve problems on our own. Sometimes he will just turn the time over to the sections to fix something. Everyone is free to make a comment to the whole class and share ideas at any time they feel appropriate. For the most part we can all sense when those appropriate times are and make insightful comments.

I've never seen another choir where the director says, 'OK, now fix your problems within your section,' and then we do it.

Then people will turn in to each other and fix it. He'll say, 'tenors you need to... or altos you need....' and they fix it among themselves. I've never seen that in any other choirs. I think that shows a great amount of trust. He's thinking, 'OK, if I turn these guys loose they really will fix the problem.' And also I think he assumes most of the time when there is a little chatter going on he's OK with it.

Most of the time I think the chatter is productive. Sometimes it's not. But if he senses it is not he will pull in the reins on us.

Principle 5: Personal Growth of the Conductor: A Teacher Can Be No Better Teacher Than He or She Is a Human Being.

Dr. Staheli believes very strongly that a teacher can be no better teacher than he or she is a human being. He had this to say:

All the people who say, 'I can live how I want to live outside of the classroom, I can do whatever I want outside the classroom and it doesn't matter,' will never

achieve their full potential as a teacher. If you are going to be a rich teacher you are going to need to be a rich human being. You never get beyond your own self in the quality of your teaching.

Your strengths are often very often closely tied to your weaknesses. The good things about your teaching are probably very closely related to your weakness in your teaching and the things you find great fulfillment in teaching are very closely related to those things that often get in your way of teaching. I see this in myself though I have never understood it.

The best way around it is to be really honest with yourself because if you don't accept your own gifts then it is harder to accept the things that you do not do very well. If you can accept the gift and see the shadow side of that, you can work on that and you can make it work so much better for you.

I have been very happy with that. I hope you know me well enough to know that it does not scare me much that there are some big gaping holes in my ability, because it is a huge and complex thing to try to do. The fact that I have big holes does not scare me. That used to scare me when I was young and innocent and I thought I knew it all. But now that I know a lot I can see and it doesn't bother me that there are big gaping holes in my knowledge and ability.

Each year you refine those a little more, but each year it is different. You never put your foot in the same stream. Every time you walk in to the classroom you put your foot in a different environment. It is changing all the time. It is such a complex combination of personalities and people and community. No one can ever feel like, 'Hey, I've really got it, I really know what I'm doing!' Beware those teachers that think they really do know everything!

Using this as his guiding principle for teaching, Dr. Staheli constantly works to improve himself each year.

One Singer commented, "The love that comes from the head in any organization—that comes from the top down—is reflected in the way that the members of that organization treat each other. Initially it has to start out with a great leader. So as the leader you have got to have a lot of love. You need to know how to inspire your group. Not with fear or any sort of guile but with love. Inspire them to good works."

Example of a Great Leader

Gordon B. Hinckley, the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is one that Dr. Staheli looks to for guidance and direction. He will often express his admiration and appreciation for President Hinckley. One Singer said,

Here is a 96-year-old man who works twice as hard as men half his age. He is a great example of a man who is as close to perfection as anyone. He's so exemplary but also publicly acknowledges his own weakness and his own desire for growth and improvement in his own life.

Sometimes President Hinckley sternly rebukes us. He has given very strong talks on sexual impropriety and pornography and gambling and getting out of debt. And that could be taken offensively if it wasn't given from a loving heart. But people know and trust his love and he asks us continually to be more kind to each other—to be more gentle and be more patient with each other.

And so I think because we have that example of a leader that we trust implicitly, we can have confidence in a strong, courageous man who can tell it like it is and be very blunt when he needs to, but can also be very diplomatic and kind and tender.

It has been said that any church or country or school or ward or branch or whatever can only function as effectively as the leadership at the top. Some people may criticize that as kind of an ethereal namby pamby idea, and say, 'How can the actions of the leader really affect the people?' But I think that the actions of the leader in his private life somehow in a real and profound and tangible way affect the quality of an organization and what that organization produces.

Dr. Staheli agrees with this premise. He tries to live his private life to the fullest and it has made all the difference in his public life.

I think that Dr. Staheli believes very strongly in that principle of having integrity in his own life. He treats his wife and children well. He reads his scriptures and magnifies his callings and responsibilities. He forgives his neighbors and treats them with patience. In all other aspects of his life he lives with integrity.

I think that is central to being an effective choir director as anything else; living with real integrity and values in your own life, whatever those may be, whatever your religious affiliation or persuasion may be. But believing in something and following that with real integrity—I think that infiltrates its way in everything we do and how we treat each other, because we know that he holds himself up to a higher standard. Dr. Staheli lives that, and there isn't duplicity or deceitfulness in

the way that he lives. He expects that same kind of honesty and truthfulness in our own living—in our own interactions.

Another observed,

He's not a person that opens up readily. But occasionally he opens up his inner feelings to us when he feels like the mood is right and he can open up, which is a very scary thing to do. But every now and then, like on tour or something, if he feels like the trust is there it happens and it's kind of neat. We all have those vulnerabilities; and for me, opening up and singing is a way to vent those. That's when I feel like I am at peace and am my best self. And he helps me with that. I learned to sing because of that.

Another Singer said,

What I've been impressed with Dr. Staheli in the last couple of years is that he has really softened. He has really learned to acknowledge his mistakes publicly and ask for our forgiveness. I think that does so much for the choir as far as loving and respecting him. Even when he overreacts or something or misunderstands something or calls us on the carpet sometimes when it wasn't really warranted, he afterwards will come to us quickly and acknowledge his wrongs and humbly asks us to forgive him which I think shows immense integrity and humility on his part. And I think that just engenders more and more love on our part when he is willing to do that. And I think we all know he has to be stern sometimes.

I've seen a progression in Dr. Staheli as far as opening himself up to people. I've had many long conversations with him in his office. I talked to him a couple of months ago for an hour and a half when I was in his office. And everyone has that relationship with him and I think that over time that has come for us as I have shared my life with him and the same in return.

There are some conductors who always have to be right. When they are wrong they are still right. They find ways to put the blame on somebody else. This causes back-biting and all kinds of things.

Dr. Staheli is willing more than many people I know to continually be open to growth and to risk himself. In many ways he embodies the principles that we seek for—the whole Singers mentality.

Occasionally he has offended people by the way he has reacted to certain situations. I think that reaction was based on insecurities and weaknesses that he is working to overcome. When this happens, he is quick to apologize and everyone comes out better because of that.

One time he really called someone on the carpet and gave a really stern rebuke in front of the class. Later, Dr. Staheli wrote this person a letter which explained why he reacted the way he did and apologized for misunderstanding. It was a wonderful letter, very eloquent. He spent a lot of time on it and just asked him to forgive him and be patient with him and be his friend and allow him to grow and allow him to have his own insecurities. I think that shows a lot of strength to allow yourself to be that vulnerable.

Another said in response to that,

That's what I was so impressed with when I first joined the choir; he didn't have to always be right. He was open to correction and asked us to correct him at times. And that relationship did wonders for my view of the world, life in general, the choir. He says all the time that we have to be able to take risks. You have to put your heart out on the line; it's one thing to just keep everything inside, but if you're going to be a singer and you're really going to touch people then you're going to have to put your heart out on the line, which is dangerous.

Another observed,

Here is a person who has all kinds of awards, accolades, renown, but is quick to offer sincere compliments. I've never felt so good coming out of an audition in my entire life! But he's not someone who flatters. In fact he often says he doesn't like meaningless conversation. He calls that 'Piff.' So it means a lot when he offers a compliment. He has a way of building the Singers' confidence. But he sincerely believes that. He sees the good and believes that it's good. It is so interesting. He can hear how what you have to offer will blend with the rest of the choir. Not just vocally but in other areas, with your personality, etc.

Building Lives and Making Music

Dr. Staheli has achieved a balance between building lives and making the music.

He finds that by focusing on the music. He commented,

The music is your central focus and yet it's not the music that you remember. It's all of these other things that are by-products of that. But now if you start to focus rather than the music your main focus is on developing close relationships then it doesn't work. This is a result of this and all of the learning things come around it and they are the things you ultimately remember and yet you try to address these on their own, separately and apart from this and it betrays itself, it backfires somehow. I don't know how that is. But you take your eye off that music and that's why you see me every day we're in that score, we're in that music and yet we are learning other things.

I need to be a little bit better at pointing out some of the important learning by-products that I don't. I leave it to the students to do it, but maybe that's the best thing to do, to leave people to sort of deduce those sorts of things from what we accomplish together.

This year I gave the choir a piece of paper at the end of the semester and said, 'write, how can I improve your experience in BYU Singers?' And I got several really good responses. I didn't get a bad one. I didn't think anything was unfair or cheap. They were really thoughtful and really constructive comments. Interestingly enough, almost every one of them, the main thrust of it was, you need to be much more demanding in terms of attendance. And it was not really an issue except for four people. A soprano, a second tenor and two basses. It affected their sense of what was going on in the whole group. I had never established this business about attendance. I just assumed and did my best. Section leaders were talking to them and I was emailing them saying, "We need you, where are you, what's going on here?" That was one of the main issues that came back. I'm going to keep doing that. I like that. I may even do that in the middle of the year. What can I do differently next semester?

I don't have them on file, I just threw them away. What pleased me was I told them not to sign their name to it unless they want to. But every single one of them signed their name to it. That says a lot about them.

Whenever I get a letter in the mail I look to the bottom and see if they have signed their name to it. Then I look quickly at the top of it and the moment it starts to get a little bit crazy I just throw it away. Unless people are going to own up and sign their name to it, why should I bother with it? I learned that too.

Sandefur Schmidt said of him,

He is constantly working to be a better person. I don't know a whole lot of musicians who, having achieved the level of success that he has achieved, are still working as hard as he is working. A whole lot would say, 'Well golly, I've got this really wonderful choir. Look at where I've sung and look at where we've toured and look at the hundreds of pieces we've sung. I think I'm just going to relax this summer and not try to learn new literature. We'll just put together a program of the best stuff we've ever sung.'

The years have brought major changes to Dr. Staheli. Many sharp edges started softening when an adult son died. Between that and becoming a grandfather, that has changed him in tremendous ways. He hasn't lowered his expectations of people, but he allows a little more wiggle room as you attempt to get where you need to be. He's mellowing, but there is still that drive for excellence.

Principle 6: Positive, Healthy, Appropriate Relationships Exist in the Choir. The Relationship With the Director and the Singers Is Loving and Nurturing, Built on Respect and Trust. The Relationship Among the Singers Is Family-Like, Supportive, Friendly and Motivating.

To be a member of the BYU Singers is to belong to a family. Dr. Staheli acts as a loving, but firm parent. Certain members emerge as leaders while others are recognized for their individual talents and have a good understanding of their role in the choir.

Elizabeth Bossard noted,

He truly is sincere. And if you check out the scriptures and see how the Savior uses the word ‘friends,’ that’s, I believe, why Ron uses the word friend. How many times did you hear the words ‘my friends?’ That’s how he greets his Singers. Check that out in the scriptures.

It takes a great observant person to adjust to the needs of the individuals in the choir because year after year he has to adjust to the new personalities, the new characteristics that come in to the choir. He goes from not knowing half of them at the start to being a father figure.

One Singer reflected,

I had no idea what I was getting into. I had come to some rehearsals before, but I really didn’t know a lot about it. I knew that it was something that I wanted to do just from hearing Singers sing. I think from the outside, singing in other choirs I didn’t know the people in Singers really well in the context of Singers. I was friends with some of them, but I think there is something that comes from actually being in Singers to give you the full effect of what is going on. I think there were a lot of impressions I had that once I got into Singers I realized why I had those impressions from the outside—oh man, they stick to each other and they don’t always talk to everybody in the other choirs, I mean there are some exceptions. They’re in their own little world and they don’t really talk to any one else. They’re so wonderful that they have to keep that up all the time.

Now, being in the choir, my perception of that is changed. I don’t think that we exclude people, but we are so tight-knit that it may come across that way just by the way we interact with each other. We hang out with each other outside of class. We come to know each other a lot better in rehearsals seeing each other every day. It’s amazing that you can get to know 43 people really well and have them be some of your greatest friends. Because of that tightness and that sense of community I think that my perception has definitely changed. I realize now that

it's the love we have for each other and the love of making music together that creates that dynamic.

Another Singer observed,

It is musically fulfilling, but more than that it is the social aspect of it as well. And not that you're best friends with everybody in the group but you meet such good people and it really becomes kind of your social circle—at least it did for me when I came in. And I don't know that I didn't have any other friends; but just interacting with these people every day, associating with such wonderful people really made it nice.

Another said,

If there is a great division among the choir—if something was happening, if there was some kind of drama between people. I think it affects it, but at the same time, when we get up to sing, it's almost like all of those things go away, like everything outside that we've been dealing with all day or whatever it is.

When we get together and sing, I think that that kind of goes away, because we have to be unified. If we are not unified then our performances are less than wonderful.

We receive so much energy back from the audience and from Dr. Staheli and each other. When morale in general is low, then we don't perform very well.

Dr. Staheli has a lot of responsibility to make sure our morale is high by the way that he looks at us and the gestures that he makes and even the way he speaks to the audience. I think that if that is more positive in nature and we feel like the performance is going well, then we have the desire to do well. I think sometimes when we go in to rehearsals like before the programs and maybe we've just had a hard day or we haven't had a good rehearsal or sound check or things haven't been going as well, or whatever it might be, then we think in our minds, 'It's just not going to work tonight, it's not working right now and it's just not the way that it has been.

Section Leaders

Section leaders are vital to the success of the choir. One Singer said,

These are typically Singers who are 'dead on' pretty much all the time. Sometimes it's flat and everyone has a tendency to mess up every now and then, but there are people who have a consistency that is very valuable in our section. So we try putting them in the middle.

When I'm next to Charles—we have similar voices and similar training so we feed off of each other and I start singing really loud and I stick out. So we were

talking about separating us to putting me in the middle somewhere. It's kind of like the whole dynamics. But when you think about how to make an effective choir though, I think the section leader thing is a really good thing.

It's kind of like the church. You've got bishops and you've got their counselors, then you've got people in the elders quorum and in the Relief Society all taking care of members all the way to the family. It's not micromanaging because then people push back. But it's a way to make sure that it's working right. You've got someone who's saying, 'Is this working? I don't know, let's try this.' So section leaders are great.

Sometimes I think the section leader doesn't hear everything. I think everybody has a different effect in the section. Some people can say stuff and some other people if they say it then everybody gets offended. I think it's a personality thing. I've felt that I can say stuff but any choice belongs to the section leader. If there is a decision that has to be made and we have three opposing ideas to resolve it, the section leader takes the responsibility and chooses, but I don't think it stifles our opinions. Everyone has a say in it.

I think that trust is a really big issue. If the conductor trusts that you are doing your best, it makes you just want to do better and be right with him and be right there to do everything you can to make it good. But if you feel like you are doing your best and the conductor says you are not or is always cutting you down or saying this is horrible, blah blah, I don't think it helps any. It helps you see where you need to look sometimes, but at the same time it feels like that trust is gone.

I've been in choirs where the trust between people isn't there. I've always trusted the conductor, though, because they're the ones that can hear everything. But it is extra special in this choir. I think it's the confidence you have in Dr. Staheli. You can trust what he hears. If he doesn't like it, then he is the conductor, he says "this is what I need from you" and you can trust that what he hears is right. I thought it was interesting because I remember talking to the Dale Warland Singers. They were amazing and they sounded wonderful but I don't think they trusted their conductor as much for their leadership because they said they just kind of did their own thing. They said he just kind of directs and we do what we want to do. I think his coaching was important, maybe his directing wasn't so good but maybe his coaching gets them to the point where they could do that.

Another commented,

In terms of trust, the first time I go into a ward house and I'm new, I never feel like anyone gives me a chance because I am not part of the group. I don't watch sports, I'm not interested in sports so all the elders think I'm some kind of weirdo. I'm really a fun-loving guy and I can carry on a good conversation and have a fun time with them but they don't know where to put me so they feel very weird about it. Struggling to place me somewhere, categorize me, I think everybody does that

with people. ‘You’re this kind of a person, so I can treat you like this because you’re this.’ But as soon as I sing in the ward, whether they like it or not, immediately trust is gained because there is something special when you sing. You give of yourself and all that kind of stuff—but I think the bottom line is they see a talent and they see that you’ve worked hard to hone that talent and that demands respect.

And so the same thing for me—if one of my home teachers who I didn’t feel very close to came over and fixed my computer, I would be so much more willing and able to converse and communicate with that person because I had respect for his efforts in his life to be somebody and be something.

Also there is the interaction that takes place as he is fixing it. I’m asking for a favor and he’s doing a favor or I’m paying him for a favor and he comes and just fixes it and is kind and generous about it and you see him in that light. I just think there is respect given. People are impressed by someone’s skills and they give them credit and they give them the benefit of the doubt because of their skills. That happens in every situation. As soon as I sing people change immediately, the way they treat me, immediately. All of the sudden there is warmth, there’s acceptance, there’s bringing me in, it’s easy to be around everybody.

Another said,

I remember talking to someone who went to Oregon State, Erica I think was telling me. When she was there she didn’t like the choir because it wasn’t like University Singers and what she saw was a whole bunch of people who came together in a choir who all wanted to be stars or they were gossiping with each other or they were talking about each other behind their backs, hating some and loving some and having cliques. I remember in my high school choir there were little cliques that were the cool people and the other people.

I really think all that spiritual stuff that we were talking about earlier—all the time Dr. Staheli takes to bring us together to think about the stuff, just kind of builds why we are singing what we are singing. I think that is what he is stressing. And the unity that we find between all of us—I think that is the key to what makes us successful. I know Dr. Staheli says that a hundred times, but when you think about it, I don’t think there are that many people in here that really talk bad about each other. Sure there are romances and a little gossip going around, but there’s not any of this back-biting or stabbing in the back or trying to show off more than anyone else. It’s all kind of like we’re helping each other out. When someone’s fallen we pick them back up and so and so next to me is not perfect and I’m not perfect and helping each other out when we failing. I think that’s the key I’ve noticed and communicating that to each other.

There is something about stressing being a team player. He always stresses that. He always stresses working together as a machine rather than everyone for his

own self. Not being a diva. And that little thing you sign when you are trying out too. The little thing that says, 'I don't want to be a star' on the paper when you audition, you sign it. It says "Here's the schedule, you have to commit to all these performances and then some we haven't scheduled yet. You have to commit to the tour schedule; you have to commit to memorizing stuff on time.' It's all clearly laid out. The other one was like "I want to be a star—'yes or no.' I like that.

Another commented,

We're a work in progress so it is very difficult to say this is what you should learn from us. We are always constantly trying to take out whatever we see as being bad—which is a good thing, I think. There are certain people that emerge as the leaders, but it doesn't necessarily mean they are the section leaders. I think there is a certain amount of trust that needs to be there and validating each other's comments and things like that and for us to perform at this level there has to be a certain relationship there between the Singers.

I think that same kind of thing happens to us because—who are the people that emerge from the group? At first it is certain people based on how well other people know that person. That person feels like he has a chance—I can step out in the tenor section at the beginning of the year a little bit easier than somebody who's brand new in the choir and is just learning how to do it. Not that they couldn't but that they just don't feel like they would. So they don't. Until later on in the year more people start coming out and you look at it later on in the year and you see so many more people stepping out in the choir to say things because they feel that trust is gained. They've earned their stripes, they've earned their colors.

So it turns from 'let's have the section leader tell the section what needs to be done' to 'let's have the tenors work it out.' A lot of it has to do with the way that Dr. Staheli organizes it. I've had other choirs where they're talking and the conductor is instructing but they're messing around. I think most of the time Dr. Staheli thinks, 'Oh they're working on something and they're solving something.' And sometimes he has to quiet us down and say, 'We'll talk about that later because I have to say something now.'

Family Feeling in the Alumni

Sandefur Schmidt said,

One thing that is maybe not unique to Singers, but we have it in such strong measure that the strength of it is a little unique, and that is what a family feeling we have among the 400 plus of us who have sung in the choir. There are a lot of us who work hard to keep that going. But it is so worth it. Singers are my family. They are my chosen family. They're not my birth family but they're the ones I got to pick!

I love our Singers reunions because they are like a family reunion where you get to pick who comes. We have reunions every four years or so. The next is in March of 2008. We try to do it on a non-tour year. And this next year is overseas so that's going to be a big push.

Role in the Choir

A Singer said,

At the retreat he has everyone sing the same solo and says, 'Let's all take everybody and put them in this color perspective, light to dark or dark to bright' and he's always constantly reassuring us that whether or not we have bright or dark we're not bad, it's just our voice, our sound.

I can see that being a personal thing because a lot of people are self conscious about their personal voice and their sound. They can feel a little exposed or naked.

That's why we're in choir! That's the whole reason why he picked us is that he felt like we would do well in the choir, which is saying something for our voice. He assures us that our personal voice is very good; it's just the color of the sound. I found that he does a really good job at making us feel appreciated and validated.

When he picked us out individually and put us in the color spectrum he kept explaining that it's not bad to be bright or dark it's just that's where you are. That's your solo voice I guess. As a choir if we all sang that way, with our solo voice, where is the blend?

Focus on Relationships

One day on the tour bus, the BYU Singers took a color code personality test. The results were interesting. Over three-quarters of the choir, including Dr. Staheli, found they were "blue" or relationship-oriented personalities. Those who were not had many blue traits in their personality scheme. So relationships are obviously very important to these Singers. It is important to look closely at the relationships that exist in the choir for several reasons:

1. The positive relationships are a measure of success in and of itself: “We are a good choir because we get along very well.” Live audiences can often see past technical problems in a choir and find value in the “good feel” of the group.
2. There is a relationship of trust that allows others to express themselves in ways they couldn’t if the relationship were not there.
3. When discipline and correction are needed, healthy relationships influence the actions taken and ensure the effectiveness of the discipline.
4. In a spiritual sense, things of the soul can be communicated more effectively when healthy feelings of love exist.
5. Talented people are attracted to Singers because of the other people: “I decided to come back because I have so many good friends in the group this year.”
6. Relationships can be the cause of problems. Solving the problems often is easier when the relationships are understood.

It is this last reason for looking at relationships that I want to focus on in this section. It is important to recognize the healthy relationships because so often the problems that arise with choral ensembles result from these relationships being out of place.

Sandefur Schmidt, in reflecting on the problems BYU Singers has faced, said,

The things that can go wrong in a choir are more interpersonal than anything. Dr. Staheli does not choose bad music. He knows how to run a rehearsal. He knows how to work with voices. He may leave a soul a little wounded once in a while if they are too tender and he has criticized at the wrong moment, particularly in front of somebody.

He doesn’t do that very often. But when he does, it’s easy for bad feelings to go around the choir. That can kill the spirit of the group right there if it’s not handled correctly!

Conflicts like this one cause tension to occur in the group. So many groups are riddled with stories like this one that can soon grow to the point where people do not want to participate in the group or that bad feelings are carried with them on to the stage. Dr. Staheli and the Signers have learned over the years that focusing on the healthy aspects of the relationship can also solve problems. They are still learning, but here are some possible issues to be wary of:

- Too close to the conductor—lose professional boundaries—or misunderstanding of professional boundaries
- People will take relationship with the conductor or others too seriously and hinge their self worth on the opinion of others
- People allow circumstances to take precedence over the relationships—they are offended at something
- Individuals do not fill expectations
- People will not deal with conflicts appropriately—will gossip and engage in destructive conversation
- Dating relationships that go awry
- People exclude themselves from the group

To each of these problems, healthy relationships are the answer. Open communication and clearly communicated expectations help to alleviate these issues. Both in and out of rehearsal a good deal of effort goes into strengthening the relationships that exist in the choir.

Too close to the conductor—lose professional boundaries—or misunderstanding of professional boundaries. First and foremost this is a professional organization that is

respected throughout the world. If it were not based on respect and professionalism nothing would be accomplished. That being said, it is made up of people who are human and need the example of a strong leader to keep behavior professional.

One Singer commented,

I think he is very good about keeping professional boundaries. Sometimes that's perceived by students, I think, as him being distant or putting up a wall. But really I think you have to keep some kind of professional relationship.

In my high school choir, my first director let those lines be blurred to his detriment. Inappropriate things didn't happen, but he just got really close to the kids. They became friends and buddies, you know, but I think there is really a fine line you walk between being a crony and hanging out and getting really close and keeping some kind of professional distance and maintaining respect. Dr. Staheli is good at walking that line. He probably errs on the side of professional distance but I think he's even changing that. Lately he has been taking us aside and wanting to get to know us and inviting us to come to his office and creating that open door policy. I think that as he has done that there has been an increasing amount of love and trust in each other because he has opened himself up and is willing to show us his vulnerabilities.

Another Singer noted,

He maintains a professional distance. But on the tour he said, 'If any of you want to get a closer relationship with me, that's fine, I'm willing, I would love to. Come sit by me on the bus and we'll talk about whatever you want to talk about.' I've always felt that he cares about me but also it's very professional like I'm the singer, he's the director, for the most part. But I've gone to him and talked to him about questions about life. And he's walked around campus with me taking about stuff. He's really kind and loving and caring, but at the same time he maintains professionalism, especially when things need to get done. I don't think he lets friendship get in the way of what needs to be done. He's never anybody's buddy just to be buddies. He says 'I love you and all, but this is what needs to happen.'

Another observed,

Most choir members understand that relationship. You can tell in the choir who has those close relationships with him. But I don't think he seeks so much those personal relationships. He lets those people come and make them. Maybe that's how he keeps that professionalism sometimes. It's not favoritism or anything like that.

Another Singer said,

Dr. Staheli is one of those people that is extremely passionate and full of love, but also doesn't have much time. So people learn how to get right to the point and not mince words. And if he cuts you off or has to go you understand why and that he still cares about you. Some people do that that have very little time can come across very harsh. But that's a good balance he has.

Another said,

I hear so many people talk about how intimidating Dr. Staheli is. My first experience with him was in that audition and I had never heard that he was intimidating. And being in the choir you know that he is not. People would ask what it's like singing for Dr. Staheli? Isn't it scary? No, he's like my Dad! He's just a big teddy bear, what are you talking about? Now, having other experiences I can understand how some people think that. We had a few run-ins on tour that made me realize that.

Another Singer said,

He is quick to apologize, quick to express love. He openly expresses his genuine love for us. I think it doesn't work with those conductors that yell at their kids and then are like, 'But I love you guys,' in some kind of forced, artificial moment of 'tenderness.' 'You guys know I love you and care about you,' but it falls on deaf ears because they don't show that. Love is expressed by a teacher or a parent or a friend or anyone. The old cliché is really true, 'Actions speak louder than words,' and you can say that, but if you don't back it up with what you do then it doesn't mean anything. I think Dr. Staheli is excellent at showing us that he loves us and his dedication and his actions in his physical expressions. He appropriately expresses his love for us for those who are open to affection in giving us a pat on the back or a hug. I think that communicates a lot of love and he'll show that verbally. In various sincere kinds of moments he'll tell us exactly what we mean to him. And we feel then how much time and effort he gives—he never asks us to give any more than he is willing to give himself ever and I love that. He shows us then he tells us then he shows us again.

Dr. Staheli responded to the question: How do you maintain that balance between friend and authority figure?

I want us to become great friends. I want our friendship to be full of the sort of respect, trust, appreciation, and gratitude that requires us not only to be our best selves, but also to grow as individuals. I intend to give you the best of me every day as consistent as I can possibly be. In turn I expect you to be honest with your very best effort, your attitude. I expect you to be loyal every day consistently.

And I don't mind sharing my own weaknesses and foibles as are appropriate in a group situation simply because if I do that then I don't have to worry about protecting that side of me that other people are going to see anyway. Because if I am not a very patient person I might as well own up to that because the other choir members are going to see that anyway. I make lots of mistakes, lots of musical mistakes. I miscommunicate a lot of the time. I might as well own up to it and say that's going to happen and it doesn't bother me in the least when you correct me, so do it.

I want to be a real advocate for students when they need me or when a faculty member needs to step into some situation; and on the other hand, I expect them to be loyal to me in that they would never pit me against another teacher just to use Singers as an excuse for not being prepared or not accomplishing what needed to be done or that sort of thing.

I want us to be great friends but I want that friendship to be built on trust, respect, gratitude, appreciation for what the other people are and based on real desire to grow, to expect the best from each other and helping each other to accomplish that.

My wife sometimes gets after me for being awfully idealistic with the students in Singers. And I am, but I purposely am. I expect them to be phenomenal people. They are phenomenal people. They are unusually gifted, beautiful, prepared, wonderful people. I really expect them to be great. I'm not great but I love it when they expect me to be great.

We all respond better to people who remind us of our potential and give us opportunities to be phenomenal. They motivate us best when they say, 'David, you are so great, but I wish you would do this...I appreciate all you are. I am so grateful for all that you are but here is an area where I'd love to see you grow a little bit.'

When someone raises their hand in choir and says, 'Dr. Staheli, I don't like the way that phrase works for such and such reason.' Well, that person works with me, they're supportive, they're with it, they're all there all the time, it just transcends any defensiveness because it's honest, it's open, it's exactly what they are feeling. I listen to them, I hear them out, and nine times out of ten they are right and that's the way I grow too.

If they are wrong then I say let me show you why. Sometimes it takes a little bit longer and if it is appropriate in the class I will take the time, but show them structurally exactly what is going on and I explain to them why I made that decision to do what I have done. And the nice thing about it is in music there really is not right or wrong. If you can make a strong case for what you do then it's right, it seems to me; if you can't then it's probably wrong.

People will take relationship with the conductor or others too seriously and hinge their self worth on the opinion of others. Sandefur Schmidt, who has known him nearly thirty years said of him,

He is not nearly as transparent as he thinks he is. He is one of the most complex men I know, but he doesn't think he is. He thinks he is wide open and why would anyone be scared of him? He's just him. I don't know of too many geniuses who aren't a little bit moody, but he's a genius and he has moods. Those moods affect the choir. There is no way they can't.

But even when he is sick, even when he is tired, he brings such energy and such focus to everything he does. He lives for choir every day. If it was a great rehearsal he is just set up until the next rehearsal comes. And if it was an awful rehearsal, especially if it was on a Friday he just drags through the weekend until he can get to Monday's rehearsal and make things right again and fix whatever it is that went wrong; it might not have anything to do with him, but because you are the conductor you feel responsible for the group if the rehearsal doesn't go well. Because you are up there and that's simply the way it is.

Another Singer observed,

We have a complex relationship. I love him and he is truly a father figure in my life. But I think like with any family member the relationship is multi-faceted and includes love and admiration, frustration and annoyance and all kinds of idiosyncratic interactions which is true of Dr. Staheli and me and true of the rest of us I think.

Well, I've been in Singers for five years so my relationship with Dr. Staheli has evolved quite a bit. When I first came into Singers I did what most people in Singers do, and put him up on a pedestal. And I would take any criticism from him really to heart and it would affect me deeply and hurt me a lot. That was partly to do with my own sensitivity and partly to do with his sometimes harshness. And eventually I came to learn that sometimes Dr. Staheli just has a bad day. Or is frustrated or misperceives me and just gets the wrong impression of people, which he did of me initially in some ways.

He actually had a great impression of me at first. And then eventually he came to realize my weaknesses and was kind of disillusioned with me a little bit and didn't treat me always that great, especially on our tour in Africa. That was very hurtful for me—we had some difficult interactions. But I came to realize that he is a man who has weaknesses and can be a perfectionist and can be stubborn and can be moody and just like all of us, has his own issues to work through and sometimes he projects his own frustrations on to the choir. If he is having a bad day he may feel that we're not with him or that we're not following his ictus or not paying

attention. Which of course is sometimes true, but sometimes it's just him having a bad time, but his way deciphering that is to project his own frustration onto the choir and says, 'Come on guys!' when really I think things are going on internally.

Often a choir member will value the respect he or she receives from the director so much that that becomes the motivating factor in their actions. One such member reflected, "People look to him as a father figure. He is full of great love and passion and people respect him so much, but especially on tour spending a whole month with him, day in and day out, on the bus, all the time. And I found that so many people were kind of hinging their self worth on his acknowledgement of them. He has so much passion and intensity, that at times if you weren't quite up to par you could really feel out of it."

Another said, "The old saying holds true: 'If momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.' We put a lot of stock in to what he thinks of us personally, at least I do. But at the same time I think most of all I feel that I'm still a good person but sometimes I feel like I'm looking for that recognition."

Dr. Brower commented,

I loved the day that I learned, 'It's not about Ron Staheli,' but he showed me that I was worth something. Not for him, but for me. I loved that day. And that day came probably about six weeks too late. But it took about six weeks of real misery and, 'Oh, I've got to be good for Ron Staheli.' And I could never be that good and there were too many other people that were too good. And I was not only in choir but I was in three or four of his classes. And you'd come not prepared and he'd just go for the jugular. And everyone else was saying things that I had never thought of before. And I thought, 'Oh, I can't keep up!' So I was depressed because I was trying to do it for him. And he would say things like, 'I know you can do better.' But it wasn't about him. About six weeks later I said, 'I can do better!'

Incidents occur that require some disciplinary action to take place. Occasionally the director will have to discipline a choir member. Most of the time the members of the

choir are self disciplined, but occasionally there is a need for disciplining from Dr. Staheli. The relationship with the individual is important.

One Singer relates this story,

I was late for rehearsal every day for about a week. After class one day he just pulled me aside, and I didn't get the sense that I was being rebuked or chastised, but he just looked me in the eyes and said, 'I know you can do better than that'. And I think that's about all he said, and he gave me a hug. And I wanted to be on time for him. And I don't know if it was for him, per se, but it was just something about him that I wanted to be better. I wanted to be like him, I wanted to be better. And it wasn't anything like, 'I'll dock your grade,' or 'You're out of the group.' It was, "I know you can do better.

Dr. Brower responded to this story,

I went through this process too. I first did it for him. He's so intelligent. He has so much capacity to process information and come up with these one liners that would stick forever. I wish I had that gift—what a great ability! Anyway, he would say things like that. And at first I found myself not wanting to disappoint him and saying 'You're right, I can do better,' but it wasn't about what I could do better, it was what I could do better for you, and you deserve more—I want to make you happy. I went through that cycle. And it spun around and I found that that was an OK start. But it was a great revelation the day I realized, 'Wait a minute, he doesn't want me to do that for him.' He knows I can do better for me! What a liberating factor! Now when you have a whole body of people that have that awareness, that they're doing it better because they can do it better and they know it, they do it for them, to show who they really are.

Another commented,

It often surprises people how frustrated he gets on tour because he is much less that way during the year. They get the 'Staheli stare' or they'll get a really stern lecture. He'll get that look and do that gesture with his hands and say, 'Come on!' But it's been helpful for me to realize that when he gets frustrated or gets sharp with us it's because he really cares. So I've learned to forgive him and just let that go. Whether it's him or it's me I can, first of all respond to what he wants me to do because there's always room for improvement on my own behalf. Secondly, I don't have to take it personally and say things like, 'Man, we really aren't doing well as a choir' or 'We're not committed.' I can say, "You know what? I am giving what I have to give. I can give even more, but he is frustrated and that's OK. It will pass. We can move forward and I don't have to take it so personally any more.'

There was an incident on tour where some of us went swimming right before a concert at a swimming hole near the site of the performance. It just looked a little funny as people were gathering to watch the concert and saw a few boys hurrying back in their bathing suits to change in their tuxedos before the concert. They tried to keep it low key, but couldn't avoid a little bit of a scene.

One who was involved in the incident commented,

I told him I didn't really feel bad for swimming in the pond. I realize it wasn't the best time to go right when we went, but I don't think it was a bad thing. That made me feel bad. Swimming wasn't the issue. It was guys without shirts in the chapel that were the problem!

But he was really quick to apologize for his overreactions to my mistakes and that really did a lot for me. Later that day he sat us down and apologized to us and told us how much he loved us. He painted a very positive picture of how we were, which was what I knew I should be, could be, and am, most of the time.

Another responded to this, "I know, and I was thinking I could take this one of two ways. I could either feel like he's driving the knife in farther. But then I think, 'no, he's trying to be really positive and it really made a difference in the last few performances that have gone really well.' Coming from him, you can tell that he's really happy and he's ready to lead us."

Sandefur Schmidt talked about earlier problems on tours,

So he's had to learn how to deal with what happens when you run into moral problems on a tour. I won't go in to detail. But generally speaking we do not run into that very much in BYU Singers. But there have been those rare occasions and when it happens it affects the whole choir because so much of who we are is who we are spiritually too. Maybe that's really the bottom line of it.

You know that day with the swimming incident. It wasn't a good day and even though he apologized and everybody apologized to each other, it made him view a few of the choir members differently than he ever had. And it did affect things. But that was minor to some of the other things that have happened.

Nobody has actually been sent home from a tour, but there have been a few that have come so much closer than they ever knew. He expects maturity beyond their years and in large part he gets it.

Individuals do not fill expectations. Sandefur Schmidt continued,

There have been some times when people have not gone on tour because of health issues or personal issues or poor choices issues. You've got to have ecclesiastical clearance. You have to be able to pay for the tour. There are kids who don't do that. You have got to keep your grades up. There are kids who love choir so much that they make it their life and then all of the sudden, 'Oops, was I supposed to take Math 101?' Physical science and math are the two that I've seen done on stateside tours most often. They are in the back of the bus with their workbooks trying to finish it up.

So much of what hasn't been perfect with Singers has been when he has taken a chance on somebody in the choir. If somebody has got emotional difficulties or physical problems or something that is going to impede the progress of the group I'm sure Dr. Staheli will think hard about including them, especially in a year with an overseas tour.

And there were a lot of prima donnas in the beginning years. 'BYU Singers featuring...'

Because he took such a view of everyone is a soloist, a lot of the repertoire was built around a piece that featured a soloist. He's gone back and rewritten some of these arrangements of his so that all of the choir would sing it. The Berlin medley is an example. That's not the first arrangement of that that he did. The earlier versions had soloists.

Every time the choir sings something like that set there is going to be a group in the choir that says, 'There's our cheese song!' OK, it's cheese, but it's such classy cheese. It is done well. It is his view that any music, if it is worthwhile music and is really performed well, is going to work. And if it is approached with seriousness and full dedication, even if it's a fun piece, we can sing it right and make it work!

We have had mostly returned missionaries and a whole lot of returned missionary women in the choir. That makes such a difference in the maturity of the choir. He's taken a chance and has tried to help people. But if they are really not ready to be helped, or if they have fought a hard fight and lost it—which happens—they are still good people. I still love them and I still keep in touch with them, but that kind of darkness of spirit does pull down the choir's spirituality as a whole. It makes him have to deal with people problems more than musical problems; that's harder on the choir when that happens.

People will not deal with conflicts appropriately—will gossip and engage in destructive conversation. Sandefur Schmidt continues,

There have been a few years where people start talking among each other instead of going to Dr. Staheli with a problem. I don't think there is anything that is going to kill a choir faster than that because then it becomes just a gossip fest. Rarely, there is someone who is ready to hurt and they purposefully repeat conversations that were never meant to be repeated or they invent them. And I've seen that happen too—whether they are doing that on purpose or they have an odd memory. They think they heard what they didn't hear. But that starts spreading through the choir and unless there is a real atmosphere of trust built up where you can go to Dr. Staheli and say, 'I heard this, is this really true? Is this how you really feel about me?' it can absolutely kill a choir.

Another observed, "On tour last year, a little bubble started to happen, then the two of us that were talking went to Dr. Staheli about it. I'm so glad we did. We got his feelings on it and then he apologized to us, but actually we were the ones that owed him more of an apology. From then on it was OK. I felt like I got to know him better through it. It was a moment of tired weakness for everybody."

Dating relationships that go awry. In Singers you have the kind of people that are attracted to each other and sometimes that overlaps romantically. You feel at home with this group, you want to be with them. Sandefur Schmidt comments on this, "One thing that just totally throws a choir is when two key members date each other and then they don't. That just comes with the territory of teaching students in their twenties. Dr. Staheli would almost rather not know until he sees them at the temple because it can be touchy when they quit dating! And yet we have had such great couples that have come out of choir. If they are mature and ready for it and know how to handle it, it can be wonderful."

People exclude themselves from the group. Sandefur Schmidt continues,

The people who have felt least at home in Singers are those who are least willing to open up and give of themselves musically and personally. They are just putting their toe in the water. They are too scared to jump in and really experience what it can be. And those people don't really know what it is all about. They sat on the edge of the dance the whole night and never joined in. That makes me sad for what they have missed because they were given the opportunity. Many of them

are the ones that would fall in the group where he was going to take a chance on them and see.

Randy Kempton reflected, “Personally I think I was a little unique. This may be surprising to you, but I didn’t think that I fit in to the choir very well. I already had children, not that there aren’t people that already have children in BYU Singers, there are, but I was a little older than the average age. I never really felt like I was a real part of the family. It’s not because of anything that Dr. Staheli did particularly, but I just felt separated a bit.”

Dr. Staheli, in response while reading this said,

I’ve learned a couple of things from Randy Kempton. A couple of things that I want to talk to him about because there are things that I wish that I could have stepped into the picture and changed for him. It makes me feel a little bit badly about his experience. And yet thank heaven I have had enough experience that I didn’t take responsibility for all of that; only that I could have made it a little bit better had I known. But since he didn’t share that with me and he was such a hard worker and such a wonderful choir member I had no idea he was having those feelings of kind of being left on the outside. That made me feel badly. I never want anyone to feel like they are on the outside. But he even qualified that and said musically never, musically he was fine, but socially he wasn’t.

I think that anybody reading about Randy will see. He gives it away with the things that he says. He says wait a minute you’ve got to take responsibility about the way you felt about it.

I just got a note from a friend who just moved to Florida and is having a tough time at church. He says, ‘I feel like I’m sitting out in the periphery and I really have a tough time.’ I wrote him back and said ‘Come on, take responsibility for those feelings. If you are feeling left out, you better go sit inside the circle.’ We’ll see how that goes.

Principle 7: They Acknowledge Their Connection to a Higher Power. They Depend Upon This as a Source of Strength. They Promote Activities That Increase the Choir Member's Faith in This Source of Power.

All else aside, the BYU Singers would simply not sound the way they do if it weren't for their belief in God and intense devotion to their religious convictions. Their common bond as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints brings them together in unity of purpose. This manifests itself in the way they look at the world. They find spiritual meaning in everything they sing and focus on building souls more than making beautiful music. In the process, they do make beautiful music, relying on a heavenly power to help them sing better. They communicate spirit to spirit and set shining examples of righteous living. Thus, in the words of Dr. Staheli, they do indeed become "a surpassing moral force."

Common Bond

Dr. Brower commented, "Ron Staheli can talk to you and me in terms that we have been reared on. We were brought up with concepts of faith, concepts of doing good, concepts of excellence, ingenuity and industry; we were brought up with those things. Our culture is brought up to work hard. We see something and we want it and OK, we're going to work for it! There are so many people that if it's not given to them, they don't think they have to work for it, it's just too hard."

World View

Dr. Brower continues, "In BYU Singers there are older, mature people who haven't experienced the pessimism of the world. They may have experienced deep sadness, but they are not like so many people who refuse to recognize when they have a

good thing. There are so many who are pessimistic and it is very difficult to work with them. And so many people who don't really think anymore about what they are doing."

Purpose: Building a Soul

One faculty member who has known Dr. Staheli for years observed, "Because I had Dr. Halliday, and Ron's hero was Dr. Halliday, I noticed things that are similar that have been handed down. The way they both are intuitive to need. Dr. Halliday was really good at recognizing what literature was best for an individual. Building the voice, yes, but building a soul. And I noticed that as fun and as great and as entertaining stuff as Ron puts out, the stuff he does to mold the soul is really great too.

I think I have at least one BYU University Singers concert on tape. And he was probably the first one to go show biz while the others were doing things in black and white. Ron was bringing in a little color; a lot of color! And he was asking his individuals to be themselves. Plus he expects you to act what is going on—he expects you to be in there. And that's what Dr. Halliday demanded of us: to be in the moment and interested and to make choices. And expose ourselves to all kinds of opportunities to risk, to reach to stretch.

They are both incredible men, building common, unique wonderful saints in the kingdom. They both saw the greatness. They didn't see the flaws. They saw the greatness. And I don't like the word potential. I have a real hard time with potential. Because just being who you are today and who you are tomorrow—how do you measure that? We don't know if there's tomorrow. So if there is no tomorrow does that mean we didn't reach our potential? Bah with that! So it's reaching and doing. It's reaching, risking—I wish I could think of another 'r' word—that's why I loved working with him. It wasn't about the music necessarily, it was about lives.

Sandefur Schmidt observed, "People are amazed at what he is able to pull out of them. We all have that spark of divinity within us and he is able to find that and bring it out of you. I will always be grateful to him for seeing that and bringing it out in me!"

Sense of Mission

A long time member of Singers said,

That's the main thing that I wanted to say that makes us work is that we have a real sense of mission. I think that any organization cannot work without a real defined mission statement, a purpose. Like Steven Covey has found great success in working with organizations, religious or not, in establishing that principle and

has created a tremendous success of that idea—of having a written down or verbally expressed mission statement that you can refer back to and go from. And I think that that can exist in any choir. I think that has to be created by the members, but I think that's something that we do very well. We have the 'Singers Psyche' we talk about.

Ambassadors on Tour

Another said,

From when we're with host families, when we're tourists or when we're doing workshops with high schools to when we're on stage performing, it's not about us; it's about us pointing the light that we feel within us and have been blessed to have in our lives to point others upward to the source of that light. And that's not just fluffy talk; we really, literally try to feel that sense of purpose. I think for any organization to move forward and have success they have to find whatever their purpose is, their purpose can't be as explicitly religious as ours—in most situations that wouldn't work. But I think, I was amazed going in to that high school the other day in which there were no members of the Mormon Church there, but they had on the wall quotes from each class, which was 'How can I keep from singing?' or quotes that had a reference to the 'soul' aspect of music—how it touched their hearts.

And I think that anyone who is involved in music, you can't separate those things in order for it to be successful. You have to get in touch with the core of what it is, with your heart, with your soul, and you can talk about that without being denominational or without being explicitly religious. But I think that without seeking that source of higher power, getting into the root of what it is we are doing and why, no choir can really be successful. And I think that's really key to what we do. We believe that we are not just a choir. We believe that we are musical missionaries.

Missionaries

Another said,

I don't think the audience has to know specifically what we believe. One of the most valuable things I learned on my mission is that by far the most effective missionary tool in the church is the lives of the members. President Hinckley has said that that is the symbol of our faith and that is absolutely true. The most effective missionary experiences we had were people who had known members in their life and just simply by the virtue of them living their life and being a great example, not for the sake of trying to convert people or indoctrinate them, but just that they believed in being truly good Christian people that others were brought to the gospel of Jesus Christ because they could see that light in their faces. They could see the quality of which they lived their lives and a certain kindness. And I

don't think Mormons in any way have a monopoly on that. I've seen a lot of great people—people can tell if you have God in your life and they are drawn to that. No, I don't think we have to tell people that. I think people hopefully can see that in our faces and feel that in every note that we sing no matter what style of song we're singing.

Spiritual Aspect in Performance

Dr. Ashby commented,

There's no way the conductor can give everything with their hands or even telling it. There's this feel thing that they have to do. And that channel has to be opened. A lot of people shut down because they expect to be entertained or told what to do. And I think it's the same channel that the Holy Ghost works through. You just have to be open to it. There are times in choir when everyone is feeling that things happen in the music that you couldn't conduct, you couldn't have rehearsed in. And they're really exciting because it's that Spirit that's working on all of you together.

I think it's a spiritual thing it has to do with people who are committed. And here we're lucky to be committed to the gospel, the church and so forth, that makes it really easy because there is one thing that we are committed to. In the outside world sometimes you can get people committed to the music, to the cause of the music and the message that they are dealing with and sometimes that will work.

To really understand it fully, I think you have to understand how the Spirit works. But people operate by the spirit outside the church all the time—good people who are doing a good work and they can have access to it. There is no reason why not. But people have to live in such a way to be qualified to receive that. And then they have to be willing to come together in that way.

Spiritual Meaning in Everything

One Singer noted, “Dr. Staheli can find meaning in everything. We were singing ‘Rattle on the Stove Pipe’ and it's just so silly. But he was able to find meaning in that! He said, ‘We have faith and we don't have to be uptight all the time because we have this hope and so we can have fun, we can relax.’”

One choir member noted,

I think people can have a full and rich experience with music, obviously, whether or not they are LDS or not of any religion. I will be bold enough to say this. I don't believe that life is as meaningful and purposeful if you are atheist or

agnostic. Maybe that's closed-minded of me or prejudiced but I believe that. I don't care if you're Buddhist or Hindu, Muslim, some natural world religion, Seventh Day Adventist, whatever, I don't care, what you are, but I think unless you really believe that we are here for a purpose and there is a higher power I think your life is less meaningful and your purpose is less significant. And you can't find music that doesn't talk about God or doesn't talk about love or tapping in to that higher power. All music is about that.

Relying on a Higher Power to Help You Sing Better

Another Singer observed,

During the very last performance of the year, Dr. Staheli announced to the audience before a particular set that the piece was very tricky. 'We're going to have to rely on a higher power to get some of these harmonies, transitions, etc.'

And then the second part of it is, and it kind of comes along with being a good leader, but you need to have that spiritual aspect of it. You need to rely on God and rely on His powers and abilities because they are infinitely greater than your own.

If you were in a situation where not everyone believed in God, I think as a leader you could still be praying for the group. You could still go to rehearsal every day with a prayer in your heart. You could still rely on God yourself. You could also invite any of those in the choir who have religious beliefs to rely on those. If they don't then to look inside of them that would help them and inspire them.

You need to create an environment where everybody is comfortable but committed. One of the ways to do that is to help them recognize that by themselves they can't do anything, that by themselves they are nothing—even the director. Dr. Staheli has said, he can get up there and wave his arms around all day but if there is no choir in front of him then what is the point! Although I would find that entertaining!

Activities Designed to Enhance One's Ability to Feel the Spirit

Sandefur Schmidt said,

It is not that Dr. Staheli expects everyone in the choir to be fully formed in to who they are going to be. But they need to be—this is Elder Maxwell's wonderful teaching: 'it is not the speed, it is the direction.' He expects the choir members to keep moving. He expects them to be working on all aspects of themselves while they are in the choir so that it is not just a musical experience. Because you don't have what you must have to give if you are not physically sound, if you are not spiritually sound, if you are not intellectually stimulated. All of that enters in to

making excellent music. Good music isn't good enough, it has to be excellent, it has to be our best. You give your very best to the Lord

To help each member move in this right direction, the choir is structured to ensure activities exist to enhance the spirituality of the group. The choir vice president is responsible for assigning people to give prayers and devotionals in class. He or she also organizes fireside meetings with the choir and on tour. Every member of the choir has an opportunity to express their feelings in a formal way at designated times. They also feel a sense of connection to the overall spirituality of the whole group.

Another Singer commented,

What distinguishes BYU Singers from other choral groups, I believe, is how much we dedicate our time—rehearsal time, performance time and other times—to meaningful, spiritual things.

I think it has to do with everyday living because we incorporate it every day. We'll have time for a prayer—we start right at the hour and end late every day. You can tell how important it is to Dr. Staheli because he always takes extra time to talk about what the songs mean or making sure we sing with the Spirit, making sure we know what the song means to us. It seems like he'll take that extra five or ten minutes to talk about the last concert or say what's important and put every thing in perspective. It's like taking time to plan for the day. He helps us do that ourselves. He incorporates the spiritual aspect in to everything and brings things from his life to bring greater meaning to something we are doing in the choir.

Another choir member commented,

We all give devotionals—I think that's one thing that really makes us work well. We see each other for our spiritual side and greater purpose. We know what we are all about in this life beyond just trying to sound good as a choir. It's not about that. Our purpose, and we all know it, is to show what we believe through song. And we see that people live that and exemplify that and they tell us that—they share their real heart and testimony in every devotional and before every concert. We kneel together on the floor in prayer and petition the Lord for His help and assistance and His guidance. I think that reminds all the time what the source of our power and talent and strength is and why we're here and what it is that we are doing, the focus is continually on the people and being ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ, of being missionaries.

Spiritual Leader of the Choir

The vice-president of the choir commented on some of his duties as a spiritual leader for the group:

When I was asked to fill that position I was instructed that the vice president is more or less responsible for the spiritual welfare of the choir. And in being so I was responsible to ask people to pray everyday throughout the year and pray before concerts. I was also asked to select people to give devotionals. Every Thursday we have a devotional in the choir. We also have spiritual devotionals before each concert. So I was in charge of selecting the people as well as selecting the topic of which the devotional would be addressed.

Picking what topic to assign was a little bit of a trick. A lot of times I would pick songs that we were singing and ask them to expound on the lyrics and what it means to them. That was good and Dr. Staheli is an advocate of that because it gets the song a little more in the heart and it gives us a little better understanding of what we are singing, it becomes more a part of the choir members.

There were many times though that I would pick a topic that needed to be addressed. It was always done through prayer as well as the selection of people. I prayed constantly for the ability to discern who needed to give devotionals and who needed to pray. And what topics needed to be given by what individuals, because certain individuals would do better at certain topics than others. So trying to match up the right topic with the right individual to give the devotional was kind of a nerve-wracking procedure.

I'll tell you one of the more significant memories I had this year. I was at a little bit of a loss as to what topic I wanted for a Thursday devotional that was coming up. I wanted to have one of the choir members give a devotional but I really didn't know about what. But I remember going up to him and asking him to give a devotional. He said, OK, what would you like it to be on? And I said you know, I don't know, I've been playing around with a couple of things but I kind of think I would like you to give a devotional on Alleluia. That's your topic.

He kind of glanced away for a minute and I said is that OK, because we can change it if you want. But he said, OK, alleluia. I'll do it. I like that. I'll work on that. I said great and thought we'll see how that goes.

This was just the word 'alleluia', not a specific song, although we sang that word in several of our pieces.

He gave this remarkable devotional about the roots of this word alleluia and certain historical figures who used the word alleluia and why they used it. And

then quotes. It was magnificent. It was amazing. It was one of the best devotionals given all year.

And that day we worked on the alleluia parts of the different songs more than any other day of the year. And that apparently was in the schedule before hand. It fell together right there and we sang alleluia in a couple different songs. It was significant part of the song. There were sections based on the word alleluia. And it was really remarkable to me how that worked out.

When I said earlier that singing in this choir was a life-changing experience, this is what I am talking about. I talked to individuals. I remember a certain girl said her favorite part of being in the choir was Thursday devotionals.

My first year I had trouble getting to my religion class and to have that daily spiritual experience but BYU Singers became my religion class because it was spiritually rejuvenating. So of course in the responsibility that I had I wanted everyone to have that experience.

Another thing that was very significant was the devotional address I gave at the beginning of the year on the *Book of Mormon*. This was shortly after President Hinckley had come out with his challenge to read it again by the end of the year. And so I gave my devotional on the *Book of Mormon*, I felt that was what needed to be done. I challenged everyone to read it every day and to finish by the end of the year.

After that devotional Dr. Staheli said, ‘why don’t we have a *Book of Mormon* moment every day where we have someone share something they had read in the *Book of Mormon*?’ We did that right before prayer every day. The idea was to encourage us every day to remind us to be reading the *Book of Mormon*. It was just an informal thing for people to share. We’d ask, ‘Does anybody have a moment?’ If nobody had a moment that was OK, but much more often than not someone had something to share. It was very brief. Just 30–45 seconds. For example, I read how Alma said ‘oh, that I were an angel and could have the wish of my heart.’ That’s sometimes how I feel. But I enjoy singing with this choir because I feel like I am singing with the angels. Something like that—just a thought or point that came out as they were reading the *Book of Mormon*. It was great. It was really great. He just came up with it on the spot after I finished my devotional and we decided to do it and it worked out wonderful.

Everyone enjoyed sharing, but it got a little bit out of hand when they started to get too long. I sent out an email explaining that we need these moments, we want them, we want people to share their thoughts and feelings but be sure that they don’t become too burdensome.

Conclusion

It was not my intent in this study to show that the Brigham Young University Singers are the best choral ensemble known to man and therefore everyone should learn to be more like them. Rather I hope that I have made them an example of an ensemble that does many things very well yet also has areas to improve. By learning the principles of the BYU Singers through examples and quotations, it should be clear to choral practitioners how they may be adapted to new settings.

But what do these findings mean to the discipline of Instructional Psychology and Technology? The ensemble is in essence a community of learners, a university class and an instructional environment. It is the mission of the discipline to help at all levels of training and instruction (Inouye, Merrill & Swan, 2005). Surely choral music can be the beneficiary of the years of research and methods that help us understand how people learn, are motivated and relate to each other.

This community of learning also provides us a model of instruction and motivation that may not be exclusive to the realm of performing arts. In most classrooms there is a certain level of isolation for each student. Even in classrooms where interaction is highly emphasized, learning still ends up being an individual effort. But in the BYU Singers, students are not evaluated on an individual level. Their success depends on every individual in the group working as a team. Thus we see the great results that come from synergy. The final product of the choir is definitely greater than the sum of its parts.

I think an interesting challenge would be to create a learning environment in another discipline outside the arts or athletics where the members of the group are as committed to an end result and to each other as they are in the BYU Singers. I believe the

result could be a larger number of students prepared to adapt to real world situations where teamwork and camaraderie are vital for success.

I actually tried this to an extent with an educational psychology class that I taught at BYU. I began by focusing on the similarities between the performing ensemble and the group of future elementary school teachers that made up my class. These students had been placed in a cohort with other future teachers. They had all of their classes together and assisted at the same elementary schools, so their relationships were already well established. It was interesting for me as a teacher to capitalize on the dynamics of those relationships to help them reach their full potential. I organized them in groups based on their strengths and weaknesses (e.g. I did not place all of the talkative students in the same group etc.) Together, their task was to collaborate on a project that presented something greater than the sum of the parts. I tried to get them to understand their role in the group and what they could uniquely contribute as well as to appreciate the roles the other group members played.

Because they knew this project would be something very similar to what they would actually be teaching in their future classrooms, our class became somewhat of a rehearsal. I gave individual assignments as homework to help them learn the material, but I spent the class time helping them polish what they had learned and “rehearsing” how they would apply their understanding of principles in their classrooms.

The other similarity that was helpful at BYU was the religious aspect. We all shared the same religious conviction and were able to start the class with prayer and bring up spiritual applications to the content. We would try to draw upon a higher power to help us understand and apply the principles we discussed in class.

My efforts of applying what I learned from my study of the BYU Singers were really only in the beginning stages. I am excited to see future implications of understanding a group like this and applying insights to new settings.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

What makes a good choir?

What makes a good conductor?

How would you define “good choral sound?”

What made you want to audition for the choir?

What was your audition like?

How did you feel your first day of Singers?

What makes a good section leader?

Tell me about a time when you felt really good after a rehearsal or concert.

How important are relationships in a choir?

What happens when relationships get out of hand?

How close of friends should a conductor be to the choir?

When should a professional distance be maintained?

What things does Dr. Staheli do well?

In what areas can he improve?

How effective are you as a section in working out your own problems?

In what areas do you do well as a Singer?

What activities exist in the choir for you to get closer to the other Singers?

What is the purpose of the weekly devotional?

Why do you say prayers before each rehearsal?

Do you ever have to ask Dr. Staheli to play your part?

Tell me about sectional rehearsals. How are they run?

What do you do personally to get you motivated for a concert?

What do you do if you find you are on auto pilot?

Tell me about a difficult performance for you.

Why do we have high school workshops?

How do Singers spend their time outside of class?

What is the common bond that keeps the Singers together?

Is the grade you receive in class any motivation to perform well?

What is your favorite part about being a BYU Singer?

What lessons will you take with you as you leave BYU Singers?

How can you gauge your improvement over time in the group?

What things is Dr. Staheli doing to improve?

Does the rehearsal ever get out of control?

Where is the best place to sit on the tour bus?

Tell me about your relationship with Dr. Staheli.

What sorts of things are not good to eat before you perform? What are good?

Tell me about Dr. Staheli's ability to explain difficult choral concepts.

What does the phrase "don't pull in your horns" mean?

If you were to be a ward (church) choir director, what ideas would you use from Singers?

What happens when someone misbehaves in the choir and needs to be disciplined?

What is your favorite piece and why?

What is your role in the choir?

What do others perceive your role to be?

Does the outfit you wear affect the way you sing?

What kind of people come to a BYU Singers concert?

If you could change anything about the choir, what would that be?

How often do you make suggestions to the whole group? To the section?

What do you think is the key to the success of the BYU Singers?

Appendix B: Sample From Audit Trail

Timeline

February – March 2005: Formulated ideas in conjunction with class on qualitative inquiry

April 2005: Prepared prospectus and gained IRB approval

April 2005: Took observation notes of classroom rehearsal

April – May 2005: Conducted extensive interviews of Singers while on tour to Canada

June – September 2005: Held email forums and engaged in protocol writing

September 2005 – January 2006: Continued classroom observations and interviews

January 2006: Conducted interviews at BYU Idaho with choral faculty

February – March 2006: Formally interviewed Dr. Staheli and analyzed documents

April 2006: Interviewed Sandefur Schmidt

May – July 2006: Extensive member checking with Sandefur Schmidt and others

June 2005 – June 2006: Organizing the story and preparing drafts

July 2006 – January 2007: Finalizing, editing, member checking etc.

Early Planning: Reflective thoughts that got things started

My idea for my study came when we sang at a convention in LA. We were received so well and several people told us that we were unlike all the other choirs they heard. They said: I felt something that I didn't feel with the others. I noticed their eyes shined and from the moment they walked on stage, before they even sang a note I was touched by this choir. Other conductors ask: What can I do to get my choir to sing that way?

So with this research training and with this question in mind I saw what I thought could be an opportunity to tell the story of the BYU Singers, to take a really close look at what goes on so that - not so much that others could imitate what was going on or duplicate Singers, but that they could improve their choirs because I think groups like this have so much to offer the musical world.

I want to examine and tell the story of what these singers believe and how those beliefs can be harnessed to make beautiful music. There are very few groups like the BYU Singers and BYU-Idaho Collegiate Singers. There are hundreds of excellent choirs. Yet how is that someone could sit through dozens of performances at a convention and hear wonderful choirs each singing in tune with expression and yet then the BYU Singers can get up on stage and the same person will say: there is something different about that choir? Ultimately I think it all comes down the lives of the singers. Each member of the choir is really living the glorious things they are singing about.

But what can a conductor do to bring out the very best in such people? How do they rehearse? What do they do to encourage each other to continue to live that way? We could look to this choir as an example.

The beautiful thing about this type of research is that it is exploratory. I do not approach it with an idea in mind that I want to test. I am willing to completely change direction if I so choose.

Rehearsal Observations

Thursday, October 6, 2005

Warmup: We do about 5 minutes of warming up by singing a piece that is not too difficult, and then a little bit of vocal exercise. This usually includes scales and arpeggios of different varieties sung to various vowels. Then we have a prayer.

Devotional (Thursdays only): R** and J** are our vice presidents. They give assignments for people to pray and to give weekly devotionals. The spiritual aspect is extremely prevalent in this group. That is what makes the choir unique and gives us depth from which to emote during performance. Audiences comment that they feel when we sing. Not only are we accurate in technicalities, but we sing with a deep understanding reflective of a relationship with the text and with God. Every day as we begin we are reminded of the prayer. On Thursdays we have a devotional. One singer is assigned to give a five minute presentation on a topic relevant to us as singers.

Today L** gave the devotional She spoke on what it means to have a testimony that testimony can carry us through difficult challenges. She included the text of our pieces Shakespeare sonnet (76) . For they sweet love remembered such wealth brings... that then I scorn to change my state with kings. We are all reminded that we love what we do and what it is we are sharing with others to give our all for the next 80 minutes.

J** opened up to us in devotional and let us in to where his personal feelings are. He talked of love and sharing it with others. When he sat down D** gave him a pat on the arm of reinforcement. He fosters this environment in the way he has set up the class.

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

Monologue -his take on the meaning of the text

Singing gives us an opportunity to express in an appropriate way what could easily be expressed inappropriately. Allow yourself to trust and sublimate yourself to give voice to

those feelings, yearnings and passions. He plead with us to trust ourselves in this expression

Thought from Elder Holland - strengthening each other

Here is the thought I wanted to write on the board, but it was too long and there were other things I needed to do. It is no small thing to sustain another person. When we sustain a friend or a neighbor even a stranger in the street we give support, we share strength, we provide help, we hold each other up under the weight of present circumstances.

Good work Habits

- Stay standing with good posture for the duration of the rehearsal
- Always have a pencil on hand ready to make notes in the music
- Police your own proper singing technique
- Smile and enjoy yourself appropriately in the rehearsal – no one wants to suffer through the hour or hour and a half
- Be an example to others in your work ethic and discipline
- Make helpful suggestions to those around you as you think of them and when it is appropriate

The bulk of the rehearsal

- Singing through lines pieces, feedback and instruction Taking suggestions from members of the choir

My Reflection After Class

This class is taken very seriously. Although there is definitely a camaraderie among the performers and an overall happy feeling to the group, -when it is time to sing,

this group snaps to attention and is focused from beginning to end. Dr. Staheli and Sister Hall comment that it is a rare treat to find a group with that kind of work ethic. We rehearse for fifty minutes on MWF and eighty minutes on T Th, That's quite a long time to sing on a daily basis, but these singers do so "with vigor.

Several times in the rehearsal today Dr. Staheli asked us to sing from memory a piece we had only read through once or twice. He always pushes us to get the songs in to our memory quickly. He says we really know it sooner than we think we do. The faster we get out of our score and trust our memory the closer we will be to mastery. he said the writing was delicious.

I am impressed as I stand in this choir at the tremendous work ethic. These singers stay standing for an hour, twice a week it 'sfor an hour and a half (on these long days there are sometimes chances to sit down when we are having a discussion, but the brain is never disengaged). They rehearse at such a quick pace. It requires a good deal of concentration to keep up with Dr. Staheli's mind It seems that the veterans set the example for the rest to follow. They encourage each other and set the standard for the new people.

They seem to enjoy themselves in the rehearsal As I look around I see people smiling, swaying with the music or otherwise bodily expressing their intimate connection with the music. They have proper jaw tension and lift in the face. I see shoulders shrugging and efforts expand the chest and to facilitate proper breathing. These singers are not casually engaged. Dr. Staheli never has to remind them to stand up straight. There is the occasional reminder to expand more in the chest and to breathe better, but most of this is enforced by the individual.

Friday, October 14, 2005

During warmups - compliment your neighbor – listen to your neighbor – if everyone blends with the person next to them it will all be in tune

Think the pitch before going up to it.

He constantly directs their attention to good singing “did you notice the difference?”

It has been a while since I’ve been able to sit in and observe the choir. This is absolutely thrilling to hear them again. I connect with a sound that seems so familiar, not because I have sung with them for two years, but it is something further. Back long before I can remember, I resonate with this sound.

“way to go”

Directs back to a passage from warmup – they already made the sound in the warm up – he is directing them back to a previous time they made the correct sound and asked for it to apply to this certain passage.

Makes the best come out of me as both a musician and a researcher – humbled to try to tackle this amazing of a phenomenon.

Always this push to memorization. He wants you to always be thinking get it in to your memory – we underestimate ourselves when it comes to memory. We know it but we’re not sure that we know it.

Flavor of a chord – that seems to make sense – there is a taste, a feel.

The altos gave each other high fives when they nailed a certain line that was giving them trouble – team unity etc.

Interviews

I want these interviews to be conversational. My responses to what people say may be just as useful as their answers to my questions

J***

Me: What are some things Dr. Staheli does really well?

I've seen a progression in Dr. Staheli as far as opening himself up to people. I've had many long conversations with him in his office. I talked to him a couple of months ago for an hour and a half when I was in his office. And everyone has that relationship with him and I think that over time that has come for us as I have shared my life with him and the same in return.

I think he is very good about keeping professional boundaries and he – sometimes that's perceived by students I think as him being distant or putting up a wall. But really I think you have to keep some kind of professional relationship. Like in my high school choir, my first director, he let those lines be blurred to his detriment. Inappropriate things didn't happen, but he just got really close to the kids. They became friends and buddies you know, but I think there is really fine line you walk between being a crony and hanging out and getting really close and keeping some kind of professional distance and maintaining respect. I think he's good at walking that line. He probably errs on the side of professional distance but I think he's even changing that. He invited us on the first time ever in my last five years of Singers, asking us to come sit by him and talk to him and I think he really means that. Taking us aside and wanting to get to know us and inviting us to come to his office and creating that open door policy and I think that as he has done that there has been an increasing amount of love and trust in each other because he has

opened himself up and willing to show us his vulnerabilities – as I said earlier been willing to apologize when he was wrong.

Me: That thought about being able to apologize – I worked with a conductor at another school who always had to be right and even when he was wrong he was still right. He found a way to put the blame on somebody else. And that just caused backbiting and all kinds of things.

Dr. Staheli also I think is willing more than many people I know to continually be open to growth and to risk himself. He embodies in a lot of ways the principles that we seek for - the whole Singers mentality and he shared a lot with me.

Me: That's what I was so impressed with when I first joined the choir was that he didn't have to always be right. He was open to correction and asked us to correct him at times. And that relationship did wonders for my view of the world, life in general, the choir. And allowed me – because he says all the time that we have to be able to take risks. You have to put your heart out on the line and it's one thing to just keep everything inside, but if you're going to be a singer and you're really going to touch people then you're going to have to put your heart out on the line, which is dangerous. OK now with those things in mind about these relationships, I want to get to the heart of what can a conductor do to encourage the relationships among the members of the choir. If you're kind of going to generalize and say: "Ok to be a good conductor you must be humble, open to correction,"

Quick to apologize, quick to express love. That's one thing that I left out. He openly expresses his genuine love for us. I think it doesn't work with those conductors that yell at their kids and then are like: "but I love you guys" in some kind of forced,

artificial moment of quote, unquote tenderness. You guys know I love you and care about you” but it falls on deaf ears because they don’t show that. Love is expressed by a teacher or a parent or a friend or anyone - the old cliché is really true: “actions speak louder than words” and you can say that, but if you don’t back it up with what you do then it doesn’t mean anything. I think Dr. Staheli is excellent at showing us that he loves us and his dedication and his actions in his physical expressions. He appropriately expresses his love for us for those who are open to affection in giving us a pat on the back or a hug. I think that communicates a lot of love and he’ll show that verbally in various sincere kind of moments he’ll tell us exactly what we mean to him. And we feel then how much time and effort he gives – he never asks us to give any more than he is willing to give himself ever and I love that. He shows us then he tells us then he shows us again.

Me: Umm Good!

Further Questions

What was your audition for the choir like?

Tell me about your first day of class?

How did you feel?

Tell me about the retreat?

Where was it?

What did you do?

What did Dr. Staheli say about you when he introduced you?

Questions for Professors

Tell me about your experience with singers.

What are the main things you learned from Dr. Staheli?

What have you repeated in your choir that was similar to your experience with BYU Singers?

What have you done differently?

What do you tell people when they want to know how it is you make the sound you do?

What organizational tips have you picked up from him?

Letter from Dr. Staheli September 12, 2005

Dear Friends,

Hope you had a great time at retreat. I hope you, individually, feel wanted, needed, and important to our success. Further, I hope your sense of connection with members of the choir has substantially strengthened because of the time we spent together up the canyon. Now, let's let our music reflect these feelings as we work even more closely knit together.

Thank you for tending to so many details important to the retreat's success. You made the time very enjoyable for all of us.

Remember how your voice fits into your section. Remember to take enormous responsible risks, but to always listen louder than you sing. Remember, oh remember the importance of your countenance and what is required for that countenance to reflect the light and radiance of the Savior. Remember the reinforced challenge to read the Book of Mormon every day.

Remember that your divine eccentricities are not simply welcome, but badly needed for us to find the success available to us as we continue to work together with faith, prayer, pure intention, and firm resolve. I believe that Father in Heaven, one way or another, has given you opportunities to learn the value of a broken (open) heart that knows and feels the truths we want to sing.

Much love,

Dr. S

Reflection

I think it is amazing how much Dr. Staheli cares about this group. He has done this for so many years, yet he finds a way to make things so fresh and new. I think it is the people. He gets energized by the people he works with in the choir. You can tell that he truly cares for them and tries his hardest to help them have a positive experience.

Appendix C: Prayer

As Latter-Day Saints, the BYU Singers pray from their hearts and try to have a personal conversation with the Lord. When officially praying on behalf of the group, the speaker uses the term “we” instead of “I”. Typically there are two parts of the prayer. An expression of gratitude and thanks for the blessings received and then a plea or asking for certain blessings. They have a firm belief that prayer is a process where the mind of the Lord and the mind of the Singers unite.

I tried not to overstep the bounds of propriety when documenting prayers. Often I would turn the recorder off for this sacred moment. I have to admit to leaving it on at times, most of the times because I just forgot to, but sometimes because I really think the way we pray influences our final product. Either way my goal with the prayers was to identify themes and patterns in prayers rather than transcribing them word for word.

Among the blessings singers thanked the Lord for throughout my observation were:

- The opportunity to sing praises to God
- That we could be gathered in the name of the Lord
- Each other’s company
- The joy of singing
- Chance to perform performing for the children of God
- The Spirit we have felt
- The time we had to prepare for the tour
- Safety while traveling
- Opportunity to be able to share our testimonies

- The friendships that have grown
- Our talents
- Our faith and our testimonies
- The willing reception we received at concerts
- Blessing of work

The Singers asked the Lord for the following things:

- That our confidence will wax strong
- That we can come together as a group
- To focus our minds and hearts to do our very best
- That the audience will be receptive to the message we bring
- That Dr. Staheli will be strengthened and inspired by Thee
- So we will remember all we have prepared
- That we will sing with all our hearts tonight
- To be instruments in Thy hand to bring a portion of the Spirit
- Those who come will have their hearts touched and draw closer to God
- That we will be able to touch lives that we ourselves will feel the Spirit
- To portray the message we have to share
- To lay aside any ill feelings
- Peace within
- That the Lord's Spirit will be with us
- To be able to sing the songs and bear testimonies of our heart to those who are seeking faith building experiences
- To feel the power of the music

- To remember what we've learned about each other and our cherished relationships
- To use the remainder of the time to get to know each other better
- To watch over our families
- To have a wonderful stay with our host families
- To feel of Thy love for us
- To have an outpouring of Thy Spirit
- That we may be unified and expressive
- To adequately share the things that we feel and know to be true
- To reach through the trials and sorrows of the world

Other themes that reoccurred were the feeling of indebtedness to the Lord—that it is by His power and design that we are here. They also hallowed the name of the Lord and dedicated each performance to Him.

I can certify that those things that the Singers prayed for were realized on many levels. Those who attended the concerts could do so as well. I strongly believe there is great power to be gained by admitting dependence on a higher power and turning your performance over to that power. The results speak for themselves.

Appendix D: Sample Staheli Pep Talks

Choir members commented extensively on Dr. Staheli’s ability to teach, lead and inspire. This is evident in the eloquent way he speaks to the choir, especially on special occasions. Before each concert he gives a speech or “pep talk” to get the group motivated and focused on the task at hand. For the sake of brevity, I included only excerpts from these talks in the earlier chapters, but I think readers will find it interesting to have a complete version of a few of them here.

Supporting Each Other

When Moses was leading the children of Israel in to battle, the Lord him stand on the mountain and hold his arms in the air. Whenever his arms were raised, the Israelites would prevail. Aaron and Ur were there to sustain him Moses and hold his arms up when he was weak.

I think that happens throughout the choir. You have your own strengths and perhaps that is a strength where someone else is very weak. And we just simply support each other and that’s how the overall effect is greater than the sum of the parts. Because someone is there ready to take over in my moment of weakness. And you are there ready to take over in their moment of weakness. And we are ready to support each other to make it happen. It’s not only in times of extremity, but I’ve learned by singing in the bass section that there are times when the guys around me can do much better than I do. And maybe there are a couple of times when maybe I am able to do something better than the other guys around me.

Father in Heaven gave you ears. Use them! When we were trying to tune that “ah” vowel—you know they say the person that doesn’t read is no better off than the person

who can't. It's really the truth if we have ears and we don't use them, then what's the point?

We are so bombarded with so much noise. Do you know the word cacophony? There is so much cacophony, that it's really hard. Our ears get so inundated that they don't hear very well—there's not very much sensitivity there.

I think the ability to keep our ears hearing acutely is really difficult. And even as we warm up those moments, we can't wait for someone else to do it. We've got to work hard to keep all of our senses about us I think, especially that of our hearing.

We had a woman [in church] Sunday morning get up with her hearing dog. She came up to the podium with her pooch in hand. I thought: "oh dear, I had seen it all." It turned out it was a very sweet testimony and it really was a hearing dog. But we as Singers can't rely on a hearing dog. We've got to be able to use that ability to listen.

So I urge you to listen like crazy. Every night it will be different. So think: "How do I make this happen? How do I fit in now with the way things are?"

Creativity

There is a thought in a Broadway musical that I think is about as profound as anything I know in any musical piece. It is by arguably the best composer/lyricist of any American musical theater ever. The musical dates from the middle 80s and in the musical It's sort of fiction built upon the life of George Sarrot. And towards the end of the first act, George is working on a Sunday afternoon. And his girlfriend/lover, who by the way is expecting his baby, is wanting to go out on the town as he has promised her they could. Then it comes to the point where she is ready to go, but he is still working on the painting.

And it's so imaginatively done on stage because you see dot on the audience side and behind the painting, which you see come and go depending on how the light hits the scrim.

So you see George up on this latter and he's doing all of this dot dot dot dot with all of these various true colors. And he's working on a hat. And the song he sings is: "Finishing the hat," Which is a pretty dumb title for a Broadway musical song isn't it? And yet it becomes so important to the whole story line because it's not just the hat but this is his creativity and all of himself is coming in to this painting. And what he's doing at that very moment. He can't possibly leave it. He can't possibly go out to a night club some where because he has got to finish the hat. And of course that kind of breaks her heart and she throws herself down and storms out and marries Louie the Baker in stead.

I think it represents for me—I was so forcefully struck with that—and the ideas come back in act two about how creativity becomes this issue of involving all parts of our selves. The physical, for sure the spiritual, the emotional, the psychological—all of these parts of us come together in creativity. And I think that that's the great act of God himself. And that is the great glory of God as he creates.

Now let me just change gears for just a second and say. I think one of my biggest issues it turns out it seems to me that I'm an idealist at heart. So much so that it's easy for me to sometimes lose a little of a hold on reality when I see things as they can be. You probably suffer from that—no, I know you well enough—I know you suffer from that a little bit too. And it's particularly jarring when reality and the ideal don't mach up. Especially when that ideal becomes so important to us and what reality is and you see it

so far below. That creates a real tragic gap for us and often times that is so incredibly difficult to reconcile.

But I think that that tragic gap must be—we've got to learn to deal with that so we don't lose our sense of creativity. Because it seems to me that our creativity unites us as nothing else does. And I'm not just talking about singing and music making or artistic endeavors. But that creativity unites us, it makes us who we are and it allows to express who we are, what we are, what we represent, what our life means, as much to us as it does to the world. That creativity I think sometimes shouts back at us at our own weaknesses our own foibles our own brokenness, our own isolation, disconnectedness. But on the other hand, it seems to me that same creativity gives us the chance to see that we are unbreakably involved in the lives of everyone else and everyone's lives are involved in ours, even if you try to play the hermit. It just doesn't work. Also I think that creativity helps us to have a sense of the fact that money, physical goods, a beautiful home, all of those things really ultimately don't mean very much. And in fact very often they become more of a pressure than they are a pleasure.

And I think that for somebody like me and many of you that take so much responsibility, creativity can help us to see that no matter how much we think this is right and we hunker down to do that thing, I think the creativity helps us to let go when we should and let natural forces, divine providence, take over.

And I think it's that creativity that gives us a chance to sense in minute perspective what it must be like to be God. The idea of creating worlds, I must tell you, has never appealed to me. In fact it scares me to death. But I love to be creative like all of you do too. We are involved in such an incredibly demanding part of creativity because

what I try to create depends so much on what you are trying to create and all of the rest of us. And by the time you times that 42, I mean the logarithms just make it an incredibly complex thing for us to try to accomplish.

My ideal—I've told you about my ideal, I've read you my ideal review how many thousand times. Sometimes I think we make it there and we do, look out, it's just terrific!

But what I want to focus on is how often we have gained so much and have grown so much and learned so much of all of the kind of things I am talking about when we put it together and we decide that we can as a body we can create something wonderful.

Oh there are times that we all pull back. There are times when we get a little bit of the "Heebie Jeebies" because we're not quite sure or we fell maybe we're losing a little of ourself or someone else is taking a little advantage of us. Or we feel like maybe we are being used or whatever. But I think by and large I think the issue for us is that we have really worked so well together in together creating something so much bigger than the sum of all the parts. That's thrilling to me.

I don't know that we have ever had an edition of BYU Singers that has been so focused. That has been so unified. Oh we have our issues. We still do, even now. But the issue is that so many wonderful things happen because so much of you is involved in what we do. For that reason I challenge us tonight to sing everything new. To create "the hat" where there wasn't a hat. The music can't work without us. The music is only paper and ink without us. And even if we sing it, it just becomes sound, but then if we really live it as we sing, it then it becomes something compelling.

I challenge us to face it anew—come at it anew for the last time. And express from the depths of our souls what we know to be there, what we have learned. And be unafraid in showing the world exactly what that is, what we are.

I commit to doing better myself. Much better. And I ask you the same thing: not to hold back because if we do, tomorrow we'll feel sorry. Tomorrow we'll have regrets. I don't want any regrets. Let it hang out, let it go. Take off the insulation. Sing with your heart as much with your brain. And then the body can get in touch with emotions, emotions can be in touch with intelligence. Intelligence can be in touch with every physical part of your being to the point that it really becomes a unified so—you know when I do this at the end of the first sonnet (pointing conducting gesture) it can be that kind of a sound even though it is very soft, it's spot on, and a beautiful, strong, little bit laser light of energy that can really mean something. If it doesn't mean anything to anybody else, maybe that's OK, but it will mean everything to us.

Be creative. Let's all be creative. And no matter how much the world jolts us, how many times we get bumped or hurt, let's bounce back, let's be creative for now, forever and ever and ever.

I love you. I'm thrilled to do it again. I'm thrilled we get to end in that beautiful hall. Amen.

Appendix E: History of the Choir

For those interested in how the BYU Singers have progressed over the years. Here is an interesting history given by Sandefur Schmidt, a charter member of the group.

I have the history of choir in one person! You probably got a lot of the historical perspective from Dr. Staheli too. But I don't know how much he thinks about how much the choir has changed. He is always so forward-looking that there is not a lot of looking back.

I have a pretty good overview of the choral area at BYU in the last thirty years. I sang with Dr. Halliday and Dr. Woodward as an undergraduate music student, and also sang with Dr. Staheli during my undergraduate and graduate years.

Dr. John R. Halliday had the first doctorate in musicology in the country. He was a brilliant man. He performed remarkable choral literature with his choirs. He wasn't a great conductor, nor a good singer himself, but he was an excellent teacher and a very caring man. Dr. Halliday was a real mentor to Dr. Staheli when he was a student, and he lit the fire that changed Dr. Staheli's emphasis from piano to choral. It was a joy to have Dr. Staheli come into BYU with his intelligence, his fierce desire for excellence, and his ability to inspire choirs to work harder than they had ever worked. He really jumpstarted Oratorio Choir. But what we have now wouldn't have been possible without Dr. Halliday or Dr. Woodward. All we have today is built on the traditions and experiences of the past conductors and choirs. With the proper conductors in place, it can only keep getting better.

I sang with BYU Singers during their first two years, '84-'85 and '85-'86. That very first year we just jumped in with both feet. We sang at the national ACDA

convention in Salt Lake City that year. That in and of itself is a unique accomplishment—the first year the choir was in existence we sang at a very prestigious national convention. And we toured Eastern Europe that spring; that was just a huge way to begin a new choir and start establishing traditions.

Dr. Staheli had worked with a lot of us before. He culled people from three different choirs because the entire organization of the choral area changed when Singers began. That's when A Cappella Choir, Oratorio Choir and Chamber Choir were retired and in their place we had University Singers and Concert Choir. Concert Choir took some of the aspects and some of the repertoire and the size of the group from Oratorio Choir; Singers was then more of a mix between the A Cappella and the Chamber Choir size and literature.

Dr. Ralph Woodward was in the forefront of choral music. His was the first doctorate in choral music from the University of Illinois, and he was very important in his generation of conductors. He was a fabulous, elegant, wonderful conductor. He started, in fact, the international touring program at BYU, not just choirs but any classical music organization. His choir was the first BYU performing group to tour internationally. The first tour he went on in 1968, the choir won the International Eisteddfod Choral Competition in Wales—no American choir had ever won it. It was a huge deal in the choral world. The tour itself was a miracle; the choir bore the entire cost of the tour, and worked their way across the U.S. to their plane in NYC. It was a 7 week tour because they had to bus across the United States, singing concerts along the way to earn the money in order to afford the tour. After the international part of the tour, they still had to bus all the way back to Utah.

Dr. Woodward really put BYU on the map; he was such a presence and was so well known. A Cappella was his choir. It was stamped with his personality and his character and his repertoire. It was a very classical, very traditional choir. The closest it came to being “loose” at all was to sing a spiritual. So the repertoire was Renaissance, Baroque, Romantic and some 20th century pieces, leavened with spirituals and hymns. It was a very much “stand there and sing” choir because that’s what was the style of that generation of conductors.

Then Dr. Staheli came in. He conducted Oratorio Choir, a group anywhere from one hundred to one hundred and eighty people that most often performed major works with orchestra accompaniment. When he came to BYU, Oratorio was viewed as no competition to A Cappella. (There were also two other auditioned choirs, Male Chorus and Women’s Chorus, which were then much lower on the totem pole.)

Immediately Dr. Staheli began improving Oratorio. It was rewarding to see the other conductors start working harder in response to that improvement. His striving for excellence himself, plus demanding so much from his students, made a difference very quickly. We were used to kind of a laid back approach that allowed us to take the entire first two hour A Cappella rehearsal to introduce each other and tell stories. Dr. Staheli also conducted A Cappella along with Oratorio his first semester at BYU. The first day of class he handed out a Hugo Distler piece, a very difficult 20th century piece, and said, “We’re going to learn this today.” We were stunned. But Dr. Staheli hit the ground running in 1978 and hasn’t slowed down since. Every choir has responded beautifully to his intense approach to music-making.

His focus and strict approach brought him great respect from his students, especially as they could hear and feel the choirs he conducted improve dramatically each semester. He talked to a few of us about how he wanted to form Singers as it became clear that Dr. Woodward would be retiring. He wanted to be able to sing the best of all music. An audience would hear some Broadway music and a maybe little bit of (good) country and some folk songs, just perform a wider spectrum. The Broadway element is less now, but the choir always sings some “lighter” literature as well as songs from the area to which it travels. The first couple of years he would say, “Come to our concert and try it because if you don’t like one piece, just wait five minutes and you’ll like the next one.”

He just really varied the repertoire. Dr. Woodward’s idea was to perform the program chronologically, with perhaps a hymn arrangement and a spiritual at the end. That was the traditional way of approaching choral music up until the last twenty years or so. Dr. Staheli shook things up in a big way. He changed the repertoire, he changed the size of the choir, he changed the look of the choir, he changed the staging of the choir. His whole approach was different.

In the initial years, Dr. Staheli had a different approach to Singers than he does now. He used to say everyone in the choir had to be a soloist and he expected that from everybody. And that first year all of us had to take turns doing a solo. Some were a lot more comfortable with it than others, but we learned from it and it worked.

His approach put a lot more responsibility on the Singers themselves to really learn the literature. We sang two to three times as much repertoire in a year in Singers than we ever had sung in A Cappella—that was a huge change. That demand has stayed

the same through the years. He has not let up. That's a quality I admire—he has never demanded of himself any more of others than he does of himself. What he does is not old. He loves doing it.

Right now (in April) he is talking about next year's choir. He is already so excited about what they are going to be singing and who's going to be in it and what they are going to do. He might take a week and relax a little but that's about it. Then it's full speed ahead at repertoire and plans for the coming year. I think it is that "joie de vivre" that keeps conductors young, and that's what keeps kids who are forty years younger than he is loving him and coming back. You are going to love those who love and respect you. And he obviously loves his choir and cares about them deeply as a choir and as individuals. That's always going to pull people in. He is not perfect, but he knows that as well as anyone, and is constantly working to improve.

I've had alumni say to me, "Oh, don't tell me anything about him. I don't want him stepping off that pedestal." What an uncomfortable place to be perched for very long! He is human and he gets tired and he makes mistakes, but when he makes a mistake he is the first to apologize. And he will do it with great generosity and great humility; that's a great example that we all can learn from.

Here is an example of how the choir in itself has changed. We sang in quartets the first few years. We would change formation as necessary for the repertoire to sound best. That horseshoe arrangement only started in about '95 (picture of horseshoe) so about ten years into Singers he found a way to have the choir stand. The back row stands so closely behind the first row that everyone feels very front and center. It helps each section to work well together, and the choir as a whole can really hear each other. Though not as

gratifying to sing surrounded by one's own voice part, that method helps with tuning and unity, and the audience often can hear the parts better.

I sit in back in rehearsals and watch. It tickles me to see the evolution. In the beginning, when the choir stopped rehearsing Dr. Staheli would fix everything. And he would fix what was wrong with the basses and then what was wrong with the altos and everyone else stood there and listened. And now when he stops, he'll work with a section, but the other sections are fixing problems without him having to say anything. I love when he says, "Are you finished yet? I'll wait for you." This is Dr. Staheli saying that! This is fairly new. But it got better and better as the section leaders figured out what they were supposed to be doing.

The continuity of having about half the choir coming back each year has strengthened the choir. There is a shorthand. You don't have to explain everything. It is the spirit of Singers and how it works and you just kind of get dropped in the middle of it and learn very fast at retreat. But the choir does so much to teach correct principles and let them govern themselves. That's what he does with the choir. It is much less autocratic than at the beginning. A choir is not a democracy, not at all. There is much more interaction. Dr. Staheli still uses the rehearsal time better than any conductor I've ever seen, but he allows a little more personal interaction now. For example, birthdays are more important. It used to be that he would sing happy birthday once a semester and say: "This is for all of you that have had a birthday."

The choir is tighter as an entity because they know each other better; he is willing to let them share a little more. Talking the next day about the concerts the night before—that hasn't always happened. "How do you feel? How do you think that went?"

Devotionals have always been there but there seems to be more careful thought about devotionals and firesides and how to really present what the choir needs to hear. That's different. That has evolved over time.

All changes have occurred gradually, but when you look at the beginning years and what it is now there is a vast difference in his approach to the choir. Musically, he has learned tremendous new ways to teach a piece and how to help with vocal problems. His approach will evolve as long as he is teaching. Personally, he always valued the individual, but he is always learning about the Spirit and what makes people behave in the ways they do. That increasing knowledge shows as he works with his students. Maybe it's also partly age and what the experience of years does to us. Now he is definitely parent age to the choir. That produces a different relationship. He became a friend to a lot of us the first few years of Singers; some of us had known him since he came to BYU.

The sections really watch out for each other. That has been more in the last ten years that they have worked hard to have a sectional sound. They are not all matching one voice. But when he says he is walking away from that, he is but he isn't. Look at how call backs work. He does know the sound he wants and he chooses that core sound and then puts everybody else in to see who affects the sound and how it works. While he is not *matching* one voice, he is using one voice to carefully determine what voices sing well together, those who produce a certain sound.

The retreat the beginning of each year sets up the entire year so beautifully by his focus on hard, intense, prolonged rehearsal and then the fun of getting to know everybody. He accomplishes so much with helping you understand know how your voice

works in the section and what are the qualities your voice has. All Singers finish the retreat knowing whether he has a dark or bright voice, and what other qualities his voice has that he should know in order to respond properly in rehearsal when Dr. Staheli is coaching a section.

The retreat probably propels the choir two months past the first rehearsal. You learn so much about your voice and how your voice works in the choir, as well as how the choir works together. It is those shortcuts that enable Singers to improve each year. Because Dr. Staheli has learned how to go from one to ten without having to pause every step along the way, he just runs ahead and takes everybody with him. And it works!

He knows what warm-up exercises work. He hears a mistake happening even before it happens because he has the experience to know what is going to happen and how to fix it. It is fun watching him learn and grow and expand and keep making the choir better as he does it. The choir is never going to get any better than he is. Some choirs are good in spite of the director but they are not great. This choir is truly great.