

July 30, 2014

Dear Board,

I would like to begin by saying how enormously proud I am of the chorus performance last Friday. It was a powerful performance with all the nuance and control that I know this group is capable of, and I know that there were many in the audience who believed, like I did, that we were the highlight of the concert. I place our performance of When I Fall In Love as one of the top music making events in my life.

Now, I know that there were some very serious concerns raised about extending the amount of rehearsal time for the upcoming season, and I wanted to address a few them. Pardon me if this gets a bit long, but I really want you to understand where I'm coming from.

To begin, I want you to know that I'm not arbitrarily trying to make a longer rehearsal. I've been a part of a number of professional groups and a host of very serious and not so serious amateur choruses. From the very large Bach Week Festival in Chicago to smaller church gigs in rural areas, I've worked with choristers of all ages, and I cannot remember ever being in a chorus that rehearsed as little as HGMC does. Lengthening rehearsals has been on my mind since our last concert rehearsals. That said, I'm not ignorant enough to believe that my experience is the authority on this subject, so before approaching the topic, I did some research and found that most other GALA member choruses hold 3 hour rehearsals as the standard. There were a couple of 2 hour groups, but they were the minority by far. Even the Womyn's Chorus holds a 2.5 hour rehearsal every week. When NJGMC came to sing during the winter, I was amazed at the number of our members who looked to them as a standard that we could attain. They rehearse from 7:30-10 every week. All of this is to say that my proposed change is not asking more of us; rather, it is bringing us in line with our peer groups.

Per the concerns, here is the proposal as I laid it out and my responses to the objections:

Proposal: Increase rehearsal time to last from 7-9:30pm. I would even say that we'd take one 15min break, which should be plenty of time.

1. Kevin mentioned not getting to rehearsal on time if it began at 6:30. I understand that, which is why I'm trying to extend things rather than begin earlier. We would still begin at 7pm.

2. He also mentioned the expectation that chorus members would rehearse outside of our rehearsal. I have two thoughts about this. The first is that I can only guarantee that we see music when I'm running rehearsals. I currently don't think our way of doing things is fair to those looking for a great musical

experience, those who practice regularly and are being held back by those who don't do these things. Bringing us to a normal amount of rehearsal time would help alleviate this. Second, I understand that singers are supposed to be rehearsing outside of rehearsal, but face time as a group is still necessary if we want to have a good ensemble sound.

3. Many of you mentioned being exceptionally busy. I get it. I don't want this to dissolve into a who's busier contest, and I certainly don't want to undermine the commitment that many of you make to this group above and well beyond rehearsal time. This is why I'm only pushing for a half-hour increase, which, again, is the norm in almost every other group in America.

4. Bob mentioned the notion of an extended break being integral to the well being of the group. I would suggest that it actually is detrimental for a few reasons. 1. It deters from the purpose of a rehearsal. 2. Eating a bunch of food midway through a rehearsal only serves to make people more tired, cranky and, at least in my case, overweight and guilt ridden for just having ate the hoagie and cheesecake laid before me. Perhaps, as a compromise, the organization could plan a couple of social events throughout the season so that we aren't using a rehearsal as an outright social hour.

5. Bob also suggested shortened warmups in the future. I can't advocate for this, and I don't think that any other conductor worth their salt would either. Warmups are the most important part of a rehearsal. They allow for the development of ensemble, musicianship and, most importantly, they prevent injury. I'm not going to ask a Tenor I to sing without being adequately warmed up. This is dangerous.

6. Eddie voted Yay, but he also raised some very real concerns that I think should also be addressed - first is his worry about Dan's compensation. I completely agree with him. For what it's worth I would also urge the board to consider a slight increase to show Dan that his time is valued.

7. Several of you wished to bring this issue to the chorus. My response to this strategy is that it undermines the point of a board and the organization as a whole to do this. Chorus members come and go, and while we have our stalwarts, the whole point of a board is to represent the members of an organization and to make decisions that serve the organization rather than leaving things up to singers who might put their own needs first. I know most of you feel like a family at this point, but in theory, we'll be attracting new members. How do you weigh the voice of a first timer with that of a veteran without either undermining the integrity of the organization or ostracizing someone?

8. I heard several times that we aren't college kids. No need for the reminder; my knees tell me this everyday! I'm sure it was meant as a light reference to energy, length of rehearsal, etc. That said, I do think it brings up a very interesting point. This group, for as fantastic as it is, and I do believe it is fantastic, can be a bit insular given the length that many of you have been a part of it. You have your

way of doing things, and I respect that. But, if we are to see this chorus grow, the organization needs to offer an experience that is in line with what most folks expect from a typical chorus experience. I believe that as singers, most folks expect a proper warm up, a rehearsal that is musically challenging and provides enough time to feel comfortable with repertoire, and an environment that places great music making as the social focus of the chorus. My favorite choral experience was an amateur group called the Springfield Choral Society in Springfield, IL. We didn't talk much in those rehearsals because the conductor was a slave driver, but I felt closer to that group than any other since because of the music we made and the way that we communicated in that sense. I'm not trying to repeat that experience, but I do believe, very strongly that music should be the center of what we do. If we can do this, our ability to attract new members and to see this group grow will take care of itself. Hopefully some of them will be college age...

I know I'm asking for change. I know that I'm asking for bigger commitments from a group that has committed so much already, both on stage and off. I also know that many of you said you wanted to see the chorus grow and prosper and be excellent. This was the charge when I was hired. It is my professional opinion that an extra half and hour would help us to take those steps.

Thanks so much for your time.

Take Care,

Adam