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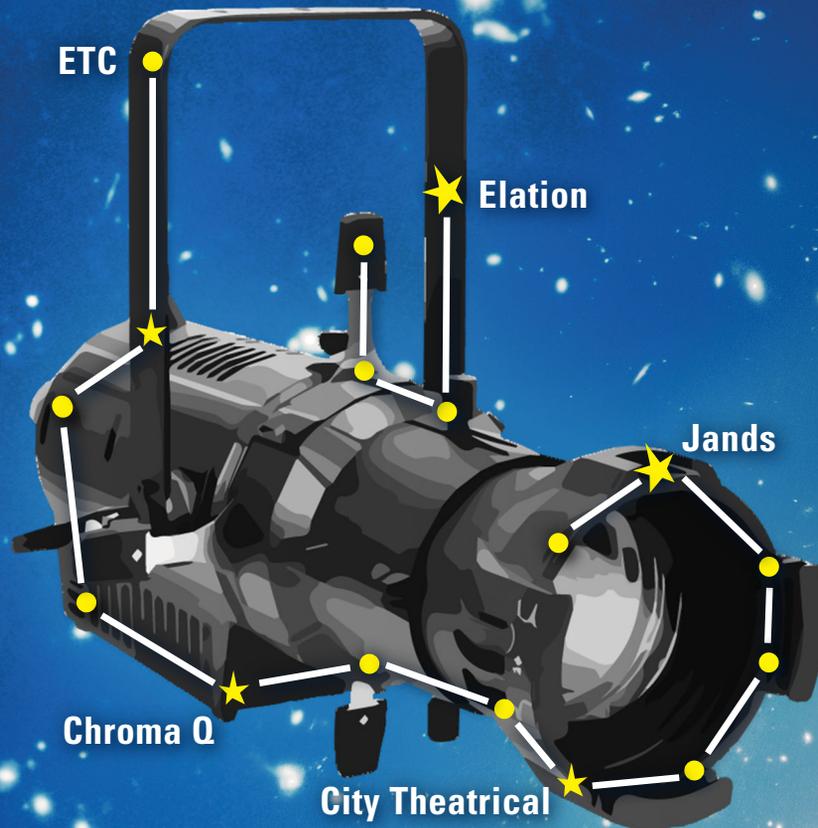
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CHOIR MIKING AND THE 3:1 RULE

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EDITOR'S LETTER

A few years ago, when I was still teaching college students, there was an instance that vividly illuminated the two types of students I was seeing among the often-maligned millennials. It was only the second class of a new semester, and during the previous class I had assigned a brief writing assignment to be due when I saw them again. Though it was, in part, a way to gather diagnostic writing samples, the assignment was a bit funky and fun (to me anyway), and I had listed several detailed notes about formatting requirements on the instructions. I liked to know early in the course which students would read the assignment.

When I asked for the one-page documents at the end of that class, one young woman snapped open her crisp white binder, flipped past carefully color-coded course materials and pulled a pristine white sheet from its confines. Not surprisingly, a quick scan revealed that formatting instructions were followed to the letter, and her opening line was both funny and intriguing. Shyly and without making full eye contact, she said, "I hope you like it—this was my sixth draft."

Immediately afterwards, a young man stood and started riffling through his jacket pockets. When those turned up only car keys, some folded money, and some hard candy, he started rummaging in the pockets of his artfully torn jeans. Eventually, he produced a crumpled sheet of paper, folded no less than six times, and handed it to me with a friendly, "Here ya' go." When I mentioned that his name wasn't on the paper, he borrowed a classmate's pen and scrawled his first name across the huge space where a title should have been.

Now, first impressions are powerful. I immediately classified her as a "go-getter." She seemed prepared, conscientious, hard-working, and bright. Meanwhile, her rumpled but charming colleague seemed a bit lazy in comparison—like someone who might do just enough to get by and move on to the next college hurdle. As I grew to know both of them well over the semester, I found—to my surprise—that one of those students was a far happier and more content person. My disorganized charmer had a B- goal for every project—seriously, that was his goal every time. His parents didn't accept Cs, so he aimed right above that mark. When he performed better than his goal, that earned a quick "sweet" from him; if he performed worse, he shrugged it off and said, "I'll get it next time."

On the other hand, my bright, funny, intelligent, and hardworking student was never content with her performance, even when it was deemed excellent by all other accounts, from my own evaluations to the reactions of her peers. She had been fighting an eating disorder since she was six-years old, if you can imagine. As a young adult, she continued to struggle with ED issues, along with severe insomnia and sometimes debilitating migraines. My gentle, brilliant student was miserable.

Since then, I've tried to remind myself of the importance of a life-work balance. More importantly, I've tried to remind my daughter. Even as I watch her do all of the "right things" in preparing for a successful career, including never taking a summer off so she can work or volunteer or do internships, and seeing all of those actions earn her scholarships and awards, I worry that she is far too stressed and anxious. Certainly, a highly competitive job market doesn't help, and—quite frankly—most adults are also exhausted and anxious, especially the highly overworked directors of music programs.

It's hard to find guilt-free time for yourself if you are worried about a looming program restructuring or layoffs. We all know that music programs are often on the chopping block when finances become problematic for any educational institution. There is a very real pressure to demonstrate excellence, both pedagogically and creatively, month after month. Though I'm unable to influence any students now, and even my influence on my 23-year-old grows more limited by the year, I hope that other educators are working to demonstrate a healthy life-work balance for their students by first finding a healthy balance for themselves.



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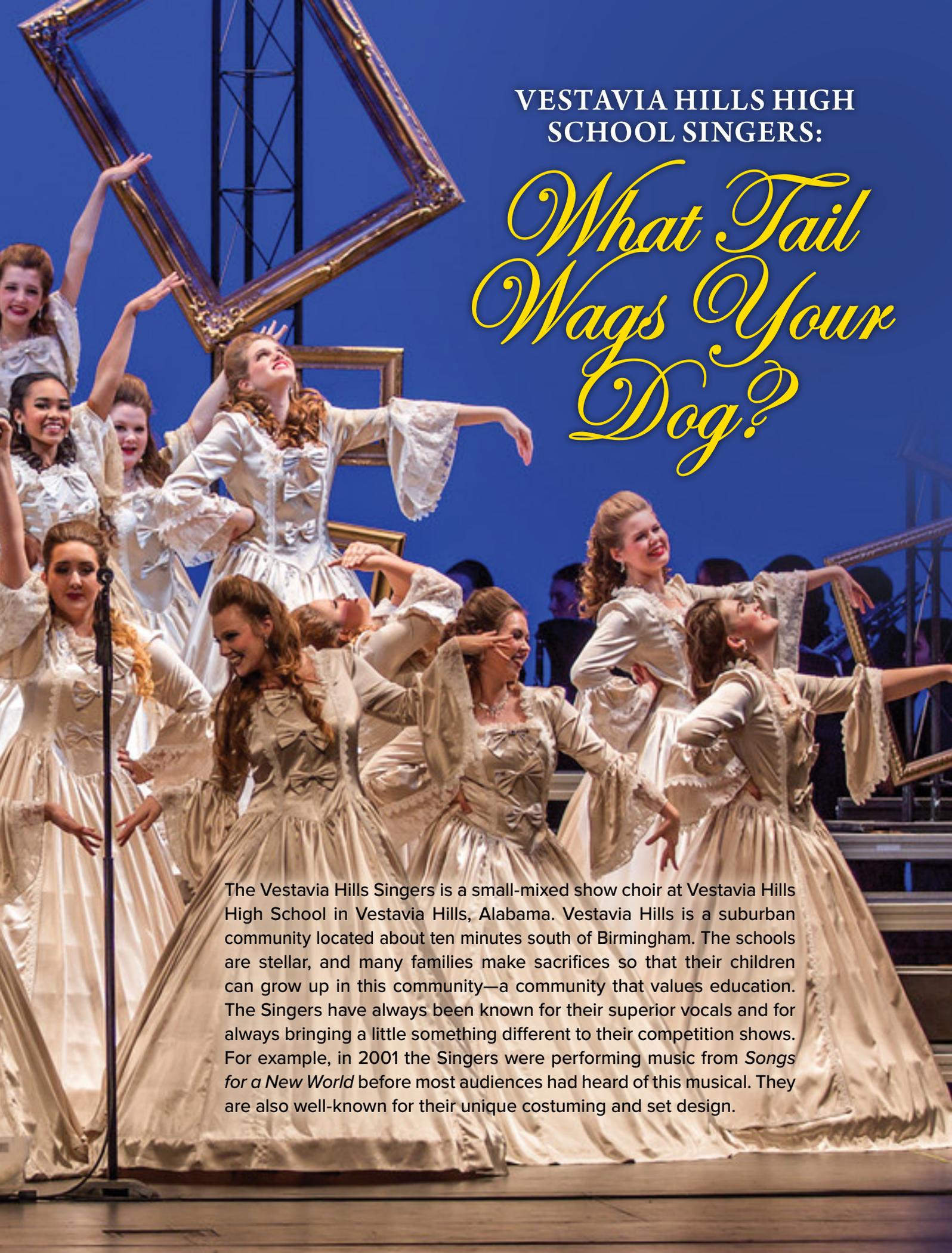
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VESTAVIA HILLS HIGH
SCHOOL SINGERS:

*What Tail
Wags Your
Dog?*

The Vestavia Hills Singers is a small-mixed show choir at Vestavia Hills High School in Vestavia Hills, Alabama. Vestavia Hills is a suburban community located about ten minutes south of Birmingham. The schools are stellar, and many families make sacrifices so that their children can grow up in this community—a community that values education. The Singers have always been known for their superior vocals and for always bringing a little something different to their competition shows. For example, in 2001 the Singers were performing music from *Songs for a New World* before most audiences had heard of this musical. They are also well-known for their unique costuming and set design.



A Program in Transition

Dr. Megan Wicks-Rudolph accepted the job at Vestavia Hills High School in 2000. She was the third director in three years. The program was in transition and there were three show choirs and one concert choir. Due to the transitions, the choral department lacked discipline, structure and students who actually knew what they were doing musically. At that time, show choir was the tail that wagged the dog. Dr. Rudolph knew that this needed to change in order to have a successful choral program.

Megan Rudolph had gone to school in the mid-west and had student taught with the legendary J.D. Smith at Findlay High School. Findlay First Edition was, and still is, one of the top show choirs in the nation. Rudolph remembers the first rehearsal she witnessed. "It was like being at a show at Disney World!" she recalled. The professionalism, dedication, and excitement were evident. Right then and there she knew that this was the way she would emulate her future program.

Every one of the show choir students in FFE was a part of another choir during the school day. This helped ensure that they had a very firm foundation of good choral singing. John Baker, former director at

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Enterprise High School, Show Choir Camps of America Clinician, and show choir judge said, "The major difference between show choirs in the Southeast and other show choirs is that the other show choirs in the country base their singing in a concert tradition." This has always been Rudolph's philosophy, and she has worked tirelessly to make sure that show choir is not the tail wagging the dog at Vestavia Hills High School.

Currently there are eight choirs at Vestavia Hills High School. There are six concert choirs, one a cappella pop group and the Singers. Throughout her tenure, the program has grown from 130 to over 280 students signed up for choir for the 2016-2017 school year. All choirs are extremely successful at state, regional, and national festivals. The upcoming school year will mark the second invitation to the Vestavia Hills High School Choral Department to participate at Carnegie Hall in the COA Choir Nationals for top choral programs.

The show choir has been extremely successful since the early 2000s. In 2005, the Singers became an all-girls group. During that time the girls won or placed in their division in every competition they entered. After that the group became mixed again and then in 2012-2013, even though



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they were still placing or winning in their division, there was not enough interest to even have a show choir. "I blame this one-year hiatus on myself. When I first arrived at Vestavia, I began emphasizing the other choirs in order to build up the concert choir portion of the choral program. So instead of kids wanting to be a part of the show choir, despite its many successes, they wanted to be a part of the Honor Choir. This was a good and bad move on my part," said Rudolph. After the one-year lapse, the Singers came back stronger than ever and the other seven choirs continued to thrive.

Adding a Second Director

Last year the Vestavia Hills School System approved the addition of a second choral director. Gavin Dover, a graduate of The University of Alabama, student taught with Dr. Rudolph the year before and she knew that he would be a tremendous asset to the already thriving choral program. "Gavin brings many strengths to this department. He is not only extremely skilled with concert literature, but he also has a tremendous passion for show choir. Plus, he is just an all-around fantastic person, who has a gift for motivating our students to be better than they were the day before!" said Rudolph. Additionally, in 2014-2015 nationally-known

choreographer Mike Weaver came aboard to begin choreographing for the Singers.

Rudolph said that she had always had local choreographers come in to stage the show or she did it herself, but she stated "It was time to step into the big leagues." Rudolph recalled having the conversation regarding Mike Weaver with Scott Raines, former director of Albertville CenterStage! and current director at Tift County (Georgia). Scott arranged a meeting with Mike during the Regional ACDA Conference. Rudolph said, "I remember I was presenting, and little did I know that Mike Weaver had entered the room. Later I remember thinking that he must have been impressed with the presentation because he agreed to choreograph for us." Weaver explained to Rudolph later that it would take three years for the show choir program to really take off. The upcoming 2016-2017 school year will be that pinnacle third year.

A Rapidly Growing Show Choir Program

Currently, the show choir is growing rapidly. The program has really taken off in the past three years. The Singers have won or placed in their division in all but two competitions over the past few years. Rudolph attributed

this success to a variety of factors, including hiring Mike Weaver and the addition of Gavin Dover to the choral program. "There is a united force of two passionate choral directors who insist on stellar character and morals," stated Dover. He went on to explain that Rudolph has laid a solid foundation and he is ecstatic to be a part of the team to take the program to the next level. "We are both passionate educators, who not only believe in the teaching of proper singing and impeccable musicianship, but also in raising upstanding individuals and future leaders," said Dover.

As the Singers approach a truly exciting year for their program, the Vestavia Hills community could not be more thrilled to see what the group brings to the show choir realm and to the city. This diverse group is made up of athletes, artists, mathletes, debate team and band members, just to name a few. They are the epitome of what we love to see in our students: leadership, excellence, teamwork, compassion and pride.

Dr. Megan Wicks-Rudolph and Mr. Gavin S. Dover are choral directors for the Vestavia Hills music program in Vestavia Hills, Alabama.

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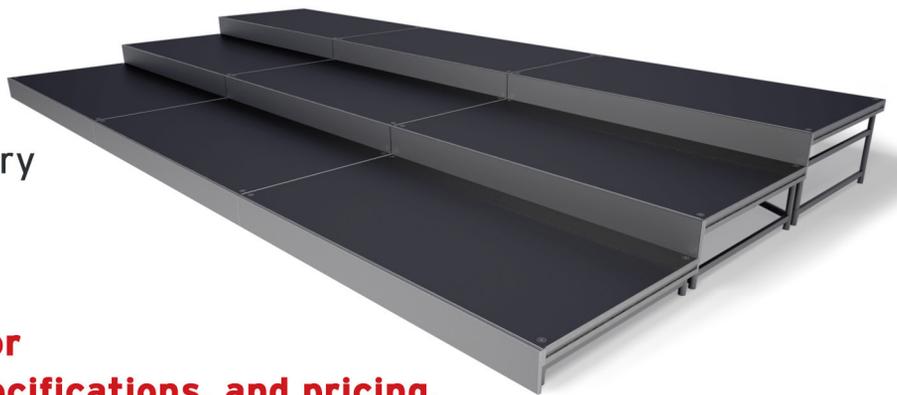


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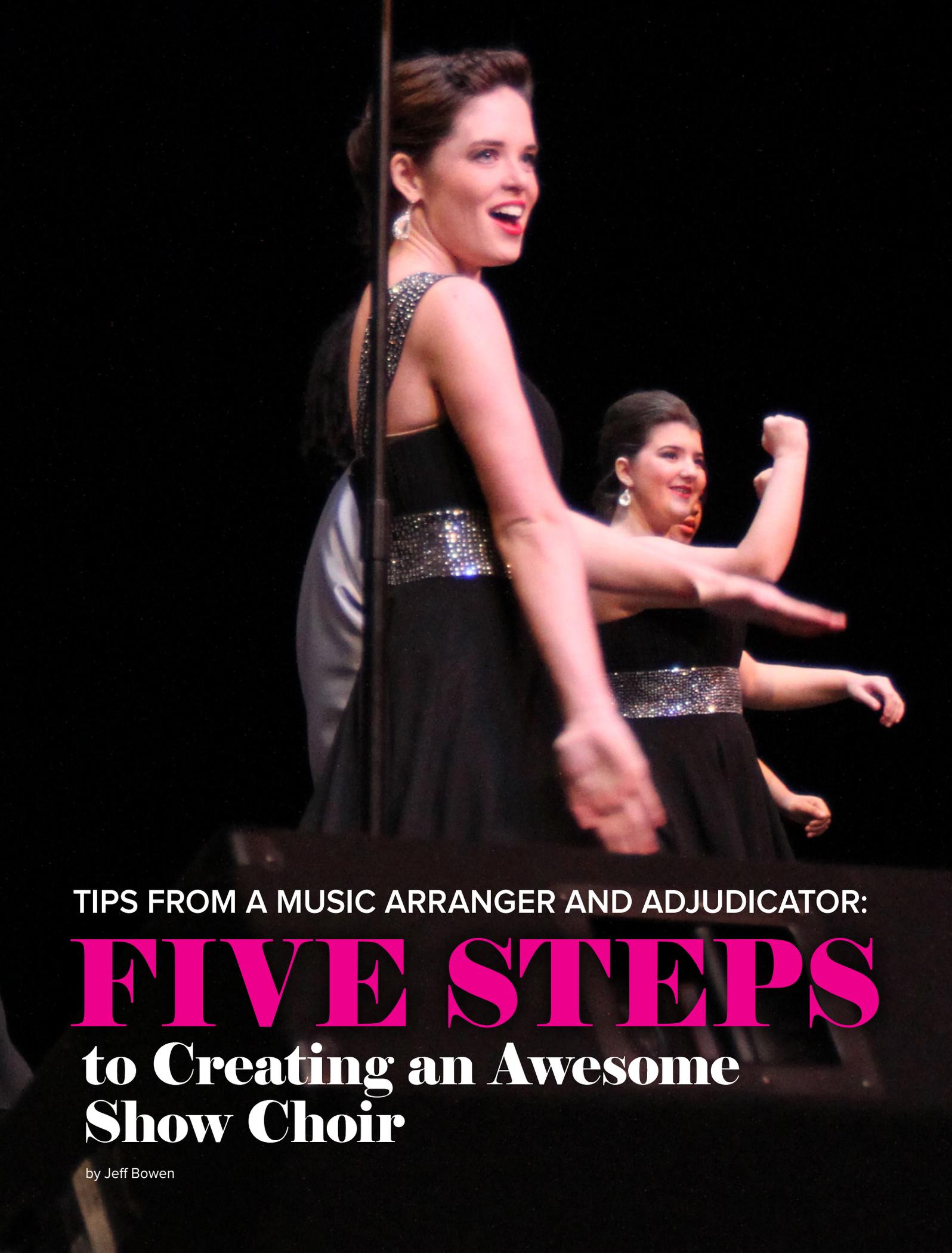
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Photo by Lisa Patti



TIPS FROM A MUSIC ARRANGER AND ADJUDICATOR:

FIVE STEPS

to Creating an Awesome
Show Choir

by Jeff Bowen

1 – THINK OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE

A respected friend years ago used to draw a circle on paper when planning something. Then he would write the ideas outside the circle at the edge of the page. After seeing this several times, I finally asked, “Why do you write the ideas way out there, away from the circle?” His reply was simple. “I use a circle instead of a box.” Genius!

The concept for him was literal. The ideas on the outside were huge and grandiose – things I knew he actually couldn’t accomplish. But as he planned, the outer ideas got revamped and marked out with the new ideas written closer to the circle. By the time the circle was full, his plan was ready to go.

2 – PLAN EARLY

When it’s time to get all of the hundreds of bits and pieces together for your competition show, all of you know to start early. Some directors need that couple of weeks after school to unwind and think about their shows, but you may want to consider at least getting some of the big ideas on paper—those huge ideas on the edge of the paper—written down and started before school is out. Don’t hesitate to contact the companies you use at this

point to at least get schedules and prices.

For instance, this year I started writing and arranging music for the 2017 competition season in early April. Even if that is super early for you, at least the ball gets rolling and may ease the pressure when school starts back, or even later in the year.

3 – KNOW YOUR GROUP

In the world of show choir competition, there have been some incredible ideas that have come to fruition and worked extremely well. Nothing feels better than true cheering from your peers and the judges when your group is waving and dancing off stage at the end of their show and you know it worked. Everything about it WORKED!

As an adjudicator, I’ve seen this for years. There were groups that used popular, mainstream music, few props and decent but simple costuming, yet the crowd and judges go crazy. So what was the key? What worked so well? Teamwork! When the director “knows” his or her group and what they are capable of, that is when the magic happens.

Embrace the group you have. Some directors scour YouTube checking other groups, wanting to find that magic piece of the puzzle that made that show work.

Always remember – that show worked for THEM. Try to make your show fit your group and not the other way around.

If you have a show choir that has some issues, then address those. It’s great to challenge them to the next level, but only if you are moving up just one level (and not to the edge of the paper). If they accomplish that, move up again.

When it comes to the basics—how they sound and how they look—always keep your singers in mind first. If you get a difficult custom arrangement, be prepared to re-work some parts for them. It’s the same with choreography and what they are wearing. Additionally, take moments to stand back to see and hear your group from a distance. Get them in the auditorium or gym when you can. Clean up vocals and really picture their moves and their look. See it in your head.

4 – KNOW YOURSELF

This may be the most important aspect of all—self-awareness. Know thyself. We’ve heard them all. Through my life, I have slalom water skied, hiked up mountains, swam in two oceans, ridden dozens of world class roller coasters, been overseas and zip lined. Just a mere year and a half ago, I learned to snow

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ski, taking on a blue hill my first day. But please never ask me to do accounting – it terrifies me!

Dig down deep and really soul search. You may have the most perfect show in mind that's ever been done – EVER (even the outer most idea on the page). Know in your heart that you can get your students to produce what you see and hear in your head, even if it's on a much smaller scale (or inside the circle).

5 – STAY ON TOP

After being in the show choir industry for nearly three decades, it is mind boggling to see how much detail show choir directors have to take care of. From an outsider's perspective, it looks impossible.

Never be afraid to ask for help. Parents and professionals can provide amazing assistance. Keep an open mind and an open heart, and remember this is a human experience. Growth and change go hand in hand. Just always do your best and stay on top of your show. And it will be the best!

Jeff Bowen is an accomplished arranger of show choir music through his company Music Arrangement Services, Inc. A graduate of Indiana State University, he has performed from the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville to New York City. He and comedian Craig Tornquist were an opening act for Jay Leno at Purdue. He also enjoys entertaining and acting.



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CHOIR MIKING AND THE 3:1 RULE

by James Wasem

Setting up mics for a choir and adequately reinforcing the sound from overhead microphones can be one of the most challenging propositions for a live sound system operator. It all comes down to four key variables: mic placement, mic type, choir volume, and background/stage noise.

Avoiding the Feedback Loop

An overhead or “boundary” mic is often placed at a relatively far distance from the singers in a choir when compared with the placement of an individual handheld vocal mic. This can greatly increase the possibility of the microphones picking up more background noise from the stage than the desired sound from the choir. And if there are main loudspeakers nearby, this can be an easy trigger for a feedback loop.

Once you can get the choir dynamics and stage volume under control, the next important thing to consider is the physical placement of your microphones. Distance is the key here—both distance from the mic to the choir and the distance between microphones.

When multiple overhead microphones are used to mike a choir, as is often the case, you need to use a basic rule when placing them so that there is limited interference among the mics.

The 3:1 Rule

The basic formula for properly miking a choir (or any group) is the 3:1 rule. Let's say Mic 1 is positioned 3' from the nearest choir member. Mic 2 should then be placed 9' from the Mic 1 location.

Put in more mathematical terms, a second microphone should be placed three times the distance from the first microphone as the first microphone distance is from the sound source. The illustration on the following page should help clarify this point.

Interference When Using Multiple Microphones

If multiple microphones are placed too close together, there will be interference between the two different mixed audio signals. This interference results from the different timing and "phase" of the audio signals being mixed together.

You can experiment with this yourself by placing two microphones near each other and presenting a single audio source, ideally something with a single tone or even "white noise" (shhhhhhhhhhh).

As you move one of the microphones closer to or farther from the first microphone, you will hear a pronounced "warping" of

the mixed audio content (the technical term for this is "comb filtering").

This is because the same signal reaches two different microphones with a difference in timing and volume level. The closer microphone receives a louder signal. The more distant microphone receives a quieter and slightly delayed signal than the closer microphone since it is farther away from the audio source.

The nuances of timing and phase are more advanced topics that we won't cover in this brief article, but you can find a good technical description and audio example of the issue at www.GreatChurchSound.com/videos.

Microphones and Mic Placement for Show Choirs

Next to microphone placement and distance considerations, the type of microphone you choose for miking the choir can be the most important decision you make.

When simply recording choirs, it is often nice to use an omni-directional or cardioid microphone pattern. However, I've found that in many live sound reinforcement scenarios, you'll benefit from having a much tighter and narrower pickup pattern, like that of a super-cardioid or hyper-cardioid microphone.

You'll also want to use a condenser microphone as opposed to a dynamic microphone, since condenser microphones are much better at picking up sound at a farther distance than dynamic mics. And remember, condenser microphones require phantom power, either from the console, external power packs, or batteries.

Hanging mics are often used for choirs. Or you can use tall mic stands to place the microphones where you want them. Some microphone systems designed for choir use come with their own floor stand and hardware.

Most sound engineers choose to place microphones slightly above the choir and aimed down towards the horizontal center row. This will really depend on how large or small the choir is and the way they are physically positioned. Experiment with different microphone positions and work with the choir director to see what mic placement sounds most natural.

As mentioned earlier, one of the most common mistakes when miking a choir is the use of too many microphones. This is bad for two reasons: (1) Multiple microphones are often placed too close together—remember to follow the 3:1 rule; (2) More open microphone channels increase the potential for feedback.

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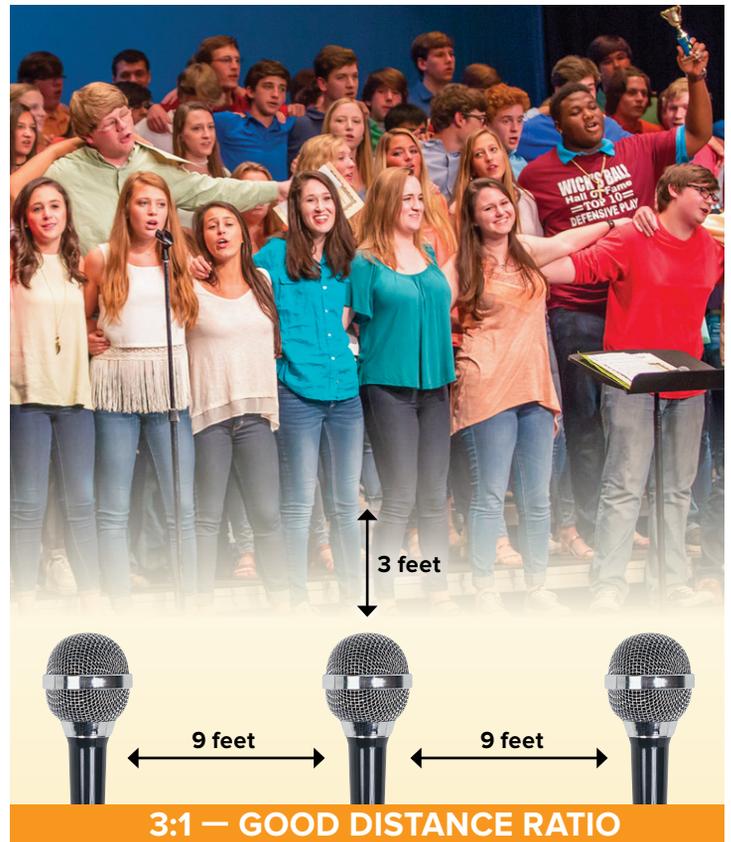
Mixing monitors for the choir can be a challenge. It is important to consider monitor speaker locations relative to mic placement and physical choir positioning. You'll likely want to limit the overall volume of the mix in the choir monitors so that the choir mics pick up more choir and less monitor content. And never mix choir mic channels into the choir monitors; this is a sure way to cause feedback.

Another important aspect of mixing for the choir is having them present in the main mix, but not overbearing. Listen to the way the choir sounds in the room without reinforcement. Smaller rooms or more acoustically live environments may require much less choir reinforcement than you might initially suspect.

I always find it helpful to mute and unmute the choir mics while the choir is singing during a soundcheck to hear the difference between their natural volume level in the room and through the loudspeakers. It may be helpful to work with the choir director when fine-tuning your choir mix – they know how their choir should sound.

Just remember – always experiment! Test things out. Use different microphones in different locations. You might even try handing out a few handheld condenser vocal mics throughout the choir and see how that sound mixes for you. Or you might find that one cardioid mic on the choir is better sounding than three super cardioid mics. Be willing to test out different arrangements and go with what sounds best.

This article was provided by guest contributor and author James Wasem from www.GreatSoundInstitute.com. James has been designing, installing, and operating sound systems for 20+ years, and he has a passion for helping live sound techs deliver great sound.



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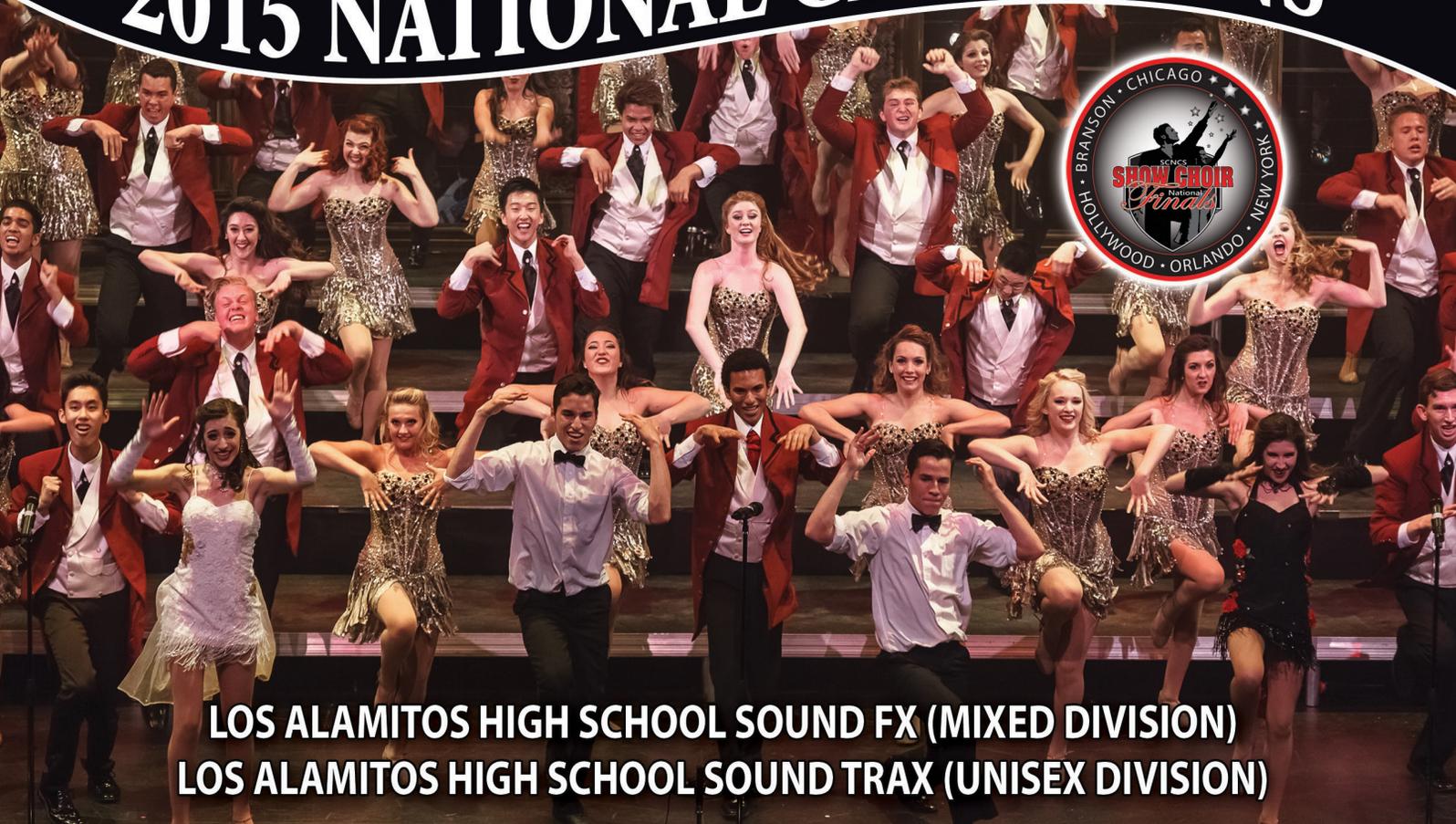
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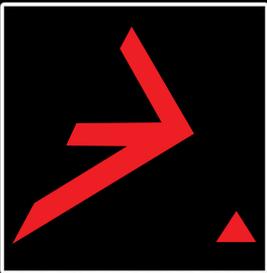
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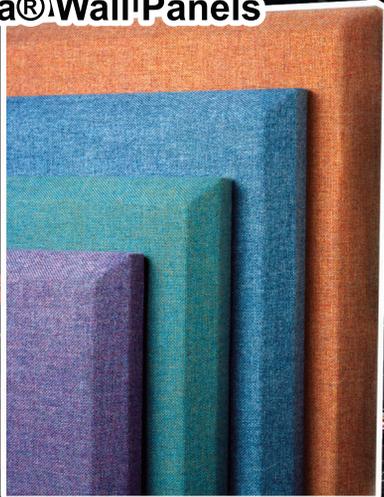


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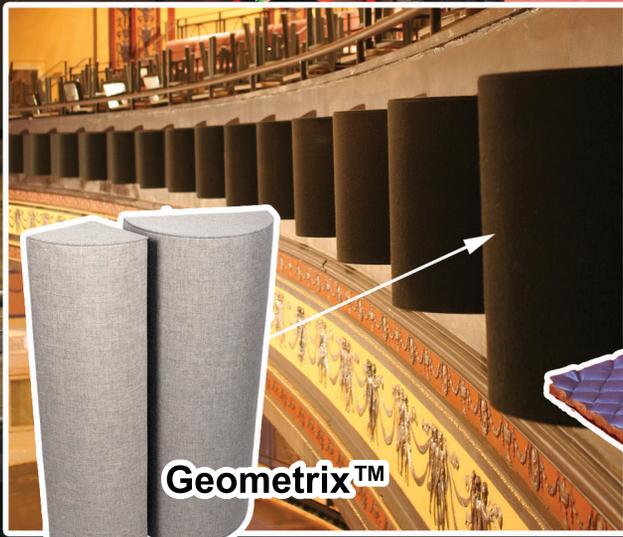
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