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## Buyer's Guide 2018 24



### OVER 25 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE: DAVE AND MARY FEHR

by Sherry Lucas

David Fehr and his wife, Mary, who designs sets and costumes for Attaché, have committed creative energies and drive to Attaché for more than 25 years, ushering a growing network of students forward with key life lessons that stretch far beyond song and dance, according to graduates of the Clinton High School in Mississippi.



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### THE POWER OF LOVE: AUTHENTICITY, OPENNESS, & SHOW CHOIR

by Aaron Spraggins

High school can be tough. Being queer on top of that can seem like a nightmare at times. I know this from experience. As a student in Opelika "Ovations" from Opelika, Alabama, nearly a decade ago, I remember being terrified of coming out as gay. Being gay in a small town had a lot to do with my fear but people have changed a little since 2011. People are more accepting with each passing day.

# OVER 25 years OF EXCELLENCE: DAVE & MARY FEHR

by Sherry Lucas

David Fehr's black Beatles cap is a clue, and music from the rehearsal hall confirms it. Under his direction, dozens of Attaché Show Choir performers build on the fundamentals of the Fab Four show that'll take them through competition season.

For Clinton High School's consistently top-ranked show choir, nationally as well as at home in Mississippi, that means banker's hours of rehearsal over the holiday break, sweating dance moves inside while it's in the mid-20s outside, and flashing winning smiles through all the hard work.

## LIFE DOESN'T END WHEN SCHOOL'S OUT

"Life doesn't end when school's out...Actually, you like to find time when there isn't school, so you can really practice," Fehr says.

David Fehr and his wife, Mary, who designs sets and costumes for Attaché, have committed creative energies and drive to Attaché for more than 25 years, ushering a growing network of students forward with key life lessons that stretch far beyond song and dance, graduates say.

Attaché alums populate the show business environs of Nashville (Shelly Fairchild), Broadway (Heath Calvert), Branson, Missouri (Eric Dalton) and beyond. Many also parlay the leadership, teamwork, and time management skills into a host of professional careers.



## From Illinois to Mississippi

Both from little towns in Illinois, David and Mary met while students at Illinois State and went into teaching. He also handled musical direction for summer stock theater. She was doing costumes for his show choir even back then—a helpmate effort that started with a Toto costume David needed for a “Wizard of Oz” production. “Her mom sewed for nuns. I guess that’s theater,” he says with a chuckle.

Mary’s mother never actually taught her, she says, but she must have learned by watching. Mary has a minor in art, too, but the costume and set designing that comes with a show choir like Attaché, she says, “I’ve just had to learn along the way, what works and what doesn’t.”

The Fehrs took over Attaché from founding director Winona Costello in the 1992-93 school year, moving to Mississippi from Illinois. “We felt very welcome here due to the appreciation the South has for the arts. And, we love the weather,” Mary says, just back from the snow and -4 degree chill of an Illinois visit. Being creative, seeing it come to fruition and working with the kids — those are her loves.

## Creativity, Direction, & Musical Genius

Clinton dentist Dr. John Goolsby Jr., who was in the choir’s stage crew back in 1992, keeps in touch and handles emceeing for some events, marvels that his alma mater Attaché, almost every single year, is No. 1 in the nation.

Bigger choirs—what David calls “the Hollywood schools”—may have big celebs and yearly allotments, “but the thing they don’t have is the creativity and direction Attaché has with David and Mary,” Goolsby says. “They’re incredibly gifted, with Mary coming up with designs, themes and songs to tell the story.” And, David “is a musical genius. Twenty years before ‘Glee’ came out—as far as putting songs together, mixing and mashing—he was doing that.”

And yet, the foundation rather than the spotlight is the priority. “It’s a much bigger story than performances and winning,” Goolsby says. “It’s more about potential and what they bring out in people.”

## Invaluable Lessons

“I can’t think of a better program that has taught me more about life and how to be successful, than that program,” says 2013 Clinton

High grad Graham Bobo, who later graduated from Mississippi College and is now a med student at the University of Mississippi Medical Center eyeing a career as a surgeon. “I learned how to sing and dance, yeah, I did learn how to do that,” he says, “but the life lessons of hard work, dedication and diligently working toward a goal are invaluable.”

Karen Godfrey, a Realtor in Clinton whose three children came through Attaché, says, “My kids are different people on the other end of it. They are able to do things other kids aren’t. Anything they go to do now, they can do without blinking.”

Clinton High, with about 1,100 students, seemed like a huge school when the Fehrs moved here, David says. In the 25 years since, “the Hollywoods and the Chicago suburbs—we’re going against schools of 2,000, 3,000, 4,000 and even 5,000 students.”

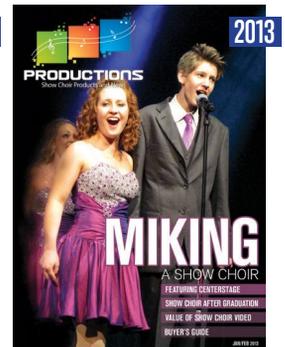
## Precision, Class, Musicianship, Dance, and Storytelling

What makes Attaché stand out? “Precision, class, musicianship, obviously dance, and storytelling,” he says. There are smaller divisions for competition “but we’ve always been in

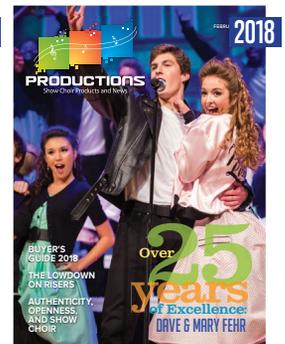
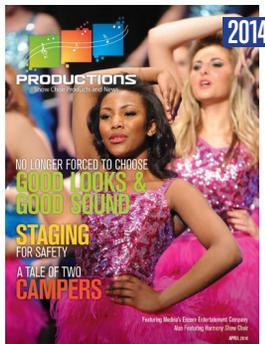


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the big, and you can choose to be in the big,” David says. “We’re in the big. That’s what we do.”

He can’t settle on a single high point over the past quarter century. Attaché was great at his start, David says, and he wanted to take it in a more theatrical direction. By 1996, “it all gelled and we started to become a name that everybody knew.”

Among many highlights, Attaché is ranked No. 1 in the nation in the National Show Choir Rank System, and has amassed one of the most impressive competition records of any other show choir in America. In 2016-17, Attaché took first place in several competitions: the South Central Classic in Homewood, Alabama; the Petal Show Choir Invitational in Petal, Mississippi, and Xtravaganza in Los Alamitos, California. Under the Fehrs’ leadership, the show choir has won 74 out of 83 Grand Champion titles since 1993.

“People say, ‘Well, how are you going to top what you did before?’ Well, you don’t. You do something different. You have to keep progressing.”



Photo Clinton Attaché Show Choir by Tracey Harrison

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**It all begins with a song...**



Photo Clinton Attaché Show Choir by Tracey Harrison

## Talent Doesn't Walk in the Door; It Walks Out

Attaché, once mostly high school juniors and seniors, has in the last decade gotten increasingly younger to keep the quality high. "With the level of difficulty that we expect out of our kids, an extra year or two under our tutelage helps develop them," David says. "We try to maximize our strengths and minimize our weaknesses and teach fundamentals. Fundamentals is the name of the game. "It's not talent that walks in the door. It's talent that walks out the door."

The reigning show choir style now is "anything goes." A model set made of Legos and a magnet board with risers, box "TVs," trampoline drums and a portion of a VW bug gives a miniature big-picture view of the Beatles set. It's populated with 46 performers, supported by a 14-member crew, and musically fueled by 17 musicians in the pit.

"They have to become leaders for this to work the way it does. They have to become part of the team. They have to learn how to teach. They have to learn how to see the big picture and how to care about others ahead of themselves," David says.

They have good examples. "Two people that couldn't possibly work any harder for people other than themselves," Attaché performer Morgan Washam, a senior, describes the Fehrs. Senior Mattie Pierce recalls the sensitive, naive freshman who started in Attaché and marvels at how she's grown, in responsibility, accountability and more. "He's not just teaching us show choir stuff. He's teaching us how to succeed in the real world."

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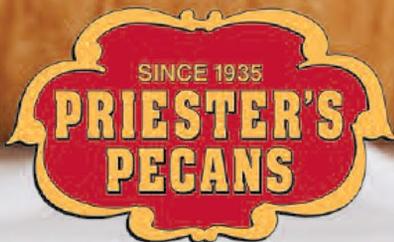
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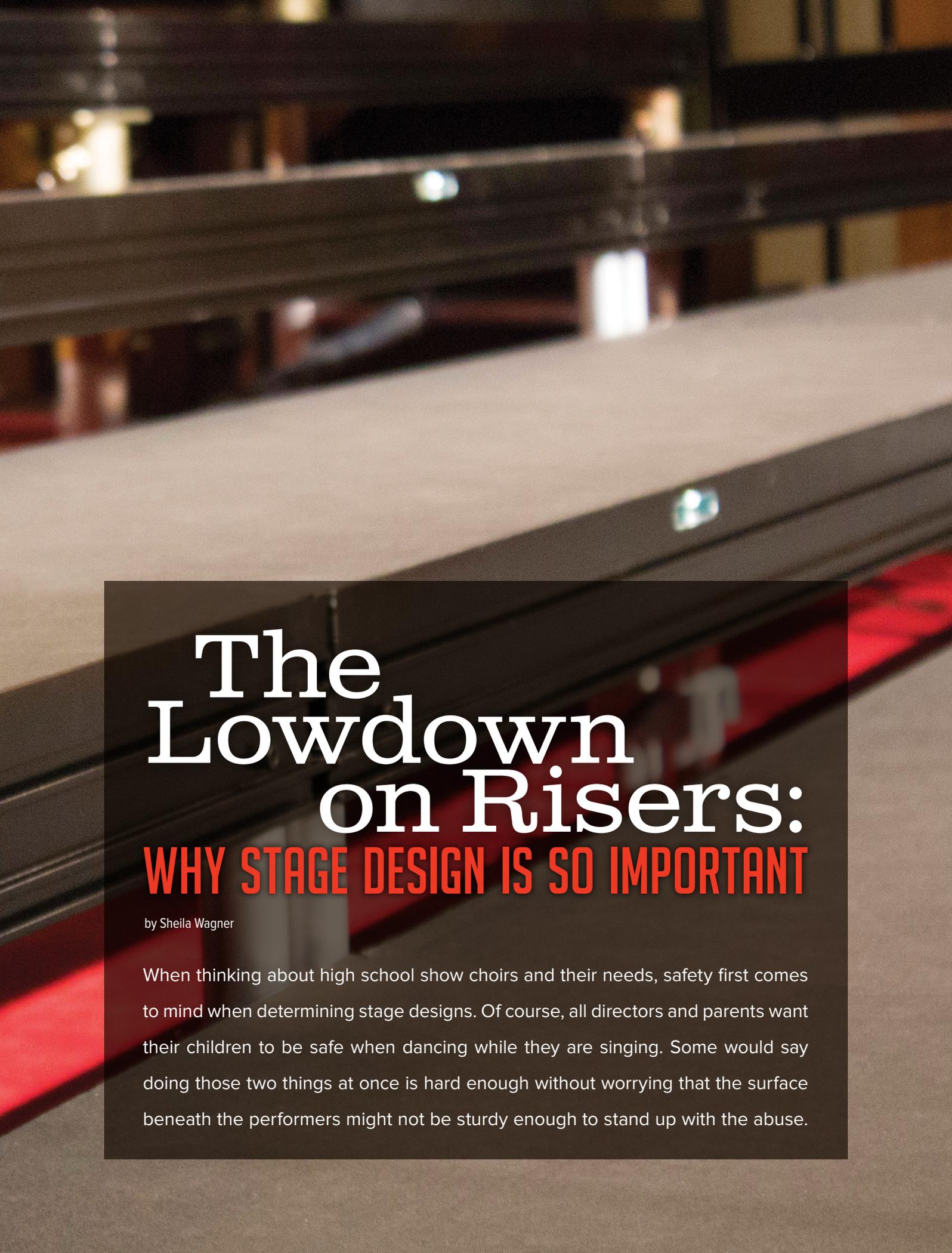
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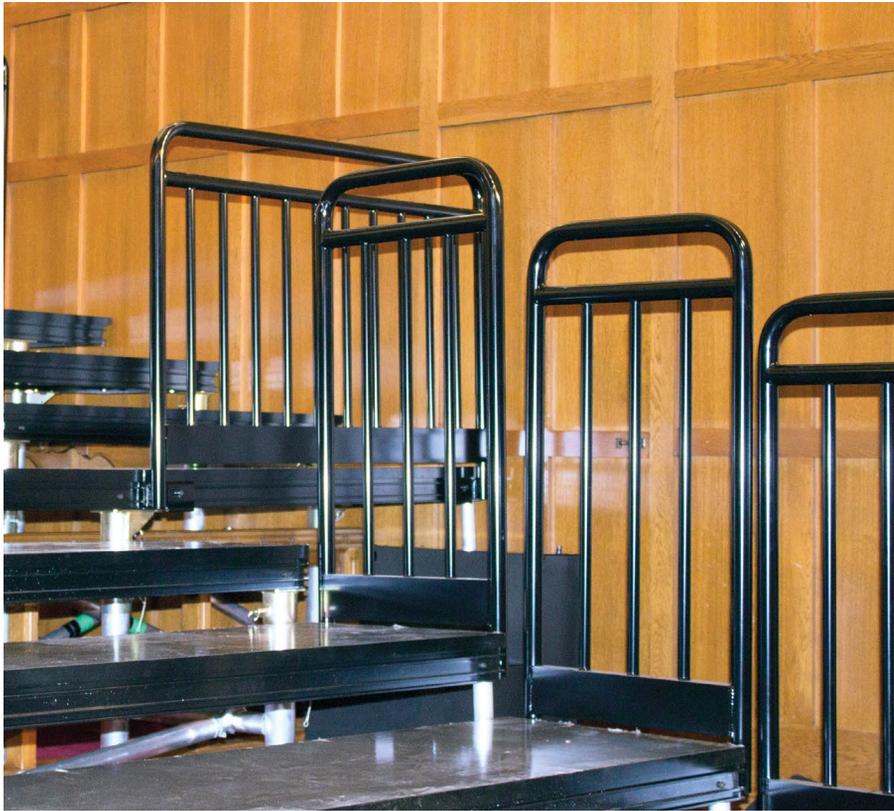




# The Lowdown on Risers: WHY STAGE DESIGN IS SO IMPORTANT

by Sheila Wagner

When thinking about high school show choirs and their needs, safety first comes to mind when determining stage designs. Of course, all directors and parents want their children to be safe when dancing while they are singing. Some would say doing those two things at once is hard enough without worrying that the surface beneath the performers might not be sturdy enough to stand up with the abuse.



### Considerations After Safety

Choir directors would also say that after safety, there are many other aspects that need to be considered when purchasing staging. For instance, using different heights and shapes for stages might be just what their competition show needs to take it to the next level. In addition, the stage set has to be easy to put up and to take down by the stage crew students and the booster club parents.

Many of the national show choir competitions make the time used to put up and take down their sets part of the overall score—a time limit is set and the choir will get deductions for every minute they go over. Therefore, it needs to be fast, easy, and intuitive for setup and take down. It would be a shame for the students who work so hard on their show to be penalized for that.

### Controlling Chaos

Greg Nelson, Senior Product Manager with Wenger Corporation, recalls how he first came up with the design for their product StageTek about four years ago. He was backstage at a national competition in Chicago to observe what was going on underneath the platforms—seeing brackets and clamps coming loose and rattling and even sometimes

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falling to the ground. In addition to that, he observed a lot of show choir fathers putting together their children's stages with duct tape and zip ties. Some had the pieces color-coded and others number-coded, and everyone was moving as fast as they could, so their choir wouldn't be penalized for taking too long with the process. It was chaos.

He walked away from the weekend knowing that they needed to come up with a product that addressed all those needs. He said, "We decided the high water mark for stage design was high school show choir." They designed StageTek with booster club Dads in mind. "We thought legs that plug into place would be the best way—very simple and straightforward." He added that the legs can be adjustable for different kinds of stage setup. They also made easy hand-holds part of the design so the Dads could prevent injuries from sharp edges.

### Facing Challenging Spacing Demands

Jessica Ley, Marketing and Communications Coordinator for Staging Concepts, says that customization is one of her company's greatest assets. During the holiday season,

"When you have 30 or 40 kids all running sideways and stopping simultaneously, that's inertia and momentum that you don't replicate anywhere else. When it comes to staging products, a high school show choir is definitely as intense as anything you would put on a stage—the high water mark for what stages need to be." — GREG NELSON

they revamped a then 40-year-old riser space and designed a custom choral riser that could hold up to 200 members at a time. The structure combined Staging Concepts' SC90 Platforms, SC9600 Bridge Supports, IBC Guardrails, and various accessories.

Ley explains that a great deal of customization goes into any project, particularly when faced with challenging space demands. For one recent project, pictured in this article, Ley explains that their engineers designed a system that sits flush against the surrounding walls and existing communion rails. She added that they can create modular systems that suit multiple purposes: "No

matter the final layout, our platforms and correlating products can be easily setup and taken down within a short amount of time by just a few people."

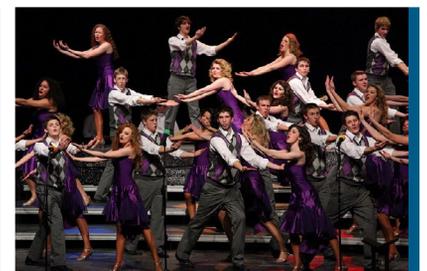
### Customization Capable of Anything

Rick Roe, Marketing Manager at Stage-Right, offered insight about their specialty projects designed specifically to enhance show choirs. He explains that while the typical systems do not exceed 32" in height (4 level), StageRight has offered and sold up to 78" systems before and it's common to go up to 40" and 56" heights for a 7-level riser. He said that while most show choir groups

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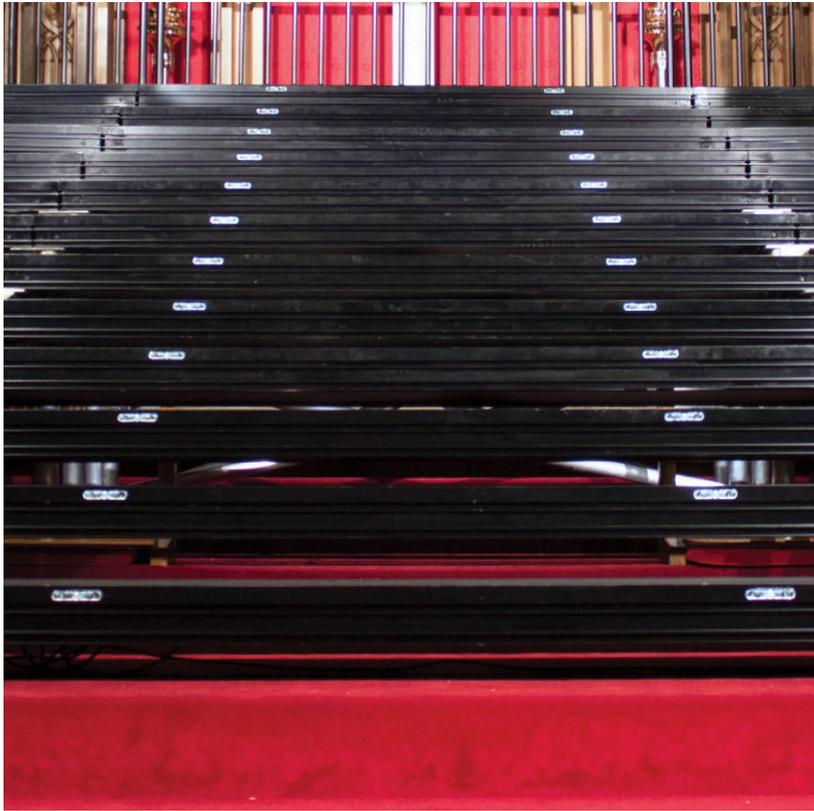
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buy the standard size decks (4 x 8, 4 x 4, and standard Pie wedges at the 8-24" heights,) StageRight is capable of "anything including round and custom trapeze shapes and would like to see this in the future."

Roe went on to say that they have manufactured standard and custom ramp systems for groups looking for something new or who are tired of the standard stairs. They have designed something really unique for a different venue. Roe adds, "The shape and size makes sense for a show choir really looking to do something a bit over the edge."

Similarly, Nelson said that he had always been told by rental companies that they were the hardest on stages, and he would say, "No, when you have 30 or 40 kids all running sideways and stopping simultaneously, that's inertia and momentum that you don't replicate anywhere else." He reiterated, "When it comes to staging products, a high school show choir is definitely as intense as anything you would put on a stage—the high-water mark for what stages need to be."

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Sheila Wagner has spent the last several years working as a professional editor and recently became the staff writer for *Productions Magazine*. She also was a booster club parent for Attaché Show Choir for 6 years. Wagner can be reached at [swagner1@bellsouth.net](mailto:swagner1@bellsouth.net).

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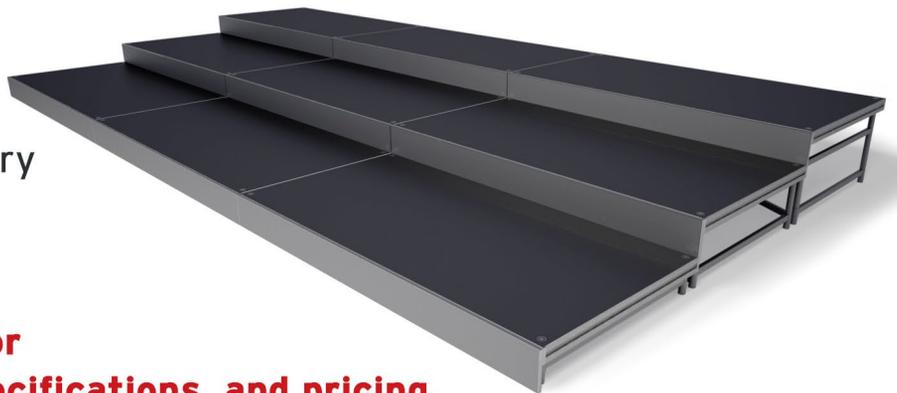


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# THE POWER OF *Love*

## AUTHENTICITY, OPENNESS, AND SHOW CHOIR

by Aaron Spraggins

High school can be tough. Being queer on top of that can seem like a nightmare at times. I know this from experience. As a student in Opelika "Ovations" from Opelika, Alabama, nearly a decade ago, I remember being terrified of coming out as gay. Being gay in a small town had a lot to do with my fear, but people have changed a little since 2011. People are more accepting with each passing day. My director was accepting of everyone who walked through his doors. I know that many of my classmates would speak up if anyone really tried to bully me. I was still terrified of being my true self.



## Making it Safer to Be Yourself

I was never fully out of the closet in high school. I remember the sweaty-palm feeling when someone would ask if I was gay. My prompt response was always “no” for fear of being looked at differently. In hindsight, the truth is that those who matter would not have cared. But in show choir, where flamboyant and campy makes a performance memorable, I was terrified to be exactly that. Looking back, it makes me wonder what could have been done to make me feel safer to be myself. After reaching out to others about their experiences, I think I have a few ideas.

I was approached from someone who attended a Christian School in the Birmingham, Alabama, area. I was asked not to disclose the identity of the person or school, but they are a straight ally to the LGBTQ+ Community, and their insight was too important not to share. “I had no worries for myself (as I identify as straight), but an LGBTQ+ student would have been expelled, at least according to how the handbook read, when I was in school. I never knew anyone to be expelled for it, but all the students I knew who were part of the LGBTQ+ community left to go to other schools by their own accord because they felt they could not express themselves. I also know a student who hid it until he went to college for fear of expulsion and persecution.” Imagine going to school where you would be expelled for being the person you were born to be.

Uniformity expectations within show choir can also pose a few issues for LGBTQ+ students. It’s generally expected that girls in show choir have hair long enough to flip, and they are usually required to wear a dress. Hair and costuming can be key pieces to the puzzle when it comes to putting together a show. However, the notion of requiring students to have a certain hairstyle or dress a certain way according to their gender assigned at birth can be problematic. Haley Blazek of Marion, Iowa, notes: “In high school, I was part of the hair and make-up committee (for show choir) we even signed a contract that said we would consult our director before any haircuts or colors between the audition and the end of the season. Due to the goal of conformity in your ‘classic’ show choir shows, and in so many aspects of show choir in general,

gender-nonconforming folks have to face the difficulties of following very specific gendered standards. Girls have to have long hair and wear dresses; guys must have short hair and wear suits. In high school, I didn’t understand the dysphoria that could create for people.”

## Gender Norms and Expectations

Enforcing these gender norms and expectations can cause more than surface level damage. It can mentally wound a person. Blazek continues, “Show choir has always been one of the most accepting groups I’ve ever been part of. It also advertises itself as very LGBTQA+ inclusive, so it makes absolutely no sense for there to be such an emphasis on gender conformity. Yet, here I am, feeling as though I may not be accepted. There is absolutely no reason for this. Do these things play a role in our scores at competitions? Because if they do, that’s ridiculous. I promise you, the length of my hair has no impact on how well I can sing or dance alongside 40 other people.”

“Due to the goal of conformity in your ‘classic’ show choir shows, and in so many aspects of show choir in general, gender-nonconforming folks have to face the difficulties of following very specific gendered standards. Girls have to have long hair and wear dresses; guys must have short hair and wear suits. In high school, I didn’t understand the dysphoria that could create for people.” —HALEY BLAZEK

Some schools have policy in place to prevent issues dealing with negativity specifically for LGBTQ+ students. A student from Madison Central High in Mississippi claims his choir is very inclusive and tolerant. “The interesting thing about our show choir (and I wouldn’t be surprised if this were the case for other southern show choirs) is that there is a zero tolerance for hazing in any form. These guidelines are set for many show choirs, and we even signed a “contract” among other things, agreeing to love and appreciate our differences. No individual is isolated for any reason. And despite

our State’s legislature, you’ll find that most show choirs are extremely progressive,” says Bradley Davis, a senior at Madison Central. It’s good to know some things have changed for the better, but some things are still the same. “We’re a family and the only thing more important to us than being good, or winning a championship, is respecting each other.”

## Show Choir Teaches Love of Self and Love of Life

Personally, show choir has taught me a lot of things. It helped me break out of my shell. It taught me how to move my awkward body and about stage presence. It taught me to love myself. I owe a lot to my show choir experience. Show choir even brought me the love of my life.

As a member of Opelika “Ovations,” I regularly came in contact with most show choirs within a 6-hour radius during competition season. This list would include the likes of Auburn “Varsity Singers,” Enterprise “Encores,” and Albertville

“CenterStage!” to name a few. Little did I know, the man I would come to marry competed against me in many competitions across the southeast.

The love story begins a year after graduating high school. I was still a show choir junkie. I worked with local groups in Birmingham during my freshman year at the University of Alabama at Birmingham to get my fix during the off-season. During competition season, I made a point to go to every competition within driving distance. My friends and I liked to live-tweet our commentary of the competition in real time. I told you we were junkies.

Show choir is about having fun and learning to create something bigger than any one individual can do alone. Show choir is also about learning from each other's differences and learning to make those differences work to the advantage of the group. As long as students are learning and loving, that's all we can ask for.

### Show Choir Leads to Lifelong Love

During one competition, I got a new follower on Twitter who promptly "slid into my DMs," as the kids say. It was a cute blonde guy from Enterprise named Seth who was attending community college working toward a music education degree. We had a common interest in music and specifically show choir, so I decided to entertain his message and gave him my number. It turns out he was a graduate of Enterprise High School and was involved in their mixed show choir "Encores." Of course, that was a plus.

We became fast friends and began messaging every day. It wasn't long before he moved to Auburn for school and we became inseparable. We liked to hang out at his

apartment and play music. We would play a game where we put iTunes on shuffle and built our fantasy show choir sets around each song that came on. Fast forward another six months when Seth came back to Auburn early from Christmas break to ask me to be his boyfriend so no one else would ask me out while he was gone. We have been together ever since. We dated for 4 and a half years before we tied the knot in May of 2017.

### Teaching Inclusivity

Seth graduated from Auburn University with his music education degree and is now a 6th grade music teacher at Drake Middle School in Auburn, continuing to share his love for music with a new generation. His students

share more open viewpoints about gender and sexuality. He explains, "They won't really care like some of our generation and older people do. They ask each other for their preferred pronouns. They want to be inclusive."

There are still a few things to fix within schools and even in the show choir community to make conditions a little better for LGBTQ+ students, but it gets better with time. It's good to know that more than ever, students are embracing each other with open minds and hearts. Show choir is about having fun and learning to create something bigger than any one individual can do alone. Show choir is also about learning from each other's differences and learning to make those differences work to the advantage of the group. As long as students are learning and loving, that's all we can ask for.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Aaron Spraggins is an alumnus of Opelika High School where he was involved with "Ovations" for 3 years. He is currently a screen printer by trade, a board member for Lee County's first Pride organization, and owns his own LGBTQ+ apparel business, Queer & Co. Check out his designs at [Queerandco.com](http://Queerandco.com).

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Dornink has over 23 years of experience creating show choir costumes for schools through the Des Moines and surrounding areas. Founder Faythe Dornink began custom sewing costumes for her daughters in show choir in 1992 when she realized their need for a unique look. Since then, designer and daughter Sarah Dornink, educated and trained in New York, has joined the business. Sarah and Faythe will personally work with you to custom design your costumes and create the perfect set.

Dornink offers exclusivity on your costumes style. Please list up to 5 schools that are competitors and we will not sell them the same style. First-come, first-serve on rights to all styles. Exclusivity begins once signed contract is received. You can reach us at 515-255-7528 or via email at [showchoir@dornink.com](mailto:showchoir@dornink.com). Visit our site to see our full show choir catalog.

Work with our design team to custom design the perfect look for needs. Whether you're looking for show choir or theatrical costumes, we can design and create just about any style. Be inspired by the many fabric selections on our fabric page. And if you don't see what you're looking for, just ask!

Let Dornink set your group apart from the rest. Dornink can design and create the look you need. Our design team is always sourcing new fabrics, styles, and the latest trends to keep your group looking amazing on stage.

**SATIN STITCHES**

[www.satinstitches.com](http://www.satinstitches.com)

Real Custom...Real Quality for 40 years! At Satin Stitches, we pride ourselves on producing couture quality show choir and dance performance costumes right here at our showroom/production facility in suburban Minneapolis. In addition to our full custom, we offer budget-conscious, customizable styles in our Web Store at [shop.satinstitches.com](http://shop.satinstitches.com). Besides owner/head designer Deborah Nelson (with a BFA fashion design degree and decades of design/patterning/construction expertise), Satin Stitches has 3 professional fashion/costume designers on staff to interpret your ideas and facilitate the creation of costumes that are "Designed for a Sensational Performance". In town? Make an appointment to stop by for a tour and design consultation, or fill out our online design request form. We create custom costumes for show choir and dance groups all across the country.

We Love our Show Choirs! Why? Because we love themed show choir costumes AND it gives us a chance to work with men's costuming (which we don't have the opportunity to do, very often). With our nearly 40 years of custom, performance-costuming design and manufacturing experience, we have been working with all types of fabrics & trims, silhouettes & styles and all types of body shapes and sizes.

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Garrett Breeze is a media composer and arranger living in Nashville, TN. He is known primarily as an arranger for many of the top competitive show choirs throughout the United States and travels regularly in that role as a clinician and adjudicator. In addition to his choral work, Garrett frequently writes for high profile media projects including film, television, video games, and corporate media. He holds a bachelor's degree in Media Music from Brigham Young University and a master's degree in Commercial Composition and Arranging from Belmont University.

We are proud to have supplied music arrangements to more than 110 choirs throughout the United States and Canada, contributing to over 86 championship wins to date! Breeze Tunes Productions specializes in creating high-quality, competitive arrangements tailored to fit your choir's show design, skill level, and budget! You can search our full catalog of previously arranged titles from our site. To order a new custom arrangement, license a previously arranged title, or to book Garrett for a clinic or workshop with your choir, you can just fill out the contact form on the site, and he will respond within 24 hours: <https://breezetunes.com/contact>.

### MUSIC ARRANGEMENT SERVICES

[www.showchoirmusic.com](http://www.showchoirmusic.com)

In the late 1980's, Jeffrey Bowen began arranging for competition show choirs as extra work. During the 1990's, the arranging grew into full-time work and was established as Music Arrangement Services. In 2012, the company became incorporated as Music Arrangement Services, Inc. with the same concept of providing high-quality competition arrangements as well as ensuring the legal licensing of each and every title.

Arrangements have been purchased by schools in over 35 states and several European countries and Australia. Music Arrangement Services, Inc. provides quality Show Choir arrangements to competition Show Choirs all over the country. With hundreds of titles to its credit, directors will be able to see the wide variety of styles created to make your show choir sound the best!

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Best Arranger	Brock Keiper
Best Costumer	Gail McInnis Productions
Spirit of Service	Clover Hill High School (Sandra Thomas, Dir.)
Most Promising New Program	Broken Arrow Tiger Rhythm (Justin Rosser)
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