



Dr. Michael Hanawalt
conducts first rehearsal
with The Tallahassee
Community Chorus.

CLAIRE TIMM

'Fellowship of music'

New prof and conductor embraces community chorus

Amanda Sieradzki Council on Culture & Arts

When Dr. Michael Hanawalt attended Florida State University as a doctoral candidate in choral music education, he assisted Dr. Andre Thomas in conducting the Tallahassee Community Chorus. Composed of 250 volunteer singers, the chorus deeply impacted Hanawalt's views on teaching choral music and creating a cohesive group atmosphere. ■ This formative experience was later instrumental in his development as a conductor and educator at Wichita State University. Now, Hanawalt is back at Florida State as Associate Professor of Choral Conducting and Music Education. ■ Along with his teaching responsibilities, he is also the new Artistic Director for the Tallahassee Community Chorus. Hanawalt will lead the chorus for the first time in November at their annual fall concert.

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Hanawalt

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"I was Dr. Thomas' student while I was here, and now I get to come back and take the reins," says Hanawalt. "It is a wonderful privilege to be back and see so many good friends and familiar faces, and make music with them."

Hanawalt is also looking forward to collaborating with other disciplines during his tenure. The chorus' January concert features a score written by Richard Einhorn that will accompany silent film, "The Passion of Joan of Arc."

This year's upcoming fall concert celebrates Austrian composer Wolfgang Mozart's "Requiem." Hanawalt enjoys how the classical piece contains pictorial elements in its language as well as a passion that will be tangible for audiences.

"It's a piece that the chorus can do for our first time together and really master, while at the same time allow us an opportunity to get to know each other a little bit," says Hanawalt.

Anton Armstrong at St. Olaf College first lit Hanawalt's passion for choral music during his time studying for his bachelor's degree in music. Shortly thereafter, Hanawalt formed a professional male vocal ensemble, Cantus, which toured nationally. His time pursuing a master's degree at Michigan State University set him on the path to choral conducting, before completing his doctorate at FSU.

As a professor at Wichita State University, Hanawalt directed the symphony orchestra chorus, similar to Tallahassee's Community Chorus. During one of his last concerts in Kansas, Hanawalt prepared the chorus and sang as a tenor soloist with his colleagues. He says

the opportunity was one of the most unique performances of his career as it highlighted the similarities and differences between being a performer and conductor.

"The conductor is working on the arms, cutoff cues, and making the right beat pattern to show the music," says Hanawalt. "Meanwhile the singer is practicing technical issues related to the vocal mechanism to make as beautiful or powerful sounds as they can."

Hanawalt is most interested in the vulnerability required to sing in a group, and loves the mutual caring and respect that performances create for both ensemble and audience. Given that most choral music focuses on text, he is drawn to pieces that deal with different stories, cultures and philosophies that will ultimately impact society and spark conversation.

When he began working with the Tallahassee Community Chorus this fall, Hanawalt took into consideration the relationship he wanted to establish with the group via his music selections. Pedagogically, he chose pieces that he felt would not only be a great fit, but would make a seamless transition between his conducting and Dr. Thomas' legacy.

Hanawalt arrives elated to the chorus' weekly two-hour rehearsals on Monday nights. His biggest challenge is keeping all 250 voices on the same page, though he feeds off of the excitement and energy in the room. On the podium, he hopes to come across as his authentic self.

"I consider those rehearsals to be sacred time in a lot of ways," says Hanawalt. "It is a fellowship of music and ideas, and I hope that I bring about a little bit of youthful exuberance and genuine sincerity to that end."

Preparing for Mozart's "Requiem," Hanawalt marks up the score in different colors so that each musical element will jump off the page. He immerses himself in the music, learning all the parts so that he can teach them to the group with precision and excellence.

If you go

What: Majestic Mozart Fall Concert

When: 4 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 17

Where: Ruby Diamond Concert Hall, 222 S Copeland St

Cost: \$22 General, \$18 Senior (62+), \$6 Student with ID

Contact: For more information, visit <http://tchorus.org/events/2019-2020-season>.

Each movement of the "Requiem" is distilled to a single thought that Hanawalt relays to the singers. Whatever musical decisions he makes concerning tempo, style, dynamics and breath all serve that single idea.

"I'm looking forward to celebrating with the chorus when we perform together for the first time," says Hanawalt. "Hopefully it is the beginning of a lot of great things to come."

In his new role, Hanawalt says he will maintain a classical repertoire of master works while pioneering new works that focus on his musical interests in twentieth century and modern music.

He is also adamant in promoting that anyone can come, sing and join the chorus. There is no audition required, just an internal fire and hunger to contribute their voice.

"[Choral music] can bring me to tears and give me a thrill in a way that nothing else can," says Hanawalt. "The human voice is deeply personal. Singing comes from inside of us. It is rooted in our physical being."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).



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