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Exploring the Collegiate Choir Participant's Values within Ensemble Performances

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Exploring the Collegiate Choir Participant's Values within Ensemble Performances

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how collegiate choral ensemble participants viewed their highest quality performance and their favorite performance. Examining characteristics of performances may encourage conversations about performance values between directors and students. Limited research has been done about musicians' views, as getting accurate and in-the-moment documentation of how musicians feel about their performances is challenging. To provide more insight into this previously understudied topic, this study aimed to explore the musicians' perspectives on their performances and how their emotions and repertoire are intertwined.

The Primary Investigator (PI) conducted an anonymous study among the 2022–2023 choral ensemble participants at The University of Southern Mississippi (USM). To help define characteristics of performances that make them memorable, participants answered a series of short-answer questions about collegiate choir performances they had participated in: one excellent performance and their favorite performance. Results showed that excellent performances have high rates of musical success and precision. Additionally, enjoying the composition of a piece was the most frequently mentioned aspect of favorite performances. For both performances, participants listed their ensemble peers and the emotions evoked by music as being important parts of their experiences. Participants reported having more fun and feeling happier during their favorite performances. Participants also discussed feeling more confident during their excellent performances. Ultimately, these results indicated that choral ensemble participants have a variety of values and expectations for their performances. However, despite the individualized differences, musicians are likely to get emotionally involved during

performances. To encourage more ensemble cohesion when working towards higher goals, choral directors may consider collaborating with their students during the standard- and expectation- setting process. Implications will be discussed.

Keywords: Choir, Emotions, Excellence, Music, Perceptions, Performances

DEDICATION

To Nana: You are my inspiration for everything I do, and you are my inspiration for this thesis. You have helped shape me into the writer, musician, academic, teacher, and person I am today. I am incredibly grateful for the impact you have on my life. This is for you, Nana, from Katydid, with love.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACDA	American Choral Directors Association
AVA	Alabama Vocal Association
FVA	Florida Vocal Association
KMEA	Kentucky Music Educators Association
LMEA	Louisiana Music Educators Association
MMEA	Mississippi Music Educators Association
NCMEA	North Carolina Music Educators Association
PI	Primary Investigator
SCMEA	South Carolina Music Educators Association
TCDA	Tennessee Choral Directors Association
USM	The University of Southern Mississippi
UTC	University Treble Chorus
VCDA	Virginia Choral Directors Association
WVMEA	West Virginia Music Educators Association

LIST OF OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Artistry	"Communicating meaning to the audience" (Davidson & Coimbra, 2001, p. 48)
Cohesion	The act or state of sticking together tightly (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)
Ensemble	A group producing a single effect such as concerted music of two or more parts (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)
Excellent	High quality; perfect or close to perfection; little to no mistakes (adapted from Merriam-Webster, n.d.)
Favorite	Something that is favored over others; loved; regarded with special liking (adapted from Merriam-Webster, n.d.)
Self-efficacy	"The conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes (Bandura, 1977, p. 193)

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Overview

For many soloists in collegiate choral settings, the quality of performance and resulting grade from adjudicators are the incentives behind hours of hard work in rehearsal spaces. However, once an individual is one voice among many, maintaining those same standards of excellence can be difficult. For the purposes of this study, "ensemble" was defined as "a group producing a single effect such as concerted music of two or more parts" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Within an ensemble setting, musicians have a responsibility to know their part and sing to the best of their ability as directed by their conductor. However, if a musician does not follow the guidance of the conductor, the audience's attention may be directed onto the individual and away from the ensemble. Cohesion, as defined by Merriam-Webster (n.d.), is "the act or state of sticking together tightly." Within an ensemble setting, cohesion is critical to a successful performance. Cohesion between conductor and choir is critical to a successful performance. When an ensemble does not work cohesively, progress towards achieving higher goals set by the conductor is limited.

The purpose of this study was to analyze common trends in standards and values for collegiate choral ensemble participants. Specifically, this study identified the standards of excellence participants hold for themselves. This study also examined the characteristics of the participants' favorite performances. Questions about participants' favorite past choral experiences may aid in the understanding of some common values held by musicians. Some values may overlap with the standards of excellence to which participants hold themselves.

By understanding how musicians reflect on themselves and their concert performances, conductors may ascertain how their ensemble participants define excellent or high quality in performances. If conductors work with their ensembles to establish certain standards of excellence, the likelihood of cohesion and success may increase. Then, when ensembles meet these standards, the musicians may feel a higher sense of accomplishment after an excellent performance. Furthermore, if musicians have positive experiences with a piece, they may be more likely to view its performance in high regard, perhaps even as a favorite performance. These favorite performances may even contribute to an overall sense of enjoyment and pride within the ensemble.

Research Questions and Anticipated Outcomes

The three main research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. What factors contribute to an excellent performance?
2. What factors contribute to making a performance a favorite?
3. How do musicians differentiate between favorite and excellent?

These questions were selected to allow participating students to discuss both a performance which they are proud of and a performance they remember fondly. Understanding how the participants critique themselves in concert settings may provide insight into what is perceived as excellent or high quality.

While standards of excellence may be easily quantified through standardized rubrics and criteria, considering the different values and emotions each musician experiences are not as simple. Identifying a performance as a favorite can be a very personal endeavor; for example, some musicians enjoy performing sacred pieces as a way to demonstrate their faith. Others may prefer secular pieces that are upbeat and exciting.

Certain musicians may find pride and joy in a performance that gains their ensemble a standing ovation or may even consider their favorite performance to be a technically precise performance. There are countless variables that contribute to how musicians develop feelings towards their repertoire, and attempting to predict those individualized beliefs would be making a biased assumption.

Operational Definition of Terms

Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defined "excellent" as "very good of its kind." For the purposes of this study, the definition was modified as follows: "Excellent: (adjective) high quality; perfect or close to perfection; little to no mistakes." Participants were asked to recall the highest quality performance they had been a part of, and the definition was therefore modified to be more specific than the Merriam-Webster (n.d.) definition. By modifying the definition, the PI was able to control the exact definition participants referenced while completing the questionnaire.

Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defined "favorite" as "one that is treated or regarded with special favor or liking." For the purposes of this study, the definition was modified as follows: "Favorite: (noun) something that is favored over others; loved; regarded with special liking." Although there was little deviation from the Merriam-Webster (n.d.) definition of "favorite," the PI added "something that is favored over others" with the intention of encouraging participants to select whichever performance they hold in highest regard.

CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the choral ensemble participants' values and expectations for their performances. When exploring the preexisting literature, the topics of excellence, repertoire preference, and the musician's perspective were considered. Each of these primary topics, in conjunction with the aforementioned research questions, were selected to provide an in-depth overview of what makes an excellent performance and how musicians develop their repertoire preferences. Within each research topic, further information on conductor views, audience views, and musician views were gathered as able.

Literature on the topics of excellence (Brinson & Demorest, 2014; Bucura, 2020; Davidson and Coimbra, 2001; Donovan et al., 1999) and motivation (Bandura, 1977, 1984, 1991; McCormick & McPherson, 2003; Ritchie & Williamon, 2010) were gathered in an effort to comprehensively understand the characteristics that contribute to excellent performances. These topics correspond to the first research question and the first section of the questionnaire distributed to the participants (see Appendix D).

Literature examining emotions (Balkwill & Thompson, 1999; Chapin et al., 2010; Fritz et al., 2009; Gabrielsson & Juslin, 1996; Gabrielsson & Lindström, 2010; Holmes, 2011; Huovinen & Keipi, 2022; Juslin, 1997, 2000, 2003; Lindström et al., 2003; Schubert, 2004; Sundberg, 1982) and repertoire preference (Bradley, 1971; Droe, 2008; Heyduk, 1975; Lim & Park, 2019; Swaminathan & Schellenberg, 2015; Zajonc, 1980) were selected to assist in developing a deeper understanding of what factors contribute to how a musician develops their feelings towards a choral piece. The topics of emotions

and repertoire preference align with the second research question and the second section of the questionnaire distributed to the participants (see Appendix D).

Musical Excellence and Motivation

According to many musicians, being excellent in music is equivalent to playing the most difficult music, having the best students and musicians, and producing a polished performance (Bucura, 2020, p. 2). In many P–12 schools across the United States, musical ensembles attend state performance assessments, competitions, and conferences. If an ensemble were to receive a "superior" rating, their director may receive some kind of award or recognition. However, Bucura (2020) established that "competition [is] used for comparability" (p. 4). This implies that performance assessment scores and test grades being shared among classes and administration can encourage "teacher-centric efficiency and measurable productivity" (Bucura, 2020, p. 4). A "teacher-centric" style of education within the choir classroom is often valued because of how visible choral ensembles are to outside audiences such as administration, parents, staff/faculty, and other non-participating students (Bucura, 2020, p. 12). Further, Brinson and Demorest (2014) argued that "a successful choir is the most important and effective aspect of recruitment and retention" (p. 22).

When evaluating the quality of a performance, musicians may be evaluated on a variety of factors. Davidson and Coimbra (2001) concluded that adjudicators perceived expressive singers as more engaging and pleasant to listen to. The adjudicators valued "bodily communication" highly, specifically in relation to facial expression and eye contact with the audience (p. 43). Artistry, defined by Davidson and Coimbra (2001) as "communicating meaning to the audience," was also believed to be valued by the

adjudicators (p. 43). Adjudicators viewed good artistry as an appropriate demonstration of the musicians' understanding of the emotional content in the musical literature (Davidson & Coimbra, 2001, p. 48). Although this study examined college-level music students, being judged on various aspects of a performance is a common occurrence at the secondary levels (i.e., middle schools and high schools).

Performance assessments at the state level are a common requirement in secondary schools; in these assessments, choirs selected pieces from their repertoire list and are assessed by qualified adjudicators based on a pre-determined set of evaluation criteria. High school performance assessment rubrics were retrieved from the following states in the Southern Region of the American Choral Directors Association (American Choral Directors Association [ACDA], 2023): Alabama (Alabama Vocal Association [AVA], n.d.), Florida (Florida Vocal Association [FVA], n.d.), Georgia (A. Hannon, personal communication, December 17, 2023), Kentucky (J. Stroube, personal communication, January 29, 2024), Louisiana (Louisiana Music Educators Association [LMEA], n.d.), Mississippi (Mississippi Music Educators Association [MMEA], n.d.), North Carolina (North Carolina Music Educators Association [NCMEA], December 14, 2023), South Carolina (J. Wall, personal communication, January 9, 2024), Tennessee (Tennessee American Choral Directors Association [TACDA], n.d.) Virginia (Virginia American Choral Directors Association [VACDA], December 2023), and West Virginia (J. Dubbs, personal communication, January 8, 2024). An examination of the aforementioned rubrics revealed some commonly valued performance features between states.

Although each rubric was different, an average of 75.5% of the points awarded were related to the technical aspects of performances (e.g., correct notes and rhythms, accurate intonation, good entrances and releases). In contrast, an average of 24.5% of the points were awarded because of musicality (e.g., appropriate style, dynamics, phrasing, breath placement). This distribution of points demonstrated that technical excellence is highly valued by the individuals who helped create the rubrics. As shown in Table 1, the distribution of points was not consistent between states, as some states put more emphasis on technique and others put more emphasis on musicality. Despite the differences in how each state awarded points to performing ensembles, the criteria for each category remained relatively the same. Some examples of criteria that the PI labeled as technique are balance, breath support, diction, entrances, intonation, note accuracy, releases, rhythmic precision, and tone. Some states divided their rubrics into different sections related to various aspects of the performances. For example, the FVA Choral Performance Rubric (n.d.) separates the graded aspects into three sections: "tone quality," "technical performance," and "musical effect."

Table 1

Distribution of Points Awarded between Two Overarching Categories within Southern ACDA States' High School Performance Assessment Rubrics.

	Technique		Musicality		
State	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Total Points
Alabama	74	84.1	14	15.9	88
Florida	48	61.5	30	38.5	78
Georgia	23	74.2	8	25.8	31
Kentucky	64	80	18	20	80

Louisiana	11	75.6	3	21.4	14
Mississippi	65	65	35	35	100
North Carolina	120	85.7	20	14.3	140
South Carolina	9	60	6	40	15
Tennessee	19	79.2	5	20.8	24
Virginia	100	87	15	13	115
West Virginia	60	60	40	40	100

Beyond standardized assessments through rubrics and judges, musicians themselves are often their harshest critics following their performances. Multiple studies have been done examining the performance habits and thought processes of musicians at differing grade levels (i.e., professional, collegiate, secondary, elementary) (Davidson & Coimbra, 2001; Denton & Chaplin, 2016; Kokotsaki et al., 2001). Denton and Chaplin (2016) found that the most common way student musicians evaluate their own performances was by comparing themselves to self-set standards of excellence. This self-awareness is often implemented in collegiate settings such as private lessons. Implementing a metacognitive approach to instruction can encourage students to take initiative in their education by establishing personal standards and monitoring their progress in achieving them (Donovan et al., 1999).

When students take initiative in their education through social and academic behaviors, they may grow in confidence, motivation, and self-efficacy. Droe (2008) defined social behavior as "student interaction with other students, teachers, and environmental rules" and academic behavior as "student responses with regard to scholastic or music achievement" (p. 268). These definitions were important to consider when examining self-efficacy within musical ensemble settings as academic behavior may overlap with motivation and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura

(1977), is “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes” (p. 193). Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy are willing to put more effort into the tasks at hand. In music, self-efficacy often relates to individual practice habits and any self-imposed expectations. Furthermore, self-efficacy is directly entwined with motivation (Bandura, 1991). Musicians have often developed a drive to produce excellent performances, which may lead to “anxiety around learning and necessary risk-taking” (Bucura, 2020, p. 12). To combat these anxieties around inadequate performances, many musicians practice outside of their designated rehearsal times, as practicing can help develop the techniques required for public performances (McCormick & McPherson, 2003). Bandura (1977) claimed that “performance-based procedures [prove] to be most powerful for effecting psychological changes” (p. 191) and that higher self-motivation creates higher standards for one to hold themselves to (p. 193). These findings imply that performances have the capacity to greatly affect how musicians feel. However, there has been limited research examining how musicians perceive their practice habits, performances, and emotions related performances.

Regarding motivation, people have three classes of motivators: biological, social, and cognitive (Bandura, 1991, pp. 69—71). Biological and social motivators affect behavior in ways that are not intrinsically controlled by musicians. Cognitive motivators, however, involve self-motivation based on self-imposed expectations. Bandura (1991) divides cognitive motivators into three categories: casual attributions (attribution theory), outcome expectancies (expectancy-value theory), and cognized goals (goal theory) (p. 71). In attribution theory, success is seen as a direct outcome of the amount of work put in, and failures are attributed to a lack of effort and sufficient skills. In expectancy-value

theory, as one's beliefs in their ability to achieve a desired outcome through specific behavior increases, their level of motivation to perform the required activities increases. Finally, goal-theory is based on the idea that people are motivated through the desire to challenge themselves. These cognitive motivators, although influenced differently, each directly impact one's motivation to do well.

Participants of musical ensembles, while coming together to achieve the same goals, each approach music with different motivations. Both solo musicians and ensemble musicians must experiment to make decisions about how to interpret their music (Ritchie & Williamon, 2010). Musicians with higher levels of self-efficacy may be more inclined to practice their music outside of rehearsal, leading them to become more proficient, capable, and confident in their musical endeavors (Ritchie & Williamon, 2010); this may lead to a higher quality final performance. Ritchie and Williamon (2010) did not find higher levels of performance-related self-efficacy between conservatoire (i.e., conservatory) students and university students, although the conservatoire students reported higher self-efficacy for musical learning scores. From this, one can infer that many students tend to view performance opportunities similarly, regardless of the level and quality of music education they receive (p. 338). The researchers determined that the conservatoire students had a higher mean score for learning self-efficacy than the students from the university; however, this difference was only present when learning the skills and techniques required for musical proficiency.

Bandura (1984) stated that "How one behaves largely determines the outcome one experiences" (p. 235). This aligns with the necessity for musicians to spend a lot of time on their repertoire, whether that be individually or as an ensemble. For example, a

musician could have a high desire to accomplish a task beyond their present capabilities. However, desire alone does not guarantee success. Musicians must apply their time and effort in a way that increases the skills necessary to complete the task. Musicians with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to practice their repertoire outside of rehearsal hours because their level of self-efficacy directly impacts their willingness and motivation to put effort into achieving success (McCormick & McPherson, 2003, p. 48).

Emotions and Music

As seen in Table 1 (p. 14), the number of points awarded to the musicality of a performance is often significantly lower than the number of points awarded for technique. Of all the states, an average of 53.9 points are awarded to technique and an average of 17.6 points were awarded to musicality. While precision is crucial to the success of a performance, researchers have concluded that musicians value expressivity in their performances. Lindström et al. (2003) reported that music students valued expressivity in their performances because they can convey emotions and experiences. When asked what music can express, 99% of student participants ($N = 135$) listed that music could express emotions (Lindström et al., 2003). Eighty-six percent of participants listed that music could express experiences that could not be described in words (Lindström et al., 2003). Lindström et al. (2003) also determined that when defining "playing expressively," participants were divided into three main groups: "communicating emotions" (44%), "[focusing] on the music itself" (34%), and "playing with feeling" (16%) (pp. 30—31). These three categories were representative of how the participants approached emotion in their music.

Sheet music often has specific markings that encourage emotional interpretations. For example, the tempo markings themselves may state something such as “Driving, with upward momentum” (Narverud, 2018, p. 3). This direction invites a quick and energetic tempo, especially considering the text and its translation: *Ad astra per aspera*, which translates to “through hardships to the stars” (Narverud, 2018). In addition to tempo markings, composers may utilize markings such as *espressivo*, which is “an instruction meaning that a passage should be played with expression, or expressively” (ClassicFM, 2022). Further, beyond what may be notated in the scores, ensembles may stray from what is prescribed by the notation. These slight differences from notation to performance are referred to as performance expression, which is defined as “the small and large variations in timing, dynamics, timbre, and pitch that form the microstructure of a performance and differentiate it from another performance of the same music” (Palmer, 1997, as cited in Juslin, 2000, p. 1797). Some musicians view performance expression as being expressive, and others view expressivity as following the prescribed notation. A musician’s emotions have significant impact on their choice of repertoire, how they interpret their music, and how they choose to perform it (Lindström et al., 2003). These variations in performance expression directly affect the emotional impact left on audiences (Juslin, 2000, p. 1798).

Multiple studies have affirmed that culture has a direct impact on how people experience music and experience emotions in response to music. However, three universal emotions – happiness, sadness, and fear – were observed to be understood across cultural lines (Balkwill & Thompson, 1999; Fritz et al., 2009). The researchers reported that listeners associated specific musical features with specific emotions

(Balkwill & Thompson, 1999; Chapin et al., 2010; Fritz et al., 2009; Gabrielsson & Juslin, 1996; Gabrielsson & Lindström, 2010; Huovinen & Keipi, 2022; Schubert, 2004). Because emotions are commonly communicated through music, music is commonly hailed as a universal phenomenon (Mehr et al., 2019). Despite the differences in music consumption, production, and traditions within and across cultures, there are no known cultures without music (Mehr et al., 2019). Balkwill & Thompson (1999) found that the psychophysical characteristics of music, such as tempo, timbre, melodic contour, pitch range, and rhythmic complexity, convey the desired emotions across cultural lines. Additionally, Schubert (2004) discovered that loudness (dynamics) and tempo directly affected the audience's mental engagement with music, and the melodic contour of a piece may be loosely related to the piece's emotional valence (p. 581).

In addition to musical features impacting the perception of a piece, Sundberg (1982) established that a performer's emotions also directly affected a piece's pitch, speed, and dynamics. He also established that there is a connection between emotions, body movements, and the sound produced by musicians. These connections may impact the quality of the performance and how a musician feels about their performance. Priest (2006) examined the ways student musicians viewed their compositions in comparison to how experts viewed those same compositions. He found that students with higher levels of self-reported creativity were more likely to be expressive when composing music, and they were also more likely to criticize their compositions than students with middle- and low- levels of creativity. While these conclusions may offer insight into how a musician's creativity impacts their compositions, there were no conclusions drawn about how

compositions and creativity levels impacted the musicians' emotions or how they held themselves to self-set standards of excellence.

Measuring a musician's emotions during a performance can be challenging because they would have to divide their attention between the performance and reporting on their emotions. Dividing attention in this way may distract from the emotional responses being recorded or the performance they are experiencing (Neale & Liebert, 1986, as cited in Chapin et al., 2010, p. 1). Additionally, limited studies have examined what techniques and skills musicians utilize to communicate emotions when performing (Juslin, 1997; Juslin, 2000). Juslin (2000) determined that musicians were successful at communicating the desired emotions to their audiences. However, each musician and listener experiences music and the subsequent emotions differently because of their individual experiences. The variability of performance expression and the subsequential emotional effect on listeners is part of what makes live music performance so engaging (Juslin, 2003, p. 274). Juslin (2003) suggested that performances are composed of five primary characteristics:

> (a) Generative rules that function to clarify the musical structure; (b) Emotional expression that serves to convey intended emotions to listeners; (c) Random variations that reflect human limitations with regard to internal time-keeper variance and motor delays; (d) Motion principles that prescribe that some aspects of the performance (e.g. timing) should be shaped in accordance with patterns of biological motion; and (e) Stylistic unexpectedness that involves local deviations from performance conventions. (p. 273)

Juslin (2003) also claimed that music performances can be emotionally engaging because of the similarity to everyday emotions (p. 294). In relation to these findings, Schubert (2004) based his study on the assumption that there was a relationship between musical features and the emotional responses they procure (p. 562). For example, an angry person tends to speak loudly, quickly, and intensely. An angry song may be performed similarly: loudly, quickly, and intensely. Further, Holmes (2011) concluded that a musician's timbre is instrumental in the communication of musical structure, ideas, emotions, and personality, both in speech and music. Holmes clearly stated that "Tone [color] is at the heart of expressive musical performance, [and] it remains less researched than other performance parameters" (p. 302).

There has been a plethora of research completed regarding about audience perception of performances (Chapin et al., 2010; Davidson & Coimbra, 2001; Nápoles et al., 2022; Panksepp, 1995), but little research has been done about the musicians' perceptions and responses. Juslin (2005, as cited in Holmes, 2011) established that the emotional responses induced by music are significantly more difficult to measure than the perceptions of these emotions. Holmes (2011) advised that further research into emotions and how to express emotions through sound could provide insight into how to improve sound quality in ensembles. Improving sound quality in ensembles and their performances could have many benefits; as Brinson and Demorest (2014) stated, "a successful choir is the most important aspect of recruitment and retention" (p. 22). In other words, musicians want to be a part of successful ensembles, and they work with conductors to produce a successful performance. However, limited research has been conducted on how musicians view their successes and the related emotions.

Repertoire Preference

Beyond the emotional impact of a musical composition itself, scholars agreed that repertoire preference also played a role in how musicians perceive their music. Droe (2008) examined the effect of teacher approval and disapproval of selected repertoire in middle school band settings. He discovered that a teacher's approval of repertoire had a positive effect on student perceptions of the music. Additionally, Droe's examination of existing literature discovered that there may be a connection between music preference and peer conformity (p. 268). Similarly, Swaminathan and Schellenberg (2015) found that when people listen to music with a close friend, they were more likely to experience more intense and positive emotional responses to said music (p. 161).

In addition to teacher and peer effect on musical preferences, research has suggested that there is a strong connection between exposure to a piece and preference for the piece (Bradley, 1971; Heyduk, 1975). Heyduk (1975) established that there may be a correlation between a musician's preferred difficulty level and their preference for a piece. For example, if a musician enjoyed being musically challenged, they would be more likely to prefer a difficult piece. Furthermore, Bradley (1971) discovered that an increased exposure typically leads to familiarity and increased comfort with the repertoire, which may increase the musician's preference for a particular piece. Increased familiarity and comfort with repertoire can sometimes lead to increased enjoyment as musicians transition from learning the music to refining and performing. Heyduk's (1975) and Bradley's (1971) findings work in tandem; as musicians continue to work on difficult repertoire, they become more comfortable with and capable of performing the piece. If a musician already enjoyed being musically challenged, they would be more

likely to enjoy the selected piece from the beginning. However, if a musician did not enjoy a musical challenge, as they become more familiar with the piece, their comfort and enjoyment levels would be more likely to increase.

On a biological level, Lim and Park (2019) determined that when people enjoyed a musical activity they are participating in, the level of arousal their brain experienced increased (p. 548). An increase in arousal increased the amount a person enjoyed and engaged in a musical experience (Lim & Park, 2019, p. 548). This increased level of engagement and enjoyment often resulted in an increased level of memory recall (Lim & Park, 2019, p. 548). This correlation helped to explain why people can often describe things they enjoyed more clearly than things they did not enjoy.

Summary

Thorough examination of the literature revealed a lack of research on the perspectives of musicians, specifically choral ensemble participants. As stated by Neale and Liebert (1986, as cited in Chapin et al., 2010), measuring the musician's thoughts and emotions during a performance can be challenging because reporting data may distract them from focusing on the performance itself. This reasoning offered a clear explanation of why much of music education research has focused on conductors and audiences instead of performers. When researching musicians, some common research topics include the examination of self-efficacy and motivation (Bandura, 1977, 1984, 1991; McCormick & McPherson, 2003; Ritchie & Williamon, 2010). Scholars agreed that musicians with higher levels of self-efficacy and motivation are more likely to work hard, persevere through learning challenging repertoire, and develop practice habits outside of their designated rehearsal times. Other scholars have examined audience and/or

adjudicator perceptions of performances (Chapin et al., 2010; Davidson & Coimbra, 2001; Nápoles et al., 2022; Panksepp, 1995). Researchers established that audiences and/or adjudicators prefer performances where the musician is expressive. Further, a significant body of research exists regarding how various musical features are used to impact the emotions expressed through music (Gabrielsson & Juslin, 1996; Gabrielsson & Lindström, 2010; Juslin, 2003; Schubert, 2004; Sundberg, 1983; Swaminathan & Schellenberg, 2015). More specifically, there has been some investigation into how different emotions may be conveyed to audiences through music across cultural lines (Balkwill & Thompson, 1999; Fritz et al., 2009). These scholars agreed that musicians value expressivity within their performances, and there are multiple different ways to convey emotions to audiences (e.g., tempo, dynamics, style, text), regardless of any existing language barrier.

Despite the abundance of research on how people are motivated and emotionally impacted by music, limited research has been done exploring the musician's perspective. Some scholars have examined how musicians develop preferences for specific pieces (Bradley, 1971; Droe, 2008; Heyduk, 1975; Lim & Park, 2019; Swaminathan & Schellenberg, 2015; Zajonc, 1980). However, there was a limited examination of the emotional impact on musicians. Some scholars have examined how musicians have adjusted their performances to imply specific emotions (Holmes, 2011; Huovinen & Keipi, 2022; Juslin, 1997, 2000). However, because of the challenging nature of getting accurate and in-time results on the musician's perspectives, a common solution has been to examine how musicians evaluate their performances once they are complete (Denton & Chaplin, 2016; Kokotsaki et al., 2001; Lindström et al., 2003; Priest, 2006). With

technological advancements, some scholars have begun using dials to gather quantitative and in-time results on audience engagement with performances (C. McKenzie, personal communication, October 8, 2021). However, as previously stated, instructing musicians to divide their attention between reporting their emotions and their performance could be distracting and diminishing to the validity of the results (Neale & Liebert, 1986, as cited in Chapin et al., 2010, p. 1).

Although many scholars have examined the aforementioned topics, no research has been found on examining the links between performances, standards of excellence, and repertoire preference. A detailed analysis of these connections may provide the information needed for musicians to develop deeper understandings of their personal values and expectations.

CHAPTER III METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine how collegiate choral ensemble participants view their past performances; further this study explored the different characteristics the participants considered important to their choral experiences. Research questions were as follows:

1. What factors contribute to an excellent performance?
2. What factors contribute to making a performance a favorite?
3. How do musicians differentiate between favorite and excellent?

Participants

The participants ($N = 38$) for this study were students enrolled in a USM choral ensemble for the Fall 2022 semester. This research was limited to the Hattiesburg campus as there are no student choral ensembles on the Gulf Park campus. Undergraduate students and graduate students were invited to participate, and students were not required to major in music to participate. Every participant in the study was eighteen years or older at the time of completion, and they could participate even if this was their first semester in a collegiate choral ensemble. One-hundred-ninety questionnaires were printed and distributed to the following choral ensembles: Concert Choir, The Southern Chorale, Tenebrae, and University Treble Chorus (UTC). These ensembles were selected because they have the highest number of participants.

Participant Sample Demographics

A total of 41 participants completed the consent form, demographics, and questionnaire. Of the 41 participants, three questionnaires were omitted due to incorrect completion (e.g., referencing high school performances instead of collegiate

performances). Their reported demographics were not included in the analysis of the participant population's demographics. Collected demographics included classification, gender, race and ethnicity, and years of musical experience. These demographics were collected to see how diverse the participant population was.

As reported in Table 2, 21.1% of the participants were freshmen, 26.3% were sophomores, 18.4% were juniors, 13.2% were seniors, 5.3% were fifth year seniors, 7.9% were master's students, and 7.9% were doctoral students.

Table 2

Participant Classification.

Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Freshman	8	21.1
Sophomore	10	26.3
Junior	7	18.4
Senior	5	13.2
5th Year Senior	2	5.3
Master's Student	3	7.9
Doctoral Student	3	7.9
Total	38	100

As indicated by Table 3, 52.6% of the participants self-identified as male and 47.4% self-identified as female. No participants selected the non-binary or prefer not to say options.

Table 3

Participants' Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	20	52.6
Female	18	47.4
Non-Binary	-	-
Prefer Not to Say	-	-
Total	38	100

Table 4 documents participants' race and ethnicity. Of the 38 participants, 60.5% participants identified as White, 21.1% identified as Black, 7.9% identified as Hispanic or Latino, 5.3% identified as Biracial, 2.6% identified as Multiracial, and 2.6% elected not to disclose their race or ethnicity.

Table 4

Participants' Race and Ethnicity

Race and Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
White	23	60.5
Black	8	21.1
Hispanic or Latino	3	7.9
Biracial	2	5.3
Multiracial	1	2.6
Prefer Not to Say	1	2.6
Total	38	100

As seen in Table 5, 10.5% of participants had zero to three years of musical experience, 26.3% had four to seven years of musical experience, 44.7% had eight to 11 years of musical experience, and 18.4% of participants had 12 or more years of musical experience at the time of completion.

Table 5

Participants' Years of Musical Experience

Years of Musical Experience	Frequency	Percentage
0—3 years	4	10.5
4—7 years	10	26.3
8—11 years	17	44.7
12+ years	7	18.4
Total	38	100

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through an anonymous questionnaire (see Appendix B) conducted at The University of Southern Mississippi (USM). Questionnaires were distributed during an evening choir rehearsal where all participants were present. The questionnaire was comprised of a demographics section (see Appendix C) and a selection of open-ended questions. There was one page of prompts and questions for each research question.

Participants were instructed to not write their name on the questionnaire, although they were required to print and sign their names on the consent form. Upon collection of the completed questionnaires, the signed consent forms were separated from the demographics and the questionnaire. These measures were taken to protect the participants' privacy as choral music has the potential to evoke a myriad of emotions. Participants may have felt emotionally overwhelmed or uncomfortable when recalling the emotions felt before, during, and after those performances, depending on their emotional connection to the performances discussed.

An announcement (see Appendix E) was made during the scheduled evening rehearsal on November 7th, 2022. This date was selected because each ensemble had had at least one performance opportunity before this date during the semester. The PI and faculty advisor made a total of six announcements to the survey population. Consent was obtained by means of participants agreeing to complete and turn in the questionnaire within the calendar week. The first two pages of the questionnaire were an overview of the research topic and include the same statement about their participation and consent in the study. A total of 41 students submitted a completed consent form, demographics, and

questionnaire. The questionnaires were arranged by grade classification and numbered from one to 41. Arranging the questionnaires by classification and numbering them was done to simplify the demographic analysis. As previously stated, three questionnaires were omitted due to incorrect completion of the questionnaire. The remaining 38 were analyzed.

Data Analysis

The physical copies of the completed questionnaires were stored in an expanding file folder that only the PI had access to. The file folder was kept in the PI's residence and only taken out when responses were typed. MAXQDA 2022 (VERBI Software, 2021) was used for digital data storage and analysis. The software was on the PI's password-protected laptop and required a separate password to log in and access the data. Each student response was typed into a separate document and imported into the software. From there, the PI used Saldaña's (2016) method of In-Vivo Coding with an Affective approach. This approach was selected because the PI could extract specific words and phrases used by participants and organize those into the overarching categories that emerged with multiple coding cycles. Additionally, In-Vivo Coding decreased the likelihood of deviation from the participants' intended meaning.

After the PI initially read all questionnaires, responses were assigned specific codes based on the words and phrases used by participants. Following multiple repetitions of this process, categories began to emerge that were representative of participants' personal standards and emotions. The coding system was then exported into a Microsoft Word document where each code was manually counted and sorted by the PI. The data were then uploaded into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet where the frequencies of

each code were calculated. When calculating code frequencies, the responses for each section of the questionnaire (excellent, favorite, and comparison) were separated accordingly.

CHAPTER IV RESULTS

Primary Categories

Multiple rounds of Saldaña's In-Vivo Coding with an Affective Method approach revealed the following primary categories for the responses to the questions regarding excellence and repertoire preference: musicality, audience, preparation, relationships, neutral personal state, positive personal state, negative personal state, and event. Each of these primary categories had multiple subcategories (e.g., text, family, friends, ensemble peers). The responses for the comparison questions are grouped into nine primary categories: musical, audience, preparation, relationships, neutral personal state, positive personal state, negative personal state, location, and same performance. Of the participants ($N = 38$), six reported that their most excellent performance was the same as their favorite.

Table 6

Frequencies of Codes Occurring Within the Designated Primary Categories

					Comparison Responses ($N = 118$)			
	Excellent ($N = 228$)		Favorite ($N = 256$)		Different ($N = 61$)		Same ($N = 57$)	
Primary Category	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Musical	76	33.3	73	28.5	22	36.1	24	42.1
Audience	19	8.3	16	6.3	4	6.6	3	5.3
Preparation	45	19.7	38	14.8	8	13.1	7	12.3
Relationships	40	17.5	47	18.4	6	9.8	7	12.3
Neutral Personal State	6	2.6	6	2.3	2	3.3	2	3.5
Positive Personal State	33	14.5	56	21.9	6	9.8	6	10.5
Negative Personal State	9	4.0	7	2.7	-	-	1	1.8
Event	-	-	13	5.1	-	-	-	-
Location	-	-	-	-	7	11.5	1	1.8
Same Performance	-	-	-	-	6	9.8	6	10.5

Subcategories

Because of the broad questions asked in the questionnaire, a variety of topics were mentioned in the responses. Each response was organized by question category (i.e., excellent, favorite, comparison) then meticulously examined and sorted into one of the primary categories discussed above. Multiple codes were sometimes assigned to a single response to ensure the data were an accurate representation of participant values. There were subcategories within most of the primary categories, and the examination of these subcategories was instrumental to glean an accurate understanding of the values held by participants.

Musical

One-hundred-ninety-five (32.4%) of the 602 codes assigned for all responses were assigned to the musical category. These codes were then individually assigned to one of the subcategories that emerged under this specific category. The responses to the questions regarding excellence were sorted into the following subcategories: success (n = 34), text (n = 25), performed (n = 7), composition (n = 5), opportunity for improvement (n = 4), and encore (n = 1). Of the responses to questions regarding the participant's favorite performance, the following subcategories emerged: composition (n = 18), musically challenging (n = 12), text (n = 12), emotions evoked by music (n = 11), success (n = 11), performed (n = 3), thinking about the music (n = 3), and location (n = 3). The responses to the comparison questions were divided by question. When asked what was different between excellent performances and favorite performances, participant responses were categorized as follows: emotions evoked by the music (n = 6), piece was different (n = 5), style (n = 5), musically challenging (n = 3), text (n = 2), and voice part

in the piece (n = 1). Participant answers to questions asking what was the same between the two performances yielded the following subcategories: personal views of the piece (n = 8), composition (n = 5), musical precision (n = 4), style (n = 3), text (n = 3), and musically challenging (n = 1).

Audience

Forty-two (7.0%) of the 602 codes for all responses were assigned to the audience category. These codes were each assigned to subcategories as appropriate. The responses to the questions regarding excellence were sorted into two subcategories: applause (n = 18) and compliments (n = 1). Responses related to favorite performances yielded subcategories of audience response (n = 11), audience influence on performer (n = 4), and no audience (n = 1). Descriptions of the differences between the excellent performance and the favorite performance revealed that the only difference was audience attendance, with subcategories being no audience (n = 2) and in-person audience (n = 2). There were limited participant responses (n = 3) to questions inquiring about what was the same between the two performances. One participant said they immersed the audience with music in both performances, another participant said they got good audience reactions with both performances, and the final participant said the audience perceived the music the same way.

Preparation

Ninety-eight (16.3%) of the 602 codes were assigned to the preparation category. Participants reported practicing with their ensemble (n = 20), a lot of individual practice (n = 14), preparing (n = 10), and little individual practice (n = 1) for their excellent performances. Responses to questions regarding the participants' favorite performance

were sorted into the following subcategories: rehearsal in class (*n* = 28), individual practice outside of class (*n* = 8), and no preparation outside of class (*n* = 2). When discussing what was different between the excellent performance and the favorite performance, participants mentioned a different type of preparation (*n* = 5) and different level of preparation (*n* = 3). The responses to questions inquiring about the similarities of the two performances yielded the following subcategories: same level of preparation (*n* = 3), and same rehearsal process (*n* = 3), and same feeling of unpreparedness (*n* = 1).

Relationships

One hundred (16.6%) of the 602 codes were assigned to the relationships category. These codes were each assigned to subcategories. Participant responses to questions about excellent performances were sorted into the following subcategories: ensemble peers (*n* = 19), director (*n* = 10), loved ones (*n* = 6), food (*n* = 4), and religion (*n* = 1). Of the responses to questions regarding favorite performances, participant responses were sorted accordingly: ensemble peers (*n* = 22), director (*n* = 13), loved ones (*n* = 6), and people in the audience (*n* = 6). The subcategory of "people in the audience" was separated from the primary category of "audience" because these comments were made regarding the people the participants knew in the audience – not the audience response or audience as an entity. Responses to questions asking about what was different between the excellent performance and the favorite performance yielded two subcategories: ensemble peers (*n* = 5) and director (*n* = 1). The responses to questions asking about what was the same between the two performances were categorized as ensemble peers (*n* = 4), being a part of the greater picture (*n* = 2), and director (*n* = 1).

Neutral Personal State

Sixteen (2.7%) of the 602 codes were assigned to the neutral personal state category. In response to questions regarding an excellent performance, participants reported experiencing chills (*n* = 2), having an adrenaline rush (*n* = 1), going home after the performance (*n* = 1), becoming a different character (*n* = 1), and feeling like the performance was a "full circle moment" (*n* = 1). When referencing their favorite performances, some participants reported chills (*n* = 2), taking deep breaths (*n* = 2), praying (*n* = 1), and taking a break (*n* = 1). In response to questions about the differences of the two performances, once participant reported that the energy was different, and another said they felt more human. In response to the question inquiring about the similarities of the two performances, one participant claimed they were motivated to excellence, and another said the performance was a reflection of their younger self.

Positive Personal State

One-hundred-one (16.8%) of the 602 codes were sorted into the positive personal state category. Among the responses to questions regarding excellence, the following subcategories emerged: confidence (*n* = 9), fun (*n* = 8), happy (*n* = 4), feeling of accomplishment (*n* = 3), felt good about performance (*n* = 2), felt relief (*n* = 2), progress in mental wellbeing (*n* = 2), excited (*n* = 1), lucky to be there (*n* = 1) and passionate (*n* = 1). For their favorite performances, participants reported having fun (*n* = 16), being happy (*n* = 16), feeling nostalgic (*n* = 7), feelings proud (*n* = 4), being passionate (*n* = 3), feeling relaxed/low stress (*n* = 3), being grateful for the opportunity (*n* = 2), feeling relief (*n* = 2), feeling good about the performance (*n* = 1), feeling fulfilled (*n* = 1), and that they thought they looked cool (*n* = 1). The responses to questions asking about what was different between the excellent performance and the favorite performance had limited

responses with participants having reported that their confidence level increased for their favorite (n = 3), and their stress level decreased for their favorite (n = 3). Participants noted the following similarities between the two performances: feeling of achievement (n = 3), relaxed in both (n = 1), same confidence and professionalism (n = 1), and that they loved performing (n = 1).

Negative Personal State

Seventeen (2.8%) of the 602 codes were sorted into the negative personal state category. Participants reported feeling nervous (n = 4), stressed (n = 4), and crying (n = 1) for their excellent performances. Additionally, participants reported crying (n = 3), feeling stressed (n = 2), not wanting to be there (n = 1), and that their performance location was hot (n = 1) for their favorite performance. Of the responses about the differences between performances, no data emerged that fell into this primary category. However, one participant did report that they felt nervous for both performances.

Event, Location, and Same Performance

Thirteen (2.2%) of the 602 codes were sorted into the event category. All the codes in this category were codes from the responses to the questions about favorite performances. After their favorite performances, participants reported going home (n = 5), celebrating (n = 3), spending time with peers (n = 3), hugging someone (n = 1), and sharing their performance with someone (n = 1). There were no responses related to this category in the responses to the other questions.

Eight (1.3%) of 602 codes were sorted into the location primary category. Six participants reported that the performance venue was different between the performances. One participant reported that the time of year was different. When referencing what was

the same between the two performances, one participant reported that both performances were out of state.

Twelve (2.0%) of the 602 codes were sorted into the same performance primary category. Seven participants said their excellent performance and favorite performance were the same. Five of the seven participants listed this in their responses to both questions, accounting for ten of the codes. Two of the seven participants only said this in one of the two questions.

CHAPTER V DISCUSSION

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the various characteristics of performances that are valued by collegiate choral musicians. Responses to the prompts about excellent performances indicated that participants considered their excellent performance to be more technically precise. For example, participants may have considered technical precision to be correct notes and rhythms. An analysis of the responses also revealed that more participants reported a connection to the text for their excellent performances than for their favorite performances. However, participants reported liking the composition more for their favorite performance than for their excellent performance. Additionally, more participants referenced being musically challenged for their favorite piece, whereas that was not commonly referenced for the excellent performances; this finding aligned with Heyduk's (1975) conclusion that there is a correlation between a composition's difficulty level and a musician's preference.

References to personal relationships were common for both performances, with ensemble peers being referenced most often with 50% of relationship responses, followed by the director, loved ones, people in the audience, food, and finally, religion. The finding that personal relationships with the director is supported by Droe's (2008) conclusion that ensemble directors have significant impact on repertoire preference. However, participants in the present study did not mention whether their director(s) expressed divisive opinions on the repertoire. Any mentions of ensemble directors were related to either the director's expertise or a personal relationship with the director. However, results were consistent with Swaminathan and Schellenberg's (2015) findings

that people are more likely to enjoy and remember a musical experience they had with a friend. Many participants referenced being friends with their ensemble peers, spending time with them before or after the performance, and celebrating the performance with their ensemble peers.

Participants reported rehearsing outside of class more for their excellent performances than for their favorite performances. While Bradley (1971) established that increased exposure to a piece of music can lead to musicians developing a preference for the piece, fewer participants in the current study referenced practicing their favorite piece outside of class in comparison to their excellent piece. However, participants did mention in-class rehearsals more often for their favorite piece than their excellent piece.

Conclusions cannot be drawn about how the amount of exposure to a piece influenced the opinions of the participants because there is no way to gather quantitative data on how much rehearsal time was spent on each piece, both in and out of class. Additionally, there was not enough data to draw conclusions about how the director's opinions influenced participants' opinions on the repertoire. When discussing their emotions about the music, participants mentioned having fun and being happy more often for their favorite performance than for their excellent performance. This finding aligns with Lim and Park's (2019) report that enjoying and engaging in a performance can lead to an increase in brain activity, which often may lead to an increase in memory recall.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study was conducted at The University of Southern Mississippi, at which the PI is a student. The PI maintains a close relationship with many of the students who participated in this study. As such, there is a possibility that participants of the study,

either consciously or subconsciously, adjusted their responses due to response self-selection bias. There is also the possibility that participants of the study wrote their responses based on what they believed the PI wanted to hear. However, as the signed consent forms were separated from the completed questionnaire, attempting to identify which participant filled out which questionnaire would be difficult. Because of this, the PI could not identify which questionnaires may be biased or inaccurate. An additional limitation is that the PI cannot generate a response rate for this study. Due to the choral department's participation in a large holiday concert, receiving responses was challenging. One-hundred-ninety questionnaires were printed, but there is no record of how many students took and completed the questionnaire. Additionally, some students may have taken a questionnaire and not returned it completed.

Scholars interested in the same topic might consider either an online or in-person interview format. An online format would allow for a more straightforward data collection process, whereas an in-person format would provide the opportunity to ask clarifying questions of the interviewee(s). Furthermore, the PI recommends that future studies use questions with a high degree of specificity. The broad nature of the questions asked resulted in responses with varying levels of elaboration and relevance. Future research may also consider a Likert scale (Clark & Watson, 2019, p. 1416). A Likert scale, as described by Clark and Watson (2019), would help for one to quantify the data and could potentially reduce any confusion related to the prompts.

Finally, examining the repertoire listed by participants may prove to be beneficial. A closer analysis of musical features such as genre, tempo, key signature, and text may provide deeper insight into what musicians enjoy performing. On a small scale, having

knowledge of a musician's repertoire preference could influence repertoire selection for upcoming performances. A possible way to approach this would be to interview musicians and ask questions regarding a recent performance. However, not everyone who participated in this study is getting a degree in music. This variable may want to be considered in future research. The present study encouraged participants of various majors and degree levels to participate, although the participants' majors were not documented in an effort to preserve privacy. Future researchers may also consider examining how music majors view their performances compared to non-music majors to see if there is any overlap in standards of excellence.

Implications

By analyzing the characteristics of excellent performances as described by participants, a choral director may ascertain how their students view excellent and high-quality performances. Furthermore, collaboration between director and musicians during the repertoire selection and standard-setting process may encourage more ensemble cohesion when working towards higher goals. Understanding how musicians evaluate their past rehearsals and performances provides insight into what is important to them as individuals and as musicians. Based on findings in the present study that suggest that musicians value technical precision, a connection with the text, and a relationship with their peers, choral directors might consider finding ways to build confidence within their choir and encourage participants to engage emotionally with the music, text, and peers. Encouraging such behavior may improve both the performance and the experience for participants, director(s), and audiences alike.

Conclusion

The way musicians view their performances is personal and complex; overall, many participants reported valuing technical precision, a personal relationship with the music, a personal relationship with their director, and a personal relationship with their ensemble peers. Singing choral music can be emotionally vulnerable; there are no instruments to hide behind, and, regardless of the language, the text being sung often has deep, emotional undertones. Some common themes of choral repertoire parallel common themes of human nature: love, loss, joy, and grief. Exploring these themes through music often provides an outlet for musicians to experience these emotions in a less isolating way. Ensembles provide their members with a support group of people who share common goals: singing with precision, singing with friends, and singing from the heart.

APPENDIX A IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office *of*
Research Integrity

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident submission on InfoEd IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER:	22-1049
PROJECT TITLE:	Perceptions of Excellence Within Collegiate Choral Ensembles
SCHOOL/PROGRAM	Music
RESEARCHERS:	PI: Kaelyn Hunter Investigators: Hunter, Kaelyn~Cicco, Ian~Kilgore, Jonathan~
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION:	Approved
CATEGORY:	Expedited Category
PERIOD OF APPROVAL:	12-Oct-2022 to 11-Oct-2023

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

APPENDIX B INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Participating students were provided the following consent form to provide them information about this study, in addition to the information that was provided during the announcement made (see Appendix E).

Today's date:		
PROJECT INFORMATION		
Project Title: Perceptions of Excellence Within Collegiate Choral Ensembles		
Principal Investigator: Kaelyn Hunter	Phone: 205.657.9827	Email: kaelyn.hunter@usm.edu
College: Arts and Sciences	School and Program: Music Education	IRB Protocol Number: 22-1049

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

1. Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to determine how college students apply their idea of "excellence" to their choral performances. By gaining a deeper understanding of what students view as "excellent," choir directors may better understand the standards their students set for themselves and their peers, both individually and as a collective. Furthermore, this study will examine the different characteristics that make a performance a "favorite" of individual students. This aspect of the study will aid in establishing some of the common values expressed by performers. These values may overlap with the standards of excellence self-imposed by the students.

If a choir director elects to utilize this data and discuss values and standards with their students, the quality of performances may increase once an understanding is reached by both director and students. This implementation may also lead to individual students achieving a greater sense of accomplishment after performances.

2. Description of Study:

Study participants will answer a series of short-answer questions about one "excellent" performance and one "favorite" performance of theirs. They will be prompted to write about why they selected that performance and what happened before, during, and after each performance. Participants will then be asked to compare the two performances.

This data will be used to analyze common trends in standards and values for the average college choral ensemble participant. All participants and researchers will remain anonymous to protect the privacy of both parties.

3. Benefits:

If choral ensemble directors elect to discuss standards and values with the ensemble members, the quality of performances may increase. Furthermore, individual students may experience a greater sense of accomplishment after an “excellent” performance. Additionally, if students are asked to think about what each song means to them, they may be able to put more emotion and meaning behind their work. This may lead to more meaningful performances for the ensemble members, directors, and audience.

4. Risks:

There is minimal risk for participating in this study. Participants will be asked to think about how a performance made them feel and what they were thinking about; if this information is related to a sensitive subject for the individual, they may be uncomfortable.

5. Confidentiality:

There will be a demographics portion of this survey consisting of classification, gender, and race/ethnicity. Participating students will only disclose their name on the consent form. Only the Primary Investigator for this study will see consent form, the demographics page, and the written responses for each questionnaire. At the conclusion of this study, all submitted consent forms and questionnaires will be shredded, further protecting the privacy of the participants.

6. Alternative Procedures:

There are no alternative procedures for this study.

7. Participant’s Assurance:

This project and this consent form have been reviewed by USM’s Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5125, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, 601-226-5997.

Any questions about this research project should be directed to the Principal Investigator using the contact information provided above.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Participant’s Name: _____

I hereby consent to participate in this research project. All research procedures and their purpose were explained to me, and I had the opportunity to ask questions about both the procedures and their purpose. I received information about all expected benefits, risks, inconveniences, or discomforts, and I had the opportunity to ask questions about them. I understand my participation in the project is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the project at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. I understand the extent to which my personal information will be kept confidential. As the research proceeds, I understand that any new information that emerges and that might be relevant to my willingness to continue my participation will be provided to me.

Research Participant: **Date:**

_____ _____

Person Explaining the Study: **Date:**

_____ _____

APPENDIX C DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

Participants were provided the following demographic questionnaire to provide information about the population completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire asked for grade classification, gender, race and ethnicity, and years of musical experience.

Demographics

1. **Classification**
   - Freshman
   - Sophomore
   - Junior
   - Senior
   - Fifth-Year Senior
   - Master's Student
   - Doctoral Student

2. **Gender**
   - Male
   - Female
   - Non-Binary
   - Prefer not to say
   - Other: _____

3. **Race and Ethnicity**
   - American Indian or Alaska Native
   - Asian
   - Black or African American
   - Hispanic or Latino
   - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   - White
   - Prefer not to say
   - Other: _____

4. **Years of Experience**
   - 0-3 years
   - 4-7 years
   - 8-11 years
   - 12 or more years

APPENDIX D QUESTIONNAIRE

Participants were provided the following prompts and their corresponding questions. The questions were open-ended, and there were no specific requirements for how long or short their responses needed to be, though participants were encouraged to be as detailed as possible.

1. **Excellence**

   Recall the highest quality collegiate choral ensemble performance you have been a part of. While answering the questions below, please consider the provided definition of the word "excellent." (NOTE: This performance may not be the same as your favorite performance).

   Excellent: (adjective) high quality; perfect or close to perfection; little to no mistakes

   a. What song was it? Who was the composer/arranger?
   b. Describe why this performance was excellent in your eyes.
   c. What happened before the performance? What did you do to prepare?
   d. What happened during the performance? What were you thinking about?
   e. What happened after the performance?

2. **Favorite**

   Recall the one collegiate choral ensemble performance you consider to be your favorite. While answering the questions below, please consider the provided definition of the word "favorite." (NOTE: This may not be the same as your most excellent performance.)

   Favorite: (noun) something that is favored over others; loved; regarded with special liking

   a. What song was it? Who was the composer/arranger?
   b. Describe why this performance was your favorite.
   c. Why has this performance stuck with you?
   d. What happened before this performance? What did you do to prepare?

e. What were you thinking about during this performance?

f. What happened after the performance?

3. **Compare the two performances.**

    a. What is the same?

    b. What is different?

APPENDIX E THESIS ANNOUNCEMENT SCRIPT

This script was read during a rehearsal on the evening of November 7th, 2022, to the members of Concert Choir, Southern Chorale, Tenebrae, and UTC.

Hello everyone! If you don't already know me, my name is Kaelyn Hunter, and I am a junior choral music education major here at USM. I am also in the Honors College, and I am currently working on my honors undergraduate thesis. This study has been approved by USM's IRB board, which is the Institutional Review Board. My protocol number is 22-1049. If you are a part of University Treble Chorus, Tenebrae, Concert Choir, or Southern Chorale, I would like to invite you to participate in my thesis survey! The only requirement for this survey is that you are in one of the four ensembles I just mentioned and that you are over eighteen.

This survey is a close examination of how collegiate students enrolled in choral ensembles apply their personal ideas of excellence and favoritism to the songs they perform in ensembles. If you choose to participate in the survey, you will be asked to complete a series of short answer questions about your favorite collegiate choral performance and your most excellent collegiate choral performance. The answers you provide will be used to analyze common trends in standards and values for the average collegiate choral ensemble participant.

You will be asked to sign a consent form, but once everything is collected, that consent form will be separated from the survey itself. This consent form will be stored separately from your answers. I, as the primary investigator, will be the only person to see your responses. Additionally, once I separate your signed consent form from your

answers, your name will no longer be attached to whatever you write for your answers. Because of this, you are encouraged to answer truthfully and to be vulnerable as you feel comfortable. Please be honest and detailed in your answers. At the conclusion of this study, all digital data will be deleted, and all paper copies of your responses will be shredded. If you have any questions or concerns about this, my email and phone number are on the consent form!

If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to reach out! There is a more detailed description of the study on the consent form, including the IRB protocol number and my contact information. Any completed surveys need to be turned into the Choral Office (PAC 105) by 5:00pm on November 14th, 2022. I will collect all completed surveys at this time! Thank you all for your time, and I look forward to reading your responses.

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