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*Fishbein: On behalf of the MD/DC ACDA board, I can say that we are all looking forward to learn from your unique expertise as a composer, choral conductor, and music educator. Can you give us an idea of what attendees can expect to take away from your workshop on Comprehensive Choral Musicianship?*

Conte: I fell in love with choral music at the age of six, through attending rehearsals of the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus under Robert Shaw, where my mother was a singer. Also, I grew up in what I like to call “The Golden Age of Public School Music Education,” in the late 60s and early 70s. My high school choir in Lakewood, Ohio was the best choir I was ever in. I’ve been lucky to work consistently in three areas that I hope have all informed each other: as a composer of choral music, a choral conductor, and a long-time teacher of Musicianship. I have developed a number of choral warm-ups that incorporate Moveable Do Solfege, which can be thought of as “the singer’s fingering.” Of course, singers have no key or fret; they have to rely on a method that allows them to hear the note in their head before they sing it, and I have long experience in exactly how this skill is developed. I think many choral conductors are understandably flummoxed about how to apply Solfege in a rehearsal situation because this is built upon being able to analyze music with thoroughness and clarity, and this has become a somewhat confused situation, beginning in the early 20th century with the abandonment of key signatures, and the influence of modes of all kinds that came into music mostly through the adventures of Debussy, and others. In addition to sharing some warm-ups, I hope to share a simple and comprehensive system of analysis that allows a conductor to “crack the code” of the musical grammar of any piece of choral music.

*Fishbein: As a composer, you have worked with many talented choral conductors around the world. What attributes do you think make a choral conductor truly exceptional? And, what would be your advice to aspiring choral conductors?*

Conte: I love the adage: “...the score in your head; not your head in the score.” This brings up what musicianship skills a conductor needs in order to learn a score. A foundation in both piano and singing is crucial. Conducting seems to me to be a matter of expressing character through body language, informed by a complete knowledge of the score. There is also the wonderfully mysterious matter of understanding the psychology of the choral singer, which is largely the province of amateurs. A good choral conductor also has to know how to best teach the singers’ music, being alert to special challenges and problems. Most important is keeping all the singers’ minds and ears alert during the rehearsal, which involves certain rehearsal techniques which I hope to share.

*Fishbein: Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. We look forward to learning from you on Sept. 12.*