

Leading a Choral Rehearsal
July 2022 | Ann Arbor, Michigan
Tuesday, July 19, 2-5:30pm ET

Instructor | Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout
glen.thomas.rideout@gmail.com

Course Description

The aim of this course is to study group singing leadership. To help organize our survey of the wide topic, I have divided our work in three:

1. **We'll engage foundational concepts** of choral music making. This will include some basic coverage of how the human body sings. We'll also use this space to think about the status quo of UU choral music: what's working and not, what are the shortcomings, how to nurture the growing edges. Other topics to visit: Organizing to lead a rehearsal, rehearsal markings, understanding a text, 'sight-conducting' practice.
2. **We'll get very familiar with gestures**, observe and refine how our bodies lead singing. This will look like group conducting practice, leading/conducting the 'class choir' in masterclass style, et cetera.
3. **We'll spend a lot of time on time.** And by that, I mean that the building blocks of musicianship are devotion, habit, tenacity. The success of this art will depend on what we're willing to spend our time chasing, whether we're even headed the right way, and how long we're willing to chase it. This is where we talk about rehearsal technique, leading songs without rehearsal, reflection and long-term artistic growth. This is also where your own personal reflection assignments will help determine the direction of our focus.

The course will devote roughly equal time to score-singing and singing-by-heart, and consider these modes of equal stature and inseparable partners.

The entire course requires strong engagement and participation from each of us. We will spend much of the time together in some kind of

motion. Our goal is not so much allegiance to a certain way of moving, but rather to learn to move intuitively in ways which encourage singers to sing expressively and well. Success here will look different for each of us; and we should each be prepared to learn as actively from observing our fellow conductors' work as we do from our own.

Course Syllabus

Objective: To possess a foundational understanding of the pre-rehearsal process; to learn a system for intentional score marking; to develop basic skills needed to coach a choir's vocal health and musical growth (vocal exercises, range and seating, etc).

Through the day, and in order, we'll work through the following categories and topics:

UNDERSTAND - excerpts from conducting history, introductory anatomy of the voice, anatomy of a choir, sound production, vowels and rhythm

DREAM (what happens before the rehearsal?) - discovering and selecting music (briefly, copyright), preparing a score/song, preparing to conduct, conductor's score notation, research, rehearsal plans.

ENGENDER (what happens once people show up?) - rehearsal atmosphere, rehearsal technique and direction, singers' rehearsal marking practices, efficiency

RETURN (what happens now?) - ensemble reflection process, memory and retention, between-rehearsal expectations, choir as community pilgrimage

Assignments for this course should be submitted through Google Classroom. An email with instructions to each student will be sent well in advance of the first due date.

Pre-course Assignments – due to instructors by July 1, 2022

Personal Reflections

You may submit a single written document addressing each prompt, a video recording of your responses. For those who will write, I have offered word limits to give an idea of the scope your responses should take. For those recording, I've offered some time length guidelines. Speaking without notes is welcome; speaking without preparation is not. Otherwise, creative license for responses is granted and its use encouraged.

1. In 100-200 words (2-4 minutes) and as creativity leads, respond to the following questions: "Where do you come from? What are you? Where are you going?"
2. In 50-100 words (30-60 seconds), complete the sentence and explain your thinking: "A choir should always..."
3. In 20 words or fewer, describe something about music making in the pandemic you hope we never lose.
4. In 50-100 words, complete the sentence and explain your thinking: "A conductor should never..."
5. In no more than 10 words, what about leading music makes you the most nervous?
6. FREEFORM - Describe where you do music ministry work. If you work for a community's music program or lead an ensemble, please name and describe them briefly. What other music making do you encounter in your work?
7. In no more than 10 words, say what interests you most to learn in this course.
8. Are there any specific questions/concerns which you would like addressed in the class?

Video Demonstration (10-15 minutes)

Submit a video recording of yourself leading rehearsal from the viewpoint of the choir. Choose a piece your choir can feel comfortable singing expressively and well (prepare the notes and rhythms before you hit the record button. You may choose an entire piece or an excerpt. Your video will help me to get a sense of your approach, artistry, and

growing edges as a musician. This is a very useful tool in helping me prepare this course particularly for you.

Post-course Assignments – due to instructors by January 31, 2023

Personal Reflection (1500 words or 7-10 minutes)

If Unitarian Universalist worship is to be alive, relevant, and thriving in 20 years, what/who do you think has to change now? Where are we making good progress toward this possibility? Where aren't we? What's a church musician got to do with any of this?

You may submit a single written document addressing each question, a video recording of your responses. For those who will write, I have offered word limits to give an idea of the scope your responses should take. The precise nature of your opinions will not be used to determine your success; demonstrated willingness to engage the question will, however. For those recording, I've offered some time length guidelines. Speaking without notes is welcome; speaking without preparation is not. Otherwise, creative license for responses is granted and its use encouraged.

Rehearsal Observations

Observe two rehearsals. Record your observations about each conductor. Include what you thought worked or didn't work and what you learned from each rehearsal observation.

You may observe a rehearsal online or a recording of a rehearsal already completed. You may observe by writing or by 'reaction video' and reflection (I will detail this option in-person).

Video Submissions (20-30 minutes in total)

videos should be taken from the viewpoint of the choir for excerpts 1-3.

use the same musical piece for excerpts 2-4. It is suggested you spread these three videos over two or three different rehearsals to show the development of the piece of music

Excerpt 1: Warm-up

Demonstrate leading warm-up with your choir using a variety of exercises to most effectively prepare your choir for rehearsal. Include written annotation of the structure of the warm-up and your thought process

Excerpt 2: Introducing a new piece

Show us how you introduce and approach teaching and leading a new piece. Think creatively about your approach, have your ensemble singing a piece for the first time, and respond with artful leadership (you are not being evaluated on the sight-reading ability of your choristers).

Excerpt 3: Troubleshooting/Polishing

This excerpt has you working on a *specific* element or moment in the piece that is in the middle stages of preparation. This could be related to style, tuning, vocal production, balance, expression, dynamics, etc.

Excerpt 4: Final product

Provide a video of you conducting the entire piece (or excerpt if from a larger work). This video could be from prior to performance or the performance itself

Assessment

Successful completion of the course will require:

- completion and submission of all assigned tasks by the given due dates
- attendance at the class course
- demonstration of thoughtful reflection and intentionality in the assignments

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTORS

Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout is the Director of Worship Arts at First Universalist Church of Minneapolis and was previously at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor, Michigan. Known for his deeply collaborative creation of worship services for congregations and national gatherings, Glen Thomas teaches worship design at Meadville Lombard Theological School and is the author of the curriculum, “De-Centering Whiteness in Worship,” with Julica Hermann de la Fuente and Rev. Erika Hewitt. A denominational leader, you may remember Glen Thomas from his appearances in worship services during the pandemic, when he created and shared stunning works of musical beauty to sustain us during our times of all online worship. Glen Thomas holds a Doctorate of Musical Arts in Conducting from the University of Michigan, and prior to the pandemic, traveled internationally to support the choir of his youth in its ensemble tour.