

# TRI-M NEWS

October 6, 2010



Tri-M's Nicole Verive (right) and Hannah Robinson toast during September's Opera Scenes Production.

Scenes Production:  
September's Opera  
Robinson toast during  
(right) and Hannah  
Tri-M's Nicole Verive

## Updates on Choir by Becky Buechel

Since the start of the school year, the three choirs have been very busy getting ready for the year ahead. The Mixed Choir has been changed from two periods into one, and they are starting to learn basic music theory. They are currently working on four different pieces of music, including an arrangement of "Viva La Vida." The Women's ensemble have been working on and reviewing more advanced music theory, and they have also started working on a few different songs.

In Concert Choir, the students have been preparing

for Opera Scenes. All of the students in Concert Choir participated in Opera Scenes by singing the chorus part in the scene from "The Elixir of Love." The students were working on memorizing and perfecting the three different chorus songs. Students in other scenes also took time to work on notes and put the final touches on each scene.

Now that Opera Scenes is over, Concert Choir is hard at work preparing for the Fall Showcase Concert on October 28. Students are currently auditioning for the solo in "I've Been in the Storm So

Long." Other songs the Concert Choir will be singing at the concert include: "The Tortoise and the Hare" by Darmon Meador, "Alleluia" by Jean Berger, "My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord" arranged by Moses Hogan, "Elijah Rock" arranged by Jester Hairston or possibly "Soldier, Soldier Won't You Marry Me" (arr. Robert DeCormier). Each of the choirs have been working very hard and this year is starting to look like a great one for the Joliet West choirs.

# The goings on of Band

## by Tyler Brodeur

The music department can be a very busy place in the fall with multiple ensembles having various performances and preparing for upcoming showcases. The band has been particularly busy, as marching band is in full swing. Also, the jazz band and the symphonic band have been preparing for the winter concert. On top of all this music, many students are getting ready to audition at the IMEA festival.

The Marching Tigers started their current season back in June with a basics camp (the drumline and colorguard since May). Frequent rehearsals would occur throughout the summer, until the band was full force into our two week band camp. The show this year is titled "Bring on the Night." It expresses a nighttime theme, with movements "Lunar Impressions," "As the Moon Rises," and "Bring on the Night." It is incredible to see the amount of progress the band has made over the past few months. Recently the Tigers performed at Benedictine University for Naperville Central's competition and also at Wheaton North's competition. After marching in the Homecoming parade, the ensemble continued to perform at the first Tigers' homecoming since 1992. The program has 3 more competitions left, ending the season at ISU. Wish them good luck!

While most students' main focus is on the marching band in the fall, the symphonic band is also preparing pieces for the upcoming winter concert. Currently, the band has been rehearsing three different pieces along with sight reading a few others. Italian Rhapsody is a medley of many Italian folk songs. Beautiful Oregon is a more modern piece written about the gorgeous state. The band will also be performing Whisper to their Souls, which is a variation of the folk song Greensleeves. A daily rehearsal consists of some intonation warmups along with scales. Then the band will tune, starting with the bass voices and building up. To conclude the warm up the band plays a Bach chorale to continue to perfect their intonation. Once these tasks are

completed the band can begin working on their respected pieces. This process can either be a run through of the song, or Mr. Carroll will break down certain parts of the song.

In a similar sense, the jazz band has been running rehearsals for two half-periods a week. Once the marching season comes to an end the ensemble will begin their Tuesday night practices. Recently, the group has been working on two main pieces. One of the pieces, Kaomah, was written specifically for the IMEA jazz audition. The other piece is a faster blues tune called A Riff in Time. The ensemble will perform at the winter concert along with Jazz 2. Jazz band 2 will begin rehearsals after school when the marching season ends. This allows for a smooth transition for students from one season to the next, musically speaking.

Along with the jazz band, members of the symphonic band will also be auditioning at IMEA. The auditions are actually quite different. During the jazz audition, a student must play the required piece or a section from it. Then winds and melodic instruments must demonstrate proficiency on scales, and sight reading. Often times a student will be asked to improvise over a given chord progression, which is usually a 12 bar blues. All of these different aspects of jazz take a lot of practice and some creativity. This is why the IMEA jazz band is so exclusive. The symphonic auditions have similar requirements; they also must perform a required piece. This band is much larger, and the rudimentary requirements vary from instrument to instrument.

Although students have just started the school year, the band program is in full force. This season can be extremely busy for many music students. This teaches kids to manage their time and set priorities for themselves, but also to get involved in the music department. This will be an exciting year for music at our school.

# Tackling Bel Canto

## by Nicole Verive

This year's production of Opera Scenes features scenes that are, in the opera world, considered "bel canto." While the term literally means "beautiful singing" in Italian, *bel canto* has come to stand for more than just sounding pretty. Bel canto opera generally features focused legato passages, a light tone, breath control, and fast-paced ornamentation and embellishment. This style of singing is difficult to tackle and even more difficult to master.

The first scene of Gaetano Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, one such bel canto opera, was chosen as one of this year's scenes. My character, Adina, has a tough coloratura (the term for elaborate ornamentation, or what I like to call vocal acrobatics) vocal line that, when I got the role, I was unsure if I would be able to handle:



A musical score snippet showing a vocal line with lyrics. The lyrics are: "pes on - - - si la ri - cet - - - ta, co - no - sces -" and "on - - - ly knew the mix - - - er of so rare". The score includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is a complex coloratura passage with many triplets and slurs.

After fully digesting the fact that I would actually have to *sing* this, I began to think of ways to approach it. I decided that, as a summer project, I would test these approaches out and see how much they could help me.

### Approach 1: The Choir Kid

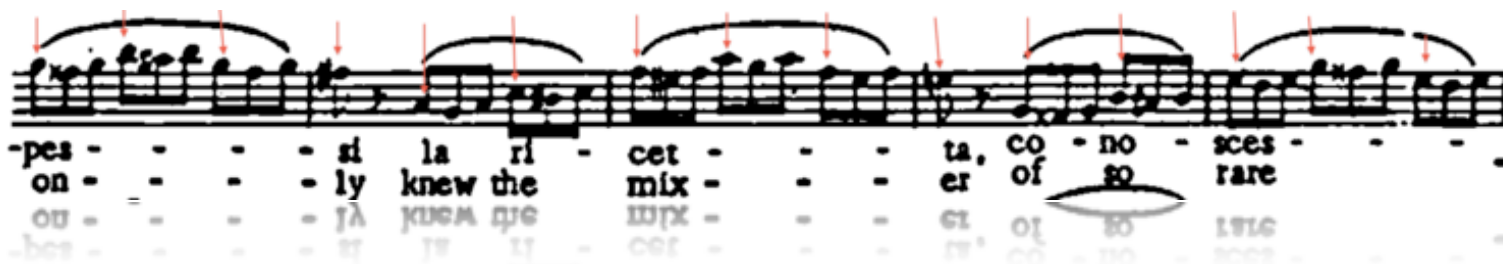
The Choir Kid approach, also known as the Pencil and Paper approach, is simple: one figures out the key of the piece and then writes in all the solfege (do, re, me, etc.). I'm singing in 4 sharps, which is the key of E. Since E is do, I write in the syllables based on that key. While I'm writing in the interval relationships, I try to imagine what my part will sound like (audiate).

The next step in the Choir Kid approach is to write in counting. This line is in 3/4 time. The trouble is, most of my notes are triplets. My counting for the first two measures is written in my score like this: one-pl-et, two-pl-et, tri-pl-et/ One-(rest), two-pl-et, tri-pl-et.

The benefits of the Choir Kid approach are mental, not physical - it gets a person used to analyzing the way a piece is composed. In bel canto, runs can get incredibly note-heavy. The Choir Kid approach breaks down the notes and rhythms in order to take some of the initial shock away. It's a good first step - but where should I from there?

### Approach 2: The Phrase

The Phrase approach is exactly what it seems to be: focus on the phrase. When singing coloratura, not all notes are equal - this approach places emphasis on only the most important notes. The other notes are just there to embellish. In the case of Adina's run in Scene 1 of *L'elisir*, each triplet is made like a sandwich - the important note is the first one, the second note is a half-step off, and the third note is the same as the first one.



A musical score snippet showing a vocal line with lyrics. The lyrics are: "pes on - - - si la ri - cet - - - ta, co - no - sces -" and "on - - - ly knew the mix - - - er of so rare". The score includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is a complex coloratura passage with many triplets and slurs. Red arrows point to the first note of each triplet, highlighting the 'sandwich' structure described in the text.

When starting to rehearse with the Phrase approach, I only sing the important notes (the ones I've put arrows on). Once I know how the main melody goes, *then* I add in the other notes. The Phrase approach is more concerned with the main notes than the other notes, so more emphasis should be added to the important notes than the others. In this case, the other notes act just as a pivot - Adina spins around the main note and then gets to the next phrase and does the same thing.

In the Phrase approach, it is also important for a singer to keep the tone light and agile. A phrase indicated by a slur should not be broken, and neither should words. How is this accomplished? Breath support. But how is breath support built up?

### **Approach 3: The Athlete**

While those who are not professional singers usually do not see singing as very athletic, bel canto could persuade them otherwise. Breath control at its basis is very physical; breath support can only come from the muscles that control the breath - mostly the diaphragm. In order to get big breaths in, a singer must also be flexible. Stamina and agility are very important in coloratura, and these come right from the core. After many a voice lesson, I found myself going home and resting because I was sore.

The Athlete approach to coloratura focuses on the physical aspects of singing. This is where my summer project gets a little weird - I would probably just have benefited by warming up my body more as well as my voice before singing. Instead, I decided to work on getting my body into shape. I had no idea where to begin - luckily, my Wii Fit was more than willing to help me. (This could always be done without the Wii, but I needed the idea of points to motivate me.) I know nothing about exercise or fitness or yoga, so all I learned was from a quick Google search and Nintendo.

Singing is based on the core. The diaphragm, which you can locate by placing your fingers right beneath your sternum, controls the expansion of the lungs. By strengthening the muscles around my diaphragm, I thought I would be able to better control my breathing. More exercise would also help me be more flexible, and flexibility is crucial when taking in big breaths for long phrases.



### **Afterthought: Putting It Together**

After using my summer to focus on these three approaches, I started the school year feeling ready to stage the scenes and to perform. Focusing on my technique has really helped me grow as a singer because, since I spent so much time working on them, these approaches have become second nature. The exception? The Athlete approach. When I got back into the daily routine of school, I let my exercise routine slide. I thought that I would be okay if I only warmed up myself before singing, but I realized that without proper exercise my posture was getting worse and the runs were getting harder to phrase. Singing bel canto is a lot more than just sounding pretty, as I learned - it is a focused, rigorous discipline that takes time to get used to and years to master. Did I accomplish my goal of nailing my runs? Perhaps. Did I get a tiny taste of what I will have to do to succeed in singing Classical opera? Definitely.

(Left) Here Nicole rehearses with Mike Schuller for "L'elisir d'amore".

# 'Tis the season for the scary



Relentless Iota Productions with Joliet West Vocal Music present:

## **The Spirit of All Hallow's Eve**

A Halloween play for all ages

October 22nd and 23rd at 7 pm

October 23rd and 24th at 3 pm

Joliet West High School

Tickets are \$6.00

available at [www.jtwestchoir.org](http://www.jtwestchoir.org)

## Advanced Theory A class instead of an ensemble

By Tim DeBoer

Every year is different, every group of students are different. These are cliches that we hear each August. This year though, things are different, at least for me. This year, my course load is different. Due to the orchestra expanding to two classes at West, I have the honor of teaching a course called "Advanced Music Theory".

I have always been intrigued by the mechanics of music, more so than just understanding enough to create a choral sound, an opera scene, or parts of a musical. Knowing why things are the way they are gives me a sense that I am doing my best at teaching them. For these reasons, my attitude has been positive--challenged to learn more.

Fast forward to present day, and the year has begun. Learning has taken place both for the students and

for this teacher. I am learning how students learn in a more academic setting than a performance based class, and I have had to do some adjusting.

Here are some things I have learned:

People learn at different speeds-- This doesn't seem like a real shocking development, however, I was surprised at how differently two "advanced musicians" can come to the same conclusions. Some students need to read the chapter in advance to get anything out of the class, others need to use it as a review.

Taking notes are not a given--I was surprised that some students never bother to take notes. Perhaps they do not need to, however, going through some pretty tricky territory, I am often surprised to see students staring back at me, notebook on the floor.

You can lead a horse to water...-- depending on the day, it is hard to stay in the game every day. Occasionally, external factors make it impossible to focus. The ability to overcome the external is probably a huge indicator of future success.

Finally--hunger is a necessary part of life. It is one thing to be a great performer, however, a hunger for knowledge and improvement is necessary to take the next step. It is my job to give the students a reason to be hungry.

So there it is. In a nutshell, it is my job to teach music theory in a way that the students desire to fill their minds and work through the hard parts. This is easier said than done, however, in the choir classes, this has always been the goal--why is it harder here? Perhaps because it is an individual achievement, perhaps because it is intrinsic, but regardless, I am excited to take this one on!!

## Alumni of the month Conner Meinhart ('10)

Conner Meinhart graduated Joliet West in the spring of 2010, and is currently studying Musical Theater at Columbia College in Chicago. Conner states, "The main difference between high school and college life is the students. College students don't have to be here, they made the choice to come to college... therefore, the students are more driven to excel at what they are passionate about." With college life, Conner also enjoys the freedom to take the classes he enjoys rather than having his schedule laid out for him class by class. And of course, he enjoys the freedom of living by himself in the

dorms. Since Conner chose to pursue Musical Theater at Columbia, he has a lot more options when it comes to shows than he did in high school. "In the theater world in high school, there is only one musical and maybe two plays all year. Here at Columbia, there have already been around twenty shows to audition for; some student directed, some faculty workshops, some strictly freshmen, musicals, plays, one acts, and dance workshops... and it only the first four weeks." Since he is doing what he loves, all while having the freedom of living in Chicago, it is obvious that Conner is enjoying his experience at Columbia during his freshman year of college.