

## Vincent Oakes Written Statement

### What is your history with ACDA?

My relationship with ACDA began as a member of the University of Florida student chapter. I was awestruck by the supportive nature that was modeled at conferences, by the connections forged between directors and choirs, and the examples of diversity and excellence that were displayed in performance, composition, pedagogy, and scholarship. Opportunities for service through ACDA came early, as I assisted with hosting our state conference and volunteered at a regional event, then later performed at regional and national conferences as a graduate student at Emory University. Through these experiences, my admiration for ACDA evolved from a membership to a passion for active involvement and service.

Upon entering the profession, I quickly realized how my “ACDA education” was the perfect complement to my university studies. Interacting with ACDA’s membership representing a variety of ensembles prepared me for working with the different choirs – secondary school, worship, and community youth/children – that I found myself in front of in my mid-20’s. Attending conferences helped me learn about the ever-expanding realities of the podium, especially when I felt pulled in multiple directions by the different choirs I served. I remember one morning of an ACDA conference where I participated in a reading session for small church choirs, attended a workshop on grant writing for community organizations, and left a performance with my face covered in grateful tears, stunned by the artistry of a children’s choir – *where else could I have such varied needs and interests met?*

I served Tennessee as newsletter/web editor, R&R chair, and state conference chair. This led to service as state president, where I saw significant advancement of the choral art in a state whose choral traditions were as strong as they were varied and storied. Prior to becoming state president, I began to accept invitations to conduct and present at state and regional events around the country, affording me the opportunity to see how ACDA’s vision was implemented throughout our organization.

Serving as President of ACDA’s Southern Region beginning in 2019 was transformative, as I worked with an amazing team to create a conference celebrating how ACDA was at work throughout our profession. Spotlight performances included choral traditions of Central & South America, the musical legacy of Historically Black Colleges & Universities, performances by VOCO, Nation, and The Concordia Choir, an ecumenical service featuring church, temple, and collegiate choirs, a contemporary *a cappella* showcase, and – on the same program – community and university choirs presenting *Ein deutsches Requiem* of Johannes Brahms preceded by a festival children’s choir performing works of regional composers, honoring both the past and the future of our art form. This experience displayed the very best of ACDA as this conference was the culminating effort of leaders who shared their experiences, perspectives, and expertise to equip the next generation of choral musicians.

Of course, not everything went according to plan...the pandemic caused several changes to the schedule and the cancellation of the final day. Many left early, while performances, honor choirs, and conference sessions were squeezed in. The final sounds of the event – Roland Carter’s

arrangement of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” performed by the HBCU festival choir –sustained, challenged, empowered, and inspired me and countless others as we went through the ensuing times of online instruction, virtual choirs, and helping choral singing emerge stronger in a post-pandemic world.

My involvement with ACDA at the national level includes participating in the inaugural International Conductors Exchange Program to Cuba, service on the national board while Southern Region president, and as a member of the ACDA Constitution & Bylaws task force. These experiences further clarified the way that ACDA is constantly at work in our art form, and how the necessary work must be done to keep the organization’s policies, procedures, and programming in service to our passion and purpose.

### **What has kept you involved?**

The simple answer to why I’ve remained involved with ACDA over the years is *the people*. The energy, passion, and commitment of ACDA’s members continually inspire me. What has kept me involved is the opportunity to collaborate with others who share my love for this art form, to exchange ideas, and to work together to strengthen the choral community at all levels.

It’s also the continual growth that ACDA encourages that has kept me engaged. I am inspired by ACDA’s dedication to offering opportunities for growth, fostering dialogue about choral music’s role, and exploring ways in which we can be more supportive of anywhere and everywhere singing occurs. The challenges we face are ever evolving, and ACDA provides a platform to confront those challenges and find meaningful solutions.

### **Why do you love ACDA?**

What I love most about ACDA is that it is where perspectives from different cultures, experiences, and traditions come together, even if those perspectives sometimes collide - this is where we find strength, growth, and progress. We may not always agree on everything, but that’s part of what makes us better—our ability to engage in meaningful conversation, share our scholarship, experiences, and practices, and learn from one another. It is precisely because of this commitment to all our constituencies – our organization’s breadth and depth – that I feel so strongly connected to ACDA and why I continue to be so passionate about the work we do together.

### **Why did you say yes?**

I said yes because I believe in ACDA’s mission and because I know that ACDA plays a critical role in shaping the future of thousands of conductors who have profound influence on millions of singers. If called upon, I hope to help guide ACDA into the next phase of its evolution. This office requires the enormous responsibility for leading our art form and profession forward, while simultaneously providing the opportunity to widen our reach, increase our impact, and strengthen our efforts as we elevate the choral art as the collective soundtrack to our humanity.

### **What are your thoughts about the future of ACDA?**

Looking ahead, I’m optimistic about the future of ACDA, but I also recognize that we face challenges. One of the most pressing tasks will be continuing to effectively serve the vast

diversity within our membership. ACDA encompasses many different types of choirs, with each bringing their experiences, perspectives, and needs. As an organization that believes in the power of choral music to change lives, we must remain a community where voices are heard, valued, and respected. There is far more that we have in common, and so I hope to amplify ways that we can learn from each other's strengths for the benefit of all.

I also believe that ACDA's future will be shaped by our ability to be nimble and forward-thinking in terms of repertoire, programming, collaboration, technology, the communities we serve, and in the voices we uplift. I am passionate about ensuring that ACDA remains a space where emerging voices—those who might not always have a platform—can be heard and valued. I also believe that ACDA plays a crucial role in advocating for the continued importance of music education and the arts in society. I'm excited to help lead this charge as we shape the future of choral music together.