

BEYOND TOLERANCE

affirming LGBTQ+ singers in the choral context

Nicky Manlove, MM (they/them)

nickymanlove.com/beyond-tolerance

nicky.manlove@gmail.com

STRATEGIES FOR LGBTQ+ INCLUSION IN CHORAL ENSEMBLES

- △ **Normalize sharing pronouns in introductions.** This is an easy step that everyone can take to include trans and nonbinary individuals. Model including pronouns when introducing yourself for the first time, and invite your students to do the same.
- △ **Choose performance attire that supports a diversity of gender expression.** Mandating clothing that is specifically gendered (i.e. gowns and tuxedos) will alienate trans and nonbinary singers, and can often be inaccessible for low-income students, when not distributed and maintained by the choral program.
- △ **Find and program repertoire that represents all people.** Choose repertoire that uses gender-neutral language so that all singers can see themselves reflected in the music they sing. Be critical of repertoire that enforces stereotypes about gender or sexuality.
- △ **Be specific and honest with ensemble names.** Ensure that your ensemble names reflect who is actually welcome to participate in the ensemble. If “women’s choir,” consider what it would mean for a woman who sings tenor or bass to join your choir. If your women’s choir sings only SSAA music or is only open to sopranos and altos, consider “treble choir,” which is more specific and honest.

COMMON CHALLENGES TO SUPPORTING LGBTQ+ SINGERS

I want to do more to support my LGBTQ+ singers but I’m worried about getting pushback from my administrators/parents/other students/board of directors, etc.

There are risks in supporting LGBTQ+ people in any environment, however data shows that knowing just one supportive adult in a school setting can significantly reduce suicidality for LGBTQ+ youth. (GLSEN, 2017)

It’s useful to think about this challenge in terms of harm vs. discomfort. Some people may feel discomfort supporting queer people, especially if they have few close personal relationships with LGBTQ+ people. However, LGBTQ+ people (especially young people) experience lasting and demonstrable harm from remaining in environments with cultures of homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, etc.

For many queer young people, these unhealthy environments can be the root cause of mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and can be significant barriers to success and health.

I want to show my support to my LGBTQ+ singers but I’m afraid of saying the wrong thing.

Have grace with yourself and trust that supporting your singers is the right thing to do. Trying and using new language can be scary, but can only improve with practice.

I don’t have any LGBTQ+ singers but when I do I will definitely support them!

It’s impossible to tell someone’s gender or sexuality by looking at them, so many conductors/educators don’t know that they actually *do* have LGBTQ+ singers who are in the closet to some degree.

Maybe even more importantly, changing cultures to be more affirming of LGBTQ+ singers takes time, and can/should begin before there are even LGBTQ+ people in the room. If a trans singer joined your rehearsal *today* would they have the support from you and the ensemble they would need to feel safe?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

TRANSITIONING VOICES

Valverde, Mari Esabel, "[Expanding the Definitions of 'Woman'](#)" For the Transgender Voices Festival organized by One Voice Mixed Chorus, 2018.

Vastine, Wendy, "[The Heights and Depths of Vocal Liberation](#)." For the Transgender Voices Festival organized by One Voice Mixed Chorus, 2018.

PROGRAMMING DIVERSITY

Cor Flammae, "[LGBTQ+ Composer Database](#)." corflammae.com/composers

Orange County Women's Chorus, "[Choral Music by Women Composers Database](#)." ocwomenschorus.org/women-composers

Institute for Composer Diversity. "[Composer Diversity Database](#)" composerdiversity.com/composer-diversity-database

Yelton Rhodes Music. [yrmusic.com](#) (Catalog > Search > Topic > "LGB Specific")

CREATING AFFIRMING CHORAL CULTURES

Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), "School Climate Survey," 2017.

National Center for Transgender Equality, "[Supporting the Transgender People in Your Life: A Guide to Being a Good Ally](#)" 2016.

Nicolazzo, Z. "Imagining a Trans* Epistemology." *Urban Education*, August 2017, 1-26.

The Trevor Project. "[A Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Youth](#)."

Wentling, Tre. "Trans* Disruptions: Pedagogical Practices and Pronoun Recognition." *Trans Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (August 2015): 469-476.

LGBTQ+ HISTORY & CULTURE

Nicolazzo, Z. "Imagining a Trans* Epistemology." *Urban Education*, August 2017, 1-26.

Stryker, Susan, "Transgender History: Roots of Today's Revolution" Seal Press. Revised Edition, 2017.

Sylvia Rivera Law Project. [srlp.org](#)

Tolbert, TC and Trace Peterson, eds. "Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics." *Nightboat Books*. 2013.

Jackson Wright Schultz. "Trans/Portraits: Voices from Transgender Communities," Dartmouth College Press, 2015.