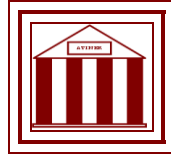


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**The Company Choir in Brazil –
An Entrepreneurial Case Study**

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The Company Choir in Brazil – An Entrepreneurial Case Study

William DiCosimo

Abstract

Choral singing as a means of musical expression framed around a community and supported by arts organizations and governmental agencies has been well documented. Tobias, S., & Leader, S. (1999). “Vox Populi” to Music. *Journal of American Culture*, 22(4), 91-101. Tuohey, T. (2012). Sing, Play, Dance! Music and Music Education in Industry. *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*, 34(1), 23-44. Fones-Wolf, E., & Fones-Wolf, K. (2003). Cold war Americanism: Business, pageantry and antiunionism in Weirton, West Virginia. *Business History Review*, 77(1), 1-61.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of company choirs comprised of company employees from mailroom personnel to executives using a music business lens. Through the entrepreneurial efforts and innovations of Dr. Eduardo Lakschevitz in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, choral singing was used as a means of strengthening the company’s vision and creating an innovative approach to team building, collaboration, and time management. Lakschevitz built, led and directed these company choirs. Using data from a recorded interview that was later transcribed, this paper identifies Lakschevitz’s program as a potential model for choral directors in other countries. Lakschevitz’s entrepreneurial business model looks to music as a creative outlet and a tool for advancing cultural activities within what might be considered an unconventional environment. The perception of music from a consumer perspective often deals with the transient opportunities of listening to and enjoying music that suits one’s personal taste by listening in places such as the home, while commuting, through attending a concert, or incorporating music as an ambient background such as social activities, shopping, dining at a restaurant, working out at the gym, staying at a hotel, resort or casino, going to a dance club, traveling by air, etc.

Additionally, this paper investigates the importance of music in the workplace by examining the potential for immersive musical activities—in this case, choral singing—as an integral and viable component of the extended business world of both public and private corporations. The implications of this corporate musical model are significant. As an often marginalized discipline, this project demonstrates that music not only has a place in the business world, but a possible role to play in improving both the quality of life and the 6 th International Conference on Visual and Performing Arts, 1-4 June 2015: Abstract Book 31 quality of work of employees in a wide range of positions. We have much to learn from Dr. Lakschevitz.

Review of Literature

From as early as 1855 and extending into the mid-twentieth century, American industry encouraged the formation of bands and other musical organizations for workers, ostensibly to provide for their improved welfare. Often, however, the actual purposes of music in industry were to prevent formation of unions and maintain social regimes.¹ Industry provided varying levels of financial support for bands and believed that benefits justified outlay. Common rationales for expenditure of company funds emphasized extra-musical purposes and included specific goals, such as improvement of worker attitudes, improvement of relations between workers and management, and effective promotion of general public relations.² For decades, music and the arts have suffered cutbacks and neglect on the grounds that they are ‘frills’ we can no longer afford. But all the while, choral singing as one form of musical expression is booming. A 1997 National Endowment for the Arts survey found that one in ten American adults performed publicly in a choir in the previous year, and that choral performance was the most popular form of public arts activity in the nation. There is no question that choral singing is on the rise. In the greater Philadelphia five-county area alone, a choral census turned up 145 choruses not affiliated with churches; in mid-size Tucson, Arizona, there are 35; in the Bay Area, nearly 500, 119 of them new since 1990. Helene Whitson, who along with Valerie Howard has compiled a directory of choruses in the Bay Area, speculates that 20,000 people are rehearsing or performing choral music there every week. And Chorus America, a loose confederation of professional, adult amateur, and children's choruses has nearly 550 member choruses and growing (About Chorus America). The American Choral Directors Association in Lawton, Oklahoma, boasts 18,000 members. Demographically, African Americans have the highest rate of public singing in groups (26%) and female participation is slightly higher than male (United States 35). Otherwise, the popularity of choral singing seems to cross all age, income, and educational boundaries.³ Many companies had musical activities in some form for their employees at one time or another in its history. Manufacturers of a wide range of products including railroads; department stores; steel, forge, and rolling mills; banks; paper mills; book publishers; newspapers; insurance companies; and manufacturers of everything from automobiles, cereal, and furniture to appliances and plumbing fixtures. In most cases, membership was open to everyone in the company, executives to janitors. Hundreds of employees participated in these ensembles.⁴ For example,

¹LeCroy, Hoyt F., (1998) Community-Based Music Education: Influences of Industrial Bands in the American South. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 46, (2) 248-264

²Hazen, Margaret & Hazen, Robert, (1987), *The Music Men*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 48

³Tobias, Sheila & Leader, Shelah, “Vox Populi” to Music, *Journal of American Culture* 22.4 (Winter 1999) 91-101

⁴Tuohey, Terese Volk, Sing, Play, Dance! Music and Music Education in Industry, *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 34.1 (Oct 2012) 23-44

the Marshall Field Choral Society in Chicago, in any given year had between 100 and 200 participants; the Strawbridge & Clothier department store in Philadelphia, had a store chorus of 150 employees; Wanamaker's Military Band had 75 members, and there were 400 voices in the General Motors men's chorus in Detroit. Employee musical groups were usually established at the request of the employees, although in some cases the preferences of the company owner dictated their formation. These groups performed originally for the workers' entertainment at lunch times, for company picnics, for special events such as Christmas concerts, or even a company musicale. They also performed for community events, parades, or fund-raisers; many times they provided community service by entertaining at hospitals or orphanages.¹

The directors of these ensembles were committed to both the ensemble and the company and were often the driving force behind these groups. They also tended to stay in their positions. The Buick Male Choir of Flint, Michigan (now the Norton Male Chorus), for example, had only four directors over eighty-years. Companies sought music directors with positive, dynamic personalities, a sense of humor, excellent musicianship (musical competence at least, if not actually a practicing musician), and outstanding organizational skills. Company executives did not look for a director with an "artsy" appearance, as this tended to alienate workers, yet they expected artistry to be evident in the careful choice of repertoire that best fit the ensemble. The director also needed to be able to interface with, and coordinate between, the company and the community. Therefore he or she required tact when dealing with people. In short, the director had to be the leader of the organization, a musician and conductor, the teacher of individual/small group lessons, the publicist, the purchaser of music and instruments, and the inspiration for the workers.²

Introduction

I am a professor at Syracuse University teaching music business, record production, film scoring, senior seminars and directed research work in entrepreneurship in the arts in the music and entertainment industry degree program. During the summer of 2013, I was invited to do a series of performances, workshops, master-classes touring Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil as the pianist with a U.S. based Latin Jazz, Rock and World Music Trio: Grupo Pagán. The trio's itinerary included a cultural exchange tour

¹Kenneth Clark, *Music in Industry* (New York: National Bureau for the Advancement of Music, 1929), 8-24; Henry Clay Smith, *Music in Relation to Employee Attitudes, Piece-Work Production, and Industrial Accidents* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1947), 62; Dan. D. Halpin, "Industrial Music and Morale," paper presented at the Acoustical Society of America, New York City, May 14, 1943, Ira Altschuler Collection, Music Therapy Archives, Colorado State University

²Tuohey, Terese Volk, Sing, Play, Dance!

sharing music at churches, non-governmental organizations, percussion schools, and the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, UNIRIO. One of the most notable performances was hosted by *Meninos do Morumbi*, a premier non-governmental organization that provides arts, music, and meals for school children in the impoverished area of Morumbi, São Paulo. As part of this musical and cultural experience the trio hosted neighborhood jam sessions after the shows improvising music with the local Brazilians.

During the trip the trio presented a performance and workshop on American and Latin American musical styles at UNIRIO and Dr. Eduardo Lakschevitz invited me to do a presentation and discussion on music production. I have taken a keen interest in looking for unique entrepreneurial business models that pertain to music as a creative outlet and a tool for advancing culture in what might usually be considered an unconventional environment. In particular, the focus for this report is the business world: specifically corporations, both private and publicly held. In the review of literature, it is apparent that there are many historical references about the efficacy of both instrumental and choral music in the workplace and that these activities particularly in the United States have had downturns late in the 20th century and then a resurgence in the new millennium. Similar to the U.S., the company choir is not new in Brazil but the vision and entrepreneurial efforts of Lakschevitz has turned the traditions of the company choir model into a unique, thriving enterprise. As he was my host at UNIRIO, I was able to interview him about his business. Lakschevitz, who received one of his master's degrees in the U.S., is fluent in English. He is dynamic and engaging with a tremendous passion for his work as both a professor and as a choral music director. The interview was semi-structured, with room for elaboration and follow-up questions. With his consent, I recorded the interview and present both his story and some themes that emerged as important.

Building Expertise

Lakschevitz had been in choral music for most of his life. His grandfather was a choral conductor; his mother was a choral director. He started out as a clarinet performance major, earning a degree from the Federal University of Rio. In his last year at the university, he started conducting his first company choir and a church choir professionally. Two years later, he went to the University of Missouri-Kansas City to obtain a master's degree in choral conducting. Dr. Eph Ehly, who was the choral teacher there was the most influential person in the development of his career. Lakschevitz stated that Ehly's classes were like he was writing a management manual. Having completed the degree, he was subsidized with a scholarship by the Brazilian government and completed both the master's degree in choral conducting and a master's in music history. The Federal University of Rio hired him upon his return as an instructor along with the credentials from the United States.

Lakschevitz entered into a doctoral degree program at UNIRIO in Music Education while teaching and conceptualized a dissertation based upon the integration of being a choral conductor and music as an educational force in the workplace. Approval for the title of the thesis, *Choral Music As A Means to Corporate Education*, did not come easily because few understood the interdisciplinary aspects of music and business. Eventually his determination paid off and the thesis along with the doctorate in music education was completed as he continued to teach music history at UNIRIO.

The federal university system in Brazil is very bureaucratic and slow to address marketplace changes. The music industry's rapid changes left traditional programs outdated and out of touch with the realities of current musical trends and the fact that creators of music need to learn and develop new disciplines as a part of their education; particularly business management. In 2012, with pressure from music education student requests for additions and changes in curricula that would incorporate aspects of business, money and management, Lakschevitz was asked to develop a course that would teach students how to build a business, and develop a better understanding of the marketplace, entrepreneurship, and managing money. The first offering had a class of ten students, the second time, 25 and by the third offering the class had to be closed after 45 students enrolled. Ironically, students who were signing up were local musicians in various rock bands who were not music education majors. These students had heard about the class by word of mouth. The traditionalists view from the academic world is that commercial musicians are mercenaries. The university needed to understand that the marketplace revolves around revenue generation. Alongside understanding the methodology of business creation and innovation, artists need to make a living.

Lakschevitz's academic teaching is only one aspect of his methodology. The other is choral music. His mother was very instrumental in choral music in Brazil. She ran a federal program for twenty years at the Ministry of Culture and Education to develop and promote choral music and was renowned throughout the country. Since he was a small child, Lakschevitz was in touch with choral people and music. At eight years old, he sang in the opera that his mother directed. In Brazil, business choirs are quite common with lucrative salaries for the conductor/director. A number of academy trained choral conductors left teaching and directing at the federal university level to work operating corporate choirs. Lakschevitz researched such choir organizations from the sixties and came to find that there were company choirs in France during the 19th century during the industrial revolution. At that time, workers came to live in the city creating a labor force. The unions saw that with the increased population, employers wanted them to participate in activities outside of the workday requirements in an effort to build social interaction and increased productivity through camaraderie. The company choir model was referred to as the *Orpheum Chorus*. The corporation's director was charged with controlling what was to be sung, and who within the choir would be designated as a soloist. Soloist choices were based upon rank and file within

the corporate structure rather than one's ability to be an effective soloist or section leader. The choral director was in effect, a dictator.

The New Model

Lakschevitz showed me a photograph of one of the company choirs he directs that performed at *The Voices of Choir Global Project*, a festival that takes place at the San Clemente Palace in Botafogo, which is the Consulate of Portugal. The emphasis of the festival is on music as a quality of life initiative for both the participants and those who attend the event. The festival's focus is to give visibility to the group as it deserves. The choristers sing with heart and soul, invest their time, and perform well for the companies they represent. He further points out that within each section: soprano, alto, tenor and bass (SATB) there is a hired professional singer. These 'ringers' have the ability to carry the choir if the corporate members did not effectively learn the music, cannot sing well or did not regularly show up for required rehearsals. Lakschevitz does not like this policy and would not allow ringers in the company choirs he would direct. His position is that they all must work for the company. It is also notable that as a director, he does not stand in front of his choir formally conducting the music, as is the case with other company choirs. His philosophy is that they do not need to have someone directing once they have appropriately learned the performance material. An ensemble-led group is similar to what you would see with pop and jazz music groups. The autocratic philosophy of a corporate choir requiring a figurehead to lead them in song is diametrically opposed to the goals of creative leadership and shared responsibility. When musical issues or problems arise, they will be addressed and fixed, perhaps through additional rehearsals, a change of soloists, or through having someone more committed or capable to take on the leadership role within the choir.

In Lakschevitz's model, the choir has ownership of the creative process. The choir does not look to or sing for the director or the corporation but rather is building a collaborative musical organization under their own control. This model is in fact, a philosophy of a self-directed work ethic that many corporations prefer to see among employees. Lakschevitz creates the scores and arrangements for all of the music works chosen, rehearsed and performed by the choir. All of the repertory is arranged for them. His expectation in taking on direction of a corporate choir is that the majority will not be able to read a musical score. He creates audio files of both the melodic line to be learned by each part (SATB) and the accompaniment. An example of a score he arranged features the men only. The song is sung to women – a tribute. In assigning three or four soloists during the piece, a potential difficulty arises when one of the soloists cannot participate in the performance or leaves the company, and then the director must find someone else who can pick up the solo and learn it. The recordings provide a viable answer to such issues.

Lakschevitz started his first choir and then after a while, another company would hear about the choir and contact him so it spread by word of mouth. Most of his colleagues looked at his work outside of the university as being too commercial. They perceive that corporate choir directorship work is just for the money and not for any sort of musical gratification. His colleagues only wanted to direct choirs populated by high quality trained singers or singers in training at the collegiate level and so his type of work made him an outcast. In reality, no matter what type of choir a director takes on, the most important aspect of the work related to the resultant musical output requires a passion and love for choral singing rather than its specific status in the community, university or elsewhere. The philosophy behind the formation of a corporate choir is to provide one more benefit for the employees. There's no marketing for a company that starts a choir. It is exclusively underwritten by the company and therefore proprietary. There's no outside branding opportunities or partnerships.

Lakschevitz used to direct a choir at a company that was both a state and private business – a half public, half private structure unique to some organizations in Brazil. He played a recording for me of their choir where he has now brought in professional instrumentalists to back music they are performing that is specifically indigenous to Brazil's Samba. As I listened to the high quality vocals of the choir, he remarks that they are as good as any professional group and in listening, this is indeed the case. He then points out that the excellent soloist featured is an employee for the company whose job there is to serve coffee. He has no training at all but performs with a natural lyric and vocal swing in the Samba style. Lakschevitz says, "I would never consider having this choir sing Mozart's *Ave Verum*. There's no place for that with a choir that can effectively interpret and perform popular music of Brazil."

Lakschevitz then proceeds to play a funky jazz recording of a song he arranged for Coral Sebrae RJ from the album *Redescobrir* (Rediscover). The company is the State Board of Network Technology of Rio De Janeiro. The song *Agamamou* incorporates a rhythm section of drums, bass, guitar, keyboards and horns. The results are extremely professional. The recording is included as part of his work with the choir that they all receive a copy of the CD as a memento. Lakschevitz makes a point of knowing his choir's capabilities, range and dynamics in creating a customized arrangement for them. In designing close harmonies as part of the arrangement, the singers have no fear or concern with attempting and successfully doing this type of singing. There's no pedagogical training manual to get in their way. In another example from Coral Sebrae RJ's album, he plays a recording of *Canta Brasil*, with a solo introduction performed by singer: Marcia Pelúcio who is an attorney for the company. Marcia had never sung a note her whole life. Her voice is clear, soaring and dramatic as well as perfectly in tune. Clearly the ability to perform in this way requires natural ability but its important as a director, to instill confidence, nurture and support the member's ability, and spend time discovering what each person may have to offer in developing repertoire.

Music's Alignment with Business Philosophy

Lakschevitz was hired as the company choir director at the State Board of Network Technology of Rio De Janeiro. At the beginning of his directorship, there were twenty-five members in the choir. With the company downsizing, he arrived to find the group now only consisted of eleven members. At this point, he assumed that he was out of a job directing the group. The owner of the company insisted that he continue. It was going to be a challenge directing the smaller ensemble but he had to deliver. Two months later, there was a corporate event where they wanted to talk about *knowledge management* as a means of making the company work effectively with less people. Usually when they had events, they would call the choir to come in and sing at the end of the speeches and presentations as a rallying component. Lakschevitz asked that the choir perform in the middle of the event allowing them to be there with the speakers and presenters. When the choir was forty members strong, they recorded a video of a song that they loved to perform. In the middle of the event, as the auditorium is dark, he had them project the video of the larger choir performing the song. During that performance, the eleven-member choir stepped on stage and joined in singing to the video. By the middle of the combined live and prerecorded performance, the audio engineer turned off the audio on the pre-recorded track so that the only singers were now the live choir of eleven. Then, the video was turned off and only the live performers finished the song. Lakschevitz turned to the audience and said: “see – we were a forty member choir and now we have a lot less people but we still have to keep going. How can one group of people continue to deliver with half the number that contributed before?” He began talking about training, developing enough competencies, rearranging groups and measuring progress through performance. The audience said: “Yeah, yeah! That’s it! You should work for our human resources department.” Then that company, whose main focus was to train small businesses as support started to use the choir not only to have fun but also as a means of education.

Competency Development

Lakschevitz expanded further on building competencies. When events in other cities required talks on *productive arrangements*, rather than send a speaker, they would send the choir. He would then create a speech based upon *productive arrangements* as they correlate with aspects of arranging music for the choir, lyrics, teamwork, time management, and ways in which the choir could increase productivity. He would then present the choir in performance and talk to the audience attending the seminar about the subject. It was a great success. At the beginning of the following year the company’s vice-president remarked to the executives that he was not happy with the other types of training they delivered to clients. He cited the choir as the most successful form of training. This comment opened Lakschevitz’s mind. Choral music is not just

fun but rather is a microcosm of what happens in the whole company. This positioning gave him a clear advantage. He knew as a choral director, how to plan and forecast in advance, what to expect and how to maximize the productivity and success of the choir. From that time on, he started to study management from an amateur's approach reading books and exploring articles and information online. The entrepreneurial model of a corporate choir grew and developed from this experience. The music work he does now is on the other side of the creative circle. He can teach and facilitate experiences that the company needs and wants their employees to have. The company executives do not want to give power point slide show lectures presented by a guy in a suit and tie. When you talk music, you are reaching the employees through a different cognitive channel.

Lakschevitz: The company could say to their employees: today all employees are required to attend a meeting at 3:00 pm in the auditorium on the third floor for a speech on *management of change*. The better enticement would be: we are meeting at 3:00 today for a jazz show. Employees show up and the band plays a jazz tune or two, then I would talk about the guitar and piano in the music are doing the same job – playing chords, providing rhythm accompaniment, at times playing the melody together or in call and response, creating spontaneously in improvisation. How do they relate? Check out the bass, he's in the back, can you hear him? What is his role how does he relate? And so on.

The band that Lakschevitz created grew out of this experience as an extension of the company choir. In studying these methods and talking to people about the model and its effectiveness, he still runs company choirs but also tours all over the country, using the band behind his presentational speeches on music to demonstrate corporate competencies. Making music as an ensemble is an activity with a large number of competencies that the market needs. Lakschevitz comments further:

For example, thirty years ago, there was an engineering spot in ICB Company. There's a search and there's 15 applicants. The best engineer is hired. Today, there would be a search for the engineering job and there would be 75 applicants. The company would look at a much broader basis of competencies beyond engineering expertise. This would include teamwork, problem solving, flexibility and creativity – all of these things would be on the table and perceived as valuable.

A place in society that can serve as a laboratory for developing these skills is ensemble music. People who are in an ensemble or observe an ensemble develop leadership skills. The music ensemble can be driven in a way that such skills will be developed without being directed as a totalitarian regime as was the corporate model during earlier times.

Allowing the members of the ensemble to have a voice beyond singing or playing an instrument is what helps in developing these types of skills along with music that has meaning, music that is accessible and relatable.

Lakschevitz speaks about one of his corporate choirs: Coro Fenaseg. The choir's members work for a service company specializing in insurance: Federação Nacional das Empresas de Seguros Privados e de Capitalizacão: The National Federation of Private Insurance and Capitalization. He explains that *segure* is the word for hold. In relating the word to this business entity, the phrase 'segure tudo' or 'hold it all or hold everything' is rebranded as 'insure everything'. The company got hold of a copy of a song written by one of Brazil's most important Samba singers, Martinho da Vila, who had written and recorded *Segure Tudo* in 1971 and had all but forgotten the song. The company bought the rights to use the song in a big promotion featuring the choir. Martinho da Vila was very happy with the large payment he received for the mechanical licensing of his song and the company director asked Lakschevitz to arrange and record the song featuring the company choir backing Martinho. In listening to the music track, I am taken with the ensemble work, both men and women singing in precise rhythm and harmony while effectively backing Martinho.

It is not Lakschevitz's place to try and educate the vocalists in traditional Western training but rather to allow them to listen and interpret by ear, the vocal arrangements provided to them while singing a style of music that is indigenous. At the corporate level, his goal is to furnish the client with the cognitive channels that clear the way for innovation, to reinforce cultural aspects of the company and develop non-technical competencies with the participants through this artistic experience. Lakschevitz states:

When I am brought in to run a company choir, it usually has to do with management seeing that there are problems within the company. What is important for management to witness is that within five minutes of working with the newly formed members, that they are effectively collaborating and producing a sound, working and communicating together in a way that reflects upon their decision to create the artistic organization as a means to improve the corporation's productivity. This is good for both the choir member's morale and management's decision to implement the creative venture.

Entrepreneurial Justification

As is the rule with case studies in entrepreneurship, does the model have merit? If acted upon as a start-up business by an enterprising individual or team of people with the appropriate expertise, will it be successful? What is the potential for a musician or a team of musicians with expertise in choral arranging, conducting, professional experience as rhythm section musicians

with a diverse and varied knowledge of popular music, recording studio experience, a strong business background, good communication skills and the ability to work with and cultivate employees of a company who either have or lack any music training to form a performance choir that has the potential of becoming a public face for the company they represent? From my perspective, all of these traits are readily available with potential to pull together a team that could provide such a service. There are numerous professional musicians and singers who live and work in my hometown and in neighboring communities who possess the necessary skills. What are the risks? In looking at Lakschevitz's model, there's little to risk and everything to gain. It would require thorough and comprehensive research of local/regional businesses with an adequate number of employers/employees to pitch the idea to. A company who is interested in providing this music based teamwork project to its employees would see the value as it is described in the company choir's creative services manifesto. It would be expected that the company would have the ability to absorb the overhead cost to program the choir's rehearsal and performance times. Lakschevitz's vision that choral music exemplifies the model of productivity, teamwork and most importantly creativity aligns well with the important philosophies that a company will want to instill in its employees.