Aurelia
Webster University

This choir is open to undergraduate and graduate students in the University community. Aurelia performs a variety of choral literature for treble voices, representing many periods and styles, sometimes in cooperation with other Webster choirs. Treble voices only.
CHARIS is a diverse group of women united in our mission to perform music that celebrates and encourages women and the LGBTQ community. CHARIS comprises 50–75 women varying in age from 16 to 66. We represent a variety of ethnicities, sexual orientations, economic situations, and abilities and disabilities.
When singers see consistently that the women’s choir at schools are second best or last best, a holding pen for those who did not make it into the top choir; they start regarding women’s choirs as a substandard choral genre. Combined with the nearly gone but still lingering social concept that women are not quite equal to men, this idea of low status for women’s choirs can be damaging to young women’s self concept and the attitude towards women’s choirs in general. Anecdotally, statements are still too often heard at honor choirs from singers in the women’s choirs, "Oh, we are only in the women’s choir," or "Wow, I did not think it was going to be this good because it just the women’s choir."
It is far more than the status of women’s choirs that is at stake. It can often follow that women’s self perception as women is negatively reinforced. **It is not too far a leap psychologically from: “The women’s choir is not the ‘good choir’” to “Being a woman is not as good.”** I am not suggesting that all singers will make that leap, but only that it is possible, especially in a society that is still not quite gender equal.

LET'S TALK ABOUT

Gender
What's in a name?
Repertoire selection
Leadership/community
LET’S TALK ABOUT

Gender

What’s in a name?

Repertoire selection

Leadership/community
The Gender Unicorn

- Gender Identity:
  - Female/Woman/Girl
  - Male/Man/Boy
  - Other Gender(s)

- Gender Expression/Presentation:
  - Feminine
  - Masculine
  - Other

- Sex Assigned at Birth:
  - Female
  - Male
  - Other/Intersex

- Sexually Attracted To:
  - Women
  - Men
  - Other Gender(s)

- Romantically/Emotionally Attracted To:
  - Women
  - Men
  - Other Gender(s)

To learn more, go to: www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan
The presence of “gendered choirs” in the American choral community is a mainstay in many communities; for example: collegiate glee clubs, treble choirs with feminist roots, boychoirs, and single-gender collegiate a cappella groups. Many of these ensembles have proven vital to identity development for males and females, and thus, personally important for many individual singers. For example, I have met many women who feel empowered through membership in a women’s ensemble with feminist roots…If conductor-teachers choose to stay with the “gendered choir” paradigm, however, they must find ways to be inclusive of trans singers. Ensemble name changes may be necessary. For example, several states have renamed their All-State women’s choirs as “treble choirs.” Because, as Skyler so aptly noted, if a choir is going to use the word “women,” then these ensembles must be accommodating of all women; likewise with men’s choirs.

LET’S TALK ABOUT

Gender
What’s in a name?
Repertoire selection
Leadership/community
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“Webster University Women’s Chorus”

Founded in response to strong imbalance of voices in choral program (i.e., too many sopranos and altos)

In 2016, ~25 singers, mostly first-year and sophomore students

Old website language:
“Sopranos and altos new to the choral program at Webster will begin their musical journey in this ensemble.”
When I first came to Webster, I was under the impression that I had the option to either be in Women’s Chorus or in Concert Choir, which was not necessarily the case. I got placed in Women’s Chorus my first year after singing for faculty and stuff. And I kind of—at the time, it was, for the first semester, all treble voices are going to be in women’s choir for the first semester, and so I was really excited about [it], and we got to do works that I had never seen before, and so I thought that was really fun. And then, after—it might’ve not even been the whole first semester; I think it was after, like, our first concert, then a majority of, like, upperclassmen music majors that were in Concert Choir—or in Women’s Chorus—switched over to Concert Choir, and then, we were kind of left with the underclassmen and non-majors—which, we still did great performances and stuff, but kind of, to me, made a difference of not quality, but, like, what I associated with the group [SH: “Hm—how so?”] ‘Cause it, it made it feel like the lesser group.
Name change procedure

Fall 2018—faculty-initiated decision to pursue changing name

Two singer “focus groups” convened to discuss name change

Discussions about gender, femininity, feminism, implications for membership and access

Resulting name: Aurelia (“golden one”)
I remember that the draw was that “Aurelia” had a feminine ending. Which kind of stuck with our, like, feminist point of view of the ensemble. But the actual definition didn’t have a gender associated with it, which I think a lot of people liked.

[...] I think that it gives the choir the royalty that we’ve associated with the name and with the color gold. I think that, I mean, if people were just to see “Aurelia,” I think that it would have a bigger impact than “women’s chorus”...
We chose something that, societally is viewed in a somewhat neutral way. Which I think is fascinating, right, that you have that component of there’s no immediately gendered association with the word “Aurelia,” and yet we’ve found ways to imbue that with meaning through the other forms that the names hold and what, but, like, we found a way to make it purposely fit within a feminist-plus lens but that’s because we’ve done the work to talk about that.
What is in a name?

Names confer identity, purpose, a “signature”

Students like to be “about” something

Traditional treble choir names often overlap with traditional(ist) gender roles

Sense of pride and purpose in “signature,” special name
About the name

In the fall of 2006, the LU Women’s Choir officially changed its name to Cantala. Over the course of several years, a choir retreat story tradition was established. “Fireside chat with Dr. Swan” involved a discussion about the five principles we can learn about leadership and community from geese. These principles became a cornerstone for the ensemble. Consequently, in searching for a unique and appropriate name, we wanted to somehow involve the geese. In 2006, our choir president, Heidi Jastram, and her father “invented” a Latin name for the group. Cantala is actually the merging of two Latin words. “Cant” is the Latin root for “to sing” and “ala” translates as “wings.” The intended meaning is: “on wings of song.” The suggestion was an immediate hit and soon adopted as the official name of the ensemble.
LET’S TALK ABOUT

Gender

What’s in a name?

Repertoire selection

Leadership/community
I am a female composer. As such, my compositions have been programmed on a concert about motherhood, though I do not have children; neither did most of the other women programmed on that concert. I’ve been asked mid-composition to change the theme of a piece, so the commission would relate to womanhood. (I did, but I didn’t rewrite the minute and a half of music I’d composed back when the commission’s theme was “outer space.”) I’ve been asked to sum up what it means to be a woman in a one-minute piece; I tried, but that piece ended up being about exactly how impossible the task is.
The hundredth anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment is in 2020. That and the aftermath of the #MeToo movement have created a perfect storm of what I think of as Lady Composer Commissions: pieces that ask the composer to reflect the experience of being a woman in her work. Equally popular these days is the Lady Composer Concert, which 1) features works by composers who identify as women, and 2) connects the music of these composers for no reason other than that they all share a gender identity...
So I’m more than happy to congratulate anyone championing the work of historically underrepresented composers. Yes, please! Let’s talk about systemic oppression and racism and the discrimination that composers who are not white and/or male have faced for centuries. Let’s talk about implicit bias and financial privilege and how all of it affects which voices we perceive as most worthy of our attention.

And yet it’s equally important to acknowledge that no single concert will fix that systematic imbalance. If it was going to, the Lady Composer Concert would have already done this, because the Lady Composer Concert has been around for decades. The Lady Composer Concert is a stale concept; we’ve tried it already, and we’re still having this conversation.
What if you had bold conversations about why you feel compelled to program more historically underrepresented groups of composers, but for the concert itself, you presented your program the same way you would any other program—highlighting the specific compositions, thematic material, and the reasons that your audience should come hear this music?

Some repertoire thoughts

Sometimes repertoire is what motivates students to join!
(No pressure.)

Focus on underrepresented composers without making them a “theme,” per Trumbore

But please have a theme!

No whining, no flowers.
Through music, we aim to create a world that affirms the worth and dignity of every person.

**REPERTOIRE**

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Concert</th>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Composer</th>
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<tr>
<td>2016-2019</td>
<td>Hearts of Courage</td>
<td>Songs of Stonewall</td>
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<tr>
<td>2018-2019</td>
<td>Hearts of Courage</td>
<td>The Windmills of Your Mind</td>
<td>Michel Legrand</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016-2019</td>
<td>Hearts of Courage</td>
<td>Before the Parade Passes By/from</td>
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[www.voxfemina.org/music](http://www.voxfemina.org/music)
Repertoire

Welcome to Elektra's repertoire resource for conductors of treble choirs. Here you'll find information on the pieces we've programmed since 1987, including, in many cases, publisher and composer links, text, English translation, and conductor's notes. Enter through one of these doors and happy browsing!

Elektra's Recordings
See what's on our CDs, read conductor's and composer's notes, and link through to iTunes or CD Baby to listen or purchase.

All Pieces
Alphabetical list by title of the works Elektra has performed since 1987.

Composer / Arranger
All music sorted by composer / arranger surname.

Collections
Repertoire suggestions grouped by theme such as “Top Canadian Picks”, “Christmas Music”, and “Suitable for...”
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www.musicanet.org
Some composers to know

DALE TRUMBORE

ANDREA CLEARFIELD

ELIZABETH ALEXANDER

IVETTE HERRYMAN
Some composers to know

YSAYE BARNWELL

ABBIE BETINIS

JOCELYN HAGEN

DIANA V. SÁEZ
LET’S TALK ABOUT

Gender
What’s in a name?
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A few leadership/community ideas

Choir officers—or nah?

Shaking up the choir retreat

“Dialogue groups” inspired by the “cogen” (Emdin, 2016)

Applying the wisdom of “no whining, no flowers”
Thank you!

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