

Paul Tucker

Director of Choral Activities

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Tucker teaches choral conducting and oversees KU's 10 choirs, which perform throughout the year. He came to KU in 2004 and became director of choral activities last year. The choral program is a significant part of KU's music program, ranked 12th in the nation among public universities by U.S. News & World Report.

Tell us about your background in Jamaica.

There were maybe a million people in Kingston, which sounds like a lot, but really it was a small environment; if you were in music, you knew everybody. When my twin brother, Stephen, and I went to the Jamaica School of Music, the guys who played with Bob Marley were there. We had great opportunities. Starting at 18, we were teaching music in private schools to the children of ambassadors. I think we need to find ways for kids to be in that kind of small environment, where people encourage them. I don't believe competition makes you better, though you'd better be ready when competition comes.

You've also been a professional pilot.

Yes. After four years at the school of music, I went to Tulsa for aviation school. I found flying made my life complete. When I was flying, I was thinking about music, and when I was playing, I couldn't wait to fly.

Music is who I am, but the way I teach incorporates flying — as if it's life or death. Your musical performance can make someone say, "I can go on." And it's about your students' lives; they're preparing to go out and teach. Every time I think about a performance, that idea is there.



Tucker conducts two of KU's ten choirs, including Chamber Choir, above. Under his direction, graduate conducting students lead the other eight choir groups.

Also in aviation, we deal with physics, and there are elements of physics in conducting. Everything conductors do imitates something from the physical world; the choir and the audience respond to our movement. Everybody has seen this reaction. So, when I say, for every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction, students get it. Flying was never wasted for me. It's still something I love.

How does giving enrich KU's choral program?

Giving is a testimony. It says, "This means something to me." I use Dr. Bob Daugherty, a donor, as my example. His story reminds me why I got involved in music. He jokes that nobody wants him in the choir, but years ago, Clayton Krehbiel, who was KU director of choral music from 1950 to 1966, went to Bob's hometown of Meade, Kansas. He didn't take a choir, but he spoke to the students and sang for them. Dr. Daugherty said that, as a boy, he cried when he heard Krehbiel sing because he didn't know anything could sound so beautiful. Later, he came to KU and met his late wife, Sandra, who was in the choral program. He gives to the program to this day because he knows the influence music can have. He told me, "If you can touch one person out there the way Clayton touched me, that's what I want."

Gifts help in many ways. They can help our choirs travel more and

reach out to people in those Kansas towns like Meade, and they help bring guests to work with our students. They also could provide scholarships for choral participants who are not music majors — outstanding students who work hard, who will be ambassadors for music later and will turn the light back on KU.

What are some events concertgoers can look forward to in the coming year?

For this year, we still have the May 3 concert at Bales Organ Recital Hall. We'll perform Maurice Duruflé's Requiem and a composition by the late John Pozdro, of our faculty, called "Spirit of Mount Oread." Dr. Jared Grantham, a distinguished professor at the KU Medical Center, commissioned this piece, which is set to the words of the poem he wrote after his son and three other KU students died in an accident in 1987.

All 10 choirs sing every semester. We tend to combine them, two in a concert.

We'll have our 2009-2010 calendar posted online fairly early this fall and in our fall newsletter for choral alumni.

— Kirsten Bosnak



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