Just as in class we begin each piece of music by first discussing the background and meaning, I would like to start with a simple story. In the old Walton building, through the narrow hall that compactly held all the fine arts, there was a quote painted above a door in the middle. It read, “When I sing I feel God’s pleasure”. I never thought much of this quote and walked past it every day without ever thinking about the words painted in blue and what they could possibly mean. It was not until I was in a voice lesson with my voice teacher/therapist/second mom, Lyn Taylor, that I truly understood these words. I had just finished singing a song and to me it didn’t feel particularly special or different than we had done it in the past. Mrs. Taylor played the final chord on the piano, took a deep breath, and said, “There’s a famous quote that says, ‘When I sing, I feel God’s pleasure’. God made you to sing, Natalie, and he feels great pleasure each time you do”. I took these words and I kept them. I kept them and stored them in a place in my heart and made sure I would never forget them. No matter how one perceives this quote, whether spiritually, religiously, or not, the message will always be the same.

There is a reason we as humans have the ability to sing. Not only the ability to sing, but the ability to change lives through our singing. We sing because we are so passionate about something we are saying, we are physically unable to contain that passion through speaking and must express it through something more, which usually ends up being through song. I’ve learned through Walton Chorus that we don’t just say “help me” when we are seeking out help. We cry out in harmony, “help me” “help me spread your fragrance wherever you go”. The song I’m referring to is “Prayer”, a song A Cappella had the honor of performing at GMEA last year. I mention this song for a few reasons. Everyone had a different reason they were singing this song.

The way I sang this song was different than how Zaim sang this song, and that was different from how Shiloh sang this song, and so on and so forth. There were 36 voices singing the same text, breathing on the same beats, and accenting the same words; however, there were also 36 different approaches to singing this text and conveying their own personal outlook on the song. Now what’s important about this is that without one of our voices, the song would have been completely different. Would it have sounded almost the exact same to an outside listener? Maybe. But it wasn’t the same. It wasn’t even close. You take out one voice, and you take out an entire person’s purpose. We have a voice for speaking of course. But we have a voice that can also make melodies, harmonies, tap into emotions we didn’t know existed, and that can impact someone for the rest of their life.

These are just a few things that have deeply resonated with me during my four years with Walton Chorus. As a person pursuing a career in a musically driven major, I know I will use each and every day spent in chorus as a driving force in my education and experience. Each year brought new thrills and challenges as I went from a freshman girl’s choir, to the advanced women’s choir, to Walton’s A Cappella choir for my remaining two years. One of my biggest accomplishments and learning experiences, however, was being the Walton Chorus President my senior year. I remember the day I found out I was given president, and to my surprise, the only president. In a job that has historically been done with two people, I was nervous as I looked at my future as a senior, knowing the 23 college applications and auditions I had to complete, along with the average struggles of senior year. Would managing a 500-person choral program be too much? Sometimes in life, the best thing to do is just dive in without too much thought and figure it out as you go. I dove, and I am so thankful I did. One of the hardest parts of being President was having to make decisions as the core leader, knowing I would not be pleasing everyone. I will admit, I am a people pleaser, and knowing that some people would disagree with certain choices I made, made me feel uneasy. That was one of the hardest obstacles as I was leading not only a group of people the same age as me, but some of my closest friends. As challenging as this was, it was the biggest learning experience of my entire life. I learned how to communicate with different people about topics that needed to be discussed, and the responsibility it took to oversee seven choirs. I feel I have gained leadership abilities and immense communication skills from my time as president and I will use them as I tackle life as a performer, a career that revolves around working with others.

While I could talk for days about the joys of Walton Chorus and all it taught me, I will leave off on maybe the biggest lesson I have taken from my time here. It doesn’t matter if I’m not always on pitch. It doesn’t matter that I said sev instead of sov. It matters that I use my voice and share it with the world. We all have a reason to sing and there will always be someone that feels pleasure when I sing.

* ***Natalie Wolff***