

# Choral Conductors Workshop with Rod Eichenberger

## Warm-Up Exercises

Eichenberger/Horstmann

Ne O Ne O Ne O Ne O Ne O Ne O Ne O Ne O Ne O Ne O Ne O Ne O Ne O Ne O Ne O

8  
Zing a por Zing a por Zing Zing Zing Zing a por

10  
bel-la bel-la bel-la bel-la don - na bel-la bel-la bel-la bel-la don - na bel-la bel-la bel-la bel-la don - na.  
pa-pa pa-pa pa-pa pa-pa ghe - na pa-pa pa-pa pa-pa pa-pa ghe - na pa-pa pa-pa pa-pa pa-pa ghe - na.  
ma-ma ma-ma ma-ma ma-ma mi - a ma-ma ma-ma ma-ma ma-ma mi - a ma-ma ma-ma ma-ma ma-ma mi - a.  
vil-la vil-la vil-la vil-la no - va vil-la vil-la vil-la vil-la no - va vil-la vil-la vil-la vil-la no - va.  
pri-ma pri-ma pri-ma pri-ma don - na pri-ma pri-ma pri-ma pri-ma don - na pri-ma pri-ma pri-ma pri-ma don - na.

14  
I love\_\_\_\_\_ to sing! Ha Ya Ya Ya

19  
zing zing a ring zing a ring zing a ring zing a ra zing a ra zing a ra zing a ra zing a ra

28  
mi ni mi ni mi ni mi ni min min min ma mi ni mi ni mi ni mi ni min min min min ma

32  
zing zing zing zing zing zing zing zing za\_\_\_\_\_ za\_\_\_\_\_ za\_\_\_\_\_ za\_\_\_\_\_ za

35  
zing zing zing zing zing zing zing zing za\_\_\_\_\_ za\_\_\_\_\_ za\_\_\_\_\_ za\_\_\_\_\_ za

38  
Nyi a i a Nyi a Nyi a i a Nyi a Nya Nya Nya Nya Nya a Nya a Nya

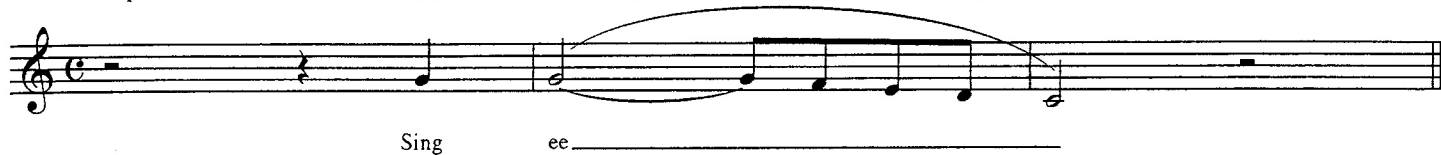
# Crowther's Common Choral Warm-ups

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose \_\_\_\_\_



Purpose \_\_\_\_\_



Purpose \_\_\_\_\_



Purpose \_\_\_\_\_



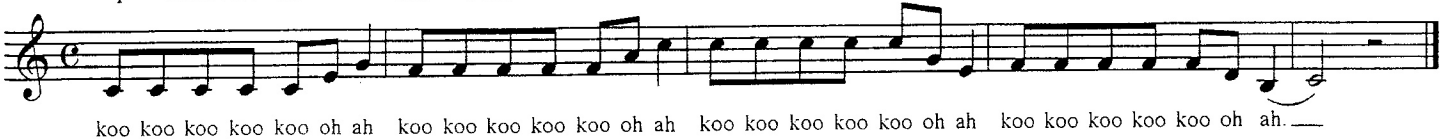
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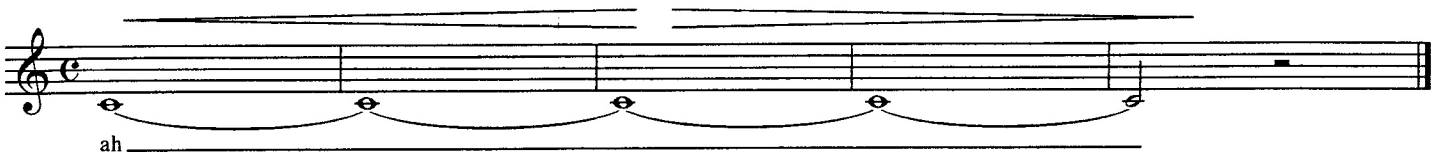
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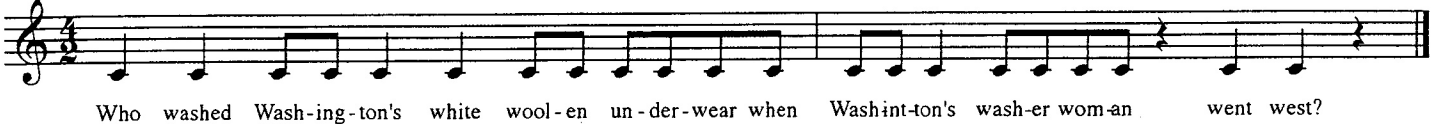
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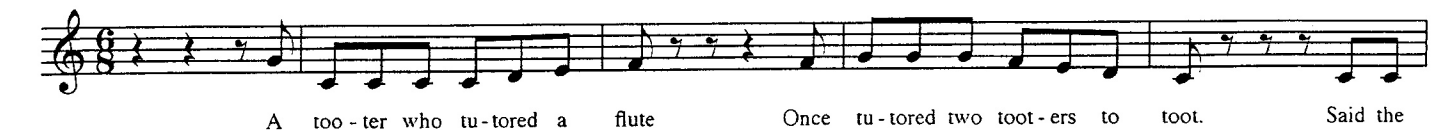


Purpose \_\_\_\_\_



Who washed Wash-ing-ton's white wool-en un-der-wear when Washint-ton's wash-er wom-an went west?

Purpose \_\_\_\_\_

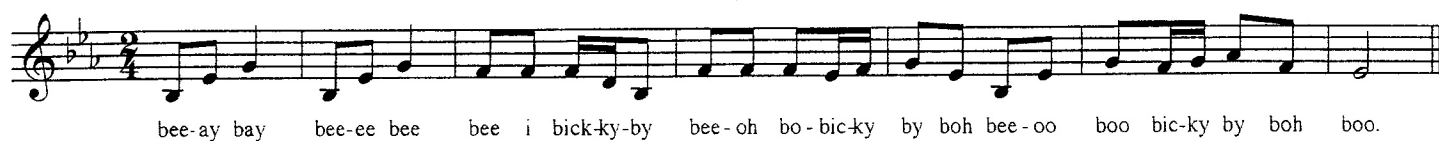


A too-ter who tu-tored a flute Once tu-tored two toot-ers to toot. Said the



two to the tu-tor, "Is it eas-i-er to toot or to tu-tor two toot-ers to toot?"

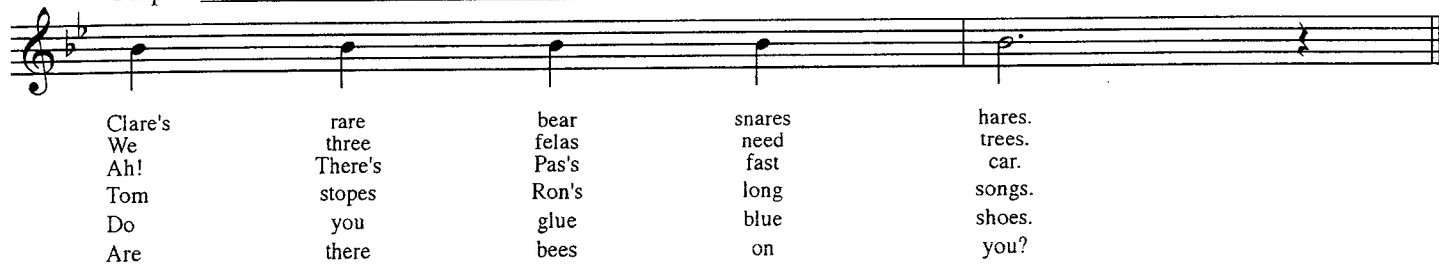
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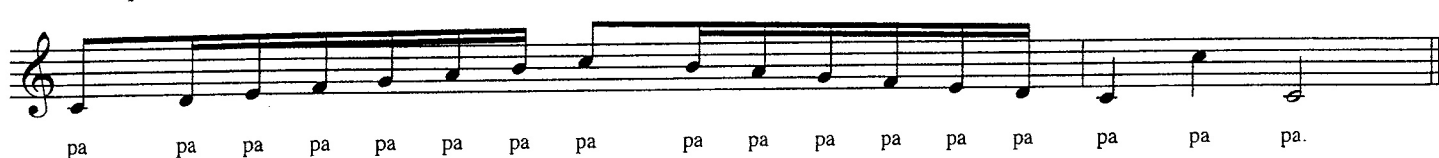
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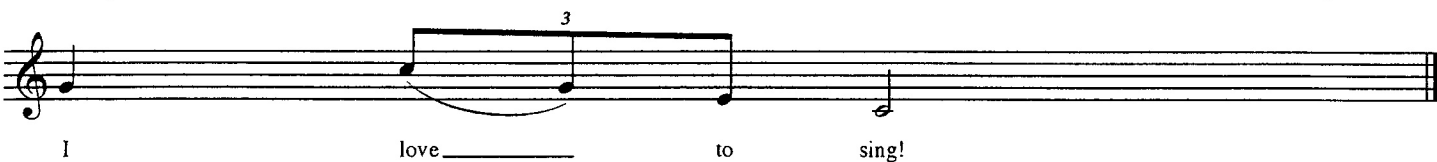
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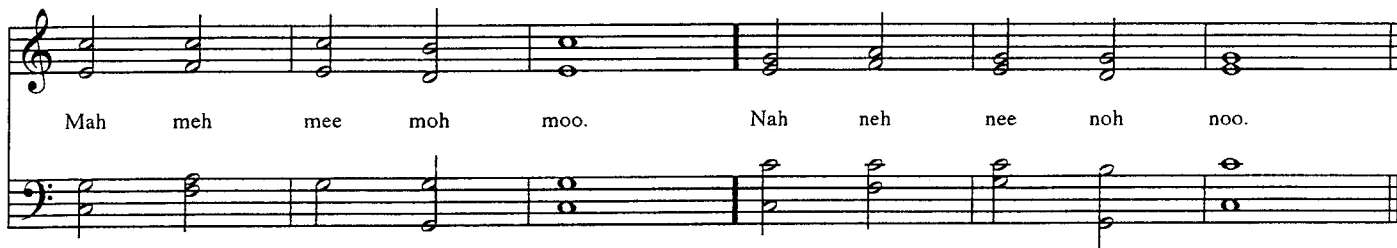
Purpose \_\_\_\_\_



Purpose \_\_\_\_\_



Purpose \_\_\_\_\_



Purpose \_\_\_\_\_

A musical exercise on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with a long phrase of 'noo naw' repeated eight times, followed by a final 'noo naw.' with a fermata. The bass line follows a similar pattern, ending with 'noo naw'.

noo naw noo naw noo naw noo naw noo naw noo naw noo naw. noo naw.

noo naw

Purpose \_\_\_\_\_

A musical exercise on a single staff (treble clef). It features a continuous eighth-note scale-like pattern across the staff, followed by a final note with a fermata.

brrr \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose \_\_\_\_\_

A musical exercise on a single staff (treble clef). It features a half-note scale-like pattern across the staff, with a final note and a fermata.

ee \_\_\_\_\_ oh \_\_\_\_\_ ee.

Purpose \_\_\_\_\_

A musical exercise on a single staff (treble clef). It features a half-note scale-like pattern across the staff, with a final note and a fermata.

yah ha ha ha ha.

Purpose \_\_\_\_\_

A musical exercise on a single staff (treble clef). It features a half-note scale-like pattern across the staff, with a final note and a fermata.

Ah ee ah ee ah ee ah ee ah ee ah ee ah ee ah.

Purpose \_\_\_\_\_

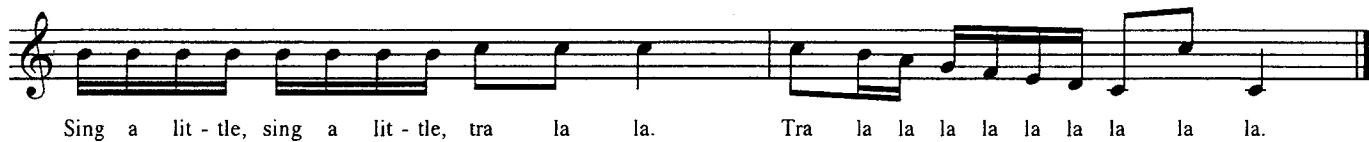
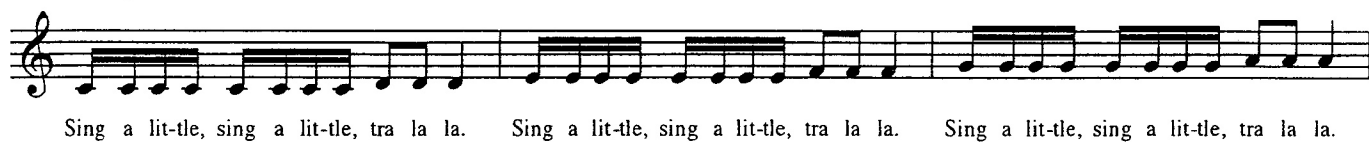
A musical exercise on a single staff (treble clef). It features a half-note scale-like pattern across the staff, with a final note and a fermata.

Hung ah. \_\_\_\_\_

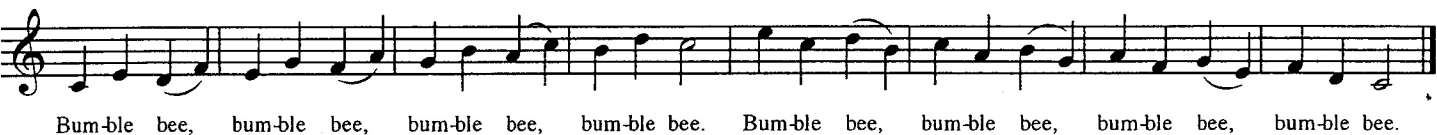
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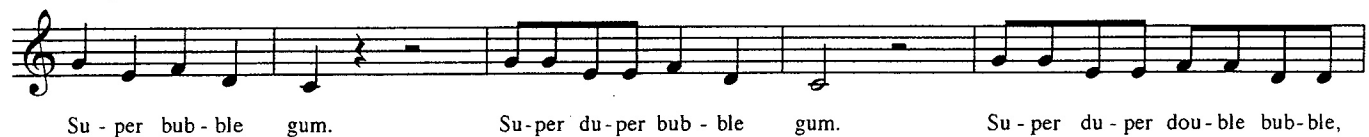
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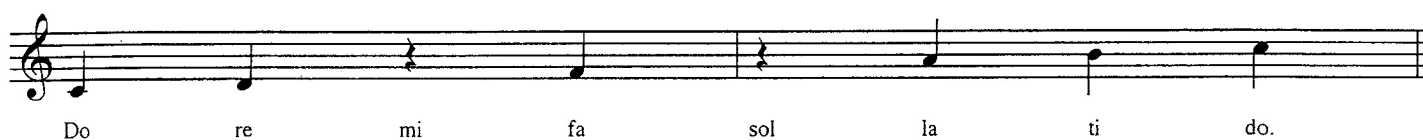
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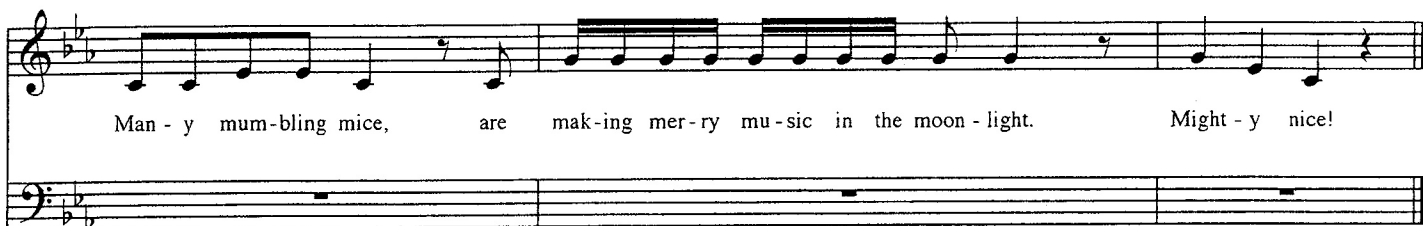
Purpose \_\_\_\_\_



Purpose \_\_\_\_\_



Purpose \_\_\_\_\_



**Sequential Warm-Ups**  
Dr. Edith A. Copley  
Northern Arizona University  
January 25, 2008

**1. Physical**

- a. Posture
  - Minimize muscular holding
  - Pretend you are standing in soft slippers—allows your body to move
  - “No, No, No” with the head—alignment
  - Think “FORWARD” and “UP” (Alexander Technique)
- b. Stretching
  - Reaching for a book
  - Arms in front and stretch
  - Upper body (arms, neck, waist)
  - Facial muscles (side to side; up and down)
- c. Slapping
  - Arms, chest, legs, face
  - Energize the body
  - Shake the hands in different tempos

**2. Breathing**

- Begin with an exhalation
- Breathe in the **shape of the initial vowel**
- Take a **quiet breath**; relaxation during inhalation
- Sensation of “warm air” on the intake

Breathe in for 4—Sustain for 4—Exhale on “SH” or “F”

**3. Onsets and Building Tone Quality**

- Beginning tone quality exercises are in middle voice

Concept of *appoggio*

- Find the 10<sup>th</sup> rib
- Expanded abdominal action
- Singer **stays in the inspiratory position during singing**
- The singer does not push out or pull in the abdominal muscles
- Sternum remains high
- Chest stays quiet
- Onsets help the choir establish a good unison and establish the importance of rhythmic precision  
Finger tips together when you phonate—apart when you breathe
- **Pinch your nose closed**—you will **not** sound nasal if the palate is raised.
- Singer should strive for a balance of upper and lower partials (dark/light tone)  
Place the sound **back**  
Place the sound **really forward**  
Now sing **in between**.
- Top of your hands on the shoulders 5—1—4—3—2—7—1 (breathe)  
Sing on [u] or [o]  
Raise arms as you sing—drop hands to shoulders when you breathe

- Work to make all vocal exercises during the warm-up musical and with a shape—never just notes
- Minimize the playing the piano during warm-ups; listen more & play less.
- Young singers need to think “space” first—then “focus.”
- Envision “inside space” more than “outside space.”

Exercises for Consistent Airflow:

- Buzzing lips
- Vocal sighs—rather than sirens
- Frisbee toss      ffffffah      rrrrrrrah      dzeeeeeeee
- Use voiced consonants      or      fricatives      to begin exercises  
v, z, m, n, l      th, sh, f, h

#### 4. Diction

Some vowel modification is needed in choral singing:

- Upper range for sopranos (some formants do not exist)  
Use [o] or [ɔ] or [ʊ]
- Bright vowels, especially [i] in choral singing often need more warmth
- [i] provides the most space in the pharynx; provides the most formants and “ring” in the tone
- [E] and [a] are difficult vowels to achieve good placement and resonance
- [u] provides the least space in the pharynx

Dark	Bright	
[u]	[i]	[ɪ]
[o]	[e]	[a]
[E]	[ɑ]	[ɔ]

schwa      [ə] upon

- Rhythmic consonants with inside space

Jeff Johnson’s “Ready, Set, Sing” video uses hand signs for vowel sounds.

Corresponding	
Voiced Consonants	Voiceless Consonants
B	P
D	T
V	F
G (girl)	K
L	CH
S (measure)	SH
Z	S
W	WH
TH (they)	TH (think)



## 5. Listening/Concentration

Warm-ups help us establish a good unison, establish the importance of rhythmic precision.

They also build awareness of pitch.

- Have the choir begin rehearsals by singing A 440
- Major scale  
Solfège or numbers (even in different languages)  
Auditate some of the pitches in the scale
- Chromatic scale (up & down; contrary motion)  
Solfège
- Whole tone scale  
Solfège
- Natural, harmonic, and melodic minor scales
- Octatonic scales
- Raise a pitch a 1/2 step over the course of 8 counts

Warm-ups also explore dynamics and range.

- **Dynamic contrast over the course of 6 beats:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	5	4	3	2	1
<i>pp</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>mp</i>	<i>mf</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>ff</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>mf</i>	<i>mp</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pp</i>

## 6. Range & Agility

- Last section of the warm-up contains extended range exercises  
Don't let basses go too high  
Sopranos do not really need to go above a high Bb.
- Use motion to free up the body  
(Tap top of hands, swaying, bending knees, throwing Frisbees, etc.)



# The Perfect Choral Warm Up Routine

By J.D. Frizzell  
[TheChoirCoach.com](http://TheChoirCoach.com)



Every warm up routine should address the following:

1. Breathing
2. Phonation
3. Articulations
4. Dynamics
5. Range Extension
6. Intonation
7. Blend and Balance

I usually place my warm ups in this order, placing an attention getter at the front and a smooth transition into sightreading, theory, or the music to be rehearsed on the back end.

Well-planned and varied warm ups are essential to building a choir or an a cappella ensemble. Directors must be careful not to choose the same exercises every day without regard to the music to be sung or the current strengths and weaknesses of the singers.

## Attention Getters

### **Squash:**

The director begins by performing a 4 beat pattern of one kinesthetic gesture. This can be clapping, snapping, patting your head, etc. The singers are instructed to be one movement behind the director (i.e. the director starts, then the singers start 4 beats thereafter). As the activity goes on, the director should increase the level of difficulty for by increasing the tempo, adding concurrent sounds like buzzing, sirens, animal noises, etc. Towards the end of the exercise, incorporate low, full breaths to provide a quick and seamless transition into stage 1 - breathing.

*Key to success: Start slowly and simply, like clapping quarter notes.*

### **Dance Jam:**

This is for the groggy, low energy Monday or the reward on Friday of a great week of rehearsing. The director plays an up-tempo song over speakers and begins leading a dance. The singers are instructed to mirror the director. Then, at some point, the director leaves the front and gets a volunteer to lead the dancing. When a singer is out of ideas or energy, she can leave the front and another singer must quickly take her place. I usually set a countdown rule wherein if someone doesn't replace the leader within 5 seconds, the game ends.

*Key to success: Make sure the song is appropriate and be ready to quickly transition to avoid lack of focus.*



## Breathing

### **In For Four:**

Have the singers place their hands at the bottom of their ribs, touching the thumbs to the ribs and the rest of the fingers on the stomach. Starting with a low, full diaphragmatic breath, inhale and gradually open up your hands. Exhale, pulling hands back towards the body. Then, say "in for four" and breathe in for four beats. Then say "Out for four" and exhale with the singers. Repeat this process in time without breaks, changing to "out for eight", "out for twelve", etc. I usually go up to sixteen or twenty. For variety, you can exhale on a hiss.

*Key to success: Model well with your own breathing and keep a steady, moderate tempo.*

## Phonation

### The Easy Open:

This warm up is great place to start. It has a three note range, improves unison tuning, and develops proper vowel placement. I choose different vowels on different days based on the literature I'm teaching. Often, I'll start with a closed hum. In addition, I will have students put a cup shaped hand on the side of their face to emulate resonating space.



*Keys to success: Start at a B, C, or C sharp and don't go up past an initial note of A or A sharp.*

### The Placement Helper:

I often find that as I teach private voice lessons, brighter vowels like "Eee" are much easier for singers to place in a forward position with a raised soft palate. By combining a bright vowel with a closed mouth shape, the focus turns to the onset of the vowel each time. The end of the warmup exercise attempt is designed to transfer the placement of the brighter vowel to the darker one.

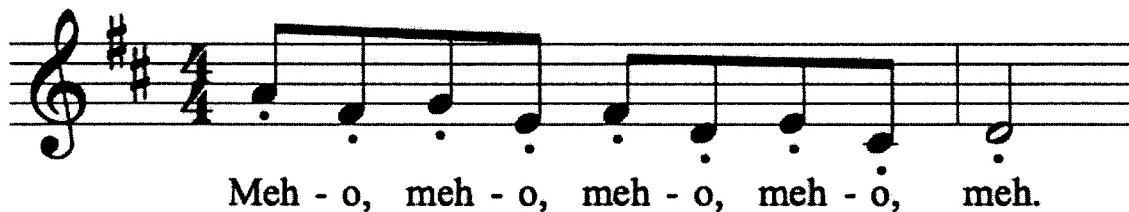


*Key to success: Again, keep the key moderate- start at C sharp and end on F or G.*

## Articulation

### The Hot Stove:

This is one of the best warm ups out there in my opinion, because it does so much at once. I first saw it in rehearsal with my choral mentor, Dr. Jeff Johnson at The University of Kentucky. Start by placing one hand palm up in front of you and start to lightly tap it with a finger of your other hand. Say, "Hot stove!" as you show the lightness and quickness with which you pull your finger away from your hand. Then you alternate to tapping the other hand, switching back and forth each time. Then sing this pattern:



You can then change the articulation to legato by making your hands flat and change your alternation of hands to a smooth one. You can even alter the tempo and dynamics by going faster or slower and increasing or decreasing the size of your gesture. You can also add accents by using a big gesture on one beat followed by small gestures immediately after.

*Key to success: Keep a moderate tempo and don't get too big with your gesture size.*

## Dynamics

### One to Eight:

Place your hands together like a clap, directly in front of you. Build a chord, then start singing 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 as you expand your hands outward. Start at pianissimo at 1 and build to fortissimo at 8, then reverse the process.

You can vary this warm up in a variety of ways:

- Change the number of beats to 4, 2, 6, 10, etc.
- Use different dynamics at each end
- Sing on vowels instead of numbers and audiate the counting
- Choose a word from a piece you are doing and create the dynamic contrast you want in that phrasing

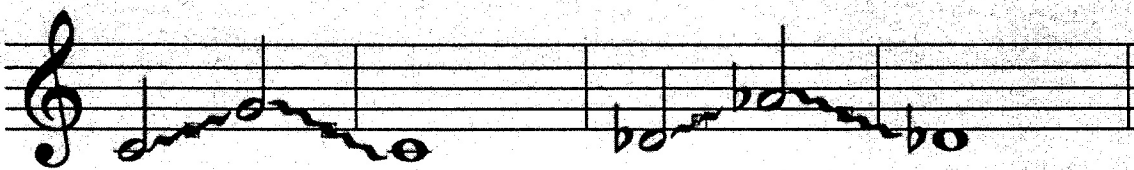
*Key to success: Make the singers do the kinesthetic gesture, too.*



## Range Extension

### The Lip or Tongue Trill:

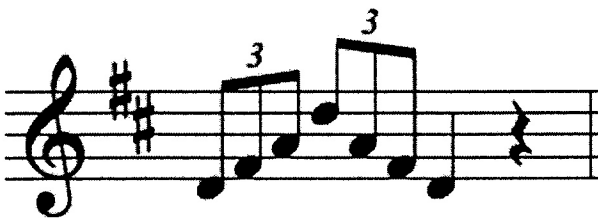
Slide up a perfect 5th and back down on a lip trill or (more advanced) tongue trill. Another benefit of this exercise is that it is not easy to do without substantial breath support. I'll often reinforce that support by having use the rib hand open and close from the "In For Four" warm up. This is also great for very quickly warming up your voice.



*Key to success: Start in the middle of the range, B or C.*

### Zee Yah:

This extends the range without letting singers push their voices.



Zee \_ Yah \_

*Key to success: When modeling the exercise, be sure to keep a light tone.*

## Intonation and Blend and Balance

### **Build A Chord, Any Chord:**

Build a major chord that works for your particular voicing. For SATB groups, for example, I find that Basses on C sharp, Tenors on G sharp, Altos on C sharp, and sopranos on E sharp works well. For TTBB, C sharp for B2, D sharp for B1, E sharp for T2, and G sharp for T1. For SSA, C sharp for A, G sharp for S2, and E sharp for S1. Sing the chord on any open vowel. I usually begin with a closed vowel like "Oo" so singers can hear better. Instruct them to hold the chord, stagger breathing when necessary, and then point up and have them all go up a half step. Once that has tuned, go back down a half step. Then go down a half step and back up to the original chord. As your singers get better at this, isolate individual sections and move them around by half step.

*Keys to success: Plan where you are going in advance to ensure success (i.e. don't end on a "weird" chord that doesn't sound "right").*

### **Half Step Over Counts:**

Point your two index fingers horizontally in front of you at each other. Sing a G on "loo". Then raise one hand up higher, maintaining a horizontal plane for your index finger, and sing a G sharp. Then go back down to G and even fingers. Have the singers repeat this process. Then, quickly slide your finger up and back down, sliding the note you sing from G to G sharp. Then go back down. Have singers repeat. As they get better at tuning, increase the difficulty by sliding through the half step over 2 beats, then 4 beats, then 6 beats, then 8 beats.

*Keys to success: Don't move on to a higher number of beats before singers can really do well where they currently are.*

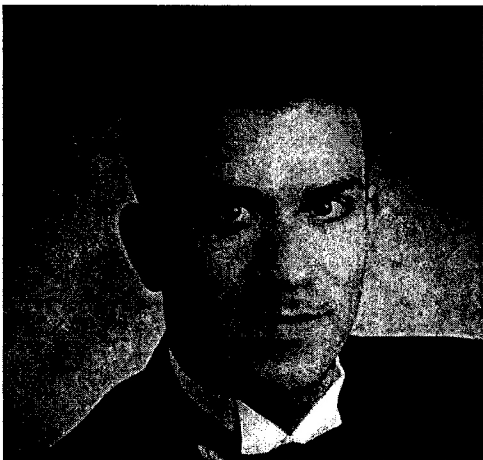


These are just some of my warm ups I use. I learn new ones all the time and keep them written down to provide variety and utility in my rehearsals. I am constantly looking for different warm ups and am indebted to my mentors Dr. Jefferson Johnson, Dr. Lori Hetzel, Dr. John Flanery, and Dr. Gregory Fuller for their guidance and ideas.

Want some more ideas for your warm up routine?

Need guidance on a particular issue you keep having in rehearsals?

Get a FREE 30-Day Trial of The Choir Coach and have the best rehearsals you've ever experienced!



J.D. Frizzell, a composer, conductor, and baritone, is the Director of Fine Arts and Director of Vocal Music at Briarcrest Christian School in Memphis, TN. In this role, J.D. is responsible for coordinating all Fine Arts programs (K2-12th grade) and for teaching Concert Choir, Chamber Choir, and OneVoice, a contemporary a cappella group. Frizzell is active as a presenter, adjudicator, clinician, and guest conductor. As an active member of TNMEA, NATS, ACDA, and WTVMEA, he has served in multiple volunteer capacities. He also volunteers as the president and co-founder of the A Cappella Education Association. As a conductor and performer, J.D. has appeared at state, regional, and national conventions of ACDA and NAFME. His contemporary a cappella group, OneVoice, is a Sony recording artist. In 7 years, J.D. grew his school's choral music program from 140 to 400 students. He is also a published composer and arranger with Alfred Colla Voce, Choristers Guild, Lorenz, and Heritage Press.

# Choral Warm-Ups with Purpose

Kate Simon, Towson University  
ksimon@towson.edu

## Body

- Stretching
  - Individual stretch
  - Individual massage where you hold tension (face neck, shoulders)
- Posture alignment
  - Thumbs up/ thumbs down (good posture/slump while standing)
  - Ask volunteer to demonstrate feet even and gently “push” their back to show unstable posture. Then repeat with one foot slightly in front of the other to show stable posture.
  - Posture balance – hands over head, then to side and stand on tiptoes. Lower arms to side and place feet flat on floor. Note raised sternum and feeling of height.
  - Yoga arms/lengthen spine
  - Posture Pooch

## Breath

- Place hands on sides around midsection to feel expansion while inhaling. Take a slow breath in for 4 beats, then out on a hiss for 4. Repeat, but hiss out for 8, then 12, then 16.
- Breathe/lip trill – breathe in for 1 beat then lip trill on mid-range pitch for 1 beat, repeat for high and low pitches. (everyone on different pitches)
- Breath to voice activation
  - sighs from upper to lower range
  - Woofers – bark like big dogs (woof, woof), medium dogs (roof, roof), and little dogs (yip, yip) to use lower, middle and upper voice

## Ear Training

- Inner hearing
  - Chordal degrees – play triads at piano and direct students to sing 1, 3, or 5 on a neutral syllable. Do not tell them which pitch to sing until after triad is played. Give listening time before response.
  - Singing scales inside – have students audiate ascending/descending scale pitches using hand signs and directed by teacher. Upon teacher’s signal, students switch to singing pitch out loud, and vice versa.
- Intonation
  - Moving by half steps – have students start on unison middle C on loo. Upon director’s cues, sopranos and tenors move up a ½ step while altos and basses move down ½ step.

- Sing scale on solfege in canon. For advanced students, sing scale on quarter notes in 4 parts starting one beat after the previous entrance to focus on dissonance and part independence.
- Crazy chromatics.  $\frac{1}{2}$  step up,  $\frac{1}{2}$  step down, alternate. Then divide choir in two and move in opposite directions. Added motion: Point index fingers toward each other parallel to the ground, touching at the tips. Left hand/finger stays still, right hand/finger moves up or down depending on direction of half step. Helps your visual and kinesthetic learners!



## Voice

- Sirens with visuals
- Humming – 5-4-3-2-1 on hum
- Staccato articulation – 1-3-5-3-1 on [bi], ascending by half-steps
- Legato articulation
  - Legato articulation - descending half notes on 5-4-3-2-1
  - Portamento – slide from 5-1, gliding and “hitting” every note between
- Marcato articulation – *sforzando* – write 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + on board and have students softly count while seated. Choose a beat to be accented and have students stand for the *sfz* beat, then return to seated position.
- Vowel uniformity
  - Sing oo-oh-ah in unison, noticing lowering of jaw for each
  - Sing oo-eh-ee, maintaining lip flare for each to keep darker quality
- Vocal Quality
  - Hung-ah – feel forwardness of sustained ng on pitch
- Range extension
  - Vocal limbo – How low can you go? Sing 5-4-3-2-1 on “low” descending by half step until everyone reaches vocal fry
- Diction- consonant clarity - students echo 4-beat patterns using voiced and unvoiced consonants
  - P-F-T-K (unvoiced)
  - B-G-V-D (voiced)
  - Mix voiced and unvoiced in varying patterns
- Expression
  - Sing exercises using different facial expressions using flashcards

- Choral Beat Box - combine sirens and diction

PART 1				PART 2				PART 3 (UP)				PART 4 (DOWN)			
PP	PP			K	K			SIREN				SIREN			
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

- Practice individual elements alone (consonants, sirens up and down), then add rhythmic pattern.
- Have everyone practice each of the parts until secure.
- Then divide into 4 groups (perhaps SATB) and start with part 1, adding a layer at a time until you have a choral beat box

### Miscellaneous

- Focus attention
  - Oh Snap! Snap a square in the air with your right hand while counting to the beat. Snap a right triangle with your hand while counting to the beat. Combine the two, starting together at the top center. You should end on the thirteenth beat with both hands in the original starting position. If you are going to get it right, instead of saying "12, 13," say "Oh SNAP!"
  - Body percussion – echo teachers movements, first alternating turns, then following 4 beats behind while teacher moves on to next pattern
  - 1, 1-2-1, 1-2-3-2-1, etc. Use numbers or solfege and complete entire scale ascending, then descending. Repeat, leaving out certain intervals.
- Increase energy
  - 10 and a Basket – run in place for 10 counts then shoot a basket
  - Grapefruit/Lemon – open mouth wide (grapefruit) and scrunch tight (lemon). Repeat with whole body (wide movement and scrunch up)
  - Shake Down
    - i. Shake right hand 8 counts, left hand 8 counts, right foot 8 counts, left foot 8 counts while counting aloud. Repeat with 4, 2, and 1 counts, then strike a ninja pose at the end and hold!

# Concepts of Choral Singing

Dr. Edith A. Copley

1. No two consecutive notes, syllables or words should ever receive equal emphasis. The music is always going somewhere and then returning. (Robert Shaw)
2. Always breathe in the shape of the initial vowel.
3. Inhalation, regardless of dynamic, should always be **silent, low, and expansive**.
4. **Stay on the vowel** sound for as long as possible.
5. Almost **all** vowels are **tall** vowels—"space between the molars"—the exception is "eh". (Sigrid Johnson)
6. Consonants are *almost always* **short** and **ahead** of the beat.
7. Consonants do not need muscular strength—they need **air turbulence**. Let the **air** carry the consonants.
8. Long notes are either < (*crescendo*) or > (*decrescendo*) or < > (*messa di voce*). **Long tones never "sit"**.
9. Dynamics are not just a question of volume—they are changes of **breath intensity**.
10. Sing with the most **beautiful sound** you can produce—**all the time**. "Never sing louder than *lovely*."
11. "Singers are 1/3 vocal technician, 1/3 musician, and 1/3 dramatic actor." (Donald Neuen)
12. Never think the same pitch on repeated notes—always think slightly higher.
13. Thing constant "**flow of tone**," rather than "just sing."
14. Feel as though you are **inhaling** as you sing the phrase—stay in the expanded inspiratory position. (Richard Miller) "Sing **in** the breath, rather than **on** the breath." (Steve Boehlke)
15. To achieve legato, **energize the back half** of the note as it moves to the next note. (Edwin Fissinger)
16. Another way to achieve great **legato** is get to the vowels as quickly as you can, **without** accenting the consonants. Think *staccato* then sing *legato*. *What?!* (Edie Copley)
17. Ascending intervals that are **greater than a 3<sup>rd</sup>**, the top note should be sung **lighter**.
18. In music, one must think with the heart and feel with the brain. (George Szell)

19. "Shed weight" as you sing higher. "Drop the luggage as you ascend the stairs." (Timothy Salter)
20. Vibrato should confirm the pitch, not confuse it. ☺
21. Choral singing is like basketball (three-second lane violation). **Look up** from your music and make eye contact with the conductor **ever three seconds**. (Edie Copley)
22. There is nothing **more tragic** than the **look of indifference**. (Richard Nace)
23. The vocal folds that create speech and song are located halfway between your brain and your heart. **Great singers use both**. (Robert Fountain)

### Rehearsal Strategies for High School Choirs

Janwin Overstreet-Goode

1. Start rehearsal as soon as the tardy bell rings. I begin with specific vocalises and breathing exercises for tone production.
2. Have a strategy for checking roll and taking care of other administrative details.
  - a. Use a student officer to check roll for me, once you have a seating chart in place.
  - b. Write all announcements on a dry-erase or chalkboard; students should be expected to read the board upon entering the room.
  - c. Have all classroom sets of music and other handouts placed on a table for students to pick up as they enter the room.
3. Sight-read – every day.
4. Music Theory – also every day.
5. Music rehearsal (minimum of two-three songs per day.)
  - a. Start with solfege first; write in syllables as necessary
  - b. Include phrasing and dynamics while using solfege syllables.
  - c. When moving to words, emphasize the need for syllabic stress from the beginning.
6. Grading
  - a. In addition to sight-reading tests and written theory tests, I also give daily participation grades.
  - b. "Questions" – verbal questions and answers posed to multiple students daily (What is the key of this exercise? Explain the time signature. What does "allegro" mean?) Every student in the class has the opportunity to answer one of these questions for a daily grade.
7. Repeat daily.



## ***Tone Building Strategies for Breath***

- Slow inhale/Slow exhale
- Staccato Exercises
- Long Phrase Exercises
- Lip buzzes
- Hissing
- Counting on one pitch
- Panting
- Lay on the floor
- Hands on the lower back to feel muscles
- Bend over for expansion in back
- Shake through a straw
- Partner Breathing
- Breathe in for 8, exhale for 8
- Deep breath; out with all the bad
- Crunches
- Happy Birthday Candle
- 

## ***Tone Building Strategies for Resonance***

- Use the vowels throughout the whole range
- Sirens on 'ee'
- Feel sensations
- Sing with nose plugged
- Snort to feel soft palate
- Lip trills, 'ng,' and 'ee' vowel
- Njeh (54321) with an nasal sound
- Use falsetto with the guys
- Pretend to bite an apple to sense the mask
- Feel tone coming out of the top of the head (sunroof)
- Pinky finger on top teeth; make finger buzz
- Hinn-ah (554321)
- Space in the sound
- Hot potatoes and gravy imagery
- Get sound forward and outside the teeth
- Drop jaw to make space
- Space needs focus
- Play with vowels using different placement
- Use students to model sound
- Teacher model the sound
- Humming (touch sides of face to feel resonance) Inside Smile
- Tip of tongue behind front teeth
- Go back and forth between 'ee' and 'ah'
- Humming and n's
- Sing above the hand
- Ooh' for Head tone
- Talk like Mickey Mouse
- Make space with vowels - Mah, meh, mee, moh, mooh

## ***Tone Building Strategies for Range Extension***

- Use half step increments
- Take any exercise high or low
- Work the extremes then connect them
- Lip trills
- Alternate lips trills with singing
- Teach boys falsetto
- Don't press on larynx going low
- five note patterns going down on 'ee'
- •Sliding to go down low
- Sirens
- Start guys in falsetto and bring them down
- "Hello," Mrs. Doubtfire Voice
- Bring head voice down with boys

## ***Tone Building Strategies for Phonation***

- Teach good breath support
- Multiple attacks on one note
- Humming, 'm's,' 'n's,' and 'ng's'
- Breathe thru the shape of the vowel
- Lip trill
- Vowels without consonants 'ooh,' 'ee,' and German umlaut
- Voiced consonants
- Have breath moving before making sound
- Z-sounds
- Zing-ah (154321)
- Experiment with bad and good onset – no glottal attacks

## ***Tone Building Strategies for Vowel Development***

- Pure vowels
- Modify vowels when necessary
- Vowels happen inside before they happen outside
- Roundness
- Soft palatespace
- Put an 'oh' behind the vowels
- Talk about where to put the vibrations
- Dissect the vowel
- Space; Dome idea
- Mah, meh, mee, moh, mooh [use hand signs]
- Modify vowels when going up
- Teach lip and mouth shape
- Match 'oo'vowels
- Teach bright and dark [use bright-o-meter]
- Listen to choirs that have beautiful sounds
- Have students model good vowels
- Solfege
- Start with 'oo' vowel and branch out
- Be consistent with vowels

- **Five Latin vowels**
- **Teach IPA**
- **Tall vowels – Million \$\$ Vowels**
- **Drop jaw – Aspirin on tongue**
- 

***Analogies/Metaphors/Imagery used to support tone teaching***

- **Tall Vowels**
- **Breath under the tone**
- **Spin the tone**
- **In the Head**
- **Open Space**
- **Behind the mask**
- **Supported tone**
- **Lifted Soft palate**
- **Tall Round Energized Resonant Focused**

## Choral Warmup in Seven Minutes

SCVA Fall Workshop 2001

Donald Brinegar, presenter

### *Key Concepts*

Respiration (Inhalation and Exhalation)

Blowing air, Fogging up Glasses

Posture (Potential for expression)

Onset (Coordination of breath flow through the vocal folds)

Flow Phonation (Bernoulli Effect, Principle of Suction)

Include different types of articulation later

Articulation (Shape and quality of the tension in the articulators)

Learning to control airflow through respiratory muscles

Resonance (Singers Formant, Vowel Formants)

Singing to a drone (pedal point)

Inclusion of tuning affects

Kinesthetic (Motion of a particular muscle or group of muscles)

Over-arching concept – all singing should be constant motion

Coordination (The ability to control all the above into an expressive aesthetic)

### *Activity*

Call and Response

[m] [ŋ] [n] [v] [z] [ð] [ø]

Speaking Eloquently

Isolating Articulators (Isometric)

Begin with a phoneme in the lower middle of the voice

Sustaining breath on a single sound (Isotonic)

Single pitch, single phoneme

Three note exercises (Calisthenics)

Five notes to a drone

Scales to a drone (Use solfege do, re, mi, sol, la, ti, do *or* sagaram sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni, sa))

Ionian (major), Lydian (raised 4<sup>th</sup>), Mixolydian (lowered 7<sup>th</sup>), Dorian (lowered 7<sup>th</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>),

Aeolian (lowered 7<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup>), and Phrygian (lowered 7<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>)

Flexibility	(Breaking down the muscle)	Isometrics
Strength	(Sustained effort)	Isotonic
Versatility	(Variety of Coordination)	Calisthenics

*Remember that technique does not necessarily make music. Music, however, demands expressive technique.*

Donald Brinegar  
6887 Starline St.  
La Verne, CA 91750  
(909) 593-9375  
dlbrinegar@msn.com

Pasadena City College  
1570E. Colorado Blvd.  
Pasadena, CA 91106  
(626) 585-7124  
dlbrinegar@paccd.cc.ca.us

# Psychology of the Choral Rehearsal

Dr. Edith A. Copley

Northern Arizona University

Las Vegas, NV January 2008

## REHEARSAL PREPARATION

### Trouble Shooting"—Score Preparation

What is the **ideal sound** that you hear in your head?

Phrasing (length, shape, destinations, and coming away)

Text: enunciation (IPA) word stress literal translations of foreign languages

Identify all the tricky leaps, doubled octaves, dissonances, etc.

Intonation Issues

Practice your conducting in front of a mirror

Try to memorize music before the first rehearsal

Have a specific time allotment for each piece in the program.

## IN REHEARSAL

Let them in "on the secret." What are you looking for today?

Constantly solicit student feedback

Sucky notes

### *Posture and Breath Management*

When breathing—think a **triplet** rather than one or two eighth notes—it slows the intake.

Always warm-up the **head voice down** rather than the chest voice up

[o] and [u] vowels are great vowels to build richness in the tone

[i] is a great vowel for brilliance and forward placement

[a] is very difficult to tune and to place

Working with Men's Voices: "Mrs. Doubtfire" or Julia Childs (the cook) voice (J. Blackstone)

### *Some Basic Ideas to keep in mind*

Use a seating arrangement that enhances the music and facilitates the rehearsal

Try to keep everyone busy the majority of the time

Always give a reason for stopping

### *Rehearsal Pacing*

Rehearsal and you should always be in motion

If something is not working, go back later

Tim Seelig (author of Shawnee Press book—*The Perfect Blend*) 5-minute time slots

When introducing a new piece (Ann Howard Jones)

1. Count sing pitches
2. 1/2 count sing and 1/2 neutral syllable
3. Text in rhythm on a **neutral pitch**
4. 1/2 count sing; 1/2 sing pitches with text
5. Everyone on text

Henry Leck adds movement into the rehearsal by incorporating Dalcroze Eurhythmics.

His DVD is *Creating Artistry Through Movement in the Choral Rehearsal* is published by Hal Leonard.

- |                                       |                 |                    |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Step to the beat                      | Clap the rhythm | Turn on the phrase |
| Step the macro beat (downbeat of 3/4) | Clap the rhythm |                    |

### *Text and Diction*

Every sound in every word is important and needs to be there

\*No two syllables, notes, or words have equal emphasis. (Robert Shaw)

Avoid speaking the text in a monotone drone; pitch the voice higher and speak with inflection.

### *Communication in the Rehearsal*

The most effective way that connects with the primal part of the brain is **gesture**

Know and hear the sound that you want in your head—then conduct that sound

Increase the **intensity** of the gesture for *crescendo*, instead of increasing the **size** of the gesture.

"Seven words or less." (Archibecque)

Alternate sitting and standing during the rehearsal. Write it into your lesson plan!

Be positive. "Be a choral director, not a choral corrector." (Eichenberger)

"Problem-solving Approach" (Nancy Davis)

"Abundance Approach"

### *The Need to Laugh*

#### *Listening—Techniques to help your students become better listeners*

Sections of the choir sing in a circle. Put an individual in the middle to listen and make suggestions for improvements.

Develop listening squads

Students who cannot sing (sore throat, bad cold, etc.)

Read using *solfege* to gain pitch memory and independence

Ask questions of specific students

Audiating

Modify standing/seating arrangement

#### *Teaching Techniques*

Eyes out of the score—you and the students

Teach choral concepts

"We tend to get what we expect." (N. V. Peale)

Almost every piece has a high point. Where is it??

"Can you please sing that more musically?"

#### *Building Expression in the Choir*

Joints and muscles are free floating

Conductors often limit the expression of the choir

Feet are soft—"ankle bone connected to the knee bone, etc."

Everyone's trying too hard

Where are our points of balance?

The sound of the word is often linked to what it means: Love Hate

Pantomime the words

"Eyes take in light"

Group commitment

### *After the Rehearsal*

Plan alone time to assess the rehearsal and plan the next one

Record your rehearsals (CD and DVD or videotape) *See handout*

Begin the next rehearsal where you left off

### *Passion in Rehearsal and Performance*

Rehearsals are a "safe" place

The creative process is not something the students hope to **see**, it is something they hope to **feel**.

Young people are not creatures of **logic**—they are creatures of *emotion*.

### *Four Agreements* *by Don Miguel Ruiz*

- (1) Always tell the truth
- (2) Don't make assumptions
- (3) Don't take anything personally
- (4) Do the best you can

## CHORAL REHEARSAL SUGGESTIONS

Edith A. Copley  
Las Vegas, NV January 2008

### POSTURE

- Place both hands on the back of the neck, so head does not pull back too far
- Allow your shoulders to release out to the sides. Let your arms hang freely at your side.
- Spine "lifted out of the hips."
- Hold arms on your chest, keeping sternum high. **Breathe below your arms.**
- Active posture of a singer—same as a boxer—not passive, buoyant, not tense.
- Floating head position—gently shake your head "No" and "Yes."
- Stand on the edge of the diving board for a back dive. Arms extended out parallel to the ground and on your toes. Return to full foot support with arms slowly down to the sides.
- Wiggle your toes to relax the feet and legs during a concert

### BREATH CONNECTION

- Exhale first**—then take breath in the shape of the vowel
- Warm air vs. cool air breath                      **Silent Breath!**
- A professional breath:** the first breath expands the rib cage—and then it never moves again!
- Breathe through hole in your throat. Spin index finger in front of the hole as you inhale. (Jeff Johnson)
- Think space between your molars
- \*Place one hand on the 10<sup>th</sup> rib (either side) and the other on the back to feel expansion.
- All breaths are FORTE breaths. No such thing as less breath for softer singing
- Right hand on abdomen; left arm behind the back. Feel the air go **into the back** first and then the front when taking a breath.
- Keep ribs **expanded** (in an inspiratory position) as you sing the phrase
- Use "FL" "TH" "V" to begin exercise                      5—4—3—2—1                      on [o]
- Exhale, inhale on AW, sustain tone, and visualize air **COMING IN** as you sing.
- Spin hand in a circle toward your mouth as you sing.
- Make inward circles with both arms at waist level. Fill the barrel with air.
- Instruct the choir to "Drink a glass of air"; this helps to lower the larynx.
- Inhale as you bend your knees, exhale on "SHOO" as you "Shoot the Basketball"

### VOWEL SPACE AND ALIGNMENT

- Back of hands up on the cheeks; teeth apart
- Think "Tall Walls" or space between the molars
- Index finger in front of face to encourage tall vowel
- Extend the arms while the hands make a circle in front of the face for roundness of vowel.
- Fingers in front of the ears for jaw release.
- Index finger and thumb on the corners of the mouth to prevent overextension of [eh] vowel.
- Add a room to your house, but do not tear down the existing rooms—add the upper room and add the basement—connect the house.
- Hand motions for AH, OH, OO, EE, AY, and EH (Jeff Johnson)
- Vowels are your "best friends"; stay on the vowel **for as long as possible**
- Speak the text aloud with tall vowels. "Julia Child voice"
- \*Keep vowels open in *forte* and *piano* singing.
- In *legato* music, think *staccato* then sustain. ☺



More inside space as you get louder and higher to keep soft palate raised.  
Think "repetition of the vowel" as the note is sustained.

## DICTION

Consonants are as short as possible—"just acquaintances"  
Vowels are always as long as possible—"your best friends"  
Analogy of the garden hose—vowels are the water and consonants your finger quickly passing through the water  
Listen to the choir as they sing AH vowels—many are singing UH.  
Imagine all articulations happening **just outside your mouth**, crisp and precise, and without tension.  
Sing as if someone who is deaf is sitting out in the audience—reading your lips and face for the text.  
"K" sound must be **more forward** when singing.  
Pronounce consonants with **inside space** and **breath energy**.  
The essence of consonants is not muscular strength, but the creation of air turbulence. Let high frequency air turbulence with a relaxed jaw "carry the consonants" to the audience on a **carpet of air**.  
Be sure voiced consonants are **on pitch**. They will also need more air.  
As a warm-up, echo rhythmic patterns using a variety of consonants.  
Use a puff of air for all fricatives.  
"WH" should always have air puff. "When, What, Where, Why"  
Project the text with the same energy as a whisper.

## IMPROVING TONE QUALITY

Begin with onsets: "Hnm, hnm, hnm, hnm, hnm" (different pitches)  
Then add vowel sounds. [i] [e] [a] ascending and descending  
Release the tone with sighs, "yoo-hoo," "yee-hee"  
Throw a **frisbee** on FAH, ZHOH, THOO, VAY  
Lightly touch the corners of your mouth—this is a reminder to keep corners in—not letting the vowels spread. (W. Noble)  
[u] and [o] vowels help the choir build warmth in the tone (Blackstone)  
[i] and [e] vowels build brilliant and focused tone  
Make the **tone** carry the emotion of the music—not the **words**. (Shaw)  
Sing with the most **beautiful sound** you can produce all the time"  
Work for a sense of **space** with proper **forward placement**  
Think constant flow of tone.  
Always think the tone color rather than "just sing."  
Ask the choir to inhale with **different colors** in mind: blue, solar yellow, purple  
If the choir gets an edge in the sound—go to a [u] vowel in a lighter quality.  
Work for resonance without weight, especially in lower men's voices.  
If there is weight, have the choir sigh from high note down. Every onset should be approached with a feeling of sighing down. Men sing in falsetto and then go immediately to the written pitches. (Blackstone)  
If the sound is too bright, ask for more "North-South" in mouth space.  
Tone quality does not change with dynamics.  
Hold your nose closed when singing, if it becomes nasal the soft palate is not raised. (Simon Carrington)  
Pull string upward on the last note of each phrase to lift it.  
Shed weight as you sing higher. Drop a piece of luggage as you go up the stairs, and pick it up again when you descend. (Tim Stalter, U of IA)  
Pull Kleenex out of the box and toss it into the air for buoyancy (Brad Logan)  
Good Choral Tone is FREE: (Don Neuen, UCLA)  
Freedom—Resonance—Energy—Expression

## UPPER RANGE MODIFICATION

Women's voice modify to the open vowel: AH or UH  
Men's voices modify to the more closed vowels: EE and OO  
In lower register: altos and basses should sing lighter and brighter.

## DYNAMICS

Work to develop dynamic amplitude from one extreme to the other.  
Counting exercise from 1 to 6: 1 is *pp* 6 is *ff*  
Memorize what 4 and 5 sound and feel like  
Make the crescendo and decrescendo very gradual  
Give shape to every phrase in the music and every exercise in the warm up  
Mee May Mah Moh Moo  
1—3 2—4 3—5 4—2 1  
*p* *f* *p*  
Conduct in outward circles with both hands  
Dynamics are not just a question of **volume**; they are changes of intensity borne out of the **breath**.  
Whisper the text. Keep that same breath energy as you sing piano.  
Sing *piano* with a "fuller sound"  
Use descriptive words like "warmer, fuller, more resonant, shimmer, spooky, etc."

## PHRASING

No two consecutive notes, syllables, or words should ever receive equal emphasis. *Robert Shaw*  
Sing one phrase with the choir using a hand gesture (arch or a rainbow) to show the shape the phrase.  
Music is always in the process of going somewhere and returning.  
Use the space in front rather than just side to side.  
Play the air as if you are a string player. Feel the fluidity of the movement, and how the arm movements affect the sound that comes out.  
Just give the choir the instruction to "**Sing more musically.**"  
Demonstrate "weak to strong" motion in Baroque phrasing.  
Feel like you continue to inhale as you sing (circular motion toward mouth).  
Walk to the note of destination and then walk back to finish the phrase.  
"**Paint the house,**" so there is pull through the line.  
"**Sing through the back half of the notes**" to achieve better *legato*. (Fissinger)  
To achieve great *legato*—**think staccato** and then sustain the vowel. (Fissinger)  
Notes that are more than one beat should get a slight surge, except at the end of a phrase.  
Interval leaps up of more than a 3<sup>rd</sup> should *decrescendo*.

## RHYTHMIC PRECISION

Tapping the sub-division of the beat on the upper chest as they sing  
Snapping fingers on the off beat  
Buoyancy—tap the inside of the palms—to spring out of the beat.  
Tapping the shoulder of a neighbor (can be problematic)  
Count singing—much easier during rehearsal. Leave spaces for rhythmic breaths. Keep energy through every beat.  
Sing without a conductor—individual responsibility for sub-division and tempo  
To begin, speak text in rhythm.  
Sing *staccato* on "doot"; this always reveals places with rhythmic uncertainty.  
Tap final consonant release in the air.  
Releases must be as rhythmically precise as onsets.

Half the choir softly uses "ch, ch, ch, ch" on 16<sup>th</sup> notes while the other half of the choir sings or speaks.

Clap on the down beats before an offbeat entrance—springboard into phrase.

Rests do not interrupt—they inspire.

## INTONATION

Flexibility in moving the keys in a Renaissance piece, esp. if it is in F or G

Much of our intonation problems are a result of vocal technique or "lifts" in the voice, not poor ears or weak listening skills.

Ascending half steps must be very large.

Descending half steps must be very small.

Think up as you descend and think down as you ascend.

Never think the same pitch when repeating a note—think a little higher.

A half step is **NOT** the smallest interval. They lied to you!

Raise a half step over the course of 8 beats.

Pitch problems are often the result of applying excessive breath pressure while carrying the lower registration too high.

Approach each pitch from above. Pick the sound up with your hand.

50% of pitch problems are due to poor rhythm.

Flatting:      Poor posture                      \*build better sense of sub-division  
                    Vowels could be too dark and back in the throat  
                    Vowels are not unified  
                    Tempo may be too slow; lacks rhythmic vitality  
                    Excessive vibrato  
                    Repeated pitches may be inaccurate (descending)  
                    Key of the piece may need adjustment  
                    Descending intervals are too weighty  
                    Conducting should be light and buoyant  
                    Have the men think up an octave to lighten the mechanism  
                    If it is warm in the room, pitch the piece higher  
                    Thirds and leading tones may be low/dull

Sharping:      Lower your gesture with less tension  
                    Less breath pressure; quiet down.  
                    Adjust key up by half step—it will require lighter, unforced tone  
                    Tune initial consonants  
                    Deeper breath

Audiate for a few measures and then cue the choir in.

Sustained "Noo-Ee-Aw" in octaves; adjust and unify vowel until strong overtones are heard.

## BLEND AND BALANCE

Blend happens when the choir sings the same **vowel**, at the same **time**, on the same **pitch**, in the same **dynamic**, and with the same **sense of phrase**.  
(Robert Shaw)

Each individual adds to the palate of the sound, but the product of the choir must be **A** color. Listen to your neighbor, but be true to your own voice.

Vibrato is connected to the core of the pitch and to the breath.

Sing the **CORE** of the pitch. Vibrato should **confirm**, not **confuse** pitch.

Blend is achieved through listening; reduce volume in rehearsals.

Stand in a circle to encourage better listening.

Stronger voices should be placed in the back of the choir.

Think like a tree. Strong roots and lighter as you go higher.  
Basses and altos should have more presence than sopranos and tenors.  
Chord balance based on dynamic strength of each chord tone:  
1      5      9      3      7

### STANDING FORMATIONS

Be sure that choir has enough space on the risers.  
Make use of all the risers, if possible.  
Rehearse in a circle to hear parts and visually connect with other singers.  
Sectional formations for polyphonic music  
Mixed formations for more homophonic music--better intonation  
What is their ear dominance? Answer the phone.  
Men behind the women  
Sopranos and Basses on one side      Altos and Tenors on the other  
    This helps with tuning      Altos help to lighten tenor sound  
Total quartet mixed formation

### EXPRESSION

If the choir was tense during their performance, begin with body and facial slaps  
    to relax them and get the body energized for singing.  
"Get out of the notes, and into the text."  
Turn to each other and get the music in your eyes.  
Everything you sing should be musical—even the warm-ups.  
There is a profound difference between **taking** meaning from a text and **giving**  
    meaning to a text. (James Jordan)  
Unlock your legs as you sing. Be aware of your feet and the release in your ankles.  
\*Singers are 1/2 musician, 1/3 vocal technician, and 1/3 dramatic actor. (Neuen)  
Ask a student to expressively read the text of the song  
Tell the story of the music with your eyes and body language  
Use slight movement of the head as you are watching the conductor  
"Let go" of the performance—don't try to control to the very last moment  
Rehearse in a circle and watch each other.  
Videotape a rehearsal and watch for expression.  
Sing as if the audience is deaf and your face communicates the emotion of the  
    music.  
Most audiences listen with their eyes MORE than with their ears.  
The vocal folds are located 1/2 way between your brain and your heart; good  
    musicians use both. (the late Robert Fountain, U of WI)  
When a singer uses his/her intelligence and emotion on a 50/50 basis—he/she is  
    an artist. (Giovanni Lamperti)  
Students play **ON** a team—students sing **IN** a choir.

### ATTITUDE

A positive attitude is an inside job. Stop focusing on limiting beliefs.  
Be grateful, rather than critical.  
Self-improvement is a life-long process. We are all on a learning continuum.  
There is no danger of developing eyestrain from looking on the bright side of things.  
Learn to react positively to negative situations.  
Avoid the negative suggestions of others.  
Don't waste other people's time.  
When you are overwhelmed—take one thing at a time.

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/ Procedure and Stewardship in the Choral Rehearsal

## Procedure and Stewardship in the Choral Rehearsal

🕒 September 18, 2013

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### PROCEDURE & STEWARDSHIP IN THE CHORAL REHEARSAL

#### PROCEDURE

We all know a fine choral ensemble when we hear one. What is not always clear is exactly how the ensemble got to that point? Do they simply have better singers in their ensemble? Does their conductor know something I don't? Why don't my ensembles sound like that? At the heart of every good choral performance is an ensemble of singers committed to working for the common goal of creating a well-coordinated and inspired representation of the composer's intentions. But it is during the rehearsal process where the true foundations of fine performances are established.

As choral conductors it is our responsibility to achieve the best results, in the least amount of time, with the least amount of vocal strain. It is also our responsibility to promote the aesthetic and personal growth of everyone in the room through increasing musical awareness and skill. We must be aware that the singers in our ensembles are not there only for the conductor (or even only for the music). Rather, they are there for a multitude of reasons and without the singers, the choral conductor no longer exists or is necessary. Choirs can (and do!) exist without conductors. The converse is not true. In his book, *Chorus Confidential: Decoding the Secrets of the Choral Art*, Dr. William Dehning encourages us to remember, "The human responsibilities of the conductor are to remain human even in light of our position or title. We should be excited about what we do, we should seek to teach as well as conduct, and we should always keep in mind the musical, intellectual, personal, and social needs of the ensemble." <sup>1</sup>

#### WHY DO WE REHEARSE?

According to Dr. Dehning, the objectives of rehearsal are: 1) to achieve the best results in the shortest time with the least strain, vocally and generally; 2) to promote the aesthetic and personal growth of everyone in the room through increasing musical awareness and skill.<sup>2</sup> The second objective (and perhaps the more important) refers to the process and not the product. Good performances are built upon good rehearsals. Good rehearsals are built upon the passion, skill, organization, gesture, and empathy of the conductor. With my own ensembles, I am quick to dispense congratulatory accolades to the signers when a performance goes well, or when the intangible elevation and inspiration are achieved. However, when things do not go so well and there are apparent problems with vocal production, intonation, balance, blend, vowel unification, or even the lack of emotional content from the performance, I am even quicker to blame myself. It is at this point when I am forced to reevaluate where in the rehearsal process I was ineffective.

#### HOW DO WE REHEARSE?

##### PRIOR TO THE FIRST REHEARSAL

Once we have selected the repertoire, learned the score, and made interpretive decisions, we must then develop a rehearsal strategy that enables the ensemble to realize those objectives. The rehearsal strategy we develop will address the following eight parameters of choral music: 1. Correct notes; 2. Precision & Rhythm; 3. Correct pronunciation & text clarity; 4. Dynamics; 5. Balance; 6. Blend; 7. Articulation; and 8. Intonation. In developing an effective rehearsal strategy it is imperative that the conductor never loses sight of the capabilities and educational needs of the ensemble or how much rehearsal time you may or may not have. Specifically, we must take into account how these parameters impact the decisions we make in the planning and pacing of each rehearsal.

### **CORRECT NOTES**

It goes without saying that singing correct notes in the choral rehearsal is very important. As conductors, we can expedite the process of teaching correct notes if we anticipate where the challenges lie. We must then be able to provide our singers with pre-determined strategies that enable them to correctly sing the notes on the page.

### **PRECISION & RHYTHM**

It is the conductor's responsibility to ensure that all members of the ensemble have a clear understanding of the tempo or rate of the song, the pulse or the beat, the meter or number of pulses, and the coordination of the breath with the onset of the voice (i.e. Inhalation, Aspiration, Phonation, and Exhalation)

### **CORRECT PRONUNCIATION AND TEXT CLARITY**

Since the vast majority of choral music is the marriage of music and text, it stands to reason that the rules of good diction should apply. The rules of good diction are: Pronunciation (standardized ways in which something is spoken), Enunciation (clarity and purity of vowel production), and Articulation (how the lips and tongue engage to produce consonants). On the rare occasion that a choral composition is primarily made up of nonsense syllables, there should still be consensus as to how the various sounds are produced by the members of the ensemble. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) has long stood as the fortress of standards and practices for how to produce sounds in most languages. These include but are not limited to primary and secondary vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs, as well as voiced and unvoiced consonants.

### **DYNAMICS**

Too often the dynamic markings in a score are interpreted by ensembles and their directors precisely as they are indicated without consideration for the reasons for them.

### **BALANCE**

Most choral conductors struggle to bridge the gap between the numbers of male singers versus the number of female singers. Unfortunately, it is not always possible or preferable to simply use fewer female voices and the conductor must find a way to balance the quantity of sound in and among the sections to achieve a balanced choral tone. Balance, or quantity of sound, is not the same thing as blend, or quality of sound. To achieve balance, it is not always a matter of just singing louder or softer. It is also our responsibility to teach the singers how to: 1) listen for one another; and 2) to understand how their part contributes to what the rest of the ensemble is doing.

### **BLEND**

Choral Blend relies on correct and unified enunciation or vowel unification for the purpose of bringing clarity to the text set by the composer and can assist in conveying emotional and poetic intent.

### **MUSICAL ARTICULATION**

Prior to the first rehearsal the choral conductor must also become familiar with the various articulatory markings the composer has indicated. Markings such as legato, staccato, marcato, etc. should be faithfully adhered to in the rehearsal process and it is our responsibility to know how each should sound, but we also must know how to teach the singers to achieve the desired articulation.

## **INTONATION**

Intonation problems fall into two larger categories: Extrinsic and Intrinsic Causes. Extrinsic Causes are those related to temperature, poor rehearsal time (early morning or late afternoon), acoustic, and fatigue (physical, vocal, and psychological). Intrinsic Causes are those problems related to the voice such as posture, inadequate breath support, constriction of the jaw, wasted breath, incorrect part designation, and too much forte or piano singing. Additional Intrinsic Causes are those related to challenges in the score. These can be related to the key of a song, vocal tension, repeated tones, descending half steps, sustained tones, releases, and psychological tension.

## **THE REHEARSAL PROCESS**

Now that we have done all of the preliminary work towards preparing for the rehearsal, it is finally time to rehearse! First, it is important to re-establish the fact that I usually do not include warm-ups during the choral rehearsal. If you are wondering why, please read on! Second, I will not attempt to dictate how rehearsal time should be spent. Instead, I will maintain a narrow focus on the rehearsal process in order to investigate the role of the choral conductor as rehearsal technician.

In Lawrence McQuerrey's book, *When the Music Stops*, the author describes in detail the year he spent on sabbatical observing the rehearsals of the finest choirs in the country. His intention was to discern how each conductor rehearsed in order to understand why their choirs were so good. What he observed was that each conductor followed the same basic procedural steps during the rehearsal, which enabled their ensembles to progress efficiently and consistently. McQuerrey termed the process he observed Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis. Simply put, each conductor would introduce a song or a section from a larger work (Thesis), they would then focus on a small portion to rehearse (Antithesis), and finally they would put the whole work or section back together again to reestablish context (Synthesis). However, it was during the Antithesis portion of the rehearsal process that McQuerrey noticed a highly specific and consistent approach utilized by each conductor that I will refer to in this article as Set Theory.

## **ANTITHESIS EXPLORED**

### **SET THEORY: SET – FOLLOW THROUGH – RESPONSE**

Simply put, during the Antithesis stage of the rehearsal process, Set Theory occurs in three stages. The first stage is the Set or the task to be performed. The second stage is the Follow Through or the act of making the ensemble perform the Set or task. The third stage is the Response stage where the conductor lets the ensemble know if the task performed was good, bad, ok, etc. If the Response is "yes", or "good", then the Set is technically closed and the conductor can move on. If the Response is "no", or "bad" The conductor address the same Set with a new solution for the ensemble to perform. If the Response is "almost" it is ok to leave the Set open and move on. McQuerrey also observed that every conductor limited the number of simultaneous Sets to three at a time.

Finally, as conductors we must always acknowledge our human responsibilities to the ensemble. The conductor-singer relationship is very special and we are obligated to approach every rehearsal with zest, vigor and purpose. Rehearsal demeanor should be an ingenious mix of non-compromising intensity, humor and patience. As teachers we are tasked with setting the goal, mediating the experience, and then accurately assessing the quality of our singers' work. As conductors we strive to make good music and inspire our students. Being an effective rehearsal technician is not just a part of our job as teachers, but it is the first step towards engaging every single member of your choir and unlocking the potential they have to become that

fine choral ensemble.

## STEWARDSHIP

I have been a choral conductor for seventeen years and for most of that time, I have diligently incorporated traditional choral warm-ups at the beginning of each rehearsal. What is the traditional choral warm-up? Strictly speaking there are very few variables that make up the traditional choral warm-up and unless they are carefully constructed to address the music at hand, they serve very few purposes.

There are four actual Vocal Exercises that make up the traditional choral warm-up:

- 1) The sustained tone;
- 2) The scale;
- 3) The arpeggio;
- 4) A combination of the three.

From these four exercises, choir directors can make Three Choices of how to perform the exercises:

- 1) We can choose the vowel;
- 2) We can choose the attack;
- 3) We can choose the melodic form.

Finally, there are Three Purposes for the vocal exercises:

- 1) To warm-up;
- 2) For vocal development;
- 3) To sing.

The idea that traditional choral warm-ups may not be as effective as I had always thought first came to me as a member of the California State University, Northridge – Northridge Singers and then again as a member of the University of Southern California Chamber Choir. Both award-winning ensembles rehearsed twice a week and traditional choral warm-ups were noticeably absent from all rehearsals. This led me to reconsider the inherent value of the traditional choral warm-up and whether or not the individuals in my ensembles might be better off without them.

The traditional choral warm-up can become deathly sterile in vocal development beyond a certain point. Students do not often see the reason for them and/or find them boring. They accomplish very little towards the music (unless we deliberately construct them to do so). Some or most voice teachers would just as soon we did not incorporate the traditional choral warm-up into our rehearsals. As someone who has studied private voice for ten years, I have always struggled to reconcile what I learned in private studio as a vocal soloist and what my choral conductors asked for in rehearsals.

In his Journal of Singing article Choir Warm-ups: How Effective Are They? Dr. Ingo R. Titze concluded that the “traditional choral warm-up disregards the individual nature of vocal development, human physiology and psychology. The vocal warm-up is a very personal dialogue between the individual and their voice. It is imperative that we understand that the rate at which an individual proceeds in the vocal warm-up process is different from day to day, hour to hour.”<sup>3</sup> Choral singers, like vocal soloists should be taught enough about their instrument to learn how to gauge its’ condition but in the choral rehearsal, it is virtually impossible for a choral conductor to effectively gauge each individual.

We must consider the following questions:

- 1) Is our role as choral conductor to be a vocal coach or a faithful steward of healthy vocal production?
- 2) Can we provide the same level of individualized attention and care during a choir rehearsal as an applied teacher can in a private lesson?
- 3) What if the student is already studying privately?

What is the purpose of the choral rehearsal? While there is most definitely a social component, as choral conductors we must think carefully about how we choose to spend our singers’ time. Why do we rehearse? In his book, Chorus Confidential, Dr. William Dehning outlines the reasons for the choral rehearsal as a means to



1) prepare for performance, 2) for musical and aesthetic growth in our choir members and audiences, 3) to teach, and 4) to achieve the best results in the least amount of time with the least amount of vocal strain.<sup>4</sup> Even a generation ago, choral ensembles at all levels were afforded much more rehearsal time and latitude as to when those rehearsals could occur. It was not uncommon for a high school or collegiate choir to rehearse from eight to ten hours a week for a single academic credit. In this culture, it was necessary to create inventive ways in which to utilize the vast amounts of rehearsal time and thus the traditional choral warm-up developed, evolved and became an integral part of the choral rehearsal. Presently, the reasons Dr. Dehning lists for the choral rehearsal have not changed, however the amount of time set aside for the choral rehearsal has decreased significantly. Do we still insist upon twenty minutes of traditional choral warm-ups per rehearsal if we only have four hours of rehearsal time per week? Can we find more effective ways to spend our singers' time?

Traditional choral warm-ups can be replaced with carefully constructed vocalizes that pertain directly to the music being prepared for performance. These specific vocal exercises will originate from the study of the score and provide applicable technical/conceptual immediacy for the singers. Additionally, we should consider strategic placement of vocalizes we develop to occur throughout the course of a choir rehearsal. Instead of frontloading a rehearsal with carefully constructed exercises, carefully space them out over the course of a rehearsal and use the appropriate exercise when the specific challenge or teachable moment occurs in the music. Of course, if a rehearsal begins at 7:00am as many high school directors must deal with, then physical warm-ups to wake up the body are quite necessary. However, perhaps we should limit the amount of time we spend on these as well!!

T. J. Harper, DMA  
Director, Choral Activities/Music Education  
Providence College  
401.865.2209  
<http://www.harpertj.com>

#### **Sources of Information:**

William Dehning, *Chorus Confidential: Decoding the Secrets of the Choral Art*, Pavanne Publishing, 2003.

Ingo R. Titze, *The Journal of Singing*, "Choir Warm-Ups: How Effective Are They?", May/June 2000.

Posted by Jeffrey Bauman  
Director of Choral and Vocal Activities  
Young Harris College  
706-379-5155  
Chair-elect, National Council for Choral Education



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# Choral Music in the Junior High/Middle School

Janeal Krehbiel, editor <janealk@sunflower.com>

## "Do it Again!"

### Repetition in the Middle School Choral Rehearsal

by

Joshua Bronfman

The traditional methods of continuous drill on a particular action (i.e., practicing one skill repeatedly until it is correct) are probably not the most effective way to learn. Rather, the evidence suggests that practicing a number of tasks in some nearly randomized order will be the most successful means of achieving the goal of stable learning and retention.<sup>1</sup>

**H**ow do you ask a chorus to repeat? If you are like me, you use a small handful of different techniques to help your students isolate difficult parts of the music and also en-

able them to maintain interest. For the most part, however, the primary method for repeating a difficult section is to simply say, "do it again!" In this column, I propose that the do it again approach to repetition may not be the most effective one, especially (though not exclusively) for the middle school chorus.

Singing and learning music is both a cognitive and a physical act. It follows then that we might gain some insight into the choral rehearsal process by examining how humans learn physical skills. Research into motor learning from the field of Sports Medicine provides some possible direction in this area. This research suggests that when learning both unvarying, or closed skills (e.g., throwing a dart, singing measures 3–5 of Brahms' *Waldesnacht*) and varying, open skills (e.g. hitting a golf ball on an unfamiliar course, sight-reading a new piece), diversifying the skill to be learned facilitates better retention of the task, and enables better transfer of the skill to other similar activities and situations more so than simply repeating the task multiple times. In other words, don't just repeat a section of music over and over

- your students will initially learn what you want them to, but they will retain less of the task over time, and they will be less able to transfer the skill to other, similar situations. It is better to repeat something in multiple ways, varying the task randomly with each repeat.<sup>2</sup>

As a former middle school choir director, I can think back to my own experience and recall the times that I "beat up" a section (more often the guys, who were dealing with the extremes of the voice change) on a particular interval or series of pitches. All too often, I would just make them do it again and again. I might say, "OK, do it again, but on 'doo' this time," and we would rehearse that way a few times. But as the research cited above suggests, this might be a less effective way to learn a task, retain it, and transfer it to novel situations. Interestingly, this research indicates that in certain situations children are more successful at completing a specific task when they practice a set of related tasks rather than practicing the actual task at all!<sup>3</sup> Think about that one for a minute.

Not only are we concerned with long term learning and transfer, but

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Joshua Bronfman is the director of choral activities at the University of North Dakota, artistic director for the Grand Forks Master Chorale, and director of *Accordo Voce*, a select children's ensemble.

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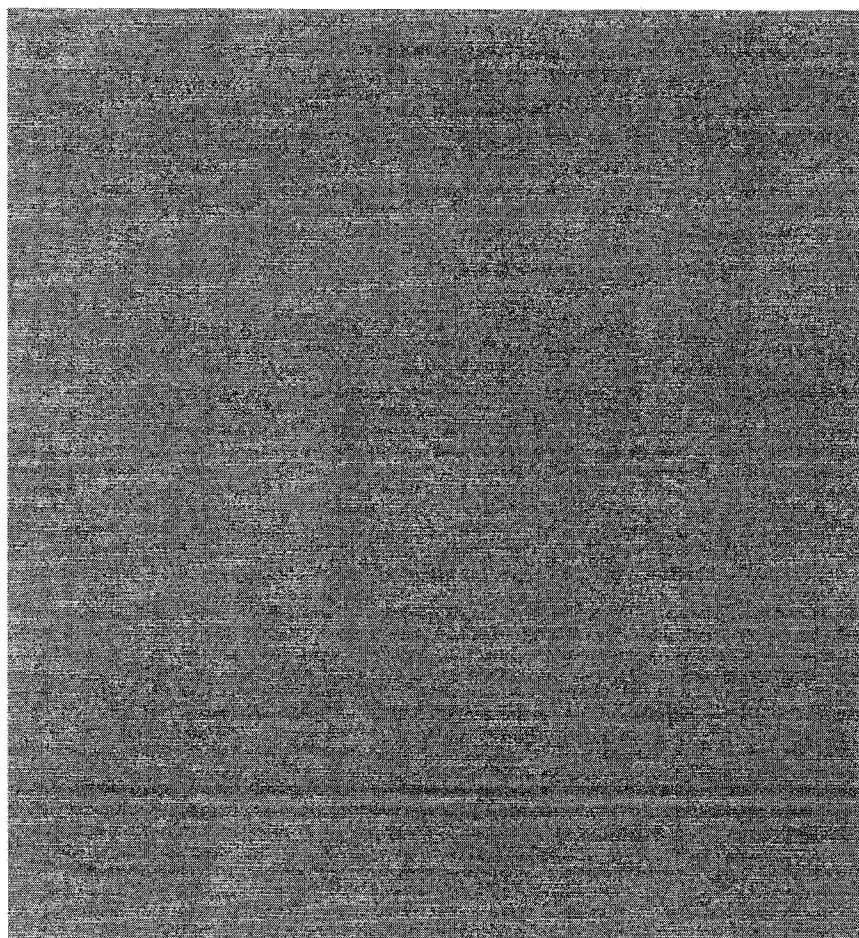
# Choral Music in the Junior High/Middle School

we as middle school music teachers are especially aware of the need to maintain interest, especially for the boys who are in the full throws of the voice change. They often need quite a bit of remediation, which can become tiring and frustrating for them. By varying the number of different ways in which you repeat, you continually place new challenges before them, which they can be successful at, which in turn should help them to stay focused.

I decided to try to come up with a list of as many different ways of repeating something as I could. I found just the act of sitting down and thinking about the

strategies very enlightening and thought provoking. I rediscovered a few gems in my rehearsal repertoire that I have used in the past - or have seen used but never tried - that I became eager to use in my rehearsals. I make no claim that this is a complete list; it is just a set of techniques that I came up with by myself and in conversations with other directors. If you think of other techniques, I encourage you to visit the [choraltalk](http://choraltalk.org) section of [choralnet.org](http://choralnet.org) and contribute your ideas to the topic labeled "Repetition." I will be regularly updating the discussion with your novel ideas.

- Count singing – the gold standard. With practice this can work for middle school chorus.
- Solfegge, numbers, etc.
- Start slow and speed up each repetition, with no break in between. Make it a game.
- Sing "Super Slo-mo."
- Insert a common song fragment, e.g. "Twinkle, twinkle," or "N-B-C," etc., into the longer phrase. When notes in question come up, switch to common song. For example, "Kyrie E-le-N-B-C-ee-zon." This is especially useful for difficult intervals that repeat in multiple parts.<sup>4</sup>
- Same deal with solfegge syllables, "Kyrie E-le-So-Mi-Do-ee-zon."
- On neutral syllable: hum, doh, lah, dü.
- Sing on text, pulsating the subdivision of the beat.
- Speak the text in time.
- Speak or sing the text in time and when a difficult rhythm comes up, insert a neutral word that you associate with the rhythm in question. "Tri-po-let" or "ti-ti" are good examples, but you can also use any word (I have used "Joshua" for example).
- Sing on neutral pitches, with text, in rhythm. Use the "Shaw-Chord"  
- Bass, E; Tenor, G sharp; Alto, D; Soprano, F sharp.
- Have the whole chorus or a portion join the group for the section you are working on.



- Sing only portions in question, and stay silent on any other part. As in a fugue – sing only the exposition. In a piece with many accents, sing only the accents.
- Sing in time, but stop and hold difficult pitches, then continue in time.
- Out of time, chord by chord, on director cue.
- Layer parts, in time, without interruption, saying "Add Altos," "Add Tenors," etc. Alternate accompanied and unaccompanied.
- Vary a musical parameter: Tempo, dynamics, articulation (staccato-legato), tone color (bright-dark, ugly-pretty, etc.), expression, etc.
- Sing it the wrong way. For example, if you are working on a tritone leap, have them sing a fourth and a fifth, then the tritone.
- Sing with eyes closed.
- Incorporate movement or a gesture: Tap shoulder of person next to you, throw a baseball on the high note, sway, clap a steady beat, walk around the room, etc.
- Sing only the vowels, or sing only one vowel.
- Sing the syllable "Doot" (Final consonant is imploded, not exploded), staccato, for each pitch, regardless of length.
- Sing all pitches staccato, regardless of length, but on text.
- Take away piano.
- Down or up the octave, if very high or low.
- Follow the notes on the page with your finger. Follow the notes of another part while you sing your own.
- Forward and backward – Ask singers to sing the pitches (with or without text) out of time forward and then backward. For example: Forward, "Three Blind Mice" and backward, "Mice Blind Three." Pitches correspond to text.

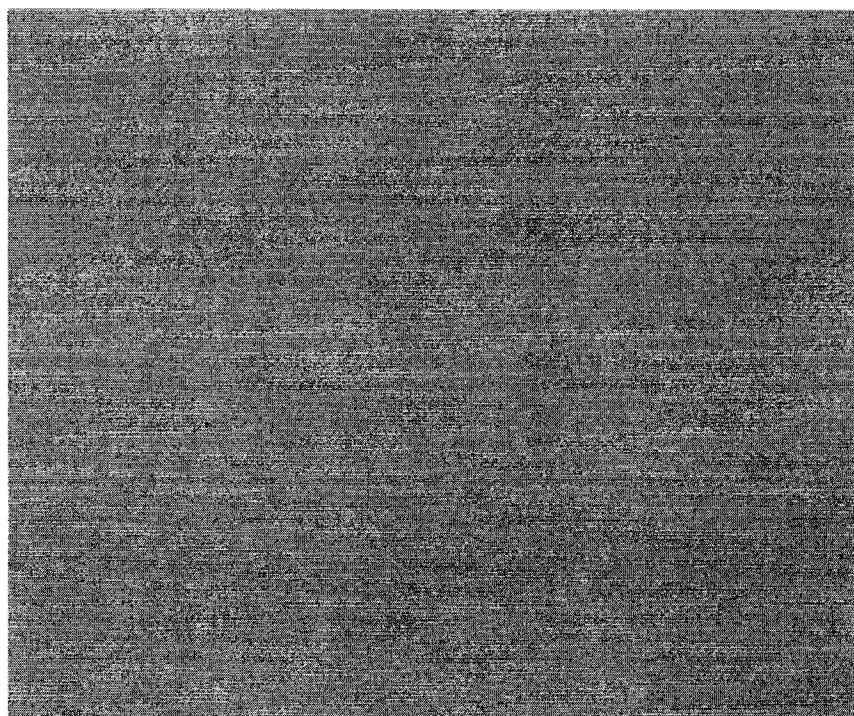
## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> R.A. Schmidt and T.D. Lee. *Motor Control and Learning: A Behavioral Emphasis*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2004, p. 338.

<sup>2</sup> Richard A. Magill. *Motor Learning and Control: Concepts and Applications*, 7th ed. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2004. R.A. Schmidt and T.D. Lee. *Motor Control and Learning: A Behavioral Emphasis*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> For sample songs for intervals, see <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ear\\_training](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ear_training)> and <<http://choralnet.org/resources/viewResource.php?id=777&category=2>>



## **Choral Resources Other than what is in the Cap**

- **Masterworks Press Sight reading – All Levels/All Voicings**
- **Southern California Vocal Association [info@scvachoral.org](mailto:info@scvachoral.org) – Music**
- **Free Music on the Choral Public Domain Library – all voicings**
- **You Tube Performance Videos**
- **ACDA Performance Videos**
- **Camp A cappella**
- **JW Pepper State Approved Lists**
- **Facebook Groups to Join:**
  - **I'm A Choir Director**
  - **CASA – Contemporary A cappella Society**
  - **G Suite for the Choral Classroom**
  - **ACDA Facebook Page**
  - **Choir Director Central**
  - **Choral Music**
  - **Choir Nation**
  - **Google Classroom for Music Teachers**