



A Curious Thing, This Recurring Dream...

by Howard Meharg

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A curious thing, this recurring dream that a good many choral directors admit to having. Yep, it's that one where you're standing in front of your choir clad in nothing but your underwear—or less. I've had that dream. So, in my curiosity I asked a psychologist about it. He said, “Dad, I have to tell you that what it means is that you think you've been ‘faking it’ all these years.” (Yes, my son is a psychologist in private practice.)

Hmm, I thought. Faking it! It does make sense, I thought. In fact, I thought, it's true that virtually every time I handle a rehearsal, I run the risk of being exposed, if not as a charlatan but always with the possibility that my technique and tricks to get the choir sounding better will fail, that the singers will see such attempts as inept and a waste of time!

Here's the odd part. In my dream, no one in the choir seemed to notice my lack of clothing! I feel certain that there are a good many interpretations for such a dream, but very often, the underlying truth is a simple fear that we're inadequate for the task. So, yes, faking it happens. I'm choosing to believe that this is not only a good thing but holds the possibility of being a great thing.

Turn a skilled jazz musician loose with a familiar tune or a twelve-bar blues sequence and, most often, wonderful things

can happen. He or she may have little more than a clue where it will lead, since he or she fake it—improvise. Sometimes it's glorious, even exhilarating. Sometimes it's out there on the cutting edge in excitement and invention. Interacting with percussion, bass, piano, or other players becomes a kind of conversation and a virtual unfolding of new and imaginative music, never-to-be-repeated music, for this is true improvisation. I'm betting there are times when the result thrills or may even seem a bit trite. So, yep, there is risk.

No great jazz artist gets to these heights without practice, training, tips, lessons, reading about and listening to others. And it goes without saying that it's the same for anyone aspiring to be a successful choral director or one who wants to continue growing in skills and understanding. Trust me: age has nothing to do with it. There is plenty to learn!

It's a good idea to remember that every rehearsal, no matter how well planned it might be, offers an opportunity to fake it. I don't mean in the charlatan sense but rather in trusting yourself to respond to what you hear, see, and sense with creative ideas, effective conducting gestures, descriptive and imaginative words. Sure, the more you practice, the better your chances for great things happening. The odds are good that those rehearsals and performances will be glorious

and exhilarating! Embrace the risk!

P. S. I read once where two of the world's greatest conductors of choral music, Paul Salamunovich and Robert Shaw, discovered, during a conversation, that they had had this same dream. Others have called it the "imposter" dream. Can you imagine that being true about those two revered individuals? Those two masters of the choral art having a dream in which they worried, subconsciously, that they were inadequate? ■