



*ChorTeach* Vol. 11, No. 3 Spring 2019  
Practical Teaching Ideas for Today's Music Educator  
Dr. Terry J. Barham, editor  
barhamte@gmail.com

Welcome to ACDA's online magazine for choral director/music educators. The articles below have been gleaned from state and division online and paper ACDA newsletters around the United States and from submissions by seasoned choral directors with topics germane to the profession.

ChorTeach, our name, is derived from the German word for chorus, chor. It is pronounced, as many of you know, like the word, core. I hope ChorTeach's articles will be a breath of fresh air for you, provide you with new ideas or techniques that give you a lift and help your singers reach the goals you and they have set. ChorTeach is designed for those who work with amateur singers at all levels.

If you have written an article and believe it would be of interest to ChorTeach readers, send it to me in Word.doc format. I will get back to you after reading it. If you have read an article from an ACDA newsletter or website you think would be beneficial to ChorTeach readers, send me the details at barhamte@gmail.com, and I'll check it

### Contents

- *Stronger When We Work Together*, Michael Jeffrey, Pine Island Schools, Pine Island, Minnesota
- *I Heart (Love) Sight Singing!* Jane Vanderhoff, Garden City High School (retired), Garden City, Kansas
- *Ten Commandments for the Children's Choir Director*, Henry Leck, Indianapolis Children's Choir, Indianapolis, Indiana
- *Catching Up with VOCES8*, Patrick F. Casey, Newberry College, Newberry, South Carolina
- *The Care and Preservation of the Voice*, Tony Thornton, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Amherst, Massachusetts



### Stronger When We Work Together

Michael Jeffrey  
Northfield Youth Choirs  
Pine Island Schools  
Pine Island, Minnesota

(Used with permission of Minnesota's *Star of the North*)

“Today we’re going to start a group project...”

Those are words that are dreaded by every type-A student. As a high school and college student, there were few words that I hated more when they came out of teachers’ and professors’ mouths. Now, as an adult, my experience with collaboration is very different. It has led to some of my favorite musical performances in the last several years.

I have been consistently surprised at how much collaboration I have found in southeast Minnesota. Youth choirs, including *Bella Voce*, the Honors Choirs of SEMN, and Northfield Youth Choirs, are working creatively with other ensembles and musicians for their concerts. Choral Arts Ensemble, an adult, auditioned choir in Rochester, is hosting its third annual Singing For Life High School Festival for which three regional high school choirs attend and perform with the Choral Arts Society in a side-by-side concert. Events like these abound, and they result in performances that are creative, engaging, and memorable for audiences and students alike.

It’s not just community and semiprofessional groups who are in on the action. One particular event I have been impressed with since I began teaching is the Zumbro Education District Choral Festival. As background, the Zumbro Education District (ZED) is a consortium of smaller rural schools that may not normally be able to provide all the services needed to support students independently. However, as a group, it is able to meet the needs of member districts.

Every fall, ZED hosts a choral festival with member high schools, and it has become one of my favorite performances each year. The traditional setup of the festival is to have every school perform two works alone, then to have all the choirs combine and sing three or four works together. This design allows students to see and hear other choirs from the area while also providing an opportunity for them to sing music together that they may not have the vocal resources to sing at their individual schools.

This year was particularly fulfilling because we changed the traditional design and tried something new. We upped our collaboration game! Instead of choosing a few mass choir works and having choirs perform their own selections, we decided to try performing an entire masterwork, Vivaldi’s *Gloria*. It is unlikely that any of the member schools of ZED would have been able to provide this opportunity for students on their own, but together we realized that we could design the program in a way that allowed our students to have this experience.

To make the Vivaldi work, we chose to do the first and last movements as a mass choir, and we divided the interior movements of the work between individual schools. Because the piece was in the public domain, we were able to use the funding that typically went toward buying music to hire adult musicians to perform the solo and duet movements.

There were many positives that resulted from this format and made the experience special for our students. First,

we ended up with different layers of collaboration. Some of our schools have smaller, younger choirs that do not necessarily have the experience or performing resources to sing a movement on their own, especially in the fall. For some movements, pairs of schools teamed up to create a kind of collaboration *within* collaboration, and they were able to perform with great success. Their students felt comfortable and supported because they had additional peers helping, and the audience saw and heard consistency in the size of the choirs, helping to prevent the judgement about size that sometimes comes with these types of festivals. In essence, collaboration allowed us to take competition out of the equation.

Second, Pine Island has an orchestra that has also traditionally participated in this festival by playing for one of the mass choir movements. This has sometimes seemed to relegate the orchestra to second-class status, as students do not necessarily understand why the orchestra is a participant as well. However, for this performance the orchestra suddenly became vital to the entire production, which dramatically changed the relationship between the choirs and the orchestra.

Choral students understood inherently that the orchestra was an important part of this music. Orchestra students were full participants in the entire concert, and both sets of students had the opportunity to experience playing and singing together. Collaboration allowed us to work better as a community of musicians.

Third, in addition to the adult soloists, we were able to hire a quartet of professional string players to play with our orchestra students. Between the soloists and instrumental quartet, our students were able to see how music can be a lifelong activity, and the side-by-side design encouraged students to take their performance to a higher level. Collaboration allowed us to push the boundaries of what we thought we could do.

When I started teaching at Pine Island, I never would have guessed that my students would have the opportunity to sing the entire Vivaldi *Gloria*. Now, a few months after the festival, I still marvel at what a great experience it was. Because ZED member schools worked together, the end result was highly satisfying for students, directors, and audience members alike. The entire production was much stronger because of our teamwork, and our students felt like they had accomplished something they couldn't have achieved on their own.

Collaboration provides us with opportunities to rejuvenate our singers and choral programs. It gives us a structure in which to be creative, to try things that are different, and to engage our singers and our audiences in new ideas. It allows us to accomplish what we may not be able to do on our own. It builds our communities by placing the focus on working together instead of competition. Every time I have been involved in a collaborative venture, it has been an incredibly energizing experience. I can't recommend it enough.

### **I Heart (Love) Sight Singing!**

Jane Vanderhoff  
Garden City High School (retired)  
Garden City, Kansas

(Used with permission of Kansas' *Choral Range*)

Sight singing is the unbreakable principle, the sacred cow, the "must do," most days, anyway! It is the key to a singer's progression/growth; it breaks the artificial ceiling of rote singing; it gives students independence and musician-ship to get started. It is the key to their success!

In my classroom it takes many forms. I use different books from year to year or throughout the year; write exercises on the board, use portions of songs, have students sing in groups or alone, sing the exercise backwards, switch from line to line, sing portions of a song, have one group clap the beat while another counts/claps the rhythm, anything to keep the brain moving in a musical direction.

For beginning sight readers, I have assigned a pitch to a section (SSA or TTB usually), and they must sing their pitch as it occurs in the exercise, in rhythm. If there are more notes than sections, I sing the leftovers. If they sing on their own, they can choose any exercise in the book for me to sing on the spot. All of these ideas have been stolen from someone else!

As we move toward Common Core standards, documentation of student writing becomes more important. As a bellwork activity, I had my singers complete the following in three or more ways, including the good, the bad, and the

ugly: “Sight singing is...” Their responses fell into five main categories:

## 1) A definition:

- Singing a song with no knowledge of said song. Basically hoping for the best. —Abby G.
- Making the notes into music. —Maritza G.
- Holding your own and being able to process music. —Consuelo S.
- A brain-busting, hair-pulling technique that all singers should work at. —Gemma L.
- A necessity! —Kimberly C.

## 2) A warmup activity:

- Not very fun, but a good way to get started. —Messina D.
- A great way to warm up and get in the singing mood. —MacKinzie W
- A good way to warm up your voice and your mind. —Christy K
- You can also use sight singing to help with songs you are learning at the time. —Josh F

## 3) A tool for teaching rhythms and intervals:

- A great way to get mistakes out of the way. —Kristin G.
- I look for rhythm patterns in my own music now. —Gary H.
- It is skill-building. —Alexandria T.
- It helps one learn common patterns within musical styles. —Victoria N
- It is the ability to do “music” on your own! —Jose V

## 4) A developmental process:

- It comes naturally to some people but is a struggle for others. —Michael P
- Sometimes it is annoying because I already know most of the stuff. —Rafael D
- It is a LONG process. —Rachel C
- After a while, it gets easier but then you get a harder song. —Kaylen M
- It’s spontaneous. —Jeff B

## 5) The big picture:

- Sometimes it’s just fun to sing something you’ve never heard before and see how it goes. —Heather B
- It helps me interact with the people around me. —Gary H
- Sight singing can create a singer out of you. —Leah L
- It separates the boys from the musicians. —Haley R
- It makes us really think about what we are actually singing. —Megan S
- It is knowing and understanding not only your part but others’ parts too; it is expressing things the way they are supposed to be expressed. —Erika F
- Sight singing is essential in the music world; for example, when you’re in a time crunch and need to learn a song quickly and perform it with ease. As much as students hate it, including myself, we have to accept it as a part of being in choir. —Nyvia D

I admire my students for their honesty and thoughtful responses. It’s nice to get a peek at what their “real” thoughts are and get a deeper look at their personalities and abilities. I will continue to find new ways to help all of my students create new sight singing wrinkles in their brains and give them the gift of independent music making!

## Ten Commandments for the Children's Choir Director

Henry Leck  
Indianapolis Children's Choir  
Indianapolis, Indiana  
(Used with permission of the  
Northwest Division Newsletter)

The following material was developed to convey, in a condensed form, some of the important elements of being a children's choir director. By seeing these ideas as "ten commandments," one should not construe that this writer has seen the burning bush.

As we all know, teaching and conducting are a continuous process of learning and growth. Children make that process an exceptionally joyful one, for they have a tremendous intelligence and artistry within them waiting to be nurtured. If a choral director takes the time to understand the child's voice, its subtleties and capabilities, the results can be completely rewarding artistically and personally.

**1. Create good mental focus.** Rapid learning only occurs when the mind is focused. Excellent musicianship becomes apparent only when the mind is acutely sensitive to its physical and aural environment. With this level of mental intensity, the text can take on life and begin to link the singer aesthetically with the audience.

**2. Teach breathing/posture techniques.** The breath is the basis of all successful singing. To shortcut this technique is to shortcut your whole choral sound. Insist on good posture while singing. Through positive exercises promoting a relaxed but erect posture, children will soon learn that it indeed is the most comfortable way to sit or stand. In a healthy choral rehearsal environment, children will very quickly acquire a habit of sitting in a "singer's posture" automatically without being reminded.

**3. Use correct vocal ranges.** Introduce vocalises and exercises in descending patterns always starting with the head voice. Promote singing in the upper part of the treble staff. Children can remember a specific pitch if it is done consistently at the beginning of every rehearsal. A good choice is

c' (an octave above middle c). By starting on this pitch, the children automatically begin singing in head voice and thus are given a tonal anchor which is immensely helpful to them as musicians. By developing the voice from the head voice down, the singer is given a wide tessitura with beauty and vocal consistency on both sides of the "break."

**4. Teach correct use of the resonating chambers.** Building consistent vowel shapes through accurate placement of the tongue, jaw, and soft palate is essential to good singing. One needs to listen to only a few children's choirs to know that there is tremendous variety in the color and texture of the sound. As a director, you must decide what sound is most pleasing to your ear. The timbre of a children's chorus will almost always be a direct reflection of the vowel shapes being taught by the director. Model each vowel consistently and accurately. The children will quickly assume those shapes in their singing with regularity.

**5. Insist on accuracy of intonation.** The director must know when certain pitches are out of tune and strive for accurate intonation through good teaching techniques. Often directors accept poor intonation. Children can sing in tune with amazing accuracy. Out of tune singing often results from improper breath support, incorrect vowel shapes, insufficient solfege training, undeveloped audiation skills, or just plain lack of focus. If you stress good intonation, the children will soon be keenly sensitive to vocal accuracy/intonation.

**6. Promote buoyancy of the sound.** When students learn correct vocal breathing and support, they often will begin to force the tone. Keep the tone spinning, buoyant, and relaxed.

**7. Teach reading skills.** Using a system of solfege (preferable movable do) develops music literacy with some music in every rehearsal. Avoid teaching songs by rote. The goal for a children's choir director should not only be to teach songs but to develop musicianship. That certainly includes the reading of music.

**8. Teach an understanding of the music.** To perform music well, it must be internalized and understood comprehensively. Give your students the advantage of understanding the music harmonically and structurally. It is imperative that the director take the time to analyze the music formally

and harmonically in order to share that important insight. Help the singers understand the context of their part in relationship to the rest of the music.

**9. Communicate text meaning to your singers.** Understand the subtleties of the language. Activate the articulators so consonants are heard clearly and the text is musically communicated. Take the time to learn the subtleties of the poetry, its meaning, etc. Artistic expression can only result from a deepened understanding of the text.

**10. Choose quality literature.** Children deserve the best. Find the highest quality literature available. Teach the music stylistically so the student has a full sense of the greatness of the text. The language should be appropriate for children. The melodic material should be well suited for their voices. But more important than anything else, the music should have aesthetic and artistic value, which is communicated to audiences.

---

### Catching Up with VOCES8

Patrick F. Casey  
Newberry College  
Newberry, South Carolina  
(Used with permission of the author)

---

As a lifelong instrumentalist heralding the virtues of chamber playing, I am increasingly drawn to the amazing world of vocal/choral creations. Since first hearing VOCES8 perform in the winter of 2014, I have found this ensemble's impeccable sensitivity and synchronicity to be completely engaging. I managed to visit with co-founder Barnaby Smith in Greenville, South Carolina, on November 13, 2018, after VOCES8 worked with area choirs in a ninety-minute master class.

**Barnaby, as the ensemble's co-founder and artistic director, will you briefly share the early history of VOCES8?**

The group was actually founded out of a group of friends. We met when we were singing together in the Royal

School of Church Music's Millennium Youth Choir. When we were about college age, we got a little bit too old for that choir, so my brother, Paul, and I started to arrange sleepovers for our friends at our parents' house, which was an excuse to socialize and have a bit of a party, and then, of course, do a lot of singing together.

We put on concerts for charity and sang for services at a local church or cathedral. A number of us had been choristers at Westminster Abbey, so it was great to keep in touch with old friends. That group of friends continued singing for a year or so and then was invited to a competition in Italy in 2005, a competition which looked, on paper, like a free holiday. All we had to do was go and do some singing. They would pay for our travel costs, our accommodations and our food, so we were set to have a great time.

When we got to Italy, we realized it was actually the International Choral Grand Prix and quite a serious competition. We set about doing lots of practicing. One of the categories was Jazz and Pop, so although we had taken a choir of twenty singers, we actually sang in that category with eight singers, and we won! From that experience, we received a couple of hundred concert invitations. That really was what gave us the ability to commit to an eight-voice ensemble and to see if we could turn it into a business.

**I want to get your thoughts on VOCES8's approach to choral expression. In my observation, choral ensemble singers in the US seem to utilize vibrato in a less discriminant manner than ensemble singers in the UK. What general "choral sound" tendencies are you observing in other lands where you are performing? And, would you talk a bit about your own experiences and conclusions specifically regarding vibrato in the context of the breadth of music in the VOCES8 library?**

This is one of the hottest topics among choirs globally. I think we need to start by stating that vibrato is a very natural phenomenon. Every voice has vibrato, and there needs to be a realization that singing without it is not a default setting. It is indeed a skill and probably a skill that one has to learn. At the end of the day, to sing without vibrato, we must understand that we have to stop the voice from doing it. Our muscles have a natural tendency when we get the body into the singing position to want to vibrate. The speed at which these muscles will vibrate ultimately depends upon their makeup,

in terms of density and shape. So, although some singers do have little vibrato—Andrea Haines in our group is a good example—every singer does have vibrato. To sing without it means that we are “holding the voice.” That in itself is not a problem if you do it in the healthiest way possible, which I think is to really try and hold it from the core rather than from the throat.

By stretching and adding extra support to the core muscles, we allow a greater level of tension, and that relieves a lot of the tension put specifically on the muscles that link to the hyoid bone and around the larynx in your throat. That being said, at the end of the day, you are still “holding” the voice, so I think the most crucial thing is that if you are going to sing a lot without vibrato, you must release that tension once you’ve performed with a good set of “warm-downs.”

In terms of the use of vibrato, I would say that in choral music, the preferred aesthetic tends to be a pure sound without much vibrato. That’s not to say always without vibrato, but rather, using vibrato specifically as a color. In VOCES8, for example, when we’re singing chordal music, we will try and sing with less vibrato, but when we are singing polyphonic music, we will use a bit more vibrato, because vibrato gives more color to the independent lines. We then certainly use natural vibrato for solos.

We always want voices in the group to blossom at certain moments, so having the ability to paint over your voice with a sort of magnolia whitewash, thus becoming a back-up singer, is an important skill. Equally important is to be able to bring out your line and shine with your own voice in its natural color. Vibrato is a very important part of that.

As one further example, when we are thinking about phrasing, we might use *messa di voce*, which is to straighten the voice out, create tension, and then as you get to the top of a phrase, release that tension, which naturally brings in a little bit of vibrato and a sense of shape. Having control of vibrato is important, and again, in the breadth of the music that we sing, we very much use it as a tool.

In terms of what I notice around the world the most, it’s the impact of solo-singing teaching versus choral teaching. A solo-singing teacher normally comes at the process of wanting the singer to be singing “healthily, freely and openly.” Not using vibrato is sometimes viewed as unhealthy for a singer. It inhibits the development of a voice. A choral director often goes completely the other way, insisting that singers be able to sing without vibrato a lot of the time. What can happen is that young singers get pulled in two different direc-

tions. They begin to not know right from wrong in any given scenario. They end up not being able to control their voices properly in either direction.

My advice is that all singers study solo singing and develop their voices, maybe not studying exclusively heavier repertoire such as Romantic opera, because then “reigning that voice in” can be difficult when one’s natural tendencies are to sing Verdi and Wagner. Certainly, singing in the style of composers like Bach, Handel, and Mozart, for example, is great for young singers to develop. In addition to that, working on control of vibrato by using one’s core muscles is my recommendation. The greatest singers have supreme control of their instruments from the softest, straightest sound, to the deepest, richest and most vivacious sounds. In my opinion, there’s no better place to learn control of the voice than in a choir!

I think everywhere around the world, in cultures where western choral music is sung, most listeners would prefer to hear composers like Eric Whitacre or Ola Gjeilo or John Tavener sung without vibrato. I do think we have hit this wall where some think singing without vibrato is “unhealthy.” At the end of the day, it doesn’t have to be that way as long as a singer does it correctly. In VOCES8, we see the use and control of vibrato as a specific skill, and we use it as a conscious choice of color, choosing when and how to employ it based on the type of music we are singing.

**You spend a great deal of time interacting with school and community choral groups in the regions you are touring. Can you share some of the more frequent aspects of ensemble refinement or expression you find yourself addressing in these sessions?**

This relates heavily to what I was saying earlier regarding the treatment of vibrato as an aspect of vocal color. I think the biggest question or issue that comes up in a lot of our choral sessions is this perceived difference between what it is to be a choral singer and what it is to be a solo singer. I really think there is no difference, that is to say, I think both of those uses for the voice require exactly the same skill set: an ability to demonstrate color with the instrument and control with the instrument whether that be at softer dynamic levels or when the instrument is operating closer to full power. There should be an ability to engage with the text and its meaning.

With many choirs, we end up hearing a performance

that might be wonderfully balanced and blended but somewhat plain when it comes to expressing words and text meaning. I believe we should think about the techniques we might use as solo singers and how they can be employed within a choral environment, specifically, thinking about diction plus how we resonate and use our bodies as our instruments, how we present ourselves physically, or what happens if we direct the sound into the head for resonance compared with chest resonance. We can compare those items with the resonance we find in our mask and what happens when we combine all of these things. I often talk to choirs who have sung in a manner that appears a bit like a pencil drawing when actually what we really wanted to hear was a full water-color. Of course, the other big thing that comes into that conversation is the use of vibrato, which we discussed previously.

I would suggest that when we are talking about ensemble refinement, we are trying to take these two opposing camps, “choir singing” and “solo singing,” and say that we need all of the skill sets that both camps expound and combine them if we are going to use our voices to the greatest effect possible. These two art forms can lead us to a much more colorful and engaging performance.

Another thing we talk about when working with choirs is the skill set specifically related to being a member of a small ensemble, as we are in VOCES8. We should think about things like how we sing without a director, breathing together, and what it means to create chamber music. Then within that idea, we should consider things like how we might tune using just intonation as opposed to equal temperament and how that is affected by the harmonic series. Then we should consider how we might tune added notes in the more complex harmonies and styles of contemporary music.

The most common theme in our work with other ensembles is that of using the voice in the most expressive manner possible to deliver the text and its meaning and how we can accomplish that with and without vibrato.

**Your video performance of Elgar’s universally loved “Nimrod” from his Enigma Variations brought new attention to this text-added arrangement (Lux Aeterna) by John Cameron, first published over twenty years ago. Can you talk about that? I am also curious about whether or not VOCES8 has embraced other works first conceived instrumentally when text additions came some time later?**

Yes, Nimrod was originally performed by our group as a suggestion of our record company, Decca, and it came out on our album *LUX*. I had always considered the work too difficult, if I’m honest, to sing live. We happened to be at a master class in Germany where they had put it on the repertoire list for their choir to sing. Whenever we offer a master class, I try and employ a method in which the choir will sing to us, and then I explain something we’re hoping to fix and have VOCES8 demonstrate it. Then everyone takes part in performing the work. So, after we had worked on *Lux Aeterna* as a group (with the two choirs), we performed the work alone, and I thought, “Oh, that was really quite good.” And so we decided to have another go at it in the Gresham Centre, and it came out very, very well. I would love to say that there is more to it than that, but there isn’t really. Obviously, it is a very well-known work that touches people very deeply, and for that, we can only thank Edward Elgar.

It can be very difficult to transfer instrumental music into vocal arrangements, which is quite funny, because as singers, we spend our lives considering how an instrument might play a particular phrase that we are singing, and also vice versa. I know when instrumentalists study, a lot of the time they think, “How would a singer sing this?” Yet, it’s quite difficult to find music that really fits easily between a sort of instrumental chamber group and an *a cappella* vocal group like ours. That’s not to say that we don’t try, but of course when you think back to the music of people such as J. S. Bach, his writing was very instrumental. And so, the *colla parte* style of performance, where an instrument might join a voice, was created in order to help the vocalists (Barnaby laughs and continues) if they couldn’t perhaps get their chops around the notes!

Generally speaking, we don’t take on music that’s written specifically for an instrumental ensemble and turn it into music for voices. Other than that, I suppose when we create arrangements of big-band-style music, we are trying to create the horns and the saxes and those types of sonorities which you would specifically think about in that genre with the big band. Having said that, when making colors as an ensemble, we do try to equate them with instrumental and symphonic color, in order that we can expand our palette to be as colorful as possible.

Something that springs immediately to my mind is the opening of *Shenandoah*, where we try to create a sort of symphonic sound, with lush, rich string textures. And, I think, as a vocal ensemble, if we are ever going to create the widest range of colors possible, we should try to think of it in an

instrumental manner. That could be quite useful because we all know the multitude of different colors you can get if you have a full symphony orchestra in front of you.

As a kind of simile or metaphor, it's quite a nice thing to be thinking, "Well I'm going to sound like the winds here," or, "This is particularly *pastoral*, should we try and sound like the flutes and the oboes?" for example, or, "This is rich and lush, let's try and sound like a big string section." So, we will think of it that way, but actually, taking an instrumental work and turning it into a vocal work is not something we do too often. That's not, of course, to say that we shouldn't.

## The Care and Preservation of the Voice

Tony Thornton

University of Massachusetts-Amherst  
Amherst, Massachusetts

(Used with permission of the author)

As conductors and singers, we work very hard over a period of weeks to prepare for performance. Concert week may include additional rehearsals and certainly a dress rehearsal. This added stress can cause the immune system to weaken, making the body susceptible to illness. It would be a pity to become ill right before the concert.

Below are twenty tips to help conductors and singers maintain excellent vocal health throughout the year.

- Strive for good general physical and mental health at all times through exercise, meditation, and proper diet.
- Get plenty of rest. If the body is tired, the voice is tired.
- Along with proper diet, a daily multivitamin, extra Vitamin C, or zinc may help you stay healthy. However, always consult with a physician before adding new supplements.
- Always warm up the voice before teaching or singing.
- Speak, conduct, and sing with proper alignment, which will allow breath to move more efficiently in and out of the body.
- Avoid loud talking, screaming, and wheezing or stressed laughter.
- Avoid speaking in loud environments.
- Those who must use their voices for an extended period of time each day, especially educators, should try to develop as many nonverbal ways of communicating as possible. In short, speak less and demonstrate your ideas more. Many resources and tips are available online.
- Constant throat clearing irritates the vocal cords. Swallow or take a sip of water in lieu of clearing the throat.
- Speak in a comfortable pitch range. Do not speak too high or too low, as this will cause wear and tear on the voice. If you find that your voice becomes tired, scratchy, or irritated easily from speaking, consult an ENT doctor immediately.
- Maintain hydration by drinking 8 to 10 glasses of water each day. Remember, the vocal cords are one of the last organs to receive the benefits of water. Drinks made with water such as tea or coffee do not count toward the daily recommended amount.
- Diuretics such as caffeine, alcohol, and artificially flavored beverages remove moisture from the body and therefore the voice. Avoid them as much as possible, especially before a concert.
- Medications such as antihistamines, allergy pills, and birth control pills may cause dryness in the throat. An increased intake of water will be necessary if such medications are prescribed for you.
- Don't smoke. Also, avoid second-hand smoke as much as possible. Not only does smoking rob the vocal cords of much-needed moisture, continued smoking damages the lungs, thus decreasing breath capacity and range.
- Food and drinks high in acids or sugar such as colas and citrus or tomato products should be avoided before singing. Also avoid dairy products such as milk, cheese, ice cream, or yogurt, which may cause the production of too much phlegm for comfortable singing. If you wrestle with acid reflux, as I do, I highly recommend the book *Dropping Acid*:

*The Reflux Diet Cookbook and Cure* by Jamie Koufman and Jordan Stern.

- Avoid spicy and salty foods in large amounts, as they may cause dryness of the throat.
- Chewing gum before a rehearsal or performance is not recommended. Keeping the gum moist uses saliva, which reduces the moisture level inside the mouth.
- Some singers are negatively affected by air conditioning, heating, mold, and perfumes. Avoid them as much as possible prior to a performance.
- Reduce the general usage of the voice before a concert. Speak less and enjoy periods of quiet reflection. Go through the music mentally.
- Do not try to sing over a cold, especially when a sore throat is involved. Lozenges or throat spray should not be used to numb the throat in order to sing. If the throat is sore, do not sing or speak at all. Whispering does not save or rest the voice. In fact, it is possibly the worst thing you can do when experiencing a sore throat. Rest the voice completely.

It is up to you, sometimes with the help of a doctor or voice professional, to assess your challenges and possible remedies to prevent sickness before a performance. Make sure to take the proper steps to the best of your ability, with common sense as your guide, to ensure a vocally healthy, enriching concert experience for yourself and your students.

