Practical Teaching Ideas for Today's Music Educator

CHORTEACH

ChorTeach Vol. 11, No. 2 Winter 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

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A Conductor's Greatest Untapped Resource

William Hienz
University of Louisiana-Lafayette and
Conservatory of Music, Lawrence University, previously
Brookfield, Wisconsin
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It was not too long ago that the "big day" in a conducting class was watching the film of Toscanini conduct his NBC Orchestra. The instructor pointed out how the conductor's every gesture held meaning, his clear point-to-point beat, the great eye contact, and the fact that he conducted from memory. Videos like this were few, and in the days before digital media, professionals and students alike had little opportunity to observe a great conductor at work. Most often, one had to be seated in the audience.

Today all that has changed. We have an enormous wealth of online videos capturing fantastic (and instructive) performances. We can view a choral conductor from two months ago or an orchestra conductor from forty years ago. We can observe conductors from many nations, places to which we may never travel.

Why is watching other conductors important? That is how we learn, and conducting is nothing if not a perpetual state of learning and striving for a perfect performance. Indeed, it is said that we become a composite of all the conductors with whom we have ever studied and performed. That statement is largely true, for better or sometimes worse. After all, not all of our observational experiences were voluntary, and perhaps we saw some things better left unseen, such as the "straight-jacket" (arms crossing while cueing), the "Batman" (head in the score with both elbows above the ears), or the "windmill" (both arms moving fast in circles).

While many practitioners have not had the opportunity to study with virtuoso conductors or even excellent teachers, we can now study the traits and styles of conductors of our choosing. We can be inspired by observing the best of the best. Whether we are beginners or professionals, conducting large or small ensembles, choral or instrumental focus, young singers or a town and gown community chorus performing major oratorios, we can learn by watching both the good and the bad.

With that in mind, consider three overarching areas where the plethora of videos available provide valuable instruction: knowledge of the score, baton technique, and stage deportment. Let's explore each in turn and then consider several performances available on video and the lessons therein.

Knowledge of the Score

Knowing the score is primary in everything we do as conductors. It is not hard to see whether a conductor knows the score. (Most often, we observers can hear it too.) Compare, for instance, a consummate professional to an apprentice. While the novice might have his head in the score with little eye contact, the professional may not even be using music. She may be conducting from memory, which means her eyes are on the choir. We can see immediately that the score is engraved in the conductor's mind; the sound is in her ear.

Also, because our professional has memorized or has a deep knowledge of the score, cues for entrances, dynamics, transitions, and myriad other items are secure. This builds confidence and allows for cueing with the eyes or a nod of the head. She and the ensemble are working as one, and the video shows it.

Our novice, however, isn't as familiar with the score. Cues are missed; transitions aren't smooth, and the music doesn't flow. Video reveals those characteristics as well. Knowing the score cold brings another advantage. It is much easier to listen when one's eyes are not reading the score. Perhaps that is why the great German conductor Herbert von Karajan often conducted from memory with his eyes closed. Professionals listen, but our novice is so busy reading the score that

he is not hearing everything he should.

Baton Technique

In the realm of baton technique, mirroring is one of the most pervasive and negative behaviors. We all do it, though some individuals more than others. Why does it happen?

One of the reasons, possibly, is lack of ambidextrousness. This, however, is a skill that can be developed to a professional level. Carlos Kleiber, Toscanini, and Pierre Monteux were outstanding at left hand independence. They were experts at using the left hand for cueing, dynamics, and phrasing. Sometimes they simply kept that hand motionless. In other words, assuming all participants have a good line of sight, they usually don't need to see the beat from both of the conductor's hands. Many times, one hand is sufficient. This was proven years ago in a most unfortunate way.

Raymond Dvorak, formerly the band director at the University of Wisconsin, was terribly injured in a train accident in 1948. He was almost killed in the wreck and lost his right arm. After a difficult recovery and questions about whether he could continue his career, he did just that![1] There is a photograph of his directing the Wisconsin Band, keeping the beat with his artificial arm while gesturing with his left.[2] True, he was left handed and did much with that hand even before the accident, but those who knew him often pointed out that mirroring was not one of his gestures. Skilled conductors avoid it, just as they avoid mouthing words.

Mouthing words is something too many choral conductors at all levels do too often. Sometimes the conductor is trying to help the choir when they are singing from memory. At other times, perhaps, the conductor is hoping to enhance expression in the ensemble. It is often nothing but a bad and unnecessary habit, one to be avoided. The author was told by someone close to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra that George Solti, the conductor at the time, said he only mouthed the words when the choir was dragging behind the beat. Doing so helped the choir pick up the tempo, he believed.

Clarity of beat is crucial. Too often we hear musicians say, "I can't find his beat." This can be due to many factors, but a clear beat is a trademark of the masters, no matter what type of ensemble they might be conducting. (Watching a conductor on video with the sound turned off can be interesting and instructive.)

There are many other conducting behaviors to observe on video. Two of the most important include the rhythmic life of an ensemble and the conductor's stage deportment. The former is as crucial to a superb performance as is knowledge of the score. Have you ever watched a conductor drag an ensemble through the music? You can tell when it is happening because the conductor is working so very hard. He is trying to impart a rhythmic life that is missing. This is particularly noticeable in soft, slow passages and has probably been occurring since the first rehearsal! Amateur conductors are not the only ones to find themselves in this situation; it can happen at all levels.

The author remembers seeing a well-known professional conductor drag a large symphony orchestra through Beethoven's Sixth Symphony in a rather embarrassing performance. Most likely, the problem started in rehearsal. Instead of teaching the ensemble that it is the rhythmic engine and that the conductor is the control, things got turned around, with the conductor trying to be the engine and the control.

How can we teach the choir the importance of rhythm? One way is by example. Wonderful internal rhythm, with the singers as the engine, can be demonstrated to the choir with videos or recordings of groups such as the King's Singers, an outstanding small ensemble with no conductor. The rhythm has to come from the singers. In this case, one demonstration is worth a thousand words.

Stage Deportment

Another aspect of conducting, often ignored, is stage deportment. Here can be seen the good and the bad.

The good is seen in the conductor who takes the podium confidently and with authority. In a sense, there is a rhythm to his entrance. He is a leader. Sometimes he smiles. He knows how to take a bow. He gets right to the music at hand. He is dressed appropriately. His appearance is neat. He knows the score. If he uses music, the score is open. If he uses a music stand, it is set to the right height. If he uses the piano on which to place his music, the score is already there open. In other words, he is professionally prepared, and his demeanor signals the fact that all participants are ready and fully attentive to the task at hand.

Bad conductor deportment can also be observed on video. Perhaps there is an inordinate amount of time be-

tween taking the stage and the downbeat. She adjusts her music stand. She shuffles scores and then realizes that the first score is missing. She leaves the stage to retrieve it. In a choral concert, she has the pitch given from the piano twice. Worst of all, she takes her entrance bow and begins talking to the audience!

The Case of Carlos Kleiber

In searching for conductors with perfect technique, one quickly realizes that some conductors are more skilled in certain areas than others. Some conductors demonstrate consistency in all performances. Others do not. While there are conductors who meet some high standards, there may be only one maestro who consistently meets them all. In the author's estimation, Carlos Kleiber is that person.

Karl Ludwig Bonifacious Kleiber was born in Berlin in 1930. The son of the esteemed conductor Erich Kleiber, the family lived in South America during World War II where Karl became Carlos. With no encouragement from his father, Carlos studied music and made his conducting debut in 1954. As his career advanced, he was extremely selective in where and when he conducted, acted as his own manager, demanded large salaries, extra rehearsals and, if rehearsals weren't going as he wanted, walked out, with no performance! After hearing Kleiber at the Met, Leonard Bernstein praised him as "the greatest living conductor in the world."[3]

Many of us in the United States have little knowledge of Kleiber for several reasons. He lived in Munich, Germany, and rarely appeared in the United States. He only appeared here with the Chicago Symphony and the Metropolitan Opera, two engagements with each. What is more, compared with his peers, Kleiber did not perform that often. And while he had a huge repertoire, over time he concentrated only on a few works.[4]

Kleiber was particular about recordings and only released twelve. Fortunately, there are videos of him available, and after watching, the reader may agree that he is one of the finest conductors ever, with a conducting style and musicality rarely seen. As Charles Barber wrote: generations to come will marvel that there ever was such an artist on the podium. He had the most eloquent baton of the modern era. Powerful and mesmerizing, supple and exacting, controlling and liberating, his was a style of conducting that had no apparent limitations.[5, 6]

If one wishes to hear only one example of Kleiber's work, Barber suggests watching *Die Libelle* (*The Dragonfly*) from the 1989 New Year's Day concert with the Vienna Philharmonic.[7, 8] (Warning: once you begin to watch this concert, you may not be able to stop.)

One may also wish to watch a video of the 1992 Vienna New Year's Day Concert, the first nine minutes of which are the absolute epitome of superb conducting.[9] His performance of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, with the Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1983, towers over other conductors.[10]

One of his most impressive and consistent characteristics is his shaping of a phrase. It is clear he is not beating time; rather, he shapes phrases and conducts sections. The orchestra "sings." He is conducting from memory; therefore, his posture is erect; his eye contact is superb, and tempo changes are perfect. His independence of hands is exceptional, even more than normally would be expected from a professional conductor. The beat is not only clear but changes size and style with the music. Sometimes he cues with the right hand, sometimes with the left, and sometimes with his eyes. *Pianissimos* find beats small and close to the body while fortes are large and dramatic. Occasionally he does almost no conducting at all since the ensemble is together and moving ahead on its own. If conducting is a controlled dance to music, Kleiber was its finest practitioner. He died in 2004.

There are outstanding conductors working today, many of whom come from strong choral backgrounds. One example, Harry Christophers, of "Sixteen" fame, also serves as the artistic director of Boston's Handel and Haydn Society. A video of Handel's *Zadok the Priest*[11] at the Proms is remarkable for its energy, rhythmic clarity, phrasing, and clean transitions. He uses a score but probably doesn't need it. The intangible in this performance is the drama the conductor imparts, which couldn't happen if he weren't so well prepared and technically proficient. John Elliott Gardiner is another English conductor who is well known to the choral community. Some consider him to be one of the great conductors of our time. A video of the Monteverdi Choir performing Handel's *Dixit Dominus*[12] shows Gardiner at his energetic best.

There are hundreds of other videos of great value available online. Many colleges and universities have splendid examples of excellent choirs led by accomplished conductors. ACDA has numerous videos of performances from regional and national conferences at ACDA.org.

In many cases, there is good footage of the conductor, some of whom are exceptional. Usually, the very best in

conducting technique finds less mirroring, little mouthing of words, and excellent eye contact in addition to the many other elements mentioned above.

Observing the Observer

We have discussed excellent conducting techniques and offered a few examples of elite conductors. Understanding the many benefits in watching others perform, let's consider now the most important professional to be studied carefully on video: you.

Now comes the fun part of video instruction. Arrange for your rehearsal or performance to be video recorded. Take note of the positives and negatives in your conducting, including mirroring, mouthing of words, and memorization. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you conducting beats/measures or phrases?
- How clear is your beat?
- How about eye contact?
- Is the choir rhythmically engaged, or are you "pulling it out of them?"
- Is the performance professional?
- In rehearsal, how many minutes do you talk and they sing? This may be the biggest surprise (and lesson) of all.

All of us are at different stages of growth as conductors. Carlos Kleiber was largely self-taught and grew up watching his father and others conduct. In this age of digital media, we too can watch the greats while constantly striving toward conducting excellence.

NOTES

1 www.oocities.org/wisconsinband/Old SiteStuff/history.html
2 https://www.flickr.com/photos/uwdigicollec/4439276486
3 James Kreger, https://www.metorchestramusicians.org/blog/2014/4/7/making-music-with-carlos-kleiber-elusive-titan-of-the-podium?rq=kleiber
4 Charles Barber, *Corresponding with Carlos: A Biography of Carlos Kleiber* (Lanham, Maryland, The Roman & Littlefield Publishing Group,2011), 6-7
5 Ibid., 7
6 Dr. Charles Barber corresponded with the reclusive Kleiber from 1989 until near the end of his life. He sent 51 video tapes over that period of time of various conductors to Kleiber, who was eager to see them. Carlos's responses are published in "Conversations with Carlos." This book is highly recommended reading for the serious student of conducting.
7 Carlos Kleiber, New Year's Concert, Vienna Philharmonic, 1989, https://youtu.be/9QX4lfl0Hmc @21:33
8 Barber, *Corresponding with Carlos,* 122
9 Carlos Kleiber, New Year's Concert, Vienna Philharmonic, 1992, https://youtu.be/R7Hn0do-xKE
10 Carlos Kleiber, Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony,* Concertgebouw Orchestra, https://youtu.be/2Sw97NzvvsE
11 Harry Christophers, Handel's *Zadok the Priest,* https: youtu.be/J6CNQqzN3mU
12 John Eliot Gardiner, Handel's *Dixit Dominus,* https://youtu.be/dS65-ZvUSSM, https://www.metorchestramusicians.org/blog/2014/4/7/making-music-with-carlos-kleiber-elusive-titan-of-the-podium?rq=kleiber

A Community Divided: Gendered Discourse in the Ensemble Classroom

Eric Rubinstein
Queens College
Melville, New York
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"In order to promote an openness of access to musical possibilities and a richly balanced and communicative musical experience for everybody, we have to be willing to open up the complex webs of cultural behavior which hold music in its current state."[1]

In a world where "boys will be boys" and "you _____ like a girl," we often do not realize the negative impact our words and actions have on adolescent males and females. Many of our teaching practices tend to reflect our implicit and perceived sex and gender biases. Based on my experiences in both secondary and higher education, I find that

discussions regarding diversity in education focus more on socio-economic status and cultural identity and less on gender discourse.

In this article, I hope to show that despite our ongoing work to promote gender equality, we may actually be making it worse. In our attempts to treat all students equitably, we might also be encouraging more divisiveness (whether we are aware of it or not). I also wonder if this is a never-ending cycle. Are we really doing anything different or are we talking about diversity just to check off a box? Outlined below, I challenge all choral directors to decide whether their repertoire choices, ensemble structures, curricula, and pedagogy are fair and equitable for all students, male and female alike.

It has been proven that children are able to identify gender stereotypes as early as age three.[2] By default, boys and girls learn misrepresentations of what it means to be either masculine or feminine. According to Patrick Hawkins, Arizona State University, these types of sex biases are then reinforced in general classroom reading materials. Most stories, he found, were about male characters who actively avoided being associated with a girl-type activity. Hawkins also found that major male characters had greater career roles than females.[3] Aside from this print material, teachers might consider additional reinforcement of the gender divide in a student's formative years: lining up by gender, any game or activity played with boys versus girls, and physical education. There are countless additional examples highlighting the increasing divide between the sexes in educational settings.

Specific to the music classroom, researchers have found male-majority illustrations in technique books, male-majority advertisements in *The Instrumentalist,* and male-majority teacher preparation materials.[4] As educators, we are not involved in the creation of these resources and the ways in which males and females are represented in the materials, so what are we doing to deter this practice in our classrooms? Gender equality and inclusion have now become standard terms in our educational vernacular, but how much is real and how much is just lip-service?

The Future is Female

Repertoire

A number of pedagogues would consider "good" choral music as legitimate (and traditional) if it is written by dead, white, Euro-American males. They might also believe the "best" music to be written for mixed choirs. By these standards, directors may turn a blind eye to this gendered music and may feel justified for continued use of an exclusionary canon.[5]

When one does look at gender-specific repertoire, the music often reinforces sex stereotypes. More often than not, women's choir music largely consists of slow ballads, lullabies, and love songs or the white middle-class definition of femininity.[6] Men's choir repertoire often focuses on adventure, travel, and drinking, topics that might make boys feel like men or entice them into joining choir. In my opinion, there are countless works that promote misogyny and gender roles, for example, Offenbach's *Neighbors' Chorus* or Copland's *Stomp your Foot.*

Ensemble Structure

Let's say that the repertoire you have chosen does not reinforce a gender divide. Are the ensemble offerings at your school equitable? Is the mixed choir or the women's chorus the top choir? Why is that? Females undoubtedly outnumber males in many choral programs. One reason might be the perception that male singers are sensitive or effeminate, attributes often associated with females.[7]

The social misconceptions about singing are beyond the scope of this paper; however, the lack of male participation in choirs can influence female singers. Considering the imbalance of voice parts that occurs too often, are we inadvertently devaluing a number of talented females by making the women's choir the place for leftovers, for women who are not good enough? By default, are we also creating a more competitive atmosphere among females that may not exist among males? Is that fair or healthy?

The second-place status of female singers promotes the idea that the individuals in these ensembles can only rise to the challenge of being adequate or acceptable.[8] Their sole function is to prove themselves worthy of eventually singing in the mixed choir.[9] Whether intentional or not, this structure creates prestige hierarchy and a stigma that men are treated differently from women.

Curriculum

Now let's assume that you are already sensitive to the imbalance of voice parts, and that you already have ensembles that reflect the large number of talented women in your program. Does the curriculum include and support females? When we discuss choral music, we talk almost exclusively in terms of contributions made by men. Julia Koza writes that women are only mentioned as to whether they did or did not participate in choral singing. Women may not have sung during the Renaissance, but they were not absent from music's past.[10] To prove this point further, directors are now promoting all-female composer concerts, acknowledging the ever-present gender divide.

What is our focus?

From a pedagogical perspective, choral directors invest a great deal of time and effort to the male changing voice. In fact, when director/teachers refer to the changing voice, it is sometimes difficult to discern whether or not they are talking about both sexes or just males.[11] We attend conferences and lectures on the topic. Complete chapters in numerous textbooks are dedicated to this subject. Add the fact that choral directors spend much time and effort recruiting men since, as I mentioned earlier, they are a minority in many choir programs. The question then arises—if our curriculum and pedagogy are male-driven and if male singers tend to monopolize much of our attention, are the females receiving the music education they need and deserve?

Summary

Gender inequality in choral music is not new, but how often do we look at this problem from the female perspective? Teachers are constantly trying to find new ways to foster inclusivity in their classrooms. Despite our best efforts, male and female singers are not represented equally in many choral programs.

Unfortunately, we must work within certain confines beyond our control—adolescent peer pressure among men, a lack of female representation in music history materials, and singing techniques that are generally more challenging for young men. With all that said, how do we work through these challenges while trying to empower our female singers? Great strides have been made in gender equality, especially in education, but the journey is long and full of challenges. Given strong leadership by clear-headed choral directors, the challenges can be met.

NOTES

[1] Jo Glover, "Music, Gender and Education Conference, Bristol University, March 1993," *British Journal of Music Education* 10, no. 3: 152, doi: 10.1017/S0265051700001698

[2] Nicola Dibben, "Gender Identity and Music," in *Musical Identities,* ed. Raymond MacDonald, David Hargreaves and Dorothy Mill (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[3] Patrick Hawkins, "What Boys and Girls Learn Through Song: A Content Analysis of Gender Traits and Sex Bias in Two Classroom Textbooks." *Research and Issues in Music Education* 5, no. 1 (2007): 5. https://ir.stthomas.edu/rime/vol5/iss1/5/

[4] Ibid.

[5] Julia Eklund Koza, "Getting a word in edgewise: A feminist critique of choral methods texts." *The Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (1994): 71.

[6] Ibid. 72.

[7] Julia Eklund Koza, "The 'missing males' and other gender issues in music education: Evidence from the Music Supervisors' Journal, 1914–1924." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 41, no. 3 (1993): 219, doi: 10.2307/3345326

[8] Phillip Swan, "The Y Factor in an X Chromosome World" in *Conducting Women's Choirs,* ed. Debra Spurgeon (Chicago: Gia Publication, 2012): 133.

[9] Jill Wilson, "Preferences Of and Attitudes Toward Treble Choral Ensembles." *Research and Issues in Music Education* 10, no. 1 (2012): 4. https://ir.stthomas.edu/rime/vol10/iss1/4/

[10] Koza, "Getting a word in edgewise," 70.

[11] Koza, "The 'missing males' and other gender issues in music education," 224.

The Unique Attributes of a Collegiate Ensemble Director

Sarin Williams
University of Rio Grande
Rio Grande, Ohio
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As an aspiring college professor, there are a variety of positions one might consider for the future. Collegiate music faculty generally fall into three main categories: academic instructors, applied music instructors, and ensemble directors. Not only are these very different types of positions with radically different daily duties, but within each position, applications can vary greatly.

How, then, does a student make an informed decision about which jobs to apply for and what type of career they would most enjoy? One answer is to seek advice from knowledgeable faculty already in these positions as to the positive and negative aspects of every job and institution. This article attempts to aid in such a search by sharing the wisdom of six collegiate ensemble conductor/teachers and their insights into the different world their positions occupy:

1. Dr. David Vroman, Professor of Music, Director of Bands, and Chairperson for the Department of Music at Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois

2. Dr. John Jost, Retired Professor of Music and Director of Choral Activities at Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois

3. Steven D. Davis, Rose Ann Carr Millsap Missouri Distinguished Professor of Music, Director of Bands and Wind Ensembles at the University of Missouri-Kansas City

4. Dr. Joe Parisi, Professor of Instrumental Music Education and Associate Director of Bands at the University of Missouri-Kansas City

5. Dr. Ryan Board, Associate Professor II of Music and Conducting and Director of Choral Activities at Pepperdine University

6. Dr. Robert Olson, Professor and Director of Orchestras at the University of Missouri-Kansas City

The purpose of these interviews and research was to discover the similarities and differences in career positions of ensemble directors versus the positions of academic and applied faculty in collegiate music departments. What are the unique attributes of an ensemble conductor's job? In what ways do they function similarly and differently from other collegiate music faculty? What advice would established ensemble conductors have to share with a student looking forward to this position? While there are many different areas to cover in such a discussion, this article chooses to focus on the following ten:

- Recruiting
- Preparation Time
- Budget
- Collaboration & Community Connections
- "Limelight" Pressure
- Research Area
- Ensemble Teamwork
- Faculty Relationships
- Administrative Work
- Variety in the Position

As an introduction to the heart of the issue, here are the thoughts of Dr. David Vroman on the subject of the difference between his ensemble director position and that of academic and applied university faculty:

> Let's start with what is the same. I have a syllabus, scheduled class meeting times, lesson/rehearsal plans, goals and objectives, texts (music), a system of evaluation/grades. The success of students depends on my ability to communicate.
>
> The big difference at the University is that of performance. I take my class out to a public forum and display what it has learned on a regular basis. The second difference is that in any performance, it is OUR work that is judged by the listeners, not an individual performance or accomplishment as in other classes. Sure, there are individual differences in ability and performance, but our work is about how the

ensemble sounds as a whole.

Finally, as a result of these two differences, there is an esprit de corps that becomes a part of a successful ensemble that you might not see in an academic class or the applied studio. Students are engaged through active involvement, and the conductor/teacher focuses his or her involvement on the key elements of the music in front of him.[1]

Recruiting: Is it an Issue?

All six interviewees agreed that recruiting for their ensembles was a prominent issue and that the quality of the ensemble depends, to a large degree, on the quality of its members. One collegiate band director gives this perspective: "Absolutely. I recruit both music majors and minors who have the potential and ability to impact my ensembles. At the university level, it is the only way to manage instrumentation. I look to a very large pool and invest lots of personal time to see a small portion of that group become enrolled at the university and then enroll in my ensemble."[2] This recruiting pressure varies from the perspective of an academic teacher, as they are more often assessed on the level of their own work and less on the work of their students. Applied teachers depend on the quality of their studio and also have significant recruiting responsibilities.

Ensembles are typically some of the more visible parts of a conservatory or department of music. This visibility puts their directors in a unique position and provides both more and fewer opportunities to recruit. For instance, a band director might feel as though he could recruit beyond his own ensemble and gather promising students for all of the music department's programs. An orchestral director, however, may believe that he has less recruiting potential because a great student studying performance is hoping to work with an excellent applied teacher, not necessarily to perform in an exceptional orchestra.

Beyond these larger issues, the conductors interviewed shared some insight into various recruiting methods. Almost all agree that a director should create a high-quality product and then make that product visible to a large audience. Performing at national, state, and regional conventions can greatly increase the audience base of the ensemble. Increased visibility as a conductor can be gained by adjudicating and working with All-State, All-Region, and Festival ensembles.

Another common recruiting technique is to invite area groups to campus by hosting an Honor Band or Honor Choir weekend. Some of the best recruiting comes from teacher's recommendations to their students as to which college institutions to attend. Lastly, graduate strong students who will then go out and be advocates for their program.

Preparatory Time: Same or Different?

"Compared to a great academic instructor, I think my time is about the same. To those who are repeating their classes and lectures without any creativity or enthusiasm, I am putting in more time. One thing I enjoy about conducting an ensemble is that my curriculum (music) changes every semester. It keeps things fresh for everyone involved in the ensemble."[3]

The largest and most obvious difference between professors in the academic, applied, and ensemble areas is the type and amount of preparation required. Accomplished ensemble directors are constantly preparing new music for their groups, typically on some type of large-scale rotational system to ensure quality literature that covers all major genres and styles. This means a large amount of new preparation every semester, every concert.

An academic instructor usually has a great deal of upfront preparation for a new course and then adjusts the syllabus each semester adding new or redefined course material as necessary. An applied instructor must learn a quantity of new music at first and then repeats a substantial amount of repertoire each semester for teaching purposes. Thus, ensemble directors typically work with larger amounts of new material each semester than do academic or applied faculty.

Preparation is similar for faculty across the music department as they develop a system and implement it consistently with any type of course. The difference comes in how the musical preparation changes in scope and proportion each semester and can provide a constant source of variety and creative stimulation. "[The preparation] is different;" states Dr. John Jost, "not as much time evaluating papers and projects, but working constantly with new material (not just repeating a syllabus with minor changes from year to year)."[4]

The following is one perspective on preparatory time from Steven D. Davis:

"I can only speak about my prep. The minimum amount of time I spend with a score is one hour per one minute of music. Thus, a 25-minute work requires a minimum of 25 hours of preparatory time. I study scores from 8:00 am–12:00 pm each day and am always studying scores for the next concert by the time the first rehearsal for the current concert takes place. Altogether, I prep around 100 pieces a year the same way."[5]

Budget: More Difficult or Easier?

"It depends on how the budget is handled. I have no set budget and have never been denied what I requested."[6] This interesting quote comes from Dr. Joe Parisi, who notes that at times the ensemble director's budget can be easier to handle versus another music faculty member's budget. Unfortunately for most collegiate ensemble directors, this type of budgetary ease is not the norm.

According to the conductors interviewed for this project, oftentimes an ensemble director's budget faces more demands from extensive use of manpower and natural resources. This includes such details as performance venues, equipment rental, contracting additional players, and the purchase of ensemble outfits and music.

For today's wind ensemble, for instance, music is only available for rent and can cost up to $2,000 per concert.[7] Due to all of the above factors, and many more, ensemble directors typically have larger budgets to manage than do other music faculty. "An outstanding college choir director must be both an outstanding administrator and an outstanding performer."[8]

Collaboration: To Be or Not to Be

It seems that a high point of their position for most collegiate ensemble directors is the great variety they find in their jobs, both from day to day and across a lifetime. One source of variety can be collaboration. For an ensemble director, this comes in many forms inside and outside of the music department and inside and outside of the university—from invitations to applied teachers for solos, to working with a local high school ensemble. These collaborative opportunities can both aid in positive relationships with fellow faculty members and provide excellent recruiting prospects.

One significant aspect of a collegiate ensemble director's position that can be enhanced by collaboration is community relations. Sometimes good collaborative opportunities can result in better community relations and performance venues for the ensemble that otherwise would have been closed.

Because ensembles are such a visible part of the music department, some directors feel a responsibility to cultivate an educated concert audience through collaboration. As stated by Dr. Ryan Board: "There is a current and general disassociation within society with the highly cultivated art forms. Our art forms do not create the immediate satisfaction the public wants. We have a greater challenge to connect with contemporary audiences."[9] In a positive situation, an ensemble director can broaden the horizons of an audience and afford themselves greater creative license within a community at the same time.

Although most college directors enjoy collaboration and believe it to be a positive experience for their students, it can be a negative musical experience for groups that are always in demand. "Everybody wants a piece of the orchestra. We service the opera department, composition department, the concerto/aria folks, and the choral department! I have to try and find a balance. We only do 2½ concerts of our own each year; at best, I do 50% of the material I want to do. Ask an academic faculty member how much he would enjoy teaching a class in which he chooses only half of the material!"[10] Dr. Robert Olson.

The "Limelight" Pressure on a Conductor

A collegiate conductor's job is one that garners much attention from a great variety of people, including other faculty, administration, area professionals, and the community at large. By far, the majority of ensemble directors feel pressure in their position. "Sure, I feel pressure every day. The band and choir directors on any campus are some of the most 'front and center' people. Every single concert is an evaluation."[11]

Conductors and their ensembles are being constantly evaluated, and the results of that "team effort" are very public, including featured performances at state and national conventions. While the director may not be wholly responsible for every sound emanating from the group, he or she is responsible for the complete product, which includes the performance of each individual.

It is surprising, then, to note that the conductors interviewed consistently felt more internal, rather than external,

pressure. To continue the quote from Professor Davis: "I do not feel as much pressure externally, however, as I do internally. I blame myself for any problem."[12]

Although academic classroom teachers may be "on stage" when they teach as are ensemble directors, applied studio teachers are not.[13] Even when lecturing, a classroom instructor typically has fewer students at any given time than does an ensemble director. This means that a conductor is literally being evaluated by more students, more frequently, and then by the general public at concerts, than are academic and applied faculty.

What about Research?

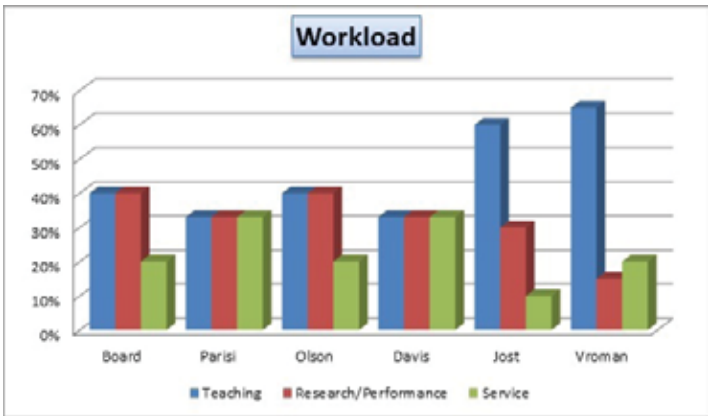
Depending on the college or university where a music faculty member is employed, there are varying requirements for a research component in a professor's workload. Many institutions of higher learning consider performance as a music faculty member's research. The amount of research required also varies by institution, but it seems that a fairly typical workload expectation is 40% teaching, 40% research/performance, and 20% service.

An institution's mission statement will often tell a prospective candidate something about these expectations. A research institution, for example, will have greater expectations in that area than a performance or teaching institution. The latter will, in fact, most likely have a stronger expectation in the teaching area and less in research and service.

What, then, do most collegiate ensemble directors consider to be their primary source of research in their prescribed workload? "My primary scholarship is performance, but not at the University. To be scholarship, it has to be beyond the bounds of local performance. In my case this is presenting clinics, guest conducting, private instruction in conducting and horn, etc. These activities are the ones that also assist in building the ensemble program because it can be an integral part of recruiting strategies that are so important to what I do."[14]

Scholarly activities vary widely for ensemble directors. Some have an emphasis on performance, which might include performing viola in the local symphony orchestra, or 20–25 concerts conducted each year. One professor plans and executes an international Mahler festival each summer as his research/performance component[15] and another plays trumpet in the faculty wind quintet.[16] Conductors with a research emphasis may write journal articles, give conference presentations, or produce a CD with their group.

The following chart shows the professional workload of all six conductors interviewed for this article. The information appears in approximate percentage of their yearly work time spent in each area (all professors total 100%). Notice that the first four professors listed are employed at a performance institution, whereas the last two professors work at a teaching institution. It is also pertinent that professors Parisi and Davis serve on the most faculty committees of any of the interviewed professors.



A Sense of Teamwork

In the article "Teaching Jazz: Practical Tips for the Classroom," author J. Richard Dunscomb states that when working with an ensemble, creating an atmosphere of teamwork is essential,[17] a statement with which all of the interviewed collegiate ensemble directors agreed. Dr. John Jost's answer exemplifies this ideal. "Absolutely. A choir of highly trained individuals is not a choir. Members must listen to one another and make a unified sound without losing their own personal sound. We work on this a lot in warm-up exercises, and it is a major goal of my rehearsals. Creating a positive, supportive, affirming atmosphere helps. Respect for students, humor, introducing the unexpected, admitting mistakes, and willingness to try crazy ideas helps."[18]

Creating one unified team from students with a variety of backgrounds and previous experiences can be a challenge especially for ensemble conductors. Directors begin this process at the start of the year with extra care given to a student seating chart and syllabus. They often work to establish a consistent routine and break negative habits. Instrumental directors, for example, may carefully instill an expectation of coming to rehearsal with the music already learned.

The beginning of a new school year is the best time to

establish a personal connection between director and ensemble. Professor Davis takes a minimum of thirty minutes at the beginning of the first semester to meet with each ensemble member individually to create a personal relationship with them.[19] Dr. Parisi posts recordings of the upcoming music on the school's virtual classroom to allow students to connect with each work prior to the first rehearsal.[20]

Once established, maintaining this respectful relationship between student and conductor is vital to a sense of teamwork. Keep punitive matters in private and let students know immediately if their actions are not up to the standards of the group. Take a concerned approach and make the creative process about an exchange between director and ensemble rather than a dictatorship.

Lastly, the good conductor is always evaluating his or her communication skills. Many directors record their rehearsals not only to improve their gestures but also to evaluate their verbal communication. Look for efficient ways to communicate instructions in the least amount of time.

"The bottom line is that you could be an incredible musician, a genius in knowledge of pedagogy and literature, an expert in theoretical analysis, a master of gestures and have perfect pitch yet you cannot make an ensemble sound good because you can't communicate very well. You have to understand how organizational structures work and how your own personality and style must be displayed to achieve a sense of teamwork with an ensemble. I record my rehearsals not to just listen to my ensemble but also to listen to myself. What did I say and how did I say it that simply did not work? What did work? I listen to see what musical response I get from the ensemble to see if I was successful. I have to manage other people, and that means the first person I have to manage is myself."[21]

Faculty Relations

"You never teach a colleague even when asked!"[22]

Faculty relationships are crucial for a successful college teaching career, and of all the collegiate ensemble director's many tasks, nurturing good relationships with colleagues can be the most difficult. Conductors are in a unique position within a school of music. They see more students and collaborate with more colleagues than do most other faculty members. For directors who depend on applied studios for their best students, there is a delicate balancing act between the director's concerns and that of the applied faculty. All of these elements make good faculty relationships essential for any collegiate ensemble director.

"Generally other faculty are somewhat jealous of the popularity an ensemble director has. They don't experience the frustration and challenges that student performance offers, and they also don't get to experience the huge sweeping enthusiasm when things go right. I have to be sensitive to these feelings that they have. I have to communicate with them on a regular basis, and that communication needs to be 80% positive. I also hold realistic expectations; I look for insight into how students perform better, but I do not expect the studio teacher to be teaching students the ensemble music."[23]

The ensemble directors interviewed have at their disposal an impressive arsenal with which to improve faculty relations. First and foremost, directors must choose their battles carefully and watch where and when disagreements are discussed. The hallway, bathroom, or parking lot is no place to discuss students, nor should a director discuss one or more ensemble members with another student. If there is an overarching problem, address it privately with the applied studio teacher.

Many directors plan positive interactions by inviting other faculty to concerts and attending their events. Invite them to perform a solo or guest conduct a rehearsal, thank them publically for their work, acknowledge their achievements. Try to schedule concerts and tours carefully, taking into account other faculty schedules. The bottom line is to avoid conflict before it arises as much as possible.

Administrative Details

The administrative details handled by a collegiate ensemble conductor are wide ranging. Bradley University's Dr. John Jost offers here a wonderful list for your consideration. "Recruiting, auditioning, evaluating, preparing syllabi, handouts, translations, scheduling, recommending scholarship amounts, choosing music (huge), ordering music, supervising student choral managers and librarians, finding accompanists, engaging guest artists and preparing payment forms for them, coordinating rehearsals with orchestra or other instrumentalists, preparing written programs, writing press releases, supervising publicity in general, planning and coordinating tours, ordering equipment, supervising recordings, auditioning choirs for festivals, planning and publiciz-

ing honor choirs, festivals, and clinics for high school choirs, and keeping track of budget."[24]

Along with those activities, the ensemble director has other administrative tasks including: securing and setting up venues, choosing and distributing attire, student advising, obtaining additional equipment, contracting additional players, moving risers, networking with other leaders in the community and nationwide, instrument and music inventory, coaching and teaching, and essentially coordinating an entire department/program. It is common for collegiate ensemble directors to have far more administrative tasks than other music faculty. In Dr. Bob Olson's words, the daily grind of details takes an enormous amount of time.[25]

Conclusion

Although collegiate ensemble directors have an enormous amount of responsibility, they also have many positive aspects to their work. All of the interviewed conductors mentioned how variety in their work was an important positive aspect of their position. For a conductor, this can come in many guises: variety in literature, types of classes taught, lecture vs. ensemble preparation, and collaboration.

Thus, along with their many responsibilities, ensemble directors also experience a large cross-section of life in the music department, often wearing many hats and teaching a variety of courses. For many, this is a job they would not trade for the world.

We finish with the perspective of one collegiate ensemble director, Professor Steve D. Davis of the University of Missouri-Kansas City. "Ensemble directors become the face of the conservatory, interface with the public more, deal with more students, and have more evening commitments. The ensemble director has to be a performer and teacher. We are the culmination of all other coursework in the music department. The people that are great are involved 24/7. I don't know one professional with a balanced life that is at the top. I came to realize that my balance point is work-a-holism; all really successful conductors are workaholics."[26] If you are already a workaholic who loves students, enjoys variety, and does not mind administrative details, you are in the right profession.

NOTES

[1] David Vroman, letter to the author, 24 March, 2009.
[2] Vroman
[3] Vroman
[4] John Jost, letter to the author, 22 March, 2009.
[5] Steve Davis, personal interview, 3 April, 2009.
[6] Joseph Parisi, personal interview, 18 March, 2009.
[7] Davis.
[8] Jost.
[9] Ryan Board, personal interview, 17 March, 2009.
[10] Robert Olson, personal interview, 1 April, 2009.
[11] Davis.
[12] Davis.
[13] Olson.
[14] Vroman.
[15] Olson.
[16] Parisi.
[17] J. Richard Dunscomb, "Teaching Jazz: Practical Tips for the Classroom." *Down Beat – Jazz, Blues & Beyond* 69.9. (September 2002): 80.
[18] Jost.
[19] Davis.
[20] Parisi.
[21] Vroman.
[22] Davis.
[23] Vroman.
[24] Jost.
[25] Olson.
[26] Davis.

Asking Facebook Colleagues What Enhances Choral Sound – A Pilot Study

Derrick Thompson
Staunton River Middle & High School
Lynchburg, Virginia
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Introduction

From year to year, many choral conductors have their choir participate in festivals, district assessments, and other adjudications in an effort to receive feedback on what can be improved in their choral ensemble. Often, the conductor receives notes that will benefit the group, and sometimes students receive feedback from adjudicators that their choral conductor alluded to previously. The benefit of attending these events for the students and the choral conductor is having the opportunity to receive feedback from someone who doesn't normally hear the group and having the opportunity to listen to other choral groups from the area or district. After attending these choral events, students have conversations about the choral groups that performed. They tend to ask the question, "How does that choir create such an amazing choral sound?" Or after reviewing feedback from adjudicators, many singers try to take the notes offered to help improve their next performance.

During the school year, conductors introduce many methods and approaches to help their students recognize the importance of proper singing technique and singing together as a group. These approaches can be presented through warm-ups, the repertoire chosen, or by listening to other high-quality performing ensembles. But the question is, what does choral and vocal pedagogy look and feel like, in action, in the classroom? What are we choral directors doing to enhance the sound of their choir and help our singers grow?

Available literature indicates that choral conductors' ideas (and singers' ideas) about a "great sounding choir" can vary depending on the perspectives of those individuals. Neuen (1988) considers a great sounding choir to be one that uses energy, which includes buoyancy, deliberately formed vowel sounds, proper placement, and vocal control.[1]

In Lamble's *Handbook for Beginning Choral Educators*, the author asked eleven participants to describe the tone quality they felt was appropriate for a high school choir. Some of the responses included:

• Having the ability to sing with "cleanliness," intonation, matched vowels, and a moderately mature tone.

• Having a naturally sounding vocal production with good resonance and breath support.

• Being open and free, natural and easy, supported and energized, flowing, focused and directed, and more vertically than laterally.

• And being well blended, including dynamic color and variety.[2]

Though none of the responses by Lamble or Neuen are wrong, it is up to the choral conductor to make sure that his or her students are capable of identifying a great choral sound when they hear it and how they can achieve that sound within their choral group. I do believe that it takes good planning, creativity, the right tools, and hard work to achieve great choral sound with our choirs.[3]

Pilot Study

In order to receive feedback from choral conductors currently in the field, a Facebook post compiled by choral colleagues was created (a closed group) asking the question, "What do you consider important characteristics of a great sounding choir?" Responses included:

• Diction

• Tall, round vowels

• Clean, balanced sound across the whole choir

• Engaged singing

• Varied and appropriate sound for different and interesting literature

• Pure, clear tone, unified vowels, and crisp consonants when appropriate

• Appropriate tone for age of the individuals

• Intonation, rhythm, phrasing, vowels, dynamics, diction, and energy

• Relaxed vowels, ending consonants together, understanding the text, and supported tones that blend

• Properly shaped mouths

• Vibrant, healthy (not forced), and balanced tone from top to bottom

• Vocally healthy, unified vowels, beauty of sound, and appropriate tone colors

• Good intonation

• Unified vowels and a great understanding of dynamics

• Vitality/energy

• Tuneful, informed, and expressive singing

• Harmony (singing in tune with one another)

• The release of tension and complete freedom and movement causing singers' bodies to be engaged in the music

• Vowels, diction, and blend

• Pure, precise, clear, tall, and finely-tuned vowels

• Crisp, fast, articulate consonants

Based on the responses given, characteristics such as the importance of vowel unification, diction, and the use of energy and expression seemed to be recurring characteristics throughout the post. Even though these three characteristics are not the only areas to help improve a choral sound, literature can be found detailing how choral conductors employ these characteristics to enhance their choral group.

Vowel Unification

Whether singing as a soloist or as a part of a choral group, singers should understand the importance of the vowel that carries out the musical line. When a group of singers comes together, whether it be two or twenty-two or more, it is important that each person in the group be capable of matching not only the pitch but the vowel at any given time.

The vowel sound being produced is determined by three factors: the lips, the jaw, and the tongue.[4] Farrell believes that a demonstration of the vowel sound for the singers can be helpful in unifying the vowel. Providing phonetic symbols can also be beneficial. By providing visual cues like [i] with the word, feet, written beneath the IPA symbol, your students with get an idea of the sound you are looking for with that particular vowel.[5]

Choral conductors may come across bright, spread, or dark vowels within their choral ensemble. This can cause pitches to become sharp or flat. Other problems may arise, all relating to vowel formation.

For issues with bright vowels, incorporating vocal exercises that allow more jaw space and relaxation are helpful. With dark vowels, the sound produced would be considered too far in the back of the mouth. Creating a more forward sensation such as the use of frontal consonants (*z, n, m, th*) in front of a vowel will aid in solving this problem. With spread vowels, many choral conductors demonstrate the vowel shape and have the students reproduce them correctly.[6]

Diction

Diction exercises are used to help teach vocal tract freedom, word pronunciation, and consonant articulation.[7] Besides making the text of a choral work understandable, diction also helps in creating a clear choral tone and developing clean and crisp consonants. In choral warm-ups, Jordan believes that the following consonants should be used:

• d (point the tongue toward the ridge of the upper teeth)

• n (useful for developing legato)

• v (useful for building resonance and controlled airstream).[8]

To help with word pronunciation, Phillips's curriculum includes the use of exercises such as tongue twisters and hissing sibilants (*s, sh, c*) to build better diction.[9] For consonant

articulation, using voiceless (*p, t, k, ch*) and voiced (*b, d, g, j*) plosives along with tuned (*m, n*) and voiced (*v, z, th, zh*) continuants are found to be beneficial in developing excellent diction.[10]

Expressivity—Energy and Excitement

Over the past eight years of teaching, I have found that encouraging singers to sing with energy and excitement can be one of the most difficult tasks even when the work builds its own momentum. In a work that has a slow tempo, the singers often don't understand that energy and excitement can still be used to enhance the sound.

To help create energy and excitement, I use acting or storytelling. By having students take away the music and speak the text as a monologue or conversation, they tend to find underlying meaning while also identifying the highs and lows that make for a more powerful and energized performance. When the students have finally understood this technique, asking them to go back and sing with the same emotion they demonstrated in their monologue or conversation adds that hint of energy and excitement that makes a work even more expressive.

Also, to help with energy and excitement, choral conductors and their students should also consider looking at articulation, dynamics, and phrasing (mentioned in Table 1) since these elements also help build feeling and emotion.

Conclusion

With literature and suggestions from current choral conductors, the ideas in this article may serve as a reminder for all choral conductors and students of characteristics to watch for in choral rehearsals. Though each conductor has had different training and preparation, it is important to share our ideas, methods, and strategies with colleagues and their singers in an effort to have our ensembles grow significantly, both musically and vocally. As a tool, Table 1 on pages 17-18 provides information concerning what choral conductors can look for to enhance choral sound and approaches they can take in achieving that sound.

NOTES

[1] Donald L. Neuen, "The Sound of a Great Choir," *Music Educators Journal* 75, no. 4 (1988), 44.

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[3] Paul Nesheim & Weston Noble, *Building Beautiful Voices: Singers Edition* (Dayton, Ohio: Roger Dean Publishing Company, 1995), 2.

[4] Kyle J. Weary, "Vocal pedagogy in the choral rehearsal: becoming a vocal technician," *Choral Director* 8: no. 1 (2011), 23.

[5] Frances Farrell, "An iconic approach to vocal technique for the teenage chorister," *Musician Educateur Au Canada* 51, no. 4 (2010), 46.

[6] Lynn Corbin, "Practical applications of vocal pedagogy for choral ensembles," *Choral Journal* 26, no. 8 (1986), 7.

[7] Patrice Ward-Steinman, *Becoming a Choral Music Teacher: A Field Experience Workbook* (New York: Routledge, 2018), accessed June 12, 2018, ProQuest Ebook Central, 44.

[8] James Jordan, *The Choral Warm-Up: Method, Procedures, Planning, and Core Vocal Exercises* (Chicago: GIA, 2005), 50.

[9] Kenneth H. Phillips, *Teaching Kids to Sing* (New York: Schirmer, 1992). 51

[10] Patrice Ward-Steinman, *Becoming a Choral Music Teacher* (New York: Routledge, 2018), accessed June 12, 2018, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Table 1: Checklist for Enhancing the Choral Sound

Appropriate Sound

The sound produced by any choral group should represent the age of the singers and the style of music being performed. A high school choral group may be able to pull off singing selections from Handel's *Messiah,* but the overall sound may be different than that of a university choral group. The choral conductor must also make sure that the sound created is stylistically appropriate for the repertoire being performed.

Articulation

Often, singers consider the term articulation in the same manner as they do diction. With articulation, terms such as tenuto (to hold the note for its full value), *staccato* (short and detached), or marcato (to strongly emphasize the note) can change the way a word or phrase is sung. These choices are often noted by the composer but can be added by the conductor. A clear understanding and demonstration of each articulation marking is helpful in unifying the appropriate articulation needed in each choral work. Articulation markings must also match mood and be stylistically appropriate for the given repertoire.

Balance

In a choral ensemble, the dynamic level for one section may not be the same for the other singers. To achieve a well-balanced choir, each section of the group should find a dynamic level that is appropriate to the remaining sections. This can be an issue, especially in many grade-level choruses where there is a small representation of male voices. The male voices must then find a dynamic level that matches the dynamic level of the female voice parts and balances out the entire ensemble.

Blend

A well-blended chorus is one that has balance and like tone quality. This consists of making sure each voice part is singing with appropriate dynamic levels and listening carefully to match tone color, which comes from the use of unified vowels and consonants.

Breathing

The breath plays an important role in singing. It initiates the sound of the voices. In choral singing, it is important that each section breathe together and finish musical phrases together before taking another breath. For repertoire with long musical phrases, the choral conductor may recommend that the choir stagger the breathing in order to keep the musical line from being broken. All singers must pay close attention to how much breath is being expended. They must make sure that their breath intake is enough to get to the end of the phrases.

Diction

Diction consists not only of articulated consonants but also properly formed vowels. Consonants should be articulated at the same time with accuracy. This calls for the director telling the singers exactly where the consonants will be placed within a rhythmic pattern.

Table 1: Checklist for Enhancing the Choral Sound (continued)

Dynamics

In recent publications of choral music, composers are providing dynamic markings in their repertoire. Though these markings are helpful, conductors should include dynamics that tell the story of each work. Knowing when to emphasize a particular section or back away can be important in the portrayal of any work.

Harmony

Harmony can become increasingly difficult as students continue to sing in the choir due to the changes in difficulty of the repertoire. That is why we often find our colleagues using less sophisticated songs in elementary and middle school classrooms to help build this skill. When working on harmony, it is important that each section of the choir not only know its part but be able to sing it with other sections correctly. It is also important to remember that harmony stands on its own; however, melody should not be buried by other elements.

Phrasing

In any form of music, whether choral or instrumental, phrasing is important. No one wants to hear a choir perform Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus* in a choppy manner. Good phrasing occurs when a choir can push and pull a musical line in a manner that creates a special sense of feeling within the music. Dynamics and articulation play a major role in determining the phrasing of a work.

Resonance

There is nothing more rewarding than hearing a choir with a rich, deep, full sound filling a room. This is resonance. In a choral group, all members must work together to effectively demonstrate a well resonant sound since voices can stick out if pushed. Not every choral work will call for a rich, deep, and full resonant sound. The choral conductor must be able to demonstrate and guide students in producing a resonant sound suitable for each work.

Rhythm

Rhythmic patterns tend to be challenging for many choral singers, especially students who have a limited knowledge of music theory. To help with learning precise rhythm patterns, conductors working with younger singers often have students clap the rhythms back to them. Conductors of older singers may have their students speak the words in rhythm or count sing before adding the text. Methods such as these help align rhythms, especially for more difficult passages. Also, having the choir recognize the underlying beat will help maintain a steady pulse rather than slow down or speed up.

Tension

We are not speaking of the tension found in building phrases. We mean tension that can build up in the bodies of singers. Choral conductors should be aware of any signs of tension in their singers since tension can hinder the healthy production of sound. To help eliminate tension, students should frequently check their posture and employ appropriate (good) breath support to minimize muscle strain, especially around the larynx and pharynx.

Sight Singing for Others at Your School

Lindsay Brazell
Chesnee High School
Duncan, South Carolina
(Used with permission of the author)

Sight reading is often something we practice in the comfort of our own classrooms. Maybe once or twice a year, we sight read at a festival or at an adjudicated event. That is all well and good, but I'd like to challenge you to do something that might make you a little uncomfortable—sight read in front of an audience. Not in front of judges or other choirs, but in front of non-choir folk, or as I like to call them, regular people.

So who are the people that you could invite to hear your choir sight read?

• Teachers who have a free period

• Teachers who have a small class

• Teachers who are willing to bring their entire class

• Administrators

• Custodians and other staff

Choose a day for your sight-reading performance. A week before the actual date, send out a school-wide email like the one you will find below.

> *I'd like to invite you to our classroom on (insert date and time) for a preview performance before we compete at _____. It will take about 15 minutes. We would really appreciate the pressure that comes with a live audience to help us prepare for this event. Feel free to come alone or with your entire class! We'll have plenty of seating. Let us know if you can make it!*

Set up chairs in your room, or meet in the auditorium if your classroom won't accommodate a crowd and you are ready to go! Inviting an audience will achieve three important things:

1. It gives meaning to the phrase "practice like you perform." This is essential during festival season or if you are taking your ensemble to an adjudicated event.

Even though there is an audience, it is a practice session because you are still in the comfort of your classroom or in your school. You don't want to give the ensemble music they can read flawlessly or that will completely stump them, leaving them embarrassed.

Plan for a normal rehearsal. The only difference will be that there are people watching and listening. Your kids will be on their best behavior, of course.

This event will create an atmosphere very similar to the one at the upcoming competition. The singers will be experiencing the same process in sight reading though there are people watching. The element of pressure will be there.

2. It educates those who rarely walk down the music classroom hallway as to what goes on in your classroom. The students who don't walk down the music hallway during the day are probably unaware of how a choir class functions. They will hear unfamiliar music and likely be puzzled by the solfege they will likely be hearing. An experience like this will reveal the academic side of a choir rehearsal.

Sight singing for others is a recruitment opportunity. Inviting students who attend your school could spark an interest in singing. Be sure to invite them while they are attending the sight-singing demonstration.

3. This is an opportunity to invite your colleagues into your classroom.

I love observing other teachers, even those outside the arts realm. There is much to learn from one another, and you may have a way of doing things that will help a peer! Plus, like the students who don't travel down the music hallway, your colleagues may not know what goes on in a choir class either.

This is a great way to get other teachers involved with your

program! You never know when you will need a helping hand. Other teachers may be inspired to invite your choirs to sing in one of their classes or club events! It's a win-win situation.

Whether you are preparing for an event or just working on concert repertoire, bringing in an audience will help you, your students, and other teachers and students at your school. Pick a day, send an invitation, and practice for an audience!