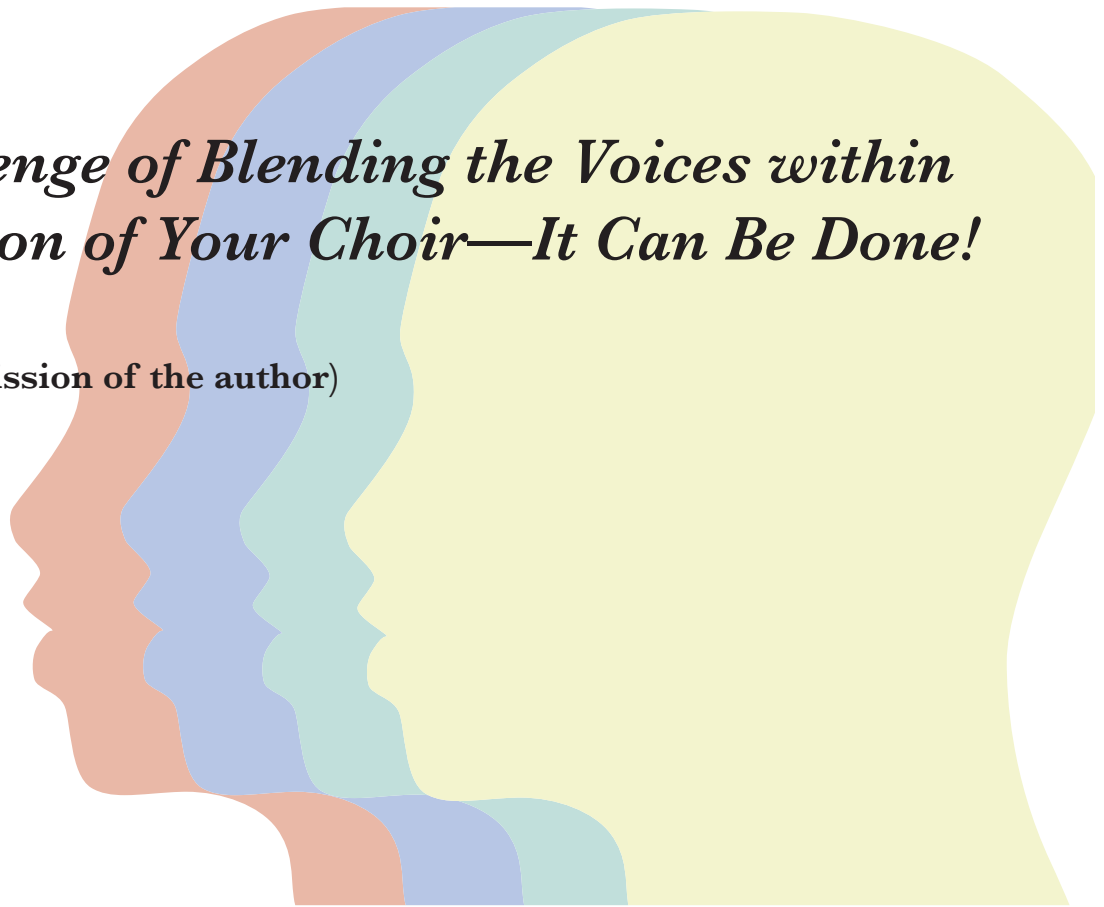


The Challenge of Blending the Voices within Each Section of Your Choir—It Can Be Done!

Terry J. Barham

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Have you struggled occasionally with getting the soprano or alto voices (or tenors or basses) to blend while rehearsing? For many years, I did! Then I attended a workshop given many years ago by Weston Noble (Luther College) in which he offered a specific approach to achieving blend within a section. Along with a few other choral directors, I volunteered, with Mr. Noble's gentle directions, to try his approach, and it changed, for the remainder of my teaching career, how I was able to meet the challenge faced by many college/university choral directors. It will work for high school directors, too!

At the beginning of every school year, plan on using half of a rehearsal (two full rehearsals for the four sections—soprano, alto, tenor, and bass) for each section to go through the process described below. Tell your singers exactly what you will be doing before you actually begin. Have a piece of paper available to write down the exact order of voices in each section—who stands next to whom within each section. Your students will sometimes be surprised by their singing partners, but they will be happy with how their voices complement each other.

After some months, some of your music majors, since they take voice lessons, may come to you and ask for going through the process again because they no longer blend with their initial singing partner. That is natural. All of us know that voices change/grow over time.

Before you begin the process of hearing all of the singers in pairs, teach everyone the melody in Example 1. It's a relatively easy melody, a hymn tune.

Within every section of the choir, decide which singer will be the "model." That "model" should be a singer who sings with ease, whose timbre (color) you like, whose vibrator, if it exists, is natural and unforced, and who handles the registers with relative ease.

Once you have chosen your model singer (this is not a personality contest!), ask one singer at a time from each section to sing with the model-voice person that you have chosen from each section. The results may surprise you. Some voices clash and clearly do not work well together. Other voices blend together with seeming ease. Feel free to ask the two singers if they like the way their voices blend together.

Once you have found a voice that fits well with the model voice in a section, have your model sit down. Then a third person from the section sings the hymn with the second singer. Everyone remaining in that section sings with singer number two until you and they find an agreeable blend with the second person. A third singer will certainly be found. Continue the process until all singers in that section have sung. Of course, you have been writing down the names (in each section) in the order in which their voices fit together.

I think this process is one of finding timbers that fit to-

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gether, that complement each other. Individual singers will get acquainted in this process, and the choir will grow closer, I believe.

Occasionally, you will find a voice that does not seem to fit with any other voice in the section. I usually put this singer at the end of the section row and try to help him or her understand the need for all voices working together to achieve certain goals, like blend.

Here's the melody everyone should use to help him or her find a partner. After teaching this beautiful melody using the piano, I would not use the keyboard with each singing pair but expect singers to sing it a cappella so that I can listen more carefully. I believe you and your singers will find this process to be very rewarding!

Example 1

My God how won - der - - ful Thou art, Thy ma - jes - - ty how
5
bright, how beau - ti - ful Thy mer - cy seat, in depths of burn - ing light.