CHORTEACH

Volume 15 Issue 2

Winter 2023

Practical Teaching Ideas for Today's Music Educator

Available online at acda.org/ChorTeach

From the Editor

Amanda Bumgarner

Welcome to 2023! *ChorTeach* is designed to complement both ACDA's traditional monthly publication, *Choral Journal*; and research journal, *The International Journal of Research in Choral Singing*. Inside each issue you will find practical content, personal stories, and resources for use in your classroom, rehearsal, and performance spaces. While the content in *ChorTeach* is intended for everyone—from the most seasoned choral director to the first-year teacher—the goal is to provide content that will inspire and encourage specifically those working with K-12 students and community choirs.

Are you working with beginning elementary singers?

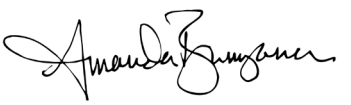
Do you teach high school or conduct a community choir?

Consider writing for *ChorTeach*!

You can find updated submission guidelines at acda.org. Click "ChorTeach" from the Publications dropdown menu and view the PDF link to Submission Guidelines. If you are interested in contributing to a future "Ask a Conductor" section, visit https://forms.gle/oVcamzqp4KwXfo5M9 or email **chorteach@acda.org**. We are looking for people to submit questions, along with people interested in answering questions.

We would love to hear your feedback on current or past *ChorTeach* articles. Write to chorteach@acda.org with a "Letter to the Editor," which we can share in an upcoming issue.

Each issue of *ChorTeach* includes several regular columns—Ask a Conductor, K-12 Resources, and *ChorTeach* Replay—along with two to three articles. In this issue, two educators answer a question related to communicating with parents and caregivers. Additional resources are included at the end of the column. Joyce Click writes on igniting your passion; Gregory LeFils shares teaching strategies for unbalanced ensembles; and we are also sharing a reprint of a 2013 *Choral Journal* article written by Michael Kemp on community choirs. Finally, Matthew Hill offers repertoire reviews for the middle school classroom.



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Ask a Conductor

Question 5

What are some of your best practices for communicating with parents and caregivers, specifically when it comes to conflict resolution and expectations?

Welcome to the "Ask a Conductor" section of ChorTeach. In this reader-generated Q&A format, readers submit questions related to teaching, conducting, rehearsing with, or singing with K-12 students. Educators who either currently work in K-12 or who have past experience in K-12 will answer the question, with a new question appearing in each issue. Our goal is for this to be a very practical section that applies directly to current concerns in the choral classroom. Readers can submit questions via the link in this Google form (https://forms.gle/oVcamzqp4KwXfo5M9) or by visiting the QR code below.

Ask a Conductor Submission Form

Question: What are some of your best practices for communicating with parents and caregivers, specifically when it comes to conflict resolution and expectations?

Libby Montiel Gopal
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New Jersey ACDA President-Elect
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Communicating with parents and caregivers is important. It is paramount to maintain healthy, clear lines of communication, especially when handling a conflict or establishing expectations. Here is a simple list of procedures I have followed during my twenty years of being an educator in order to minimize confusion and set clear expectations:

• Write a choir handbook that contains an overview of the course, attendance policies, grading policies, uniform expectations, rituals, routines, and classroom procedures. Make sure that this handbook is accessible to your school community by creating it in the most common languages that are spoken in your school district.

• Have the parents/guardians and students sign a contract acknowledging the expectations for being a part of your ensemble or course.

• Reach out to the parents (by phone, email, or informal gathering) during the first two weeks of school to establish communication.

• Let the parents and caregivers know the best way to contact you. Consider establishing virtual office hours or using an app like Remind so that you can efficiently send out quick communication, reminders, links, PDFs, or pictures.

• Listen. When a parent is concerned, angry, or upset and needs to talk with you, take the time to listen to the parent. Keep an open mind and hear the parent's concern as if you were the parent and that was your child.

• Make decisions that revolve around what is in the best interest of the children. Even if the parent is not happy with your choice, as long as it is in the best interest of the child and his or her well-being, that is what matters the most.

Lastly, when I was in the classroom, every decision I made centered around the following thought: Is this the program, classroom environment, and experience I want for my own children? If the answer was a resounding yes, then I knew I was on the right path.

Reginal Wright
Choral Director,
Mansfield High School
Choral composer with a number of works
for middle and high school choirs
www.reginalwright.com

In the midst of maintaining a successful choral program, several moving targets must be managed. These can include: administrative responsibilities, student social emotional issues, finances, community partnerships, program branding, and marketing.

While navigating this ever-changing landscape, wisdom dictates that we add conflict with parents and enforcing program expectations to this list. As a 20+-year teacher I have experienced a multitude of scenarios that create conflicts that must be remedied. Most of these conflicts were easily preventable with some form of communication from myself. *The most valuable gift that you can give yourself is the gift of planning and communication.* Parents and students deserve to have a full perspective of the expectations of participation in the choral program. This allows for a better delivery as these crucial conversations occur. I employ a few strategies to establish solid expectations and communication for all students and parents.

Handbook

It goes without saying that the syllabus/handbook provides the most fundamental base on which to establish for expectations. We provide a handbook online that covers all of our expectations. This includes our calendar, classroom procedures, grading scales and percentages, a listing of all choirs, uniform contract and fees, expectations and consequences along with a signature page that ALL students and parents must return as proof of receipt. The link to an online version of the handbook is also located on the choir's website.

Google Calendar

We provide and maintain a Google calendar on our website. This calendar contains all concerts, rehearsals, and school holidays. Students and parents can subscribe to the calendar on their personal smart devices. This keeps all interested parties well informed of upcoming dates that affect choir students and parents.

Newsletter

We provide a bi-weekly newsletter for our students with subtle reminders, student highlights, date changes (if needed), birthdays, and upcoming engagement descriptions. For my choir, we have a paid subscription through www.smore.com for $70 yearly. Through this service we create digital newsletters that can be shared with parents and students through the use of an embed code or hyperlink. The newsletter can also be distributed using Remind, social media, and email.

Website

The choir website is the one-stop shop for all things choir. These sites can be created for free and managed with very little technological skill. On the website, the calendar, newsletter, and handbook can be embedded for quick and easy access by parents and students. Take the time, however, to be familiar with school district rules and policies

before posting images of students or copyrighted material.

In the inevitable event that conflict does arise, prior communication gives the teacher a useful basis for discussion with parents. In my experience, the lion's share of conflict stems from a lack of communication from the music office regarding rehearsals or events. Remaining vigilant and proactive with communication helps to provide transparency and trust in the choral program. Without it, conflict is all but certain. Happy planning, my friends. CT

For more on this topic of communicating with parents, see these past articles, online at acda.org:

"Communicating with Parents—Help for Music Teachers"
by Susan Dill
***ChorTeach* Winter 2015, page 2**

Practical communication strategies to help choir directors initiate and foster constructive communication with parents. A sample handbook and strategies for conflict resolution are included.

"How to Share What You Teach,"
by Brandon Williams
***Choral Journal* April 2015, page 75**

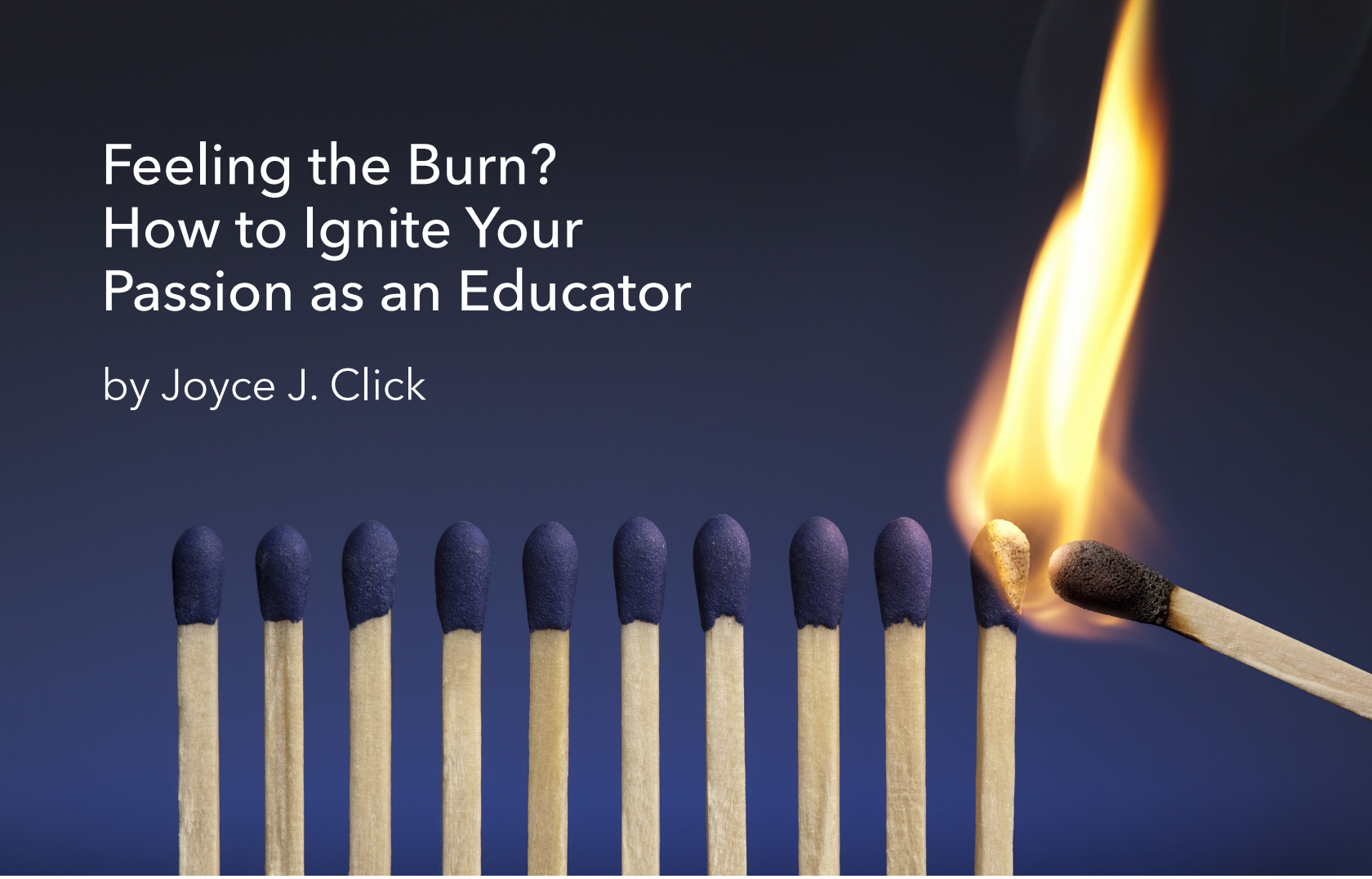
Explaining the value of singing and music education in general with parents and administrators.

"The Care and Feeding of Choir Parents,"
by Pamela Burns
***Choral Journal* June-July 2019, page 38**

The author examines the value of maintaining a positive relationship with the parents of young singers.

Feeling the Burn? How to Ignite Your Passion as an Educator

by Joyce J. Click



Joyce J. Click spent forty-four years teaching choral and general music in MSD Washington Township in Indianapolis, Indiana, and now serves as an adjunct instructor at the University of Indianapolis while serving as an educational mentor and clinician. jclick8@gmail.com

When I recently retired from teaching choir and general music after forty-four years, I was surprised by the number of colleagues who questioned my decision because I was still passionate and enthusiastic. I loved working with students but explained that at age sixty-six, it seemed a fitting time. Other effective co-workers had made the same decision once they approached a similar milestone. So what are the factors that contribute to occupational satisfaction? Nationwide, we are hearing reports of teacher burn-out that contributes to teacher shortages. Universities have seen a 35 percent decline[1] in the number of students majoring in education over the past ten years. Outstanding educators are being hired away by private industry and businesses.[2] Burnout, a condition in which an educator has exhausted personal and professional resources, is being reported by growing number of professionals in schools.[3]

A Mayo Clinic report[4] sited six possible causes of burnout:

1. Lack of control
2. Unclear expectations
3. Dysfunctional workplace
4. Extremes of activity or chaos
5. Lack of social support
6. Work-life balance

As I reflect on my own career in education, I unknowingly combated these issues in several ways.

Lack of Control

I learned to "work around" the rhetoric and focus on what I could control. I identified supplies, instructional materials, and field experience opportunities that benefited my students. Writing grants to groups such as Donors Choose, The NEA Foundation, Adopt a Classroom, and local parent and district funding sources helped me provide for students rather than spending energy being frustrated by a lack of funds.

Unclear Expectations

Educational trends and initiatives come and go. I decided not to spend time embracing one methodology, as every child learns differently. Instead, I focused on specific objectives that promoted a growth mindset and observable progress. Best practices, backed by research, provided more long-term success in my classroom pedagogy.

Dysfunctional Workplace Dynamics

Some of the best advice I received was to steer clear of negative influences surrounding education. I figured out ways to maintain a positive perspective such as picking a new path to walk to the office that avoided negative individuals. When "water-cooler" gossip circulated, I excused myself from the conversation.

Extremes of Activity or Chaos

I paused my activity level and took three slow breaths when feeling stressed. I repeated encouraging self-talk phrases such "I can do this" and "I am the adult here" during tense situations. Consistently following a clearly defined classroom management plan in a methodical rather than frantic manner helped classes feel safe, secure, and regulated.

Lack of Social Support

I surrounded myself with like-minded individuals whom I trusted to keep discussions non-judgmental and confidential. During my first year, I asked a co-worker to help me revise my classroom management plan. In the final semester, I invited a long-time mentor to critique my conducting gestures during rehearsals.

Work-life Balance

I left work each afternoon at a specific time, except when evening programs were scheduled. I made sure that I had everything ready for the next morning before departing for home, including lessons plans and instructional materials. I designated daily time blocks to answer work-related e-mails, generally a block in the early morning and one in the afternoon during a prep period.

Master Teachers Respond

Ten career educators in my professional learning community shared what ignites their passion for teaching, and I recorded their responses here:

- Love the big payoff moments such as a great performance or seeing an individual student grow. (Mr. G)
- Enjoy high school students for their well-developed cognitive abilities and childlike curiosity. (Mr. P)
- By far, the students are the best part—getting to know them as human beings and seeing them grow as people. (Ms. K)
- Being paid for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and learning while helping students develop confidence and find their voice. (Ms. B)
- Seeing the "lightbulb" moments and observing students learning something new. (Ms. S)
- The saying is true, "You can't teach them until you reach them." Everyone has a story and they just need an adult to listen to them. (Ms. E)
- Watching students believe in themselves and start taking risks in their own learning. (Mr. L)
- Helping students develop a vision for their life beyond high school and see those young adults get launched out into the world. (Ms. H)
- Being creative and renewed each year and receiving feedback from students. (Ms. J)
- Observing the growth that each individual student makes over the span of time. (Mr. D)

These experienced instructors gave their best advice for "avoiding the burn." It is no coincidence that many of their comments had similar themes.

- You must take care of your mental and physical health to be the best teacher you hope to become. (Mr. D)
- Find ways to laugh and learn with students and just close your door (literally and figuratively) to the outside noise of administrative and societal judgements. (Ms. J)
- Do not believe the word "can't" and remember that teaching is not a sprint, but a marathon. (Mr. L)

- If you do not take time for yourself and your family, you will not survive. Protect yourself from unreasonable demands. (Mr. E)

- Look for the gains, however small, that students make. Know that you are making a difference even if it is not visible to you right now. (Mr. H)

- There is no need to continue working in a toxic environment. If you experience actual dread going to work, then find a new school. (Mr. P)

- Always strive to teach from a positive perspective. Look for special traits in your students and don't be afraid to point them out. (Ms. S)

- Don't take work home every night, as you deserve rest. (Mr. K)

- Hold on to the big payoff moments, like after a student graduates and tells you how much they loved your class. (Mr. G)

- Read Ralph Waldo Emerson's "From a Letter to His Daughter"[5] often. "Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could… Tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely." (Ms. B)

Conclusion

Now is the time for you to start your journey on the path to a fulfilling long-term career in education. Our students need your collective experience and wisdom. Create your *Catch Fire Action Plan* that will help ignite your passion and "avoid the burn."

Catch Fire Action Plan

1. State what you like about teaching on a Post-it Note and refer to it daily.

2. List a negative influence that you are going to avoid.

3. Select one resource that will help your instruction and a possible source for funding.

4. Draft a learning objective that you are going to focus on.

5. Write a phrase that you will say to yourself when you are stressed.

6. Identify a person you trust who will serve as a collaborator and schedule a meeting time.

7. Designate two times per day that you will read your work e-mails.

8. Target a time for leaving work each day.

Select two items from the *Catch Fire Action Plan* above that you are going to implement this week and reward yourself for following through. Eventually your new behaviors will become habit and you will have more energy, avoid the burn, and be joyful in your career. CT

NOTES

[1] Myah Ward, "The Teacher Shortage Problem is Bad, Really Bad." *Politico*, August 15, 2022, accessed August 21, 2022 https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-nightly/2022/08/15/the-teacher-shortage-problem-is-bad-really-bad-00052053.

[2] Kathryn Dill, "Teachers are Quitting, and Companies are Hot to Hire Them." *The Wall Street Journal,* February 2, 2022, accessed August 8, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/articles/teachers-are-quitting-and-companies-are-hot-to-hire-them-11643634181.

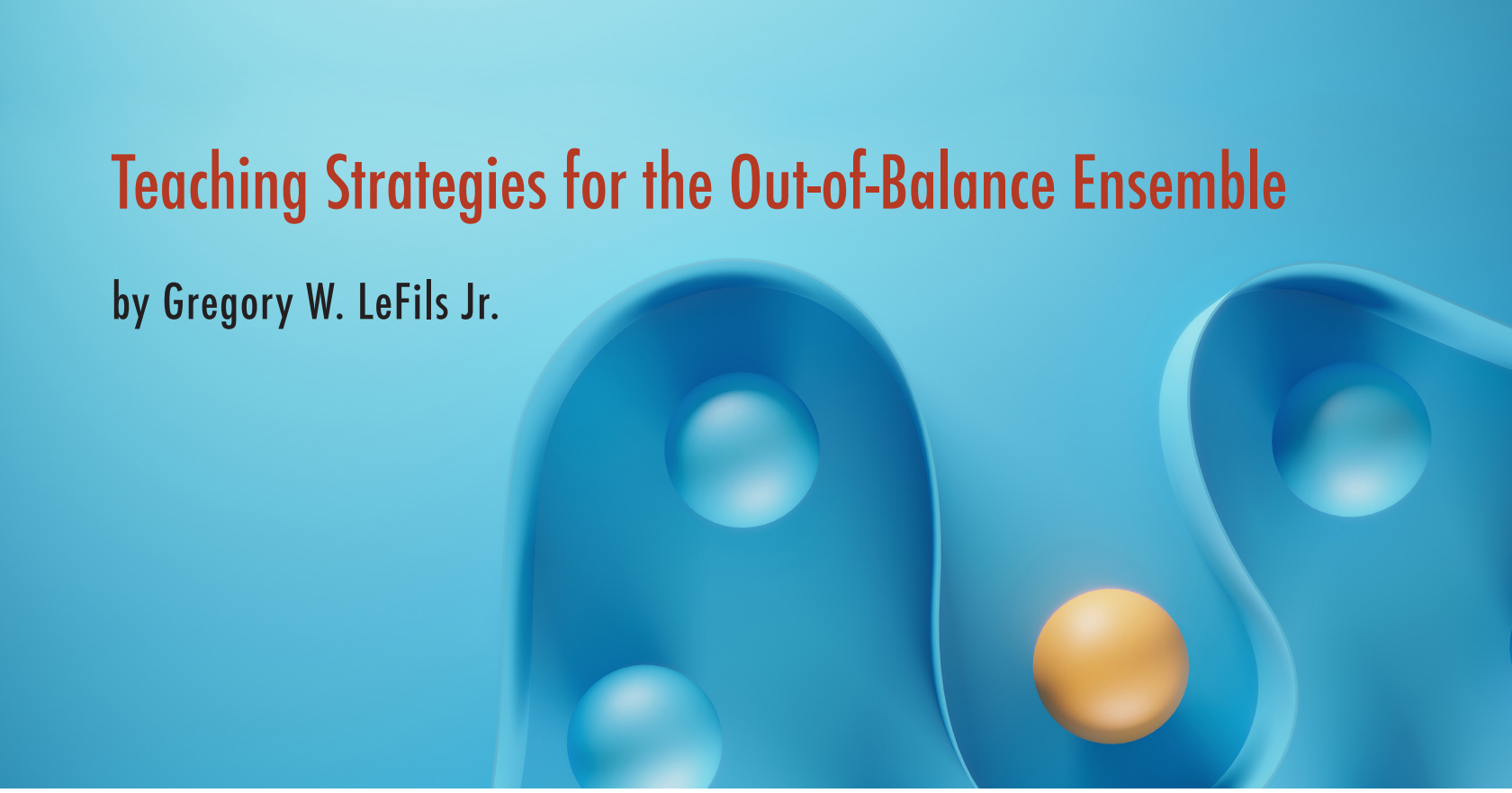
[3] Tim Walker, "Getting Serious about Teacher Burn-out." *NEA News*, November 12, 2021, accessed August 6, 2022, https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/getting-serious-about-teacher-burnout.

[4] Mayo Clinic staff writers, "Job Burnout: How to spot it and take action." Mayo Clinic Health Information, June 5, 2021, accessed August 20, 2022, https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642.

[5] "Finish Every Day and Be Done With it," https://quoteinvestigator.com/2018/12/19/finish-day/, 1939, *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson in Six Volumes*, Edited by Ralph L. Rusk (Professor of English at Columbia University), Volume 4, Letter from: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Letter to: Ellen Emerson, Letter date: April 8, 1854, Letter location: Concord, Start Page 438, Quote Page 439, Columbia University Press, New York.

Teaching Strategies for the Out-of-Balance Ensemble

by Gregory W. LeFils Jr.



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One commonality between my experiences singing in the middle school and high school choirs was the largely disproportionate ratio of male to female[1] singers—a ratio that did not exist in the more advanced choirs offered by the two programs. Conversations since with other middle school and high school colleagues around the Southeastern United States echoed similar experiences with their introductory ensembles, especially when a tenor/bass choir for new students was not offered. It was clear to me that I needed to learn more about teaching strategies for these out-of-balance ensembles.[2]

This article will seek to offer strategies to help choral educators to engage and retain middle school singers. These strategies include the singer's self-efficacy, voice change and matching pitch, repertoire selection, and how to arrange repertoire to fit the needs of the choir. While at times the focus is specifically on helping retain males in a choir of mostly females, the suggestions presented here will positively impact the entire choir.

Participation Rates

The low participation rate of males in choir as compared to females is nothing new to the literature and has been a topic of discussion in music education conversations for much of the century.[3] There are potentially many reasons as to why male participation in choir is disproportionate; Frederick Swanson offers three possible reasons.[4] Though an older source, these are still applicable today:

(1) Male voice change. Males undergoing voice change can have lower self-efficacy beliefs and neglect to sign up for choir for fear of not being good enough or are embarrassed of their changing voice.

(2) Singing becomes an elective. During the elementary years, singing is often a core component for all students in their music education; beginning in middle school, singing becomes elective and students could potentially sign up for other electives or choose to pursue athletics.

(3) Singing in a new idiom. The males who sang in elementary school often sing the melody or other simple harmonic lines within close proximity to the melody. During middle school, on the other hand, when males are amidst the vocal change process, they will often be assigned to a tenor/baritone/bass part, on an unfamiliar clef, singing notes that are much lower and harmonically strange to their ears. To sum up our challenge in choral classrooms where males and females are grouped together, the females can be developmentally ready for more advanced singing experiences, whereas the males are singing unfamiliar harmonies with changing voices or newly minted changed voices. Effective choral educators must have instructional strategies at the ready to engage all of these singers regardless of their level of vocal development.

Steven Kronauer, of the LA Children's Chorus Young Men's Ensemble, clearly expresses our charge. Instructors must possess:

> an intense knowledge of the physiological changes the boys are undergoing, strong knowledge of vocal development, knowledge of choral repertoire suited to this unique time, and a sensitive, kind soul who builds an environment of trust alongside artistry.[5]

The Singer's Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy can be defined as the individual's judgment of their capability to accomplish a given task.[6] Individuals with higher self-efficacy beliefs tend to exert more effort and show higher levels of perseverance toward their goals than do individuals with lower self-efficacy beliefs.[7] Using these operational definitions, self-efficacy, which is closely related to self-confidence, expresses that if our students have higher confidence in their ability to sing in a choir, they will show more effort and perseverance during our long and focused choral rehearsals. Furthermore, to take a direct transfer from the realm of athletics, there is a key figure who is largely responsible for maintaining and building collective efficacy beliefs, and that person is the team leader—the coach.[8] In our world of choral education, we, the director, shall take primary responsibility in the development of an environment that builds the efficacy beliefs of all our singers.

There are many ways to go about building self-efficacy. While participating in beginning or introductory ensembles, students will feel more assured and confident when they're singing the melody that is well within their operational vocal range. Of course, we want all our singers to experience the joy of singing harmonies; however, when students are new to your school, to the ensemble, or to singing in general, it can be quite advantageous to their self-efficacy if they can develop their initial singing habits while singing melodies.[9] Higher self-efficacy beliefs can also be reinforced in rehearsals where the director appropriately scaffolds instructional steps, being careful not to overwhelm the students, so that the new knowledge and/or skills can be built affirmingly. The director must also have patience to allow for consistent productive repetitions over time to allow for the knowledge and skills to become habit.

The Changing Voice and Matching Pitch

Having the students singing in comfortable ranges is a bit more complicated than simply assigning them a voice part. To choose repertoire and other vocal exercises that build self-efficacy, the director must first know every singer's voice. Where are they comfortable singing? Where are their voices most resonant? How well does the male transition from head-voice to their chest-voice? The truth is, from grades 6 to 9, directors will have a bit of everything—from unchanged high voices, to voices going through vocal change, to students with newly changed baritone and tenor voices. One thing that is common through these stages of change, however, is that some of your singers will have difficulty matching pitch.

Matching pitch is an important component toward building higher self-efficacy. In fact, even while participating in the most casual of singing environments, the ability to match pitch has been observed as a prerequisite if that experience is to be viewed as successful.[10] When the singer is aware of their lack of pitch matching ability, perceptions of non-musicality can develop to where the singer may believe that they "can't sing" or "can't hold a tune in a bucket."[11] These perceptions can have detrimental effect on their self-efficacy, which could result in a lack of participation in any form of music making.[12]

Because our students will have a wide variety of pitch matching ability, it is important to have a clear idea as to where the students' singable range is before any work is started to correct pitch matching issues. Evaluating the singable ranges can be done individually in a separate room or by having them sing one at a time in front of their peers. Facilitating this task as a group may be less traumatizing and a more efficient use of time. Irving Cooper provides an easy model to follow, which has been adapted by Judy Bowers as follows:

"Jingle Bells" Group Test Model for Identifying Singable Ranges[13]

Step 1:

Have the group sing "Jingle Bells" in the key of D major. This will place the initial pitch on F♯. As they sing, take note of the males who are singing the melody down the octave and matching pitch; these are likely changed voices and you will want to seat these students together in a section.

Step 2:

Sing the melody again but now in the key of G major. As before, listen closely to the students who are matching pitch. The males matching pitch and singing in the upper octave are likely unchanged treble voices, and like before, you'll seat these singers together as a section.

Step 3:

Once more, have the group sing the melody but now in the key of A major. The males with changing voices and matching pitch will likely be the ones undergoing vocal change and should be seated together in a section. The males whom you've indicated as unable to match pitch in any of these keys would be the students you'll want to work with either in small groups or individually. Directors should note that this three-step process may need to be repeated throughout the school year so that the director can be well informed as to the male's developing singing ability.

Now that the males in various stages of vocal change have been identified along with those who are struggling with matching pitch, the next step is to equip them with strategies to be successful in matching pitch. How often and for how long you meet with individuals or small groups will vary greatly between programs, but it is recommended that you try to meet with them at least once a week for five minutes of focused coaching. As you meet with them, keep in mind that their self-efficacy may already be on the lower side, as sometimes the individual could be embarrassed about their current level of pitch-matching ability. Do your best to keep these coaching sessions affirming and enjoyable by employing positive feedback, both verbally and non-verbally. Alan McClung, of the Cambiata Institute, has a very useful and practical four-step guide to helping learn to match pitch.

Strategies to Develop Pitch Matching Skills in the Singer with Inconsistent Pitch[14]:

Step 1: Have the student sing a pitch, which the director then matches.

This is an affirming exercise because whatever pitch the students chooses to sing will be the correct one. For a student whose self-efficacy is low, in terms of matching pitch, this type of exercise provides a launching point for the teacher and student to have discussions about recognizing matching pitch. The student can then be encouraged to choose another pitch and the process begins anew. Once the director is convinced that the student can recognize the unison pitch, the director may feel free to proceed.

Step 2: The director sings a pitch, which the student then matches.

Obviously, the initial pitch must be one that is within the singable range of the student. This step can be more challenging than the first for the student, but the director should stay positive and choose pitches that have the highest probability for success for the student. This is not the time to challenge the student's ability. As before, keep this step positive and enjoyable. Praise the student when they are able to match the director's pitch.

Step 3: Pitch sliding to the desired pitch.

Demonstrate this by having the student sustain a pitch. While they sustain, the teacher will vocally slide in pitch, from above or below, and stop and sustain when they match the student. Try this a few times with different pitch targets and then reverse the roles. The director then provides a pitch that the student should attempt to slide into until the two pitches are matching.

Step 4: Repeated pitch on "Hey, hey, hey, hey."

McClung approaches this step from a neurological basis. He explains that a specific pitch synapse is responsible for inconsistent pitch singing and in order to correct this, multiple successful firings are required. For this step, choose a comfortable pitch that the student can sing successfully, and march around the piano singing the same pitch repeatedly on each marching step. After a couple of laps, reverse direction and choose another pitch.

Choosing Repertoire

The task of choosing repertoire can be exhilarating and excruciating. Despite those feelings, how the director handles the selection of repertoire for a choir that is largely out of balance becomes exponentially important to the musical experience of the singers, the final performance, as well as the interest and enthusiasm for the choral program once the concert is completed.[15] When considering repertoire for an unbalanced ensemble, two foundational criteria are occasionally at odds with one another, and the director must

choose which criteria is more pertinent. These are the technical and aesthetic criteria.

Some directors will frequently choose repertoire primarily along aesthetic lines; however, in an effort to be inclusive of all singing abilities, directors are urged by experts to rely more on the technical criteria when selecting repertoire for this particular type of ensemble.[16] Quite simply, although it is important to sing music that is aesthetically pleasing, it does no benefit to the unbalanced choir if the technical aspects of the music or singing ranges are too far outside of the students' comfort zone. By choosing repertoire that challenges the singers, but not so much that their self-efficacy suffers, the director gives the ensemble the best possible opportunity to have a successful and enriching experience.

What if the director doesn't feel they have enough tenors and basses to sing SATB literature? What if they are concerned with major balance issues? Shouldn't these unbalanced choirs simply program SAB literature? Choosing SAB literature solely based on the number of singers may seem like a logical choice, but developmentally and musically, the vocal needs of developing voices may not be met. John Cooksey cites that SAB music contains poor voice leading, and the baritone part frequently becomes more of a compromise between the three voice parts. In addition, it's frequently observed that the baritone part is too high for new baritones and too low for new tenors or unchanged voices. Finally, males undergoing voice change often have a gap between their chest voice and their head voices—notes they physically cannot sing yet. Unfortunately, many of the baritone parts found in SAB literature are placed within or very near to these gaps in vocal ranges.[17]

If the arranger tries to correct the issue of singing too often in the break by making the baritone part lower in the bass clef, it then becomes too low for the changing and unchanged male voices. Assigning these males to a voice part that is frequently too low for them can have detrimental effect on their self-efficacy.

What makes the common SAB arrangement even more difficult to rehearse, is that the sopranos are usually given the melody, which is most often times the easiest part to hear. The altos are frequently given a harmony, with which they likely have ample experience singing. The few males in this ensemble, the ones singing a less familiar harmony with voices that are likely undergoing voice change, could consequently drift away from their part in favor of the melody within their comfortable range or worse yet, to sing monotone within this comfortable range.

Could it ever be appropriate for a director to pair SAB music with their out-of-balance ensemble? Of course, the answer is yes, but it usually only works in very specific situations. As stated above, directors should check off the technical criteria first. Can the singers physically sing the music? The only way for the director to know this is by having a clear understanding of the individual vocal development that is happening in the room. The director must also know exactly what pitches the males in the room can sing beautifully. If those pitches align with the SAB arrangement, then yes, this music could work. Keep in mind two things: (1) vocal ranges during this time change frequently, and (2) even though the music works for the ensemble based upon technical criteria, Emily Crocker warns that this music could still sound empty and unblended due to a wide pitch gap.[18]

There are alternatives to SAB literature for the out-of-balance ensemble, and that often includes males with changing voices. For example, the Cambiata Press is one such publisher whose mission includes providing "quality music for early adolescent choirs with changing voices," and music that "fits choirs with fewer males than females."[19] Included in their various choral offerings are selections specifically arranged and crafted to accommodate the males undergoing voice change. Instead of SATB, you'd see SACB. The C designation represents cambiata voices: the males undergoing voice change. As with any other potential repertoire selection, these pieces must also undergo the same level of scrutiny. Publishers and music providers that offer this type of specialized repertoire are certainly helpful, but in the end, an out-of-balance ensemble may require still other options for their repertoire needs.

In the case of an ensemble that is too out of balance to support independent tenor and bass sections, a good option would be to seek out two- and three-part treble literature. This option allows the director the freedom to arrange the piece to best fit the individual needs of the singers. As compared to SAB literature, the director must ask themselves, what would be easier and more rewarding for the males in an out-of-balance ensemble, of which some may still be undergoing voice change? Is it singing the melody or simple harmony in their individual workable range, or a designated harmony a sixth or more below the melody that may also be outside their range? By seeking two- and three-part literature with the understanding that the director can be flexible in adapting the parts, the males can sing any combination of the following: the melody down an octave, a simple arranged ostinato designed to fit the limited range of a chang-

ing voice, an alto part in the chest voice of an unchanged voice, or they could use their high voice and sing the soprano or alto part in their falsetto.

Of course, making these kinds of adaptations to the music is more easily done in a two-part rather than a four-part piece. The creative director, with a little bit of harmonic analysis, could easily adjust any two- and three-part piece to fit the comfortable range of their intended singers. Henry Leck offers some guidelines to help sort out the basic ranges of males with changing or newly changed voices for the director who is new to adapting parts to fit the needs of singers. He states that newly changed voices who can still access their falsetto can sing in the treble staff. If he's using his new chest voice, D to G within the bass staff (D3 – G3) is normally most comfortable. This melodic interval of a perfect fourth, clearly highlights the limited range of the male with a newly changed voice.

Singing across the break (D4 – F4) is rather difficult for newly changed voices. It has been observed that males singing here without the time to develop proper technique will often sing well below the pitch, chins may raise, they might use a shouting or pressed tone, or they'll possibly use tension instead of air to sing. Sadly, some males will drop their voices into a comfortable monotone range, singing neither the melody nor assigned harmony, and not even know they're doing it. Unfortunately, as stated above, SAB literature frequently places the baritone part either in or within very close proximity to the singer's break.[20]

Arranging Literature to Fit your Ensemble

> Such a class cannot progress unless there is a teacher who is experienced, adaptable, and innovative. A teacher must be able to transpose, play a tonic sol-fa chording in any key, manufacture a simple descant, even write out a three-part arrangement of a favorite song.[21]

Once the director has selected a piece for their choir and is acutely aware of the individual comfortable ranges of their singers, they can then go about the process of making adaptations that best fit the needs of the intended singers. Often it's best to start with the simplest of solutions: assigning singers to different voice parts. Bass singers, even if only a few are present, would be far better served if they double the soprano line down in their octave and within their healthy singing range. This placement will reinforce the melody rather than drawing attention to an unbalanced separate bass line. The males with unchanged voices or stronger falsettos can double the soprano two at pitch, and the ones currently going through voice change can often double the alto part at pitch in their chest voice.[22]

These decisions can solve many of the director's problems but must be made in accordance with the demand of the repertoire, the abilities of the students, the number of males, and their comfortable ranges. Once the director opens themselves up to this kind of creativity, a whole new world of SA/2-part and SSA/3-part literature becomes available.

The duet, *Wir eilen mit schwachen* (Figure 1 on the next page), from J. S. Bach's cantata "Jesu, der du meine Seele" provides an excellent opportunity to pair voices in unbalanced choirs. It is a fun polyphonic piece where the singers can divide on both parts, as needed. Academically, this piece allows the students to learn about Baroque polyphony and melismatic practices. As an added bonus, the polyphonic texture of the music tends to mask that both the males and females are singing together. The duet *Abendlied* (Figure 2 on page 16), this one by Felix Mendelssohn, is another example of where voice pairing can be used to place the males on parts that keep them singing in a comfortable range. In addition to exposing the singers to the German language, this example also helps to develop the ability to sing long melodic phrases that sit nicely in their healthy and comfortable singing range.

Arranging three-part treble literature provides more flexibility for placing tenors and basses of varying ranges and adds complexity for the sopranos and altos who are ready for the challenge. As a general rule of thumb, place the sopranos and the tenors who are comfortable singing around middle C on the top line. The second line would be for the soprano twos and basses in their own octave. Finally, place the altos and tenors who can sing with ease above middle C on the third line (Figure 3 on page 16).

Conclusion

We must do our best to be affirming and encouraging to maintain our students' overall singing self-efficacy. Despite all our best efforts, intentions, and careful planning, singers in our program may still have moments of frustration and disappointment. When this occurs, engage them in the learning process and use your supportive community to lift them up. By continually staying up-to-date on the latest vocal

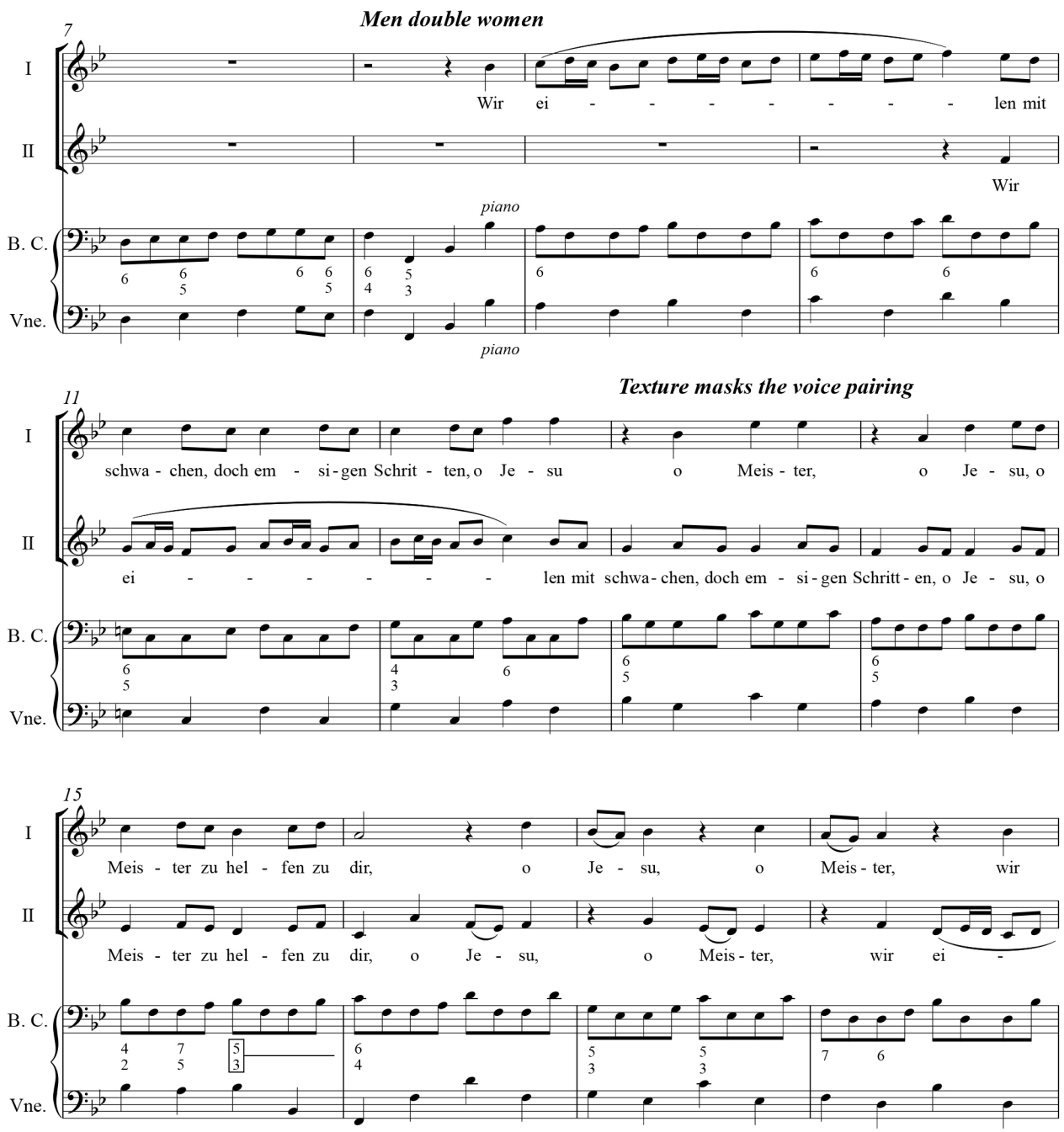

Figure 1. Johann Sebastian Bach, *Jesu, der du meine Seele,* BWV 78, 1724, mm. 7–18.

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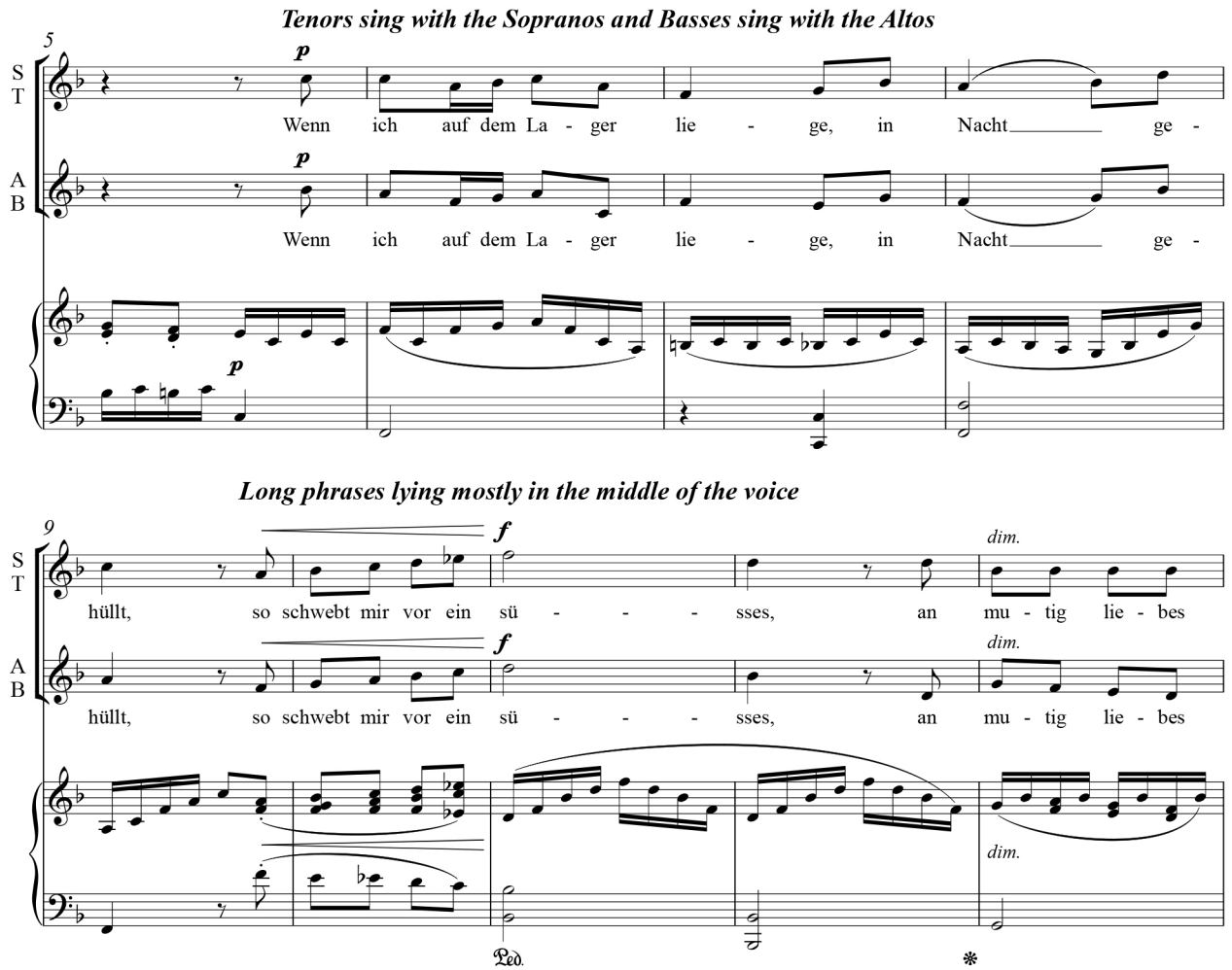

Figure 2. Felix Mendelssohn, *Abendlied,* mm. 5–13.

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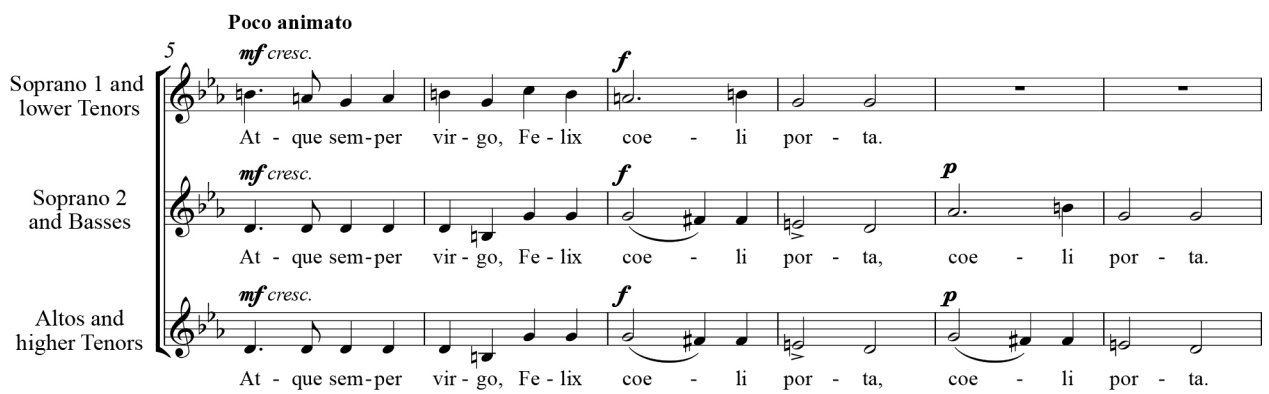

Figure 3. Edvard Grieg, *Ave maris stella,* 1898-1899, mm. 5–10.

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developments and comfortable singing ranges, you will have the confidence to choose valuable repertoire that is suited to your ensemble's needs. By arranging these selections as needed, and even engaging students creatively, choral singing during voice change or with an out-of-balance ensemble will remain a rewarding and life-changing endeavor.

You may be interested in the following *ChorTeach* articles on the topic of male recruitment:

"Male Chorus: Recruit, Maintain, and Develop" by Mark Cotter; Vol 3. Issue 3, Spring 2011.

"Recruiting Boys into Choirs—Techniques that Work" by Jonathan Krinke; Vol 6. Issue 4, Summer 2014.

"Mission Impossible? or How Best to Recruit and Retain Junior High Male Chorus Members" by Suzanne Callahan; Vol 8. Issue 2, Winter 2016.

"Recruiting and Retention Ideas for Beginning High School Choral Directors" by Lorraine Lynch; Vol 12. Issue 2, Winter 2020.

NOTES

[1] A discussion of gender and sex are beyond the scope of this particular article. The terms men/male and women/female refer to cisgender singers who identify with their birth-assigned sex.

[2] For purposes of this article, an "out-of-balance ensemble" refers to an ensemble with a higher ratio of female singers to male singers.

[3] For one example, see: J. T. Gates, "A Historical Comparison of Public Singing by American Men and Women" *Journal of Research in Music Education* 37, no. 1 (1989): 32–47. In many cases throughout the United States, it's possible to see a ratio of female to male singers in middle school and high school choirs around 5-2. See also: "Engaging Boys—Overcoming Stereotypes: Another Look at the Missing Males in Vocal Programs," by Scott D. Harrison (September 2004) : 24.

[4] Frederick Swanson, "Changing Voices: Don't Leave out the Boys" *Music Educators Journal*, 70, no. 5 (1984): 47–50.

[5] Chloe Veltman, "Boys to Men: Singing Through Voice Change" The Voice, 34, no. 4 (Summer, 2011): 5.

[6] Albert Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1986), 391.

[7] T. R. George & D.L. Feltz, "Motivation in sport from a collective efficacy perspective" *International Journal of Sports Psychology* 26 (1995): 98-116.

[8] Albert Bandura, "Perceived self-efficacy in the exercise of personal agency" *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 2 (1990): 128-163.

[9] Henry Leck, "The Boy's Expanding Voice" *Choral Journal* (May 2009): 49-60.

[10] Steven Demorest and Ann Clements, "Factors Influencing the Pitch-Matching of Junior High Boys" *Journal of Research in Music Education* vol. 55, no. 3 (Autumn 2007), 190.

[11] John Sloboda, et al., "Quantifying tone deafness in the general population," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* vol. 1060 (2005): 255-61.

[12] Ann Clements, "The Importance of Selected Variables in Predicting Student Participation in Junior High Choir" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Washington, 2002).

[13] Michele Holt and James Jordan, *The School Choral Program: Philosophy, Planning, Organizing, and Teaching* (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc, 2008), 363.

[14] Alan McClung, "Strategies to Develop Pitch Matching Skills in the Singer with Inconsistent Pitch," Cambiata Institute, accessed October 7, 2020, http://cambiatainstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Inconsistent-Pitch-Singer.pdf.

[15] Henry Leck, "The Boy's Expanding Voice," *Choral Journal* (May 2009): 49-60.

[16] Rebecca Reams, "High School Choral Directors' Description of Appropriate Literature for Beginning High School Choirs," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 49, no. 2 (2001): 122-135.

[17] John Cooksey, "The Development of a Contemporary Eclectic Theory for the Training and Cultivation of the Junior High School Male Changing Voice. Part 4: Selecting Music," *Choral Journal* 18, no. 5 (January 1978): 6.

[18] Emily Crocker, "Choosing Music for Middle School Choirs," *Music Educators Journal* 86, no.4 (2000): 33–37.

[19] "Cambiata Press Mission," Cambiata Press, accessed January 8, 2021, http://cambiatapress.com/.

[20] Henry Leck, "The Boy's Expanding Voice."

[21] Frederick Swanson, "Changing Voices: Don't Leave out the Boys," *Music Educators Journal* 70, no. 5 (1984): 47–50.

[22] Judy Bowers, "Building Early Choral Experiences – Part 2," in *The School Choral Program* (GIA Publications, 2008): 365-67.

Stretching the Skills of Your Community Choir

by Michael Kemp

Michael Kemp (1946-2021) led church, school choirs, and community choruses, and community orchestras in multiple states. He authored five books for choral directors and voice teachers.

The following article is reprinted from Choral Journal, May 2013, Vol 53, No 10. We reprint this article here to introduce it to those who may not have read the original publication. The original article includes photograph examples of posture. Read the article in full by visiting acda.org/choraljournal. Log into the website with your username and password, and choose "May 2013" from the archive menu.

Let's face it. Conducting a community choir is different from conducting with advanced college or professional choirs. Although interpretive goals are basically the same for all choirs, conductors working with amateur choirs must employ many skills and sensitivities beyond those that are taught in standard choral training. A community choir is composed mostly of amateurs who, by definition, simply love to sing. These singers care about quality. They work hard to sing well and improve their musical skills, but for them singing is essentially an enjoyable and fulfilling pastime. A significant difference among community choirs and college or professional choirs is that the members of a community choir don't have to be there. They are neither graded nor paid. As a result, conductors of amateur choirs have the added responsibility to motivate their singers to be there, a skill not often taught to conductors. In addition, because most amateur choir members have not had private voice lessons, rehearsals must include continuous reinforcing of fundamental vocal skills. The most significant of these fundamentals are posture, breath support, and tone placement. The language often used to explain these concepts is obtuse to most amateur singers. They know they should sit up, but what that means specifically might be unclear and interpreted differently by almost everyone. The same is true regarding breath support and tone placement. This article will provide ideas and explanations in language that is accessible for amateur singers.

Posture and Spinal Alignment

Unintentionally, amateur singers tend to slump forward with their upper torsos and then look up at the conductor, jaws lifting forward. When they begin to sing with this posture, tension is created in the upper abdominal wall, which slows the amount of upward air flow. Inadequate air flow puts strain on the larynx and creates pitch instability and weak sound. With seniors, it produces what we interpret as

an "old" sound. Singers need to be consistently reminded to hold their upper torsos in a higher position, in what the Alexander Technique refers to as perpetual lengthening. This should be a fluid feeling as opposed to a rigid, stiff position. Heads should be facing forward instead of looking down toward the floor. Following is a procedure to help your amateur singers assume exemplary singers' posture:

• Whether sitting or standing, have singers look up as if into a tree, naturally bending their upper torsos slightly backward. The object of this is the resulting feeling of the lower back, which should be retained during the next steps. (*Editor's note: The original article available at acda.org/choraljournal includes eight positioning photos.*)

• Retaining the lower back in that resulting position, elevate the back of the top of the head straight up, as high as possible.

• Now, while still elevating, bend the head slightly down toward the upper torso, and then the upper torso slightly down toward the lower torso. This slight rounding of the still elevated body is the perfect foundation for singing. Professional opera singers have told me this slight rounding is critical.

This posture is imperative, whether standing or sitting. To countermand the tendency to slump forward, have singers instead lean slightly back, keeping the upper abdominal wall from tightening, a restriction that diminishes breath support. The upper torso must not be allowed to collapse forward and down, but rather must retain this elevated position. Sitting forward in your seats is not as crucial to good singing as staying elevated.

In order to be aware of the posture of singers, a conductor must look at them often. When there is a section of the music in which you don't need to follow the score closely, concentrate visually on your singers.

Breath Support and Air Flow

The term vocal cords is misleading. Singers do not have vocal cords, but simply two flaps of skin in the larynx called vocal folds. The vocal folds are drawn together by upward air flow, a phenomenon called the Bernoulli Effect. The elasticity of the skin then pulls the vocal folds back apart, and the air flow brings them back together again. This continual process creates vocal sound. Breath support is the key to moving maximum air flow through the vocal folds, the only way the folds can work efficiently. The vocal folds act involuntarily, being activated not on their own, but only by upward air flow. Discomfort in the vocal apparatus during singing is most often caused by illicit physical effort centering in the vocal folds, instead of singers allowing the folds to work involuntarily.

Breath Support Analogy #1

After making sure your singers are in a healthy posture of perpetual lengthening, an efficient way to teach breath support is the "fire breathing dragon" analogy. Imagine a medieval dragon burning down a village with its fiery breath. That fire would have emerged from an extremely open throat, gently and consistently spewing the fire up from the belly and out the mouth. This is the physical sensation you should experience while singing. Be an actor and imitate what this would feel like to an imaginary dragon. Get accustomed to the idea initially by making a lot of breath sound. Then do it again, but this time a little more gently and without making sound, being particularly aware of what is happening physically in your lower torso. Your tummy should feel as though it is pushing in the direction of your backbone.

Now repeat the "fire breath," but do it without making any sound and pushing a bit more gently. Be careful not to engage in the "fire breathing dragon" effect with too much force and jerkiness. Good breath support should result in singing that is carried forward by a consistent, gentle stream of air flow. In the process exhibiting good breath support, the musculature of the lower torso should feel similar to the gradual gripping of a good handshake.

As a reminder of this "fire breathing dragon" effect, place one fist on your sternum and your other hand on top of your fist.

Now using the gentle but solid breath support described above, hum a quiet, sad moan, aiming the sound into your hands. Do not allow any effort to initiate in the vocal apparatus.

Have singers place a hand lightly over their throats as a reminder not to allow effort there, and then, still utilizing the "fire breathing dragon" breath support, hum a few medium-range pitches. The only noticeable physical effort should come from the lower torso, the sole basis for lifting the air flow.

Breath Support Analogy #2

Another useful analogy is to have singers think about the physical effects of jumping on a trampoline or a pogo stick. That sense of going down and springing back upward is what the initiation of vocal sound should feel like. Remind singers to "trampoline" the first note of a phrase, going down in their bodies for breath support, with a sense of getting under the note and lifting it. They should also "re-trampoline" the target notes within a phrase, or whenever they feel pressure creeping up into their throats. Relaxing the lower torso for each breath just prior to renewing this trampoline effect is essential to keeping the singing voice relaxed.

Breath Support Analogy #3

Good singing should feel like wearing imaginary suspenders, pulling down on the front straps while singing, yet another useful analogy for breath support.

Singing should feel like long-distance speaking, rather than talking on the phone. In long-distance speaking, we naturally project our sound, automatically supporting and using more air. Have singers sing a simple phrase with their hands up to their ears, as if singing into a cell phone. Then repeat the phrase, projecting the sound to someone on the other side of the room. The result of this long-distance singing is more effective breath support.

Things to Avoid

As much as possible with amateur singers, and especially with aging singers, avoid staccato warm-ups and glottal attacks of vocal entrances. Singing must be primarily sostenuto, a horizontal singing style that focuses on linear flow. Vertical punching should be used sparingly, only for necessary musical effects. Why? Because consistent air flow and breath support, from one note to another, is important. Even the initiation of the first note should already be a part of the journey through the melodic phrase, with a trajectory aiming down the phrase. Staccato singing stops this horizontal flow, and then amateur singers struggle to re-initiate ongoing air flow.

Besides affecting the quality of vocal sound, increased air flow and breath support solve the problem of singers running out of air, a major complaint of singers over the age of fifty. Although it seems contradictory, if you want to sing longer on one breath, use more air (and more "fire breathing dragon" breath support), rather than less. Don't try to control the amount of air being used. The more air you use, the more efficiently the air is used, and therefore less is wasted, leaving more air with which to sing. Increased air flow and breath support are also assets in developing better agility on fast moving notes and in helping singers move gracefully between registers.

Tone Placement

Though posture and breath support are for me the foundational vocal concepts, tone placement is a crucial ingredient in helping singers brighten and project their voices. Here is a simple way to explain tone placement:

Ask your singers to feel with the tips of their tongues the hard surface behind the upper teeth above the tongue. Explain that this is called the hard palette and that they should in their imaginations aim their sound into that space, instead of just letting the sound feel as if it is falling out of their mouths.

Also related to tone placement, there is a helpful technique called "flaring the nostrils." Have singers touch the place where the bottom of their nostrils and their cheeks come together. Where they feel their fingers on their cheeks, have them raise their cheeks and keep them in that position while singing. It feels similar to a clarinetist's embouchure. "Flaring the nostrils" makes more complete use of the cavities in the facial structure to enhance and amplify vocal sound. This technique adds clarity to both pitch and enunciation, and significantly aids projection, the carrying power of the voice. A side benefit is that your singers look more pleasant to the audience.

Singers should generally use smaller, more circular-shaped lips and sing as if sending the sound out mostly through the top half of the mouth. Have them hold a sheet of music between their opened teeth and instruct them to imagine their sound going above the paper, not below it.

Singers should sing as if the source of the sound is coming up from the floor and out the top back of their heads, rather than the source being in their mouths and then falling down to the floor. This creates better tone placement and breath support.

Breathe through both the nose and the mouth. Breathing through only the mouth decreases natural nasal resonance that is an important part of tone placement, projection, and pitch clarity. Breathing just through the nose means that inhalation is slower and less efficient, and that the vocal apparatus needs to be re-opened and re-initiated in order to sing after each breath. So, breathe through both.

Open Throats

Singing with an open throat should be the last concept that a conductor mentions, and only if needed. There is a danger that saying too much too soon to amateur singers about open throats could be misinterpreted, causing tone placement to slip back and down, instead of up and forward. Singing with an open throat is not about opening the mouth wider, but rather about opening unrestricted passage up and down the throat. Mention the open throat concept only if the choral sound is shallow, and then speak of it in terms of increasing the echo quality of the sound. Shallow sound becomes an increasing concern as amateur singers begin to age, but shallow singing can also slip into the sound of singers of any age, and therefore needs to be addressed. If the choral sound needs more warmth and depth, referred to here as a sound with a feeling of echo, consider this procedure (Figure 1).

Have the choir sing this simple exercise on an "aw" vowel, keeping in mind the already discussed posture and breath support. Focus on sostenuto and use a small mouthed "aw." Repeat the exercise, but this time have the singers cup their hands around their mouths, as if to shout at someone far away.

Singers will hear from their own voices a remarkably echo-like sound. Repeat the melody once again, with the cupped hands now held eight inches away from their mouths, but instructing them do whatever it takes to sing with that same echo-like quality as before. Then repeat the phrase without using the hands at all, but still insisting on an echo-like quality.

This echoing quality is the result of singing with what we call an open throat. Remind your singers, especially your senior singers, of the importance of always feeling the echo quality in their sound. It is helpful to note that singing with a more open throat is also the primary solution to sharp singing and vocal scooping.

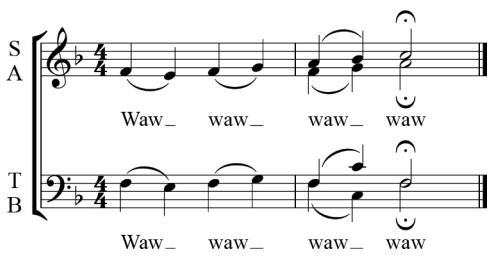

Figure 1. Exercise on "Aw"

Getting the Rehearsal Started

Motivating our singers requires a stimulating rehearsal plan. The opening of a rehearsal should reinforce the love of singing, creating positive feelings that elevate the rest of the rehearsal. During these initial rehearsal moments, avoid focusing on tedious musical brain challenges. Instead, use something melodious and singable to momentarily let the voice "out to play." The tedium of sharpening skills and learning difficult notes needs to be faced eventually, but if the joy of singing has been reestablished first, then choir members will sing whatever needs to be worked on more enthusiastically.

Rather than beginning rehearsals with extended explanations and too much talking, simply begin the melody of a canon that everyone knows and one they can quickly memorize and then sing without music while getting to their seats. An example is this four-part arrangement this author made of Mozart's famous "Alleluia" canon. I have always loved this canon, but because it had only three parts, it was impractical for an SATB choir. So a fourth part was created, which you are welcome to use (Figure 2 on the next page).

Warm-ups should not cover every aspect of the choral art. Save more complex musical exercises for mid-rehearsal, finessing as the need arises. By focusing initially on vocal fundamentals, these skills become the default vocal technique of our singers, an automatic part of their singing habits, and our rehearsals reap the benefits.

How does warming up these fundamental skills help our choirs? If appropriate posture and optimal breath support become habitual, about eighty percent of common vocal/choral concerns will never appear. Working initially on vocal fundamentals solves most problems before you even get to the music. Among those issues that can be solved in advance by developing a more reliable default vocal technique are flatness of pitch, listless singing, thin sounding voices, lack of agility, cracking voices, voices that tire too quickly, lifeless phrasing, and an inability to project sound. Using this approach will solve most of these common frustrations so that you can move more quickly to aesthetic considerations. Wouldn't we all like to get there sooner?

Rehearsing Your Choir is Reactive

After these initial warming up activities, the conductor's job becomes a reactive endeavor, reacting to whatever is heard in the process of teaching notes. With community choirs, there is much that needs the keen attention of the conductor. Whereas advanced college and professional choirs are usually able to start in on aesthetics right away, with most community choirs, the choral instrument needs substantial fine-tuning before moving into deeper artistic issues.

Beyond refining tone quality, an important objective is to help our community choir members develop the discipline of listening carefully to one another while singing. This listening affects all aspects of precision, rhythmic ensemble, uniform articulation styles, and dynamic proportions. Such aesthetic considerations necessitate instant recognition and analysis by the conductor, followed by practical and encouraging approaches to solving whatever the problems are.

Helping Your Choir Develop Artistic Intuitions

Amateur singers seldom have natural, artistic intuitions about issues such as the ebb and flow of momentum in musical phrases. Typically, amateurs sing individual notes without any sense of the relationship the notes have to one another. They tend to leave aesthetic concerns to the person they consider to be the only real artist in the room: the conductor. It usually doesn't even cross their minds that they could use their own musical imaginations.

One of the most effective methods to enhance a choir's artistry is for the conductor to convince the singers that they should develop their own artistic imaginations, shaping lovely phrases, instead of singing seemingly unrelated notes.

Once choir members begin to use their own artistic imaginations, the conductor's job is to shape those cumulative artistic intuitions into one aesthetic entity. Don't let the conductor be seen as the only artistic soul in the room.

Being Sensitive to Amateur Singers

In amateur choirs, we should be sensitive during rehearsals to the feelings of our singers, keeping in mind that one's voice is intensely personal. If you play an oboe and the sound is not all you had hoped for, you can say "it must be the reed." But, singers cannot distance themselves from their own voices in this way. In fact, emotionally they often

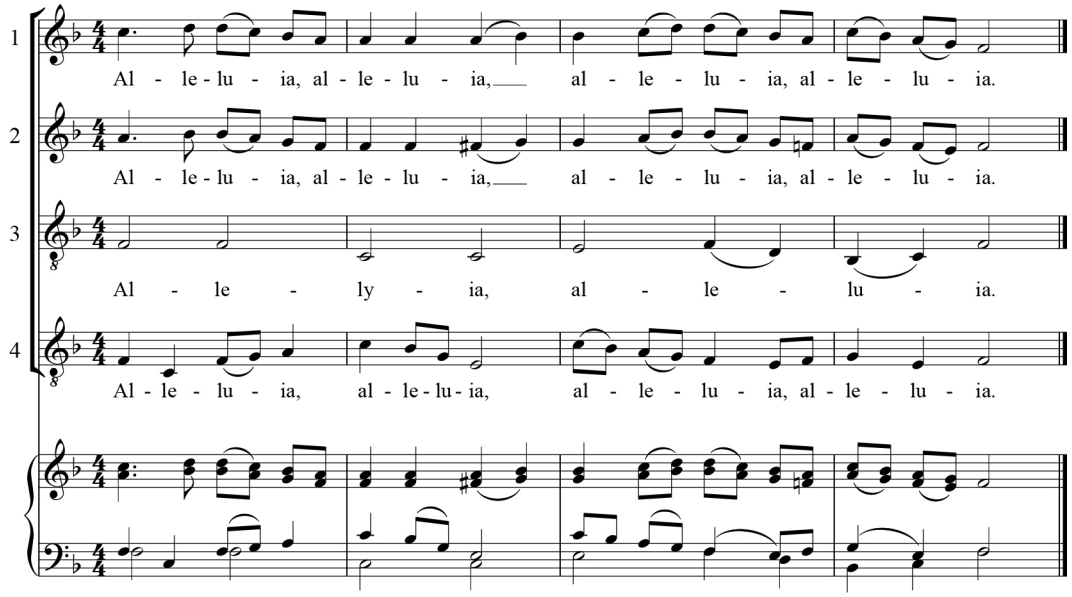

Figure 2. Alleluia Warm-up
(W. A. Mozart, *arranged by Michael Kemp)*

equate their voices with their own identities. Singers do not have a choice of instruments. They are stuck with the one with which they were born.

Be cautious about making negative comments about voices. When working with amateurs, comments about voices in rehearsals should not be viewed as criticism but rather as helpful and intriguing means to improve their vocal skills. Singers will be more open to working on a vocal problem if the conductor first compliments something they are already doing well (use your imagination, there is always something), and only then suggest the needed adjustment, which could be added to what they are already doing well.

In a similar regard, conductors of amateur choirs sometimes unknowingly hammer away with great intensity at vocal or musical concerns, but when singers finally overcome the problem, far less is made of the improvement than the memorable intensity of the original concern. As a result, the subconscious minds of singers linger on the conductor's temporary disappointment in them. They feel little pride in the eventual accomplishment because so little was made of it in relationship to the problem. Yet, it is pride of accomplishment that causes community choruses to sing with spirit and confidence, enriching their choral sound. So when dealing with a vocal concern, be calm, patient, and encouraging, and when the problem gets solved, overdo the congratulations!

Protecting the Voices of Directors

Most choral directors find that rehearsals are tough on their voices, especially when conducting amateur choirs that need modeling and note help. As conductors begin to age, they notice this vocal stress more readily, perhaps thinking that their voices are simply getting old. That isn't the problem. We need to be more aware of unnecessary vocal strain on our own voices during our rehearsals and develop healthier habits to avoid it.

So what is it about rehearsals that tire our voices?

• We are so busy preparing for rehearsal that we fail to get ourselves ready vocally. Take a few minutes to warm up your own voice quietly before every rehearsal. Be aware of your posture and breath support. Above all in your personal warm-up, think horizontally. Begin with expressive middle range humming and move on to simple phrases in which you can concentrate on technique. Avoid staccati.

• Conductors tend to start rehearsals by speaking loudly over the choir to settle them down, which is not a healthy start for your voice. As the rehearsal begins, be aware of your speaking voice, making it gentle and inviting and using natural inflection, rather than allowing your sound to be harsh and punched.

• Out of expediency, we tend to sing all the voice parts whenever there is a problem, often over the singing of the choir. Besides being an inefficient teaching method, when we do this, we sing too loudly. When a voice part needs note help, stop the music and have the piano slowly play the problem passages. Singing over your choir's singing results in the choir learning little, while conductors are wearing out their voices.

• When male conductors sing women's parts in falsetto, they should be sure to use ample breath support. When female conductors sing men's parts, they should mix some head voice in with the chest tone and use forward tone placement.

• When helping voice parts on the spot by singing their notes, the conductor is inevitably looking down at the music on the stand. Proper posture is compromised, the head is lowered, and the upper abdominal wall is tight. This posture results in inadequate air flow and a throaty, swallowed singing quality. When you need to model the various voice parts, pick your music off the stand and hold it as you want your choir members to hold their music, allowing you to use better vocal technique.

• When speaking to the choir, avoid leaning forward toward the singers, because this posture tightens the upper abdominal wall, diminishing the air flow needed for healthy singing. See the earlier discussion about posture.

• There will be times when you need to quickly sing voice parts and do not have the time to stop and lift up your music. In that case, develop the habit of putting one leg a little behind you, sticking your butt out slightly and arching your back so that your upper torso is high and your jaw is not jammed down on your vocal folds. The vocal result is that your voice is free and unimpeded. This type of posture is a

physical strategy used by opera singers when they have to sing down to someone on the stage, e.g., a fallen lover or comrade. The audience can't see that they have made this slight physical adjustment, but their sound is undiminished.

Boosting Retention at the End of Rehearsals

Here is a significant way to help choirs retain concepts worked on during a rehearsal. Use the final minutes of rehearsal for an interactive discussion with your singers concerning ideas that surfaced during the rehearsal. As individuals offer concepts that made a difference to them in their singing, the conductor should clarify the concepts. During this reminder process, the singers could write down the most helpful ideas on provided 3 x 5 cards. Strongly suggest that just before the next rehearsal, they read their notes. This intellectual closure helps the next rehearsal begin on the level that this one ended, instead of slipping back a few paces.

Closing Rehearsals with a Cool Down

A former high school student of mine, Jarod Spector, is the lead singer in the Broadway musical *Jersey Boys.* We went out after one of his performances, but he wouldn't allow himself to converse for almost fifteen minutes, explaining that he always went through a cool-down procedure of light humming right after a performance. Both vocally and psychologically, this seems a valuable concept for amateur choirs. It helps our choirs transition from vigorous rehearsal singing to the more gentle vocal usage of everyday life. This technique also avoids having singers leave rehearsal in a whipped, frenetic state. Consider ending rehearsal with a short moment of simple, quiet singing. This more gentle singing could be akin to the following traditional canon, to which I again added a fourth voice part. This easily memorized music can become a traditional and unrehearsed ending to each rehearsal, sending people out with a smile (Figure 3).

Vocal Solutions for Aging Amateur Singers

Speaking of developing practical solutions to vocal problems, how do we deal with the aging singers in our community choirs? There is a superb old movie by the name of *Christmas without Snow* in which John Houseman plays a retired college choral conductor who, in his retirement, becomes the director of a non-auditioned church choir. The story line follows his budding relationship with the choir within the context of preparing Handel's *Messiah.* Whoever wrote the script must have been personally involved in an amateur choir, because among the singers in the movie is every choir character any of us has known.

One of those movie characters is a dedicated older alto

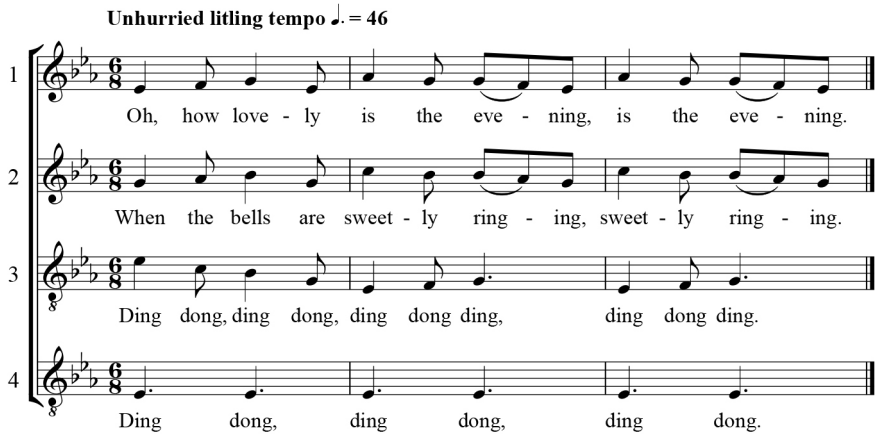

Figure 3. *Oh, How Lovely* Cooldown
(Traditional German, *arranged by Michael Kemp)*

with a heart of gold and genuine love of singing, but who is beginning to experience diminishing vocal skills. It is touching and sad to watch the scene in which Houseman pulls her aside and with obvious awkwardness, gives her the dreaded "too old to sing" speech. This woman, for whom singing in the choir is so important, was asked to leave the choir. This was the accepted solution to vocal problems of aging singers in past generations. Singing in the choir was at the center of this committed choir member's life, especially so now in her senior years when life was less active and increasingly lonely. Removing her from the choir seems both insensitive and unnecessary.

You might be saying to yourself that my sentiments regarding senior singers are rather pollyanna-like, but some of these senior singers are becoming detrimental to the sound of my choir, frustrating other singers and diminishing the overall aesthetic result. We directors don't mean to be insensitive to the needs of seniors, but we are engaged in an obvious struggle. We want to respect our seniors and keep our choir lofts filled, but we also need to protect the quality of our choirs, somewhat threatened now by the growing number of aging singers.

Which begs the question, are the diminishing vocal abilities of our seniors due strictly to aging, or can their singing skills be revived or revitalized? The fact is, we need senior singers in our choirs and they need us. Instead of giving them the dreaded "too old to sing" speech, we should do what we can to help senior singers become and remain assets in our choirs.

I became involved with senior singers when I offered to assist my then ninety-four-year-old mother, Helen Kemp, with her retirement home choir. I was immediately impressed by the passionate enthusiasm and obvious dedication of these senior singers. I caught myself wishing that my own community choir members cared so much and sang with such commitment and joy. It came to me that the perfect choir member would have the attitude of a senior singer, but with a younger sounding voice! Or, could we combine these ideas by helping senior voices sound younger?

These dedicated older singers do not have vocal problems on purpose. They clearly want to be as good as they can be, but they simply don't know what steps to take. The more I observed their singing, the more I realized that many of their vocal problems were shared to some extent by all of them.

I volunteered to give every member of my mother's choir a private voice lesson, and was able to identify and develop solutions to the most common of their vocal concerns. Those findings were illuminating, and so I expanded the research by giving voice lessons to senior singers of my own community chorus. Aging singers need to be proactive in re-developing certain physical habits. *The common thread to the vocal health of aging singers centers on posture and breath support.* Every rehearsal for aging singers should begin by focusing on these two basic concepts.

Posture is the most significant in helping an aging voice sound younger. Although many seniors are not able to be too strenuous, it is essential to find a way to keep their upper torsos from collapsing forward and down. Ask them to put their shoulders back and look up at the ceiling. Then retain that feeling in their torsos, but look straight ahead, head held high as if having just won an award. Next ask that they pretend to be ballet dancers, holding their rounded arms out in front of them in a ready position, shoulders still back. Now without getting too rigorous, have them go back and forth between slumping and good singing posture. The important thing is that seniors know what to do when they want to sing their best.

Many seniors use very little breath support. This discipline no longer occurs naturally, but almost all seniors can imitate, to some extent, the "fire breathing dragon." Using the resulting physical sensation in the lower torsos, first have the choir hum a few middle-range moaning sounds, and then carry the concept into simple pitches. Follow this by singing the first six measures of "My Country 'tis of Thee" (in the key of F) twice, first without any feeling of breath support, and then singing with breath support. When you tell senior singers to use breath support, they will now know what you mean and will be empowered to do it.

Conclusion

Unlike most college and professional choirs, the sound, artistry and attitude of community choirs needs to be continuously developed. To be successful with community choirs, conductors need to utilize far more than the traditional skills taught in standard choral training. These additional pragmatic skills and sensitivities include:

• vocal coach

• music theory teacher

• drama coach

• speech teacher

• psychologist and

• salesman

Look closely at this list and consider the misconception that conducting community choirs is easier than conducting college and professional choirs. Admittedly, when working with community choirs, we often have to teach basics and smooth out rough edges, but the result is well worth the effort. As the name "community chorus" implies, there is a built-in sense of community, a feeling much like an extended family. The singers form an amazing array of intelligent, dedicated, and extremely interesting people, and it is a privilege to be a part of enriching so many lives with beauty. CT

Repertoire for Musical Growth: A Selection of Choral Music Reviews for the Middle School Classroom

by Matthew Hill

Matthew Hill teaches at J. R. Fugett Middle School in the West Chester Area School District. Mhill@wcasd.net

As choral music teachers, it can be overwhelming to narrow down the vast offerings of repertoire. I wanted to share octavos I have used often in my classroom that I feel supports students' musical growth and success. The suggestions in this article are two-part, three-part mixed, and SAB/SATB voices, but many of these arrangements are available in multiple voicings. The exemplars of choral octavos included here are accessible, exciting to sing, pedagogically sound, and useful particularly for winter concerts.

For teachers who are new to working with middle school changing voices, I recommend selecting two-part music for your fifth and sixth graders and maybe even your seventh graders in the first semester, three-part mixed for your seventh graders (if you have young men whose voices have begun to mutate [see John Cooksey's Midvoice-II or New Baritone stages]), mostly three-part mixed for eighth graders, and potentially SATB or SAB music for larger eight-grade or ninth-grade choirs. I've chosen pieces that are: 1) polyphonic and/or make clever use of ostinati, 2) have singable lines with limited ranges that are accessible, and 3) easy to memorize due to the use of repetition.

Two-Part Music

Gloria
by Rae Moses
BriLee Music
Duration 1:30
Available in SATB/SSA

I have always found that my students respond well to pieces that utilize mixed meter, and this setting of *Gloria* by Rae Moses is no exception. A short but impactful work, this piece alternates between E-flat and G-flat in a way that is well supported by the accompaniment and uses some bits of dissonance that will make for a great teachable moment. Furthermore, Moses uses repetition quite a bit, which will help your students and your accompanist to be successful. The biggest challenge may be teaching the Latin pronunciation, but I've found that Latin is a great first foreign language to try with young singers due to its consistent vowel and consonant pronunciations.

When Sweet Winter Comes Again
by Cynthia Gray
Choristers Guild
Duration 1:58
Can also be done with three-part or four-part choirs

Rejoice! Here's a round for middle schoolers that is *not* ancient or boring! Gray's piece combines a canon texture with unison singing perfectly to create a singable, fun, and accessible piece for this age group. My students always enjoy singing this because they learn it *so* quickly and it instantly sounds great. I love it because I can quickly focus on musical elements, teach form, and refine diction. It's a secular piece, which makes it even more enticing. The piano accompaniment is a little quicker, but if you're able to record it ahead of time, there are no tempo changes, which makes it easier to follow.

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In the Dark of December
by Lon Beery
BriLee Music
Duration 2:07

I've included several pieces published by BriLee Music, as they provide affordable part learning tracks for all of their pieces. This is a tremendous help for stressed-out choral teachers trying to manage limited program funding. This piece by Lon Beery is in Dorian mode, features text from the poem "I Hear a Bird Sing" by Oliver Herford, and includes a beautiful flute obbligato. The melodic line is singable, and ranges are perfect for young singers. This would be a beautiful secular piece for winter to add to any young choir's repertoire.

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Pat-a-Pan
arr. by Andy Beck
Alfred Music
Duration 2:05
Available in three-part mixed

Andy Beck's arrangement is written as a partner song style with limited ranges. The traditional French carol is based on the legend of shepherds visiting the Christ child and playing instruments for him in the manger. Also available in three-part mixed voicing, but I prefer it as a two-part piece. The song form will make this an easy piece to teach in a variety of learning environments.

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Bidi Bom
by David Eddleman
Carl Fischer Music
Duration 1:50
Available in SATB/three-part mixed

Bidi Bom is great an original piece by David Eddleman that can be sung either as a generic holiday piece or a Hanukkah-specific piece. The melodic lines are either in unison or contrapuntal, which allow teachers to teach them separately and bring them together as you get closer to the concert. The accompaniment is relatively simple and could be played by a talented student accompanist. I have used this piece with my choirs several times, and it always sounds impressive and tougher than it actually is.

Three-Part Mixed

African Noel
arr. by Victor Johnson
Heritage Music Press
Duration 1:40
Available in SATB/two-part/SSA

A well-written arrangement of the traditional West African Liberian folk song *Banuwa*, this piece works for rebuilding ensembles due to its repetition. Also, the melodic lines are written in a middle school-friendly way with limited ranges, and they work very well as sight-singing exercises. Try having students writing in their solfége before you even begin rehearsals!

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I Saw Three Ships
arr. by Russell Robinson
Carl Fischer Music
Duration 2:15
Also available in SATB/two-part

A staple piece for any young choir (by one of the giants of middle school arranging, Russell Robinson), this setting of the classic English carol works especially well for groups new to homophonic singing, as it only features one such section that gets repeated a few times. I had my eighth-grade chorus sing this a few years ago with much success, and I am sure you will find it a welcome addition to your program.

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Shiru l'Adonai
arr. by David Neches
BriLee Music,
Duration 1:30
Available in two-part

This is piece based on a well-known Hebrew prayer. Arranger David Neches has chosen to set it canonically for the A section and recapitulation, with a short homophonic B section. It's an accessible tune that students can quickly learn, and the middle section can be easily learned via practice tracks. An excellent piece to give your students successful musical moments.

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Shout Allelu
by Roger Emerson
Hal Leonard
Duration 2:35
Available in SSA

This upbeat piece can be used during the holiday season or any time. Although the song contains a large amount of unison singing, the mixed-meter piano accompaniment and funky bass line make this exciting for both students and audiences! It also features a great teachable moment with a bridge section in quartal harmony. One word of warning: while marked three-part mixed, part 3 is a little lower (E3) than I personally prefer for developing men's voices, so it might be best for eighth-grade singers.

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SAB/SATB

Antiphonal Deck the Hall
by Greg Gilpin
Alfred Music
Duration 2:33
Available in SATB/SAB/two-part

Just as the title suggests, this piece relies heavily on an antiphonal texture, which makes it a great choice for your eighth- or ninth-grade choirs with limited experience. Written by Greg Gilpin in a lilting 6/8 texture with a relatively easy accompaniment, this piece has always been a success with my students because it allows each section to have their own distinct melody in the B sections, with an antiphonal A section that is repeated often with different text.

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Bethlehem Spiritual
by Donald Moore
Alfred Music
Duration 2:15
Available in SATB/SSAB/TTBB

This original a cappella work has been in circulation for many years, but it's a favorite of mine with choirs that can handle a cappella singing and a lower line for baritones. What makes it accessible for rebuilding ensembles is the ostinato-like layering of each voice line in the A sections, which allows students to learn their parts separately and only requires a limited time to put it together. The B section is homophonic, but half of it is in unison. *Bethlehem Spiritual* is an exciting piece with a driving groove to challenge your students and entertain your audiences.

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Hanukkah Hayom
by Michael Larkin
Alfred Music
Duration 2:00
Available in SAB/two-part

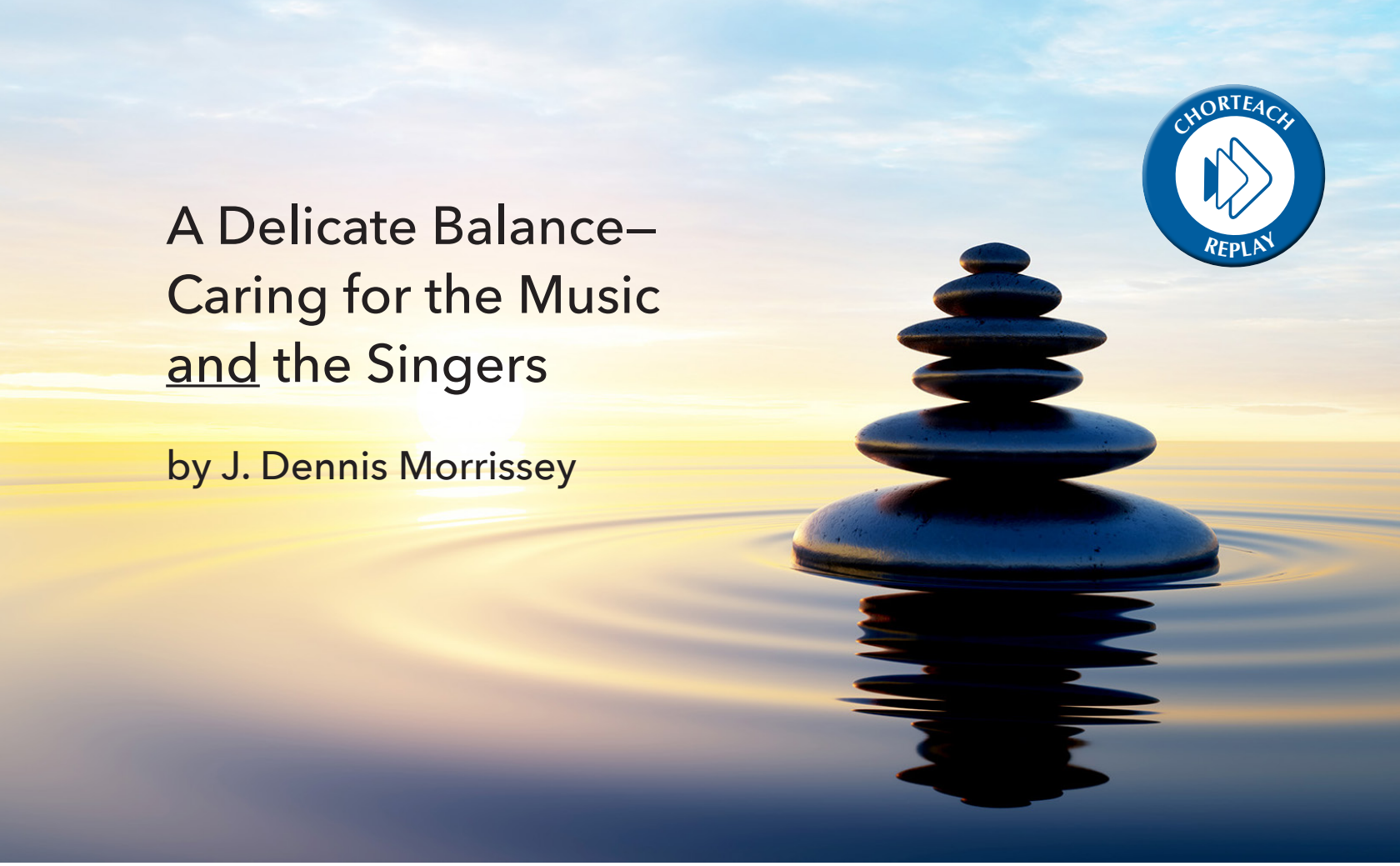
Michael Larkin's *Hanukkah Hayom* was an excellent addition to my library of Hanukkah music. My eighth-grade men loved this song because it allowed them to sing into their low range with a big, bold sound. What

makes it useful in this setting is that the chorus is largely in unison (with the sopranos singing a descant), and the A section, while homophonic, is written melodically and is singable for all parts. If you only have limited rehearsal time with your "y'all come" choir, this may be a challenge; but this is a great choice for a group that learns music quickly or one that gets sectional time.

Conclusion

I hope you can find some music in this article that will excite you and your students! I encourage everyone to remember to use the resources already available to all of us: there are several publishers that include low-cost, part-by-part recordings on their website, free accompaniments, and sample recordings. There are publishers that include part-by-part recordings on their website, free downloadable accompaniments, and sample recordings via YouTube. These will be far easier to share with your students than sending them to a music site where they may need to search on their own.

In addition, many colleagues have also recorded their own practice files and shared them on YouTube, or at least sequenced practice files in MIDI format. Avail yourself to the magic of a Google Search before setting out to make your own material (keeping any necessary copyright rules in mind, of course). As we continue the school year, may you and yours continue to be healthy and happy, and your ensembles growing! CT



A Delicate Balance—Caring for the Music and the Singers

by J. Dennis Morrissey

J. Dennis Morrissey is a past president of Illinois ACDA.

Editor's note: This section will appear in each issue of *ChorTeach* and will preview a past article from the archives. You can view the full archives at acda.org/chorteach. (You must be logged into the website with your username and password.) Following is a preview from the Spring 2021 issue.

I've often marveled that some choral conductors can consistently and even aggressively strive for choral excellence in rehearsals and performance but without undermining or damaging the relationship with their singers. These conductors have achieved what I call a delicate balance—caring for both the music *and* the singers. This balance would seem particularly challenging to maintain at the college/university level, considering the attendant pressures that likely accompany frequent and musically demanding public performances. In an effort to glean some insights, I decided to undertake a study.

My purpose was to explore the ways in which successful college/university choral conductors work to establish and maintain a balance between striving for musical excellence (*caring for the music*) and valuing their choristers as human beings (*caring for the singers*), particularly in the context of the choral rehearsal.

I conducted in-person interviews with twelve successful college/university choral conductors from my state of Illinois, all of whom, as I will explain, care for both the music and the singers. I use the word *successful* to describe choral directors who have made at least one appearance at a national or regional ACDA conference, conducting a choir she or he rehearsed on a regular basis. Clearly, these conductors could not be successful without caring for the music. That they also care for the singers is evident both from the reputation each conductor has established for respecting the humanity of his or her singers and from my personal observation(s) of each person in rehearsal.

I am indebted to the conductors who supported this study by graciously consenting to be interviewed: Karyl Carlson, Illinois State University; Scott Ferguson, Illinois Wesleyan University; Joe Grant, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (retired); Brad Holmes, Millikin University; Mary Hopper, Wheaton College; Jon Hurty, Augustana College; Eric Johnson, Northern Illinois University; John Jost, Bradley University (retired); Lee Kesselman, College of DuPage; James Stegall, Western Illinois University (retired); Jeff Wilson, Greenville University (retired); and Ramona Wis, North Central College.

1. Is caring for the music and the singers a necessity for a choral conductor's success?

Ferguson: Absolutely! I believe that you *must* value the person and the music. Especially in an educational institution, our job is to help students grow. We must pay attention to the individual growth of our choristers as well as the growth of the choir as a whole. If you don't value them, they're not going to want to sing! Tone comes from your inner spirit, I believe. And if their spirit is not well, if their well-being is not at peace, the color and the vibrancy is not going to be in the sound! So, I think the sound of the choir directly depends on how well you value all of the individuals in it.

Wilson: For me, excellence in music and caring for my singers are not mutually exclusive ideas. They come together and are essential in a choir.

Wis: It is not an either/or, but rather, a both/and mindset that we need to have as conductors. But this can be difficult to develop when we consider our undergrad, and even graduate, education and training. The discussion or study of the singer as a being is minimal, at best. It's usually about what they can do. But at some point, for most conductors, we start to realize that what we are doing is engaging with people at a very deep level, and in order for this to happen, it has to be built on something that's really powerful. Music is very powerful, but there has to be a relational connection. And there has to be buy-in. There has to be an investment. There has to be a payoff.

Hurty: The old school was "it is my way or the highway" and I think directors who use that method probably would not be successful these days since we are working with a different kind of singer. Unfortunately, it does seem like the old school to not care so much for the person and just care for the music or the product more than anything else.

Holmes: There are probably examples of successful choirs under a conductor who has a poor relationship with the singers. But I'd like to think that the best music is made with the best human situation.

Hopper: I believe a conductor should balance the quality of the music, the quality of texts, and your obligation to the singers. So, even through your programming, you're thinking about how you're caring for the singers, not just doing all the music that you like but what they need.

Wis: At North Central College, we always frame their learning and experience within this larger context of leadership, and we help them understand how to balance musical excellence with the needs of the people they are given to lead.

Carlson: One of the first things is that you have to love what you do. I still try to maintain that idealistic, happy ignorance that I had when I first walked into my elementary school, as a new teacher, and I was so excited. I don't ever want to lose that.

2. How do you envision the ideal balance in the choral rehearsal between caring for the music and caring for the singers?

Stegall: Caring for the music and the singers are one and the same. Choosing high quality repertoire with profoundly communicative texts makes it possible to simultaneously inspire singers and enhance their performance.

Hurty: For me, it's not as much a balance between those two things as if you were to use 75% to 25% or fifty-fifty. But rather, pushing for the limits of both of those things is what I view as being the ultimate way to achieve excellence while caring for your students—simultaneously. I don't think excellence in approaching the music is in any sense exclusive of caring for the people. You will actually get a more excellent level of musical accomplishment by caring for your choir. You have to completely commit yourself to both of those things.

Carlson: In my rehearsals I generally try to set up the atmosphere and mind-set that rehearsals are for learning the music and related issues. There has to be a modicum of professional distance, even though I like them very much. But when we're rehearsing, it's about the music. It's not about me, and it's not about them.

Johnson: It's not about me! That's the biggest thing we have to learn as conductors.

Jost: I don't know if there is an ideal balance. In the rehearsal, I feel like I'm really working on the music and not thinking necessarily about the singers except in the sense that I think there are some givens in terms of respect that need to be part of it. I'm not thinking, "Oh, this tenor probably had a rough day today" or that sort of thing. I think we need to let go of those things and just go to work.

Hopper: I think the repertoire you choose for your singers is really key in caring for them. One thing I think about a lot is the texts that we're giving them. We're giving them texts that are going to encourage them, to feed their souls, to do something, convey a message because that's something they take with them for the rest of their lives sometimes. There's a great story I use often about a woman who sang in the women's choir here before my time as the conductor. She was kidnapped when she was a missionary in Africa in the '60s. She wrote a book about it. She writes in the book that, for that amount of time she was held hostage, it was the songs she sang in the women's choir at Wheaton College that were in her mind that came back to her and gave her encouragement during the time of captivity, especially a Kodaly piece called *Cease Your Bitter Weeping* that she quotes. And so that has always struck me how important it is what we're putting in the minds of our students.

Wis: I would start by saying that caring for the singers and caring for the music are not mutually exclusive. Is it process or product? Of course, we can't have one without the other. To function at our best and for the singers to reap the most benefits, we need to have process and product in front of us at all times, working toward our immediate goal of a great performance as well as our long-term goal of wonderful creative work and the development of people as musicians and collaborators.

Holmes: In some ways, a choir is the last bastion of youness, not me-ness, in artistic expression. It's a lot about the 'you' and a lot less about the 'me.' It's about a 'we' coming together. If it is all about the conductor, then the sense of other-ness is lost. The concept of otherness is crucial to the whole thing that I'm trying to build. In that sense, it is always about building up the individual through the community endeavor. Otherness is so key. In the Millikin University Choir, or 'U Choir' as we call it, one of our ongoing mottos is, "Not Me Choir—U. Choir!" And I think that takes us very far. That isn't to say that individuals aren't important. In fact, they're so much more important in that context—where their individual strengths are given to each other. The conductor does the same thing. He gives himself to the ensemble. The individual is absolutely vital, but the submission of individuals to one another makes for an amazing experience.

Jost: It is going to be a much richer experience if I can call upon their experience and not just feel that everything has to be coming from me. Over the years I've come to realize that there are ways to use the experience of the group. What you want to do is increase the ownership of the group over the music and the music-making process, and you can't do that by constantly being the only source of wisdom and knowledge and truth yourself.

Grant: The experiences I had within my groups taught me that these two things can go hand-in-hand. I think if you're a conductor at the professional level and the primary emphasis is on the performance alone, then you can really dial it toward that, just taking care of the music. If you're in a school situation, a college situation, it seems to me that that balance has to come more to neutral—that is, at least an equal emphasis on student growth and musical performance. But you have to be intentional. I don't think it can happen by circumstance.

Hurty: When I started, I think I was probably more rigid in my approach to people because I was more concerned about me rather than about them. And the more experience I've gotten, the more I realize that it truly is about the music itself—what the music or the composer or the poet has to say. Learning to get me out of the way and make the music be more important has been the best developing experience that I've had.

This article continues with 3 questions:

- *How do you establish and maintain the ideal balance in rehearsal, especially in the face of mounting rehearsal pressures?*
- *How do you regain the balance in rehearsal if it has been lost?*
- *How do you enhance your ability as a conductor to care for the singers?* CT

Call for Submissions

Are you an educator currently working in or have previous experience with K-12 or community choirs?

ChorTeach is a publication of the American Choral Directors Association, published four times per year, online. The editorial board is looking for practical articles related to teaching, singing, conducting, performing, and rehearsing specifically with K-12 students and community choirs.

We are also looking for educators to contribute to our "Ask a Conductor" section. In this reader-generated Q&A format, readers submit questions related to teaching, conducting, rehearsing with, or singing with K-12 students. Submit a question via the following link (https://forms.gle/oVcamzqp4KwXfo5M9) or by visiting the QR code below.

Ask a Conductor Submission Form

Email **chorteach@acda.org** with questions, comments, feedback, or to submit an article.
We look forward to hearing from you!