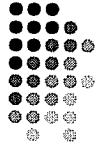


## How to make your membership numbers ROCKET!

Alyson Chaney  
IES 2008  
Trinity University, San Antonio



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## Let's share our successes!

- In pairs
- Each pair join with another group
- Plenary



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## The singing course model

- Initially a British Association of Barbershop Singers (BABS) initiative
- Model adopted by other choruses in SAI Region 31 and LABBS (Ladies Association of British Barbershop Singers)
- On a personal level, very successful courses run in Lincoln in 2005 and 2007 and in Nottingham in 2006



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## The Lincoln Sounds model



- Working party set up 3 months beforehand
- Music selected, course notes prepared
- Extensive advertising throughout the county
- A FREE Harmony Singing course
- No mention of barbershop!
- Pre course registration team set up
- All course materials printed
- All music and learning CDs prepared

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## Details of course



- Breathing and posture
- Vocal production and placement
- Resonance
- Vowels
- Diphthongs
- Consonants
- Legato singing
- Intonation
- Music theory
- Stamina
- Performance preparation

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## The first night!



- Over 45 attendees
- All received a pack containing CD, music and first week's handout on breathing and posture
- Started at 7.30 pm and ran till 9.00 pm
- Whole chorus participated in addition to new singers
- New singers decided which voice part they should learn

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## Some figures



- Of the initial 49, 35 stayed until the end of the course
- Of these 35, 15 have become full members of the chorus and SAI
- Chorus has grown from 28 to 43 singers

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## Positives



- Very good feedback from all participants
- Existing chorus enjoyed the classes on vocal production
- Existing chorus enjoyed singing with a much bigger group
- New members learnt very quickly with the help of the existing chorus members and section leaders
- End of course concert a great success and well attended by friends and family

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## Lessons learnt....next time we would



- Limit the course to six weeks as ten weeks was rather long
- Omit the music theory element
- Do voice testing to allocate parts initially
- Run the singing course as a parallel class so that existing chorus does not stand still

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## The Lace City model



- Learnt from previous models
- Limited the course to six weeks + an end of course concert
- Ran as a parallel class from 7.15 till 8 pm with the new members joining with the chorus after that
- Selected challenging songs to learn
- Voice tested all participants at the end of week 1 to determine voice part

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## Facts and figures



- 47 initial respondees
- Over 50 on books at mid point of course
- Prepared over 50 certificates to be presented at end of course concert
- 19 new singers registered to join the chorus
- Of these 19 new singers 11 performed with Lace City in Calgary in the International Chorus contest

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## After the course



- Very important to have plans in place
- New extended chorus learns a new song together
- Fast track some of the new members so that they can pass auditions, others can take longer – it's their choice
- Chorus repertoire should be immediately accessible to new members (music and CDs) with set order for learning the songs

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### What do they think about it?



- Lincoln Sounds singing course members
  - *For 10 weeks no one has told me I can't sing!*
  - *It's been great fun and I learnt a lot*
  - *Can't wait to join – when can I start paying?*
  - *Such I shame I live up in Grimsby (50 miles away). Will you form a chorus up there please?*

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### What do they think about it?



- Lace City singing course members:
  - *Best thing has been being able to listen and join in with Lace City. Fantastic thrill to stand up there on the risers with them!*
  - *The quality of the teaching – the teacher makes it interesting and fun*
  - *The friendly welcome*
  - *The fact that we are made to feel we can do it too and that our contribution is helping Lace City sound better*
  - *I love it when the tenors come in with their notes – creates such a buzz*
  - *If I had known of the chorus's successes beforehand I wouldn't have had the confidence to come along*

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### What do they think about it?



- Others (organisers, established chorus members)
  - *Worth all the effort*
  - *Many many hours of hard work but worth it 1000 times over*
  - *Some other things at chorus have to be put on the back burner*
  - *Preparation and follow up very important and each session needs to be so well prepared*
  - *Sessions during the course have to be the most exciting things the new members have ever witnessed!!*
  - *It's not enough to expect an influx of new members just by hearing the chorus perform – you have to go out there and get 'em!*

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## Key messages



- Lots of people out there want to sing
- A free singing course generates a huge amount of interest
- Be encouraging and positive all the time (but have a quality control system in place!)
- Giving them the opportunity to join in with the existing chorus members gives the new people such a thrill
- An end of course concert is a great way to end the course and celebrates their achievements as well as being an excellent PR opportunity.

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## More information



- LCS Singing course handouts on Region 31 website [www.sweetadelines.org.uk](http://www.sweetadelines.org.uk)
- Members' Toolkit (SAI) has lots of useful tips for recruitment
- Singers wanted! An excellent resource [www.sweetadelineintl.org](http://www.sweetadelineintl.org)
- Set up a regional one day workshop to find out what it feels like in practice
- Contact me [alysonchaney@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:alysonchaney@yahoo.co.uk)

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## Harmony Singing Course

### Week One – Alignment and Breathing

Singing is a whole body process:-

- The structure of your body keeps you upright
- Your lungs provide the reservoir of air, providing the energy to make sound
- Your abdominal muscles, diaphragm and back muscles control the release of air
- Your vocal folds control the pitch of the sound you produce
- The air from your lungs must have free passage to the vocal folds and beyond

Rule 1 – Align your body naturally

- Feet slightly apart below the shoulders, knees relaxed (not locked), top of the head as far away from the floor as possible and the head not tilted forward or back
- Think upwards and forwards but don't attempt to stretch your spine
- Your body is like a tall chimney with your feet as the foundations
- If anything causes any stress or tension stop and start again

Now make the following adjustments:

- Rock forward until your weight is on the balls of your feet. Rock back till your weight is on your heels. Now find the mid-position between these two. Feel your weight going through all parts of your feet.
- Raise your arms above your head, which will lift your chest. Now slowly allow your arms to move to their relaxed place by your sides but don't let the chest fall back. This raised chest position is the one that will help you sing. This avoids the waste of pushing your ribs out every time you breathe in. However, don't attempt to push your chest up. Allow it to rest in this comfortable elevated position.

Rule 2 – Breathing should be easy, quick and silent

- If you are standing properly as described above, and your lungs are empty all you have to do is get out of the way and the atmosphere will push air into your lungs. There is no need to suck air in. Notice whether you are doing this as you breathe and stop yourself.
- The tongue should be resting in the bottom of the mouth, flat and out of the way. This allows air in and sound out. During singing it will sometimes move to help you make consonant sounds but most of the time it should be like a fireside rug – flat and still
- Use the inner smile and the yawn to get the false folds out of the way. They are only there to stop food getting into your lungs so we don't need them when we are singing.
- Breathe in order to sing the next phrase, not to survive at the end of the last one. This helps the music to flow.

Now the ugly bit

If you are doing all of the stuff above, when you breathe in the diaphragm will go down and all the contents of your abdomen (stomach, liver etc.) will have to get out of the way. This will cause your tummy to move out. If this happens you are breathing properly. You'll get thin again as the air comes out as you sing.

## **Week Two – The vocal Mechanism**

Remember the key points of week one:

- Singing is a whole body experience. Check that you have your feet are shoulder width apart and that your body is lined up like a chimney so the air can get through without anything getting in the way.
- Find that equilibrium position between the heels and the balls of the feet then check that your ribcage is comfortably elevated to allow the lungs to expand – **don't** let it collapse as you exhale.
- Make sure your tongue is resting on the bottom of your mouth with the tip behind the lower teeth, check that the lower jaw is relaxed and free, employ an inner smile so that the false folds are out of the way and use all the air when singing each phrase so you can replace it with clean air for the next one.
- When the air does go in, relax your abdomen and allow it to expand

## **This Week – Making the right kind of sound.**

The holy grail of choral singing is that the sound we produce should be

- Well-supported
- Freely-produced
- Resonant

If you are doing everything we covered last week you have the first two covered:-

- If the chest remains expanded and high, if the shoulders don't rise and fall, if your tummy moves out as you inhale and in as you exhale, if you engage the muscles of the lower back to control the abdominal and diaphragm muscles the sound will be **well supported**. If you want more support move something – anything!
- If you are standing up straight, if your air column is like a chimney, if you have an inner smile, if the tongue is flat and relaxed, and if you always use all your air and sing on the breath (i.e. don't hold the breath before you sing) the sound will be **freely produced**.

Before we go on to look at the third point let's just check this stuff by looking at the **onset of sound**. What we usually want is a simultaneous onset of air and sound. We don't want the air to come first (try it – it causes us to waste breath and it tends to make us scoop the note) or the sound to come before the air (called the glottal attack it gives rise to a harsh sound that is rarely appropriate). Check - you can do it wrongly

then practise simultaneous onset. When you are getting it right it makes for a pleasant sound to which we can add **resonance**.

Resonance – how will we know it is happening? The sound will:

- Have a fullness and richness that makes it exciting to listen to
- Have a carrying quality so we can hear it at the other side of the room
- Have an overtone content which is the complexity that makes good singing what it is
- Have a quality that enables each individual voice to blend with other voices in the ensemble to produce solid harmonies

So how is it done?

The sound produced when your vocal folds vibrate is very quiet. It can be heard when we amplify it in one or more of the resonators we were born with. Fundamentally you have three resonating spaces:

1. Your mouth cavity (generally the one we use when we speak. This is OK but if it's the only one we use when we sing the sound will not be very interesting.
2. The space high in your head behind your eyes (where you thought your brain was). This one gives the sound a brightness or ping. This is a characteristic of the barbershop style.
3. The space in your throat. This one provides the fullness and roundness and is often referred to as chest resonance.

The ideal vocal production will mix these three resonators, using more of no.2 and less of no.3 when you are high in your range and allowing a little more of no.3 when you go lower but ensuring you have some of no.1 in there at all times. The important thing to avoid is "bottoming out" as you sing the lowest notes. This sound won't match anybody else's sound.

The Teeth and the Lips

The sound is ready to come out so you need to get you teeth and lips out of the way. Check that your teeth are a thumb apart but adjust this if it causes any tension or stretching. Ease the lips off the teeth and again check there is no tension. Think tall, not wide as you create the space for the sound to escape.

### **Week Three – The Vowels and keeping them regular!**

Remember the important messages from last week:

All sound should be:

- Well-supported

- Freely-produced
- Resonant

There is so much we can do to produce resonant sound. Practise creating resonance using this week's visual images:

- The 'C' shape formed by thumb and first finger in front of your face
- Pushing sound out to the walls with the palm of your hand
- Taking the sound into the crown of your head

It is tricky to do more than two of these at a time because you only have two hands but we need to be doing all three at all times by visualising a third hand.

The sound we make when we sing (compared to when we speak) is mainly vowel sound with a very small amount of consonant. The exact vowel sound we make will cause the sound to resonate in different places, it will be associated with the mouth being open more or less and the tongue will arch differently. Try singing the words in the table at the end of the sheet.

The main vowels:

EE    EH    AH    OH (AW)    OO

These vowels sometimes combine to form diphthongs – more about that next week – but we need to fully understand the pure vowels first.

The easy one to start with is AH. It doesn't take much to turn the AH into any of the other four. The key is to keep the space in the mouth and the windpipe the same in the other vowels as it is in AH. Practise singing a combination of notes on the same vowel and see how it changes as you go up and down. Note that you need to create more space and use more air as you go up but at all times keep relaxed. No tension in the cheeks or jaw.

Keep the vowels tall and think about the shapes when producing the sound. If you find the EE shape getting wide, change it so it is more square. Remember to have a small shape for OO so that you can stop the sound with your little finger. The OH shape should look like it sounds – big and round. Keep the sound light when high in your register and allow some lower resonance when you move to lower notes. Remember though – no forcing or tension.

If we can do a combination of these things we will make a sound that will be a joy to both the singer and the listener. Lots and lots of practice is all we need for you to do this well. If we all do it the sound will match and the chords will tune better – just what we need for good harmony singing.

### **Week Four – Diphthongs: connected vowels**

In week three we considered the **pure** vowels – **eh** (as in there), **ee** (as in sleep), **ah** (as in car), **oh** or **aw** (as in saw), **oo** (as in blue). There are a few others that are adaptations of these five such as **a** (as in bat), **uh** (as in girl) and **ih** (as in bit).

Remember that in a capella music (a posh phrase that means there isn't a band) the only sound the audience hears is made by the singers so we have to match everything we do. Actively singing the correct vowels whilst ensuring that the sound is well supported, freely produced and resonant will result in a superior product. Actively singing vowels means shape and air direction.

This week we concentrate on the **diphthongs**, which are combinations of two pure vowels:

**OH EE** (as in boy)

**EH EE** (as in day)

**AH EE** (as in fly)

**AH OO** (as in loud)

**OH OO** (as in go)

The first vowel in each of these pairs is called the target vowel and the second vowel is called the secondary vowel. As the name suggests the target vowel is the one we must concentrate on most. It should occupy 90% of the time you spend on that note, only "turning" the diphthong to the secondary vowel right at the end. It is important not to allow the target vowel to leak into the secondary vowel half way through if you are to match all the other singers. The way to do this is to aim for the end of the word as if it was a pure vowel with a consonant on the end. This is the **90:10 rule**.

E.g. when singing fly, sing it as if the word is flag and sing **ah** followed by an **ee** sound right at the end instead of a g. So it would be **flah.....ee**

Frank Sinatra made millions as a singer but he wouldn't have made the grade as a barbershop singer because he never gave enough time to the target vowel. As he so often sang; "I did it maheeeeeeee weheeeeeeeee".

It is important to sound the secondary vowel or the word won't make sense so be careful not to throw it away completely.

Finally, listen out for some triphthongs, which start with consonants that are sounded as vowels. Think about the sounds we make when we sing the word "why".

## Week Five – Make Sure To Be Consonant

**Vowels** are the parts of the words that we can use to make music because they are **singable** with **pitch**. This means we can hold a note on a vowel but it is much more difficult on a consonant.

**Consonants** like t, p, d and k could be described as percussive because you make the sound and then they are gone. If you delay making the sound you will feel pressure building up behind them. Try this out. It is possible to spend some time singing a percussive consonant. Try saying "darling" putting an 's' between the 'd' and the 'a'. In this context it is appropriate as it affects the following vowel but it probably wouldn't be if you were singing the word "dog".

Consonants like f and v are just air and s and z not much better.

Of course we need the consonants or the words will not make sense, however, in a cappella singing we must concentrate on the vowels, using just enough consonant to make sense of the words. Note that in other forms of choral music, there is much more emphasis on the consonants.

Some consonants are **singable** – m, n, ng and l can be sung with pitch and they have a similar role in singing to the **diphthongs** you met last week. They help to glue the vowel sounds together so that the air can keep going. Remember that for almost all of the time between starting and ending a song we aim to be making sound. Try out these singable consonants.

If there are some un-singable consonants in the music we must spend as little time as possible on them so that the sound keeps going. Revise the idea of the sausage of sound, with the vowels in the sausages and the consonants in the links between the sausages.

Vocal music fulfils two distinct roles. The consonants help us to express the **meaning** of the words and the vowels help us to express the **emotion** of the song. You have to have both. Note that instrumental music can carry emotion because the instruments are essentially producing just the vowels. You can get an idea what a piece is about. The precise meaning can only be understood if consonants make words. Think about a few words such as love, tender and heart and how the meaning of the words can be affected by the way you sing the consonants and vowels.

Next week is the last week of the course and then on \_\_\_\_\_ we perform at \_\_\_\_\_ with the \_\_\_\_\_ **Chorus**. Bring your friends and family along.

## **Week Six – Putting it on Stage**

Here we are; the sixth and last week of our course. During the very short time you have been coming to these sessions you have learned:

- How to stand with the correct alignment to sing well
- How to breathe so that you can maintain pitch to the end of each phrase
- How to start and end a phrase appropriately and with everybody else
- How to sing vowels so they match the others in the group
- How to sing consonants and synchronise them with others singers
- How to connect sound with singable consonants and diphthongs
- How to add a visual component to enhance the sound

Throughout the course you have also been learning the notes for your section and how that fits with the other three sections of the chorus. Together, all these components make up vocal harmony. The progress that has been made in such a short time is remarkable but as you can imagine there is still a lot to learn. In fact nobody, not even those who devote their entire lives to this, can ever learn it all!

Learning to sing is reward in itself and learning to sing close harmony is particularly exciting. However, the icing on the cake is the opportunity to perform and share your music with an audience and we are going to do that next \_\_\_\_ (day) \_\_\_\_ at the \_\_\_\_\_ School. A separate sheet will be provided this evening giving information on when and where you need to be so that we can start the performance on time. Tonight we are going to look at the way we present ourselves to the audience so they enjoy our musical performance. The key to all performance is to be well prepared (which is what the last six weeks have been about) and on the night don't worry about a thing.

Your performance goal next week is to enjoy the experience yourself and to notice how much you enjoyed it. If you succeed in enjoying yourself you can be sure the audience will enjoy your performance too.

Our reward is the knowledge that you have attended our course and that you have found your harmony singing voice. We hope you will use your new skills and continue to sing. Should you wish to apply to become a member of \_\_\_\_\_ you would be very welcome. On the second sheet I provide some information about the chorus and what it would mean to become a member.

Congratulations on your achievements.

## **Lace City Singers Chorus A Little Background Information**

The Lace City Singers was formed in September 1992 at Arnold Hill School. It was the natural progression for some of the students who were, at that time, singing in the school's Girls Barbershop Chorus "Sweet Adolescence".

In the 14 years since its formation the chorus has grown to become the largest barbershop chorus of any kind, male or female, in the British Isles. Winning the Sweet Adelines International UK and Ireland chorus competition for the second time in May 2006 was confirmation of the Lace City Singers' star quality. In October 2007 the chorus will compete in the World Championships for the second time following their debut at world level in Detroit in 2005.

It seems a long time since the Lace City Singers won their first trophy, taking the "Ladies Choir" title at the Nottingham Music Festival in 1994. The chorus has medalled in every UK and Ireland Sweet Adelines contest it has entered since 2000 and became the Irish International Champions in Dublin in 2001. The chorus's quartets have won UK and Ireland medals on nine occasions including four golds by "Sound Bites" who shared the podium with bronze medallists "Upbeat" in 2006.

The Lace City Singers are proud of their continued association with youth. Over half of the national "Young Women in Harmony" chorus are Lace City Singers and it is the chorus's policy to encourage participation by young people in music.

At the same time there are a number of singers who are 60 years older than the youngest member and all of them make just as valuable a contribution. Every decade from the teens to the seventies is almost equally represented. It is the variety of ages, voice types and life experiences that help create the complexity that characterises Lace City Singers performances both vocally and visually.

All of this has been achieved by being faithful to the chorus's open access policy. We believe anybody can reach our entry requirements, which are that:

- You sing all the right words
- You sing all the right notes
- You sing them in the correct order
- You sing them in a way that blends with everybody else
- You learn to move together with the rest of the chorus
- You are a woman!

If you are prepared to put in the necessary work you can become a Lace City Singer. Our comprehensive programme for prospective members will lead you through the process of qualification. If you think you would like to do more of this, please come

Sweet Adelines International  
Making your membership numbers rocket!  
Alyson Chaney

International Education Symposium  
Handout #2  
Page 9

back next week. In the meantime you can discuss any of this with me on \_\_\_\_\_  
or email me on \_\_\_\_\_.