

FORWARD MOTION

A Sweet Adelines International Newsletter for Members of The Directors Certification Program and Front-Line Directors

How Voices Learn: From Cognition to Aesthetic Experience

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USED BY PERMISSION, TAKEN FROM THE MAY 2007 AMERICAN CHORAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION'S CHORAL JOURNAL

Systems of symbols and shapes, such as letters or numbers, assist humans in the process of recognizing and comprehending myriad amounts of information. In learning music, a specific system of symbols, and fundamental patterns of rhythms and sounds, must be understood, recognized, and duplicated. These fundamentals are the foundation of learning, as singers shift from cognition, to replication, to the eventual goals of musicality and the aesthetic experience. Music reading, efficient musical practice, and healthy voice use are the components necessary to reach this objective.

MUSIC LEARNING METHODS

Rote Learning. Most choral singers are familiar with learning by rote or imitation: the choral conductor sings something and the students copy what they hear. Eminent music educator Edwin Gordon likens this method to using tracing paper to copy a picture. Learning by imitation is basic and primary to life in general, and is widely used in elementary music programs, by voice teachers, by choir conductors, and in church congregations alike. Often it seems that imitation is the fastest way to get the job done, whether it is for the purpose of learning parts or to demonstrate an element of expression. One of the drawbacks of rote learning is

that one must rely on his or her memory for accuracy. Problems can occur when there is no written record of what has been taught. That being said, learning by rote can be advantageous for ear training and system memory (learning to vocally and aurally recognize patterns).

To young singers, rote learning can also feel more like one is playing a game rather than “working hard” to get it right. However, if a choral conductor begins skill building with imitation, it is desired that students will next progress to learning audiation skills. Gordon defines audiation as “when one hears and comprehends music silently, the sound of the music no longer being or never having been physically present.”

An interesting study by two researchers in 1999 scanned the brains of a group of non-musicians. Some in the group actually listened to music, while others were directed to simply imagine hearing the same piece of music. It was found that many of the same areas in the temporal lobes were activated in either case. These two important researchers underscore the important role that audiation plays as a fundamental skill set for musicians.

Staff Notation. Music reading with traditional staff notation is a skill that has

been taught since the time of the original colonies. In traditional notation, students must learn many different variables to use as decoding skills before they can effectively use the written score as a tool. To teach staff notation, choral conductors often use solfege (moveable or fixed do), note names, or numbers that correspond to the eight note scale. Whatever method employed, the goal is that the student attains a high level of audiation. One drawback in traditional notation is all that information on a single page (many systems, multiple texts, sixteenth notes, etc.) can look difficult to beginning singers, which may cause them to tense up before they even begin singing.

Nashville Number System. Along with traditional staff notation there is also the Nashville Number System (NNS) for understanding and transcribing music for performance. This system emerged in the late 1950s and was originated by Neal Matthews, a member of the Jordanaires.

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It is a method of substituting Arabic numerals for traditional Roman numeral chords (i.e. 1 4 5 instead of I IV V). In this system, only the numbers 1-7 are used to denote up and down (along with other NNS decoders). This method, however, does not dismiss learning basic music theory concepts, such as keys, scales, and rhythms.

The method that one uses to learn new music, whether rote, traditional staff notation, or the NNS may well have a bearing on (a) the rate of learning, (b) the amount of new knowledge one is able to learn, (c) how independent vs. dependent one is in regard to learning, and (d) the vocal technique used by the singer. Regardless of the method of learning, pattern recognition and duplication is the goal of the fundamentals. Reimer calls this functional literacy. Functional literacy must be achieved first before musicality and interpretation can take place.

EFFICIENT PRACTICE

Basic Elements of A Song

When learning a new song, choral conductors often teach the basic elements: key(s) of the song, meter signature(s), and formal structure. Many times, however, no further analysis to break the song down into its basic melodic elements is done. It is vitally important for students (and their teachers) to recognize what I call “recurring melodic patterns”. (In deconstructing a song, it is helpful to remember that melodies are made up of phrases, which are made of patterns joined together, which are made of intervals joined together, which are single pitches joined together.) Recognition of patterns is crucially important in learning songs. Human brains actually go through an “editing” process to look for things that are different. Therefore, if students already have a library of patterns to draw upon, there is a foundation for linking familiar to familiar, which allows for quicker progress toward identification of what is different or novel.

Recurring Melodic Patterns

Recurring melodic patterns may be used as preparation for patterning the ears, brain, and larynx prior to singing the song. The perfect place to begin is in the choral warm up. A simple process can be used:

- Pick out recurring melodic patterns to use as exercises
- Break them down into small patterns (3-4 notes – don’t use an entire phrase)
- Write these out on manuscript paper
- Choose a comfortable consonant/vowel combination
 - * For consonant choices, begin with either b, p, f, s, sh, or m
 - The consonants b and p are plosives (voiced and unvoiced) which allow for a feeling of control or safety at the front of the lips. This helps to alleviate unnecessary pressure off of the larynx. The consonants f, s and combination sh create a resistance space for the airflow to travel through which engages the abdominal musculature for steady release of managed airflow. They also help to move airflow forward. M is the most frontal nasal consonant which allows for natural frontal resonance without manipulation.
 - * For vowel choices start with u or o
 - The vowel u is the smallest vowel chamber, which aids in the ease of air and sound through space without excessive effort. The lips are round in shape which aids in directing the flow of the air/sound (resonance tract shape/verticality and molar space/jaw relaxation). The o vowel allows for more jaw release/molar space naturally and is oblong in lip shape. It also aids in resonance tract verticality for efficiency of sound production.
- Start in a comfortable range and then move the pattern up and down by ½ steps

- Change consonant/vowel combinations
- Add one of the vowels found in the actual music of the melodic pattern chosen
- Add all of the vowels found in the actual music of the melodic pattern chosen to a consonant.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

It is initially important to study melody in isolation, without the addition of text. When learning a new song, working too many elements together immediately, like text, rhythm, and melody, has the potential to cause confusion, vocal tension, and lead to inefficient muscle memory. Often when reading a new song, a choir is asked to sing through the song one or two times with pitch, rhythm, and text together, and by the third time the conductor is already asking for phrasing, diction, and musicality. Perhaps if more time were taken with melody alone, there would be less “pounding” of parts. If singers vocally and mentally approach learning a song with such effortful words in mind as “pounding,” what is the behavioral association? Pounding and banging of notes can have a negative influence in the approach of vocal production and the systems balance (airflow, phonation, resonance). This may, in turn, have a domino effect in the overall desired sound of the choir.

As rhythm is a most fundamental element of music, students can benefit from counting or clapping the rhythm of the melody, clapping the melody while the accompaniment is being played, and count singing. It is also advantageous to include recurring or difficult rhythmic patterns during the choral warm-up.

Sectionals are an efficient way to concentrate on single parts before putting the parts together. During sectionals it would be constructive to learn the notes by replacing the actual text with a comfortable consonant/vowel combination, such as mum, mlm, mo, mu, shu, wo, wu. Once melodies (parts)

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LAYERING — THE EXTREME MAKEOVER HOME EDITION

By Joan Boutilier, Director of Choral-Aires Chorus

Our chorus' mission is: to know our songs and the plans of our songs so well, that when we focus on one layer in order to polish our product, the other layers will be there at a high level of musicianship, with the eventuality of performing all layers of all our songs to the very best of our abilities given this point in time.

In thinking about the LAYER concept, one of the very best analogies is the idea of a house, its foundation, and what goes atop the foundation. You may believe the order of the layers could be slightly different and that's just fine. Just as long as you see that the layers exist and that they all need to be there for our EXTREME MAKEOVER HOME EDITION to be complete!

EXTREME MAKEOVER HOME EDITION

1. The Concrete Foundation and Basement:
 - a. Notes
 - b. Words
 - c. Breaths and
 - d. Rhythms
2. The Walls:
 - a. Core Sound
 - b. Resonant Sound
3. The First Floor:
 - a. Tempo
 - b. Implied Meter/Forward Motion
4. The Windows:
 - a. Dynamic Plan
5. The Shutters and Window Treatments:
 - a. Choreography Plan
6. The Paintings, Pictures, Floors and Wall Colors:
 - a. Artistic Elements

1. The **Concrete Foundation and Basement**: Notes, Words, Breaths, and Rhythms: (including tuning and harmony accuracy)

Knowing and being able to sing correctly the notes, words, rhythms, and proper breaths ALL the time are elemental to our craft. Wrong notes kill the possibility of "chord lock and ring" which is the ultimate mission for our style of singing and what differentiates us from any other style of singing in the world.

Knowing when and where to breathe, and being able to breathe correctly is foundational. The basic breath types are:

- Breathing in tempo, as in an uptune between phrases or at the beginning of a song (tempo breath),
- Breathe quickly when the tempo is getting faster (accelerando breath), to pause dramatically for effect (pregnant pause), and
- Personal breaths (breathing within a phrase at a place of your own choosing, leaving out a word or two).
- Correct notes are considered accurate when they are sung ("intoned") by each and every singer using the basic rules of Pythagorean tuning. The result is clean and accurate "intonation".

2. The **Walls**: Core Sound and Resonant Sound: (our "walls of sound") (including phrase endings, vowels/diphthongs, blend)

Being able to produce a quality, freely resonating, supported, tension-free sound is the singer's goal. The potential for a sound to be properly and completely resonated is, in part, affected by setting up the instrument correctly with proper body alignment, facial lift, and a basic understanding of how to take in air, initiate and resonate sound.

Singing on a column of air creates a resonant sound with each vowel having adequate height. Voices blend and create an ensemble sound when the sound is allowed to ring in the mask at all times,

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have been learned, text can be added. The choral conductor must insure healthy vocal production, so that there is no excessive effort on the part of the articulators (lips, tongue, jaw). It is often helpful to begin to work on text by having students:

- Chant the text of the song on a single pitch, the first time out of rhythm, the second time in rhythm
- Write text on index cards for memorization (use as flash cards)
- Type out text on a single sheet to use as a monologue (can also aid in memorization)
- Research individually and then discuss interpretation in the rehearsal

Finally, put the song together with the musical elements of rhythm, melody, and text. After the song elements have been combined, then it is appropriate to work the song for both musicianship and textual interpretation.

Singing a song is a creative, complex process that combines the balancing act of tone production along with the basic elements of song as discussed above. In singing a melody, there is a constant shifting of the lengthening and shortening of the vocal folds for pitch change. There is also a changing of the thickness of the edge that vibrates, depending on the pitch and the register. When musicianship comes into play (i.e., crescendo, diminuendo, etc.), there is a shifting of the amount of airflow per wave cycle and force of vocal fold closure that occurs. When taking into account the elements involved in learning and singing a song, there are many bits of information for the brain to decipher and decode.

NOTE: Part 2 of this article will be in the next *Forward Motion Newsletter* — stay tuned!

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having more frontal focus on low notes and more width and space on high notes. Voices also blend when each singer has the same target vowel in mind. Sound always travels away from the singer. It is to be shared with the audience. Sound has to have energy all the time, including at the ends of phrases.

Resonant sound is carried on vowels (eh, e, ah, oh, oo, ih, uh), but some consonants have “sing-ability” and carry pitch (l, m, n, r, w, y). Consonants that interrupt air flow (b, c, d, f, g, j, k, p, q, s, t, x) should be minimized, as a general rule. Diphthongs are an important part of our craft, enhancing the natural, speech-like delivery of our lyrics; as a sound moves from a target vowel to a secondary vowel, it should be done keeping resonance equal on both sounds. (Ex., “my” is sung as “mah – ee”) Breathing, posture, phonation, resonance and articulation are the components of “Vocal Skills” in our Sound Category. As all sung pitches are “in motion”, all bodies are kept “in motion” and have a natural “physical expression”. Keeping the body in motion is a basic requirement for producing a resonant, tension-free

quality/core sound, in much the same way that proper posture and facial lift are.

3. The **First Floor**: Tempo and Implied Meter/Forward Motion: (including forward motion, phrase flow, and synchronization)

Tempo is the speed of the pulse of the song and is typically steady in most parts of an uptune. The pulse, the accented beat of the measure, is felt either on the downbeats (beats 1 and 3) or backbeats (beats 2 and 4) of each measure and is like the heartbeat or the drumbeat of the song, which allows the listener to tap his toe to the song without stubbing it.

“Implied” meter is used in a ballad when the tempo is “rubato”; there are “gives and takes” in the meter, but there is still an underlying feeling of the meter (3/4 time or 4/4 time, etc.). The understanding and execution of breath timing in tempo or ad lib songs affects the FORWARD MOTION, along with the PHRASE or LYRIC FLOW in a typical BBS ballad. A phrase that flows in a speech-like way has a feeling of moving forward purposefully, lyrically and conversationally. Phrases should flow without excess consonant interruption. A shared ensemble tempo

combined with unified phrase flow creates overall unity, chord synchronization and a sense of forward motion.

4. The **Windows**: Dynamic Plan: A song without dynamics is like a house without windows. All houses have windows, yet windows are not absolutely necessary in the construction of a home, therefore, they are the first layer of “decoration” in our house. We all know the power of hearing dynamic contrasts when listening to a song. Dynamics are more exciting when there is a wide contrast between louds and softs, along with moments of traveling from one range of volume to another, getting gradually louder or softer (crescendos and decrescendos) within a phrase or even just a word. Just as the windows of our house need to be kept clean for extra beauty, our dynamics need clarity and support so they won’t be cloudy when soft, and they need to be kept musical at loud volumes so they won’t shatter glass!

5. The **Window Treatments**: Choreography Plan: Window treatments are not essential to a house, but you rarely see a house without something decorating the windows, and you rarely see a BBS uptune performed without at least a basic choreography plan. Just like curtains, which do provide a practical purpose of adding privacy to our homes, the choreo plan does provide a practical purpose in that it supports the foundation of the song, and allows the lyrics of our songs to be more expressive. A good choreography plan is interesting to look at and doesn’t get in the way of the foundation of the song for the performer or the observer. There is a lot of room for personal expression in both the creativity and the execution of the choreography plan. It can be plain or highly decorative, but either way the choreography plan must be executed with unity, character and believability in order to make the windows of the house POP!

ADVANCEMENTS

ADVANCED TO MASTER DIRECTOR

Tori Hicks, Midwest Crossroads Chorus, Region 3

Jenny Lawson, Surry Harmony Chorus, Region 31

David Sangster, Forth Valley Chorus, Region 31

Gwen Topp, Aberdeen Chorus, Region 31

ADVANCED TO CERTIFIED DIRECTOR

Lynnell Diamond, Red RockApella Chorus, Region 21

Elizabeth Falkowski, Suncoast Harmony Chorus, Region 9

Shirlie Holmes, Spirit of Evansville Chorus, Region 4

Prem Neeff, West Island Chorus, Region 1

Sarah Rae, Foveaux Harmony Chorus, Region 35

Cindy Repasy, Image City Sound Chorus, Region 16

Jeff Veteto, Ozark Showcase Chorus, Region 25

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6. The Paintings, Pictures, Floors, and Wall Colors:

Artistic Elements: (including embellishments, inflections, finesse, emotional communication, musical energy, and vocal style)

When you enter a person's house for the first time it's impossible not to be curious about the owner's personal touches, i.e., the wall decorations, floors and floor coverings, choice of colors on the wall, and various decorative items. These are an expression of the owner's personality and are what add interest to what is otherwise just a building with a foundation, walls and floors. These decorations are the art of the house and what make it a "home". They are what guests look most closely at. Even the plainest building can look like it's worth a million if it's spruced up and even the foundation is sound, the walls are firm, the floors are solid, the windows are shined up and treated! For this reason, our audiences can enjoy these decorations only when everything else is taken care of or they will be distracted by the crack in the wall or the peeling plaster in the bathroom shower.

Embellishments are one of the highlights of our BBS craft. When a big peel-off from a unison note happens with correct vocal production and complete unity, it can knock the wigs off an audience! When a bass section successfully sings from the lower part of its range to the highest part without any flaws in execution, that's finesse! When a lead section sings with total vocal energy and color in a swingy uptune, that's style! When an entire chorus plays with words to make them sound like they are written (ex. "round" or "millions"), that's inflection! THIS is what we live for and pay our dues for and make sacrifices for — this is DECORATION!

Did you want to attend IES and couldn't?

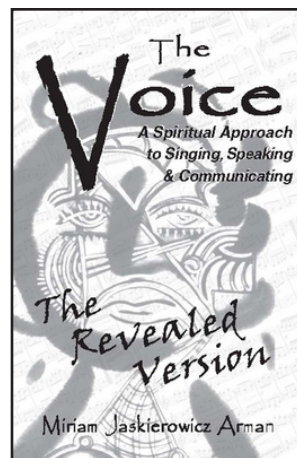
We have Kathy Carmody's class Rehearsal Psychology and Strategies on a podcast for you to experience! You can access this by going to <http://web.mac.com/sweetadelines>. Login: director; Password: sweetadelines.

Since this class had a target audience of directors and assistant directors, this podcast audience will remain consistent in that effort.

BOOK REVIEW

The Voice: A Spiritual Approach to Singing, Speaking & Communicating *The Revealed Version*

By Miriam Jaskierowicz Arman



This book is a very interesting and unique way of approaching vocal production. The author works primarily with stage performers, operatic, Broadway stage and hopefuls. She has found a method of teaching where she is not the singing example to the student. As she so simply puts it, "I am a Teacher, not a Singer." She does, however, address the spiritual aspect of the voice. She states, "I understood from the beginning, that without spirituality, the real potential of the voice could not be accessed."

As a reader you will learn how this method came about, what is in her personal culture and background to direct her in this manner. Many of the ideas in her method are familiar and yet, they are a totally different approach than I have ever read before.

Even though she is a voice teacher and not a choral director, her ideas and tools can be utilized in either setting.

I feel the need to re-read this book because I don't believe that once is enough to best understand this material. There were some real eye-opening moments for me. She has included fantastic drawings of the voice toward the back of the book which, once you find them, will help you to understand what she's writing about. Even though, at first, they remind you of cartoon character heads, you must look at the details to best take in this pictorial representation of the words in the previous chapters.

I highly recommend this book for anyone who is looking for new/different ways to help their singers and/or themselves improve. It's probably not what you're used to. How great is that! One more thing — there is also an audio CD titled *The Voice: A Spiritual Approach to Singing, Speaking and Communicating: The First Lesson* that includes additional materials on vocal production. This is also quite enlightening but I would recommend reading the book first to understand the concepts she's discussing.

Righteous Rehearsal

BY TOM PATRICK MCAULIFFE

TAKEN FROM AUGUST 2006 SINGER & MUSICIAN

Love it or hate it, rehearsal is essential to better performing. From casual musicians getting together to ‘kick out the jams’ and have a few beers, to Vegas headliners going over charts with the band note by note; the time you spend in rehearsal is crucial to both performing better and enjoying your time on stage. I’m always amazed at the different ways bands and performers rehearse. What’s even more surprising is the mystification some have with why the gig didn’t go well. Given that the rehearsals were disorganized and haphazard or even almost nonexistent, the answer is obvious.

Avoiding Boredom

The challenge is to conduct rehearsals that stay interesting, and keep the group, or yourself learning and progressing in musicianship. The key is planning and conducting a rehearsal that is focused on a goal or solving a problem. Using the same approach for every tune or rehearsal will not help your goals as quickly as using different approaches for different problems. Rehearsals must be interesting and fun, not monotonous, lest your people rebel, lose interest, or stop attending. And we all know what happens to a group when one member thinks they are too good to rehearse.

Every performer or group has its own way to practice. Some learn the tune individually and then play it when they come together and some learn the song collectively. Once everyone is on the same page and knows the chord changes, etc., it’s time to put it together. With cover tunes, my approach is to play a recording by the original artist as a point of reference for everyone. Then play(sing) the selection straight through the first time trying to sound as near to the original arrangement as possible. This run through gives you an idea where to begin detail work. Then hold a discussion about the changes we want to make to make the tune our own. Then synergistically, the group comes up with its own version. After playing (singing) that through once or twice, it’s time for a gig level performance. The purpose during this last ‘run through’ is to do everything just like you want the gig performance to be. But every singer and musician makes mistakes. It’s important when they occur that they be acknowledged and addressed. Glossing over problems and continuing to just ‘run through’ a piece will just reinforce mistakes and make correcting them even more difficult.

Play the Bridge

When I rehearse (and I do it everyday), I usually start at the beginning and play the song straight through or until it falls apart. Then I rehearse the trouble spot, restart and continue until you reach the next problem...and so forth. This method is useful when time is short, particularly a week or so before a gig. One other rehearsal technique I’ve used is to ‘play the bridge’. Where sections join, particularly if there is a change of tempo, key, meter, or character, the ‘bridge’ or any special things musically should be rehearsed until everyone feels the changes. Then you can kick it up a notch and play it as you would in a live performance.

Noodle Later

Rehearsal time is a valuable resource, especially if your schedule is tight. Rehearsals are not the time to party or invite guests. Distractions must be kept to a minimum so no TV’s, kids, dogs, cell phones, etc. Stay focused and keep discussions about the tune at hand. Once you have a set list that works it’s important to play a 45-50 minute set straight through. That’s why some rehearsals are for learning new tunes while others are where you try to play as if you are live at a gig.

By allowing the music to develop from early rehearsal stages to final tightness; remembering that a band is about collaboration; and that everyone has something to offer, your rehearsals will be something to look forward to rather than dread. One thing is certain – you’ll play live before an audience just like you do in rehearsal. There’s no magic wand that suddenly turns you into super player right before you hit the stage. The object is to develop practice sessions that work and then do that religiously.