

SESSION BY DR. CHARLENE ARCHIBEQUE 2016

CHAR'S QUICK FIXES for Common Choral Ailments

POSTURE

- Crown on head
- Puppet pulling strings
- Champagne glass between hip and lowest rib
- Pull tape out of top of head
- Shoulders over hips
- Lift sternum
- Shoulders at 4:00 position

TONE

- Chicken wings
- Sharp fingernail down throat
- Dracula “I want your blood!”, Julia Childs: “Crack the egg”
- Lifted eyebrows
- Fish mouth, dixie cup
- Add chords at piano during warm-ups
- Stir giant cauldron—faster, slower
- Spin plates on sticks like juggler
- Sing into a giant barrel
- Cover lips with hands for darker timbre
- Mental images
- Placement of singers

VIBRATO

- When throat is open and muscles of support are engaged, vibrato happens
- Shake hands to get it (Roger Wagner)
- Indian Love Call—top notes like a Theremin (electrophone)
- “Ride the vibrato”—fast runs or triplets
- Straight arm to eliminate it

MORE INTENSITY

- Bending knees
- Holding hands and arms high
- Left hand fist, thumb on top
- Thumbs up—hold plate glass in place against wind—very straight arms
- Rubber bone—pull it sideways
- Rubber band trick
- Demonstrate breathy tone, then spinning tone
- Snore and snarl

LINE

- Tai chi—never let weight settle

Images—pull in 100 pound marlin on fishing line
“Play” string instruments—basses, string bass, tenors cellos etc.
Conductor must minimize rebound—connect beatpoints in figure 8
(See Handout: *50 Ways to Create Line and Forward Motion*)

LATE ENTRANCES

Breathe one measure before song begins
Be sure conductor is breathing one full beat before entrance with open mouth, high eyebrows and facial energy—prep gesture must be proactive with strong impulse of will

Check to make sure all singers are watching conductor for beginning of prep! Train singers to “sense” the breath with all other singers in section—listen and feel for breath uniformity

Conductor must make sure downbeat drives from top of beat to ictus (many conductors use double downbeat without being aware of it—hence singers are not sure when ictus is indicated)

BEHIND THE BEAT

Have singers tap pulse on laps
Tap beats on shoulders of neighbors
Teach singers to internalize the beat: Count aloud 12345678 at 60mm—then silent count 1 thru 8, alternate—as conductor turns hand over singers count different number of beats silently eg,
123456781234567812345678
Insist that singers hold music up very high—and that they connect with conductor on all downbeats and at least once every measure. (Barry Green calls this strong sense of internal pulse of all members *entrainment*. Memorize as much as possible

TUNING PROBLEMS

Singing major scale—eliminate piano-- Point up on third and 7th (and lift eyebrows at same time)
Chromatic scale—Play giant piano in the air—as piano plays, then remove piano; close eyes and sing letter names (sharps up, flats down)
Whole Tone Scales—“She sells sea shells by the shore, She can’t sell them any more”. Sing chromatic and whole tone canons.
Mark half steps with tents, whole steps with tables—often singers are not thinking interval relationships. Isolate and rehearse out of tune intervals, eg. Major 6th, or minor 6th. Teach songs for both ascending and descending intervals. Circle interval of the day.
Circle and identify intervals between parts, eg. Alto and tenor, sop & bass
Teach overtone system—eliminate beats in octaves and fifths
Double bass octaves
Repeat chords on piano on held notes
Walk around room while singing

Stand up to sing—cannot use pelvic tilt when sitting
Take a faster tempo, or a higher or lower key
Change seating positions—put basses behind sopranos

BLEND

Match vowel shapes—use partnering
Use Weston Noble's Voice Matching
Practice in circles—sections in small circles, women encircled by men
Close eyes while rehearsing a section
Divide choir in half—let every other singer sing while other half listens
and critiques
Change standing position of singers

ARTICULATION

Play trumpet
Play piano on arm
Sing on tee or doo
Sing staccato
Pretend to play glockenspiel

BALANCE PROBLEMS

Weak basses—double at 8ve with baritone—increase overtones
Double bass with piano or cello or string bass
Have basses sing brighter & ahead of the beat
Stand basses in middle of choir and across front
Use music with treble divisi
Too many sopranos?
Move some to alto
Choose music with soprano divisi--SSA
Put sopranos along entire back of choir, place altos in front

DYNAMIC CONTROL

Count beats for crescendos and diminuendos—eg. 6 beats cresc. 2 beats
diminuendo (AMEN of Bruckner *Ave Maria*)
Practice conducting and singing at 8 different levels—from ppp to fff
Speak numbers at different dynamic levels—1p up to 5 F

LACK OF MUSICALITY

Speak a poem or the text as a trained actor, with nuance, flexibility,
contrast,
Teach musical ideas: No two consecutive notes, syllables or words can be
sung exactly alike.
Teach agogic accents, mark stress & release (SR) or __ (). Circle stressed
words or syllables
Teach harmonic implications, change tone color to highlight important
chords
Long notes grow or go
Use hand movements

SOME SINGERS NOT ANIMATED?

Divide choir into two long rows—put most alive faces on one side—have dead faces watch as they sing and imitate their favorite expressions
Put animated singers in middle of choir—less animated at edges
Work on appropriate expression during entire rehearsal
Choose most expressive and have rest of their section mirror them

FOCUS

Silent mirroring—start with big motions, then smaller
Change activities often: 2 min. 4 min. 5 min.
Talk quietly, whisper; better yet, don't talk at all; use magic slate
Hum or OO first pitch of each song
Ask questions of entire group, then call on specific people
Write on board, direct attention to a word or a phrase
Use quotations, discuss their application to choir
eg. **"We are what we repeatedly do, therefore, excellence is not an act, but a habit." Aristotle**
"A Chain is as strong as its weakest link; A Choir is as strong as its weakest member"
Put section leaders or singers with sore throat in front of choir and have them take notes on what they see, and what they hear

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