

REPOSITION YOUR SINGERS: REFINE YOUR SOUND is derived from a workshop originally presented at the 2005 National ACDA Convention by Dr. Charlene Archibeque and the San Jose State University Choraliers. Dr. Archibeque has developed her approach to positioning from meeting the challenges of conducting her own choirs as well as countless festival and all-state choirs in a variety of rehearsal and performance situations. Her ideas formed the basis for the planning and production of the recent GIA DVD, "HOW TO MAKE A GOOD CHOIR SOUND GREAT!"

REPOSITION YOUR SINGERS: REFINE YOUR SOUND 2016

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To make any choir sound better:

1. Teach all singers to use their voices correctly
2. Improve your conducting skills
3. Choose the right literature for your choir
4. Try a different standing position:

FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN CHOOSING AN EFFECTIVE STANDING POSITION:

Acoustics of venue

maximum reverb?

in front of curtain, middle of stage, back of stage, apron, pit

altar, chancel, balcony, near audience, on floor, on risers, on steps

reinforcement of overtones

which partials?

which voices sound best in acoustic? sopranos? basses?

Size of stage

spread choir out as much as possible (1 row, 2 row, 3 or 4?)

be sure singers have a window to the conductor

singers need their own space--to move in, to hear in, to BE in

no singer should sing into another person's hair, body, clothes

optimum space between singers for maximum sound is 4 feet!

number of risers (use floor to get four rows, use chairs to add fifth or sixth row)

Number and type of singers

voice matching and blend

"best voice position" in each section

beauty and strength of each voice

color, timbre of each voice (vibrato?)

density and sonority of sound desired by conductor

Musicianship of singers

best ears

secure on part

pitch accuracy

intonation (how will standing position affect the tuning of the choir?)

Literature being performed: construction of each piece: polyphonic,

homophonic, antiphonal, solo section, doubling of parts etc.

balance--can all parts be heard?
weaker section in middle or in front, e.g. tenors
numbers of singers in each section
conductor's ideal sound: pyramid (BTAS) or double pyramid (BT, AS)

Appearance of singers (size, attractiveness)

facial expression

physical involvement

height (avoid very tall next to very short--they can't hear each other)

Special needs : wheel chair, crutches, singers who can't stand or see

CHOIR POSITIONS:

Four rows, three rows, two rows, single line, (five or six rows for large choirs),
Surround sound, sing in the round, in sections, in quartets (scrambled or mixed),
in the aisles, in the back

Spread across the stage--four feet between singers optimum

Horseshoe curve, wide curve, straight line across apron of stage

REHEARSAL POSITIONS:

In parts for learning new music: Basses behind sopranos, tenors behind altos

Men in middle, women on outside (SBTA)

Women on left of conductor, men on right of conductor

SATB (preferably 4 rows, but be sure to alternate rows each week)

In four same-voice rows: altos in front row, sopranos 2nd, basses 3rd, tenors 4th
or: high to low (SATB), or ?

Circles: one large circle around room

men encircling women in circle

women encircling men

sops and basses on outside circle, altos and tenors on inside

four individual parts in separate circles (works if pulse of piece is steady and constant)

Four rows in circle position

try different combinations (tenors in front, then basses, sopranos, altos)

four rows with parts in sections B2B1T2T1 facing S1S2A1A2

In double quartets throughout choir (gives confidence to weak singers)

SSAATTBB

SBTABSAT

BBTTAASS

ATBSATBS

SSBBTTAA

TASBTASB

BBSSAATT

BSATSBTA

Then scrambled formation in random quartets

Alternating sopranos and basses in the back two rows, altos and tenors in the front two:

SSBBSSBBSSBB

BBSSBBSSBBSS

AATTAATTAATTA

TTAATTAATTAATT

Two rows facing each other. Watch and listen to each other.

Two equal choirs listening to each other (side by side or facing one another)

Let section leaders sit in front watching and listening and taking notes

Take turns each day letting different singers sit in front and listen

Many of these rehearsal positions will also work in performance. Let your ear be the guide!

PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS:

Put most beautiful voices in the front--audience hears that sound first (stronger in back or front?)

Minimize problem singers by placing them in front of strong singers or at edges where they don't influence others as much

Consider appearance and animation then place most interesting singers in prominent positions for audience to see

Use singers with best intonation in anchor positions

Separate singers whose voices do not blend or which clash harmonically

Move singers from piece to piece

Get soloists out in front so audience doesn't have to search and so their voices project better

TYPICAL PERFORMANCE POSITIONS:

Men stronger than women: Put men behind women B2B1T2T1
S1S2A1A2

Men weaker than women: Put men in middle and curve women on outer sides: SBTA

All parts equal: Scramble with best voices in front (this is never random, but worked out carefully during rehearsals with key voices in key positions)

ATYPICAL PERFORMANCE POSITIONS:

One section featured: i.e. Sopranos across front or high up in a balcony with rest of choir scrambled (e.g. The Bluebird, Charles Stanford); Tenor solo: Tenors in front of choir (e.g. I'm Gonna Sing, Moses Hogan)

Altos weak: disperse sopranos and basses around edges; put tenors behind altos

SBSB AATTAASBSB

BSBS AAAAAABSBS

Tenors weak, hide worst voices in back and place best in front in triangle

SSSBTTTBAAA

SSSBTTBBAAA

SSBBBTBBBAA

Too many sopranos: place sopranos across back two rows

SSSSSSSSSSSSSS or SSSSSSSSSSSS

SSSSSSSSSSSSSS SSSSSSSSSSSS

AAAABBBBBBAAAAA AAABBBTTTAAAAA

AAAATTTTTTTTAAAAA AAABBBTTTAAAAA

TWO ROW POSITIONS

BT BBTBTT SSBTTAA SBATATBS BBSSAATT

SA SSAASSAA TTAASSBB SBATATBS BBSSAATT

ONE ROW POSITIONS

SSBBTTAA TBSSAABT SBTAATBS SATB BSAT

ANTIPHONAL WORKS

ST BA (Britten, Jubilate Deo)

SBTA ATBS or SATB BTAS or SATB SATB or? Rows, scrambled, etc.

ORCHESTRAL/BAND PERFORMANCES

Keep like parts in same sight lines: sopranos and first violins, altos and seconds, tenors and violas, basses and string basses/celli (SATB)

Always keep highs on left near violins

Weak bass voices: Place cellos and string basses on both outer sides in front of basses on outer sides with instruments in front of women (depends on hall)

Put choir much higher than instruments either behind or in pit with orchestra on stage, or place singers on right or left of instruments. Better: Place singers in front of orchestra (orchestral risers behind)

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Maintain choir's "awareness of its corporateness"--it should look and feel like a choir

Conductor should be as far back as possible to hear what audience will hear--20 or 30 ft

Be sure to go out into hall when choir is warming up before a performance in venue

Get people whose ears you trust to sit in various spots in hall while choir is rehearsing

Be sure singers can hear each other. Bring singers down on floor, keep horseshoe or semicircle

Plan positions and have charts ready prior to rehearsal.

Never use rehearsal time to move voices around except to tweak a new arrangement

Post seating chart as singers enter room. Use name cards on chairs so singers sit exactly in new designated positions.

Missing singers? Practice leaving their spot empty or change positions to eliminate holes?

Singers missing performance? May mean changing entire performance position.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Teaching Choral Music, Don Collins

Choral Directing, Wilhelm Ehmann

Choral Concepts, Don Neuen

Choral Music Education, Paul Roe

Up Front, Guy Webb

This outline parallels material featured in the GIA DVD, "HOW TO MAKE A GOOD CHOIR SOUND GREAT!" Many of these positions will be demonstrated for the Missouri Music Educators Conference in January 2016 with the Lee's Summit High School Chamber Singers directed by Amy Krinke. Dr. Archibeque's basic premise is that the sound of a choir can be changed and improved by judiciously arranging and rearranging singers in both rehearsal and performance. Allowing singers to hear each other in creative and non-traditional arrangements:

- heightens singers' awareness of other voices and parts
- improves balance and blend
- enables the choir director to minimize weaknesses and maximize choirs' strengths

Careful arrangements of singers allow the audience to hear the choir in different ways, improving their enjoyment in the sound of the choir and often their ability to better understand and appreciate the music.