

## The Choral Director as the Voice Teacher

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The benefits of having students in your ensembles participate in voice lessons can be invaluable. The reality is that access to these lessons is not always available or affordable. This participatory session will introduce vocal techniques, literature ideas and rehearsal tips that will strengthen your singers' musicality and promote healthy vocalism throughout your rehearsals. This session is for the "do it all" teacher/conductor searching for more strategies to develop their choral singers' personal vocal development.

### Focusing Your RehEARsal

#### **A. Before Rehearsal**

1. Listen to several recordings to gather an aesthetic appreciation of the various interpretations of the piece.
2. Sing through each part to gather familiarity of the challenges your singer might encounter. Use whatever tool you may ask your choir to use. (solfege, numbers, count singing)
  - a. Take note of:
    1. Range
    2. Tessitura
    3. Passaggio
    4. Difficult intervals
3. Re-listen to a single recording and focus your EAR to one voice part. Do this for each vocal part.
4. Redo step 3 but close your eyes and try to hear one voice part at a time.
5. Recite the text of the piece (out of rhythm).
  - a. Take note of:
    1. Text stress
    2. Vowels (diphthongs, modification, unification etc...)
    3. Consonants (combination, 'wh vs w', pronunciation of 'the')
6. Recite the text of each voice part in rhythm
  - a. Take note of
    1. Difficult rhythms
    2. Meter changes
    3. Where the setting doesn't match the spoken text stress
    4. Words you can't define
7. Sing through each line on text
  - a. Take note of:
    1. Text stress
    2. Vowels (diphthongs, modification, unification etc...)

3. Consonants (voiced vs. unvoiced, combination, ‘wh vs w’, pronunciation of ‘the’ – th”ee,” – before vowel, th”uh,” (schwa) – before a consonant or th”oo” (as in hook) – for removing the unintentional stress

8. Conducting for comprehension  
a. your gesture will affect your singers tone.

### **B. Error Detection Hierarchy**

1. Rhythm The right note at the wrong time is still a wrong note!
  - a. Diction
    1. Consonants
      - a. Execution
      - b. Placement
    - b. Tempo
      1. rushing
      2. dragging
      3. phasing
  2. Pitch
    - a. Accuracy
    - b. Intonation
  3. Tone
    - a. Quality
      1. Placement
      2. Chiaroscuro
    - b. Appropriateness for piece
      1. Genre (madrigal, motet)
      2. Style (individual composer characteristics)
  4. Sound (Texture)
    - a. Performance forces/balance
      1. a cappella
      2. instruments
    - b. Hierarchy of voices
      1. melody
      2. counter-melody
  5. Harmony
    - a. cadence structures
      1. intonation implications
    - b. tonal areas
      1. major vs. minor vs. modal
      2. relationship to text

### Rehearsal Strategies

#### **A. Vocal Techniques**

1. Unifying the registers:
  - a. Descending scale (passaggio)
    - Men: falsetto to head voice,
    - Ladies: bringing head voice down (no belt)

- b. Trumpet exercise (do re do so la so do)
2. **Messa di voce:** singing a on a single sustained note maintaining consistent resonance and vibrato while evenly increasing and then decreasing volume throughout the note.

Benefits:

- 1. build stamina through increasing the duration of the sustained note.
- 2. breath management **NOT** control
- 3. tone builder!
- 4. opportunity to incorporate kinesthetic learning
- 5. builds musicianship
  - single voice example
  - chordal example

3. Developing vocalism

a. Releasing the tone – onset:

- 1. (“e” 4 note exercise)
- 2. physical gesture

b. Imagination (imagery) – feeling the voice

- 1. Figurative language
- 2. The V (vibrato) word
  - a. Connected to emotion (find recordings of solo singers)
  - b. Colors as a motivator of a change in emotion
  - c. Descriptors for change – pitch variation, business, contemporary tone

c. Modeling

4. Placement – where singers direct sound

- Chiaroscuro:

- a. Chiaro – bright tone quality (forward)
- b. Oscuro – dark tone quality (back)
- c. Chiaroscuro - balanced

**B. Literature**

- 1. Using Italian Art Songs in class (all sing Gia il sole)
  - a. Use them on your concerts
  - b. Benefits of singing unison
    - 1. Intonation
    - 2. Quick lesson
    - 3. Options for semester exams
- 2. Text/Translations (rehearsal application)
  - a. Dona nobis pacem (example)
  - b. Draw connections: Teach the men’s or women’s choir the solo version and teach your mixed choir the choral version (Brahms: Der Gang Zum Liebchen)

**C. Collaboration/Encouragement/Programming**

- 1. Invite professional singers into your rehearsal
- 2. Let students who are taking lesson sing in front of the class or on concerts
  - a. Set it up as a reward
- 3. Set up a lesson program
  - a. Skype

- b. During class - if you invite people in
  - c. Set up class voice in your curriculum
- 4. Participate in Solo/Ensemble
- 5. Sing for your students (be a model)
  - a. They need to hear what you sound like when you are NOT screaming their parts and are REALLY using your voice
    - 1. In class
    - 2. On concerts (dedicate a song to them)
- 6. For those “BIG” voices –
  - a. explore the literature of vocal chamber music of the Romantic Era (Mendelssohn, Brahms, etc...)
    - 1. Brahms (vocal chamber music, i.e. Ziguenerlieder)
  - b. choral arrangements
    - 1. Danza Danza Fanciulla (choral)
  - c. Mozart – accessible small choral works with solos
    - 1. Veni Sancte Spiritus
    - 2. KV 275 Bb major