

PEGGY DETTWILER, DMA – CHORAL CONDUCTOR & CLINICIAN

WORKSHOPS & PRESENTATIONS

The CONDUCTOR as CHOREOGRAPHER: DANCING WITH YOUR HANDS

Most choral conductors agree that we strive for choral performances that present healthy, vibrant singing, and appropriately render the music as written in the score. We encourage our singers in rehearsal to take deep – expansive breaths, maintain good posture, and respond to the musical demands for articulation and dynamic contrasts. Some of this teaching could take place without words, simply by the way we present ourselves as conductors. Our posture and conducting gestures can have a direct influence on the sound and musicality produced by our choirs. They mirror us! As conductors, we need to have the physical posture of a singer with an expansive conducting vocabulary to more accurately inspire our singers to portray the composer's intentions without continual reminders.

Choral conducting is an applied art, which should be practiced before rehearsals and performances as one would practice the violin, piano, or the voice. Laban Movement Analysis is a method and language for describing, visualizing, interpreting, and documenting all varieties of human movement. It originated from the work of Rudolf Laban, one of the pioneers of modern dance in Europe, and has been developed and extended by Lisa Ullman and Irmgard Bartenieff, among others. Various conductors have studied this dance notation and developed an approach of Laban Movement Analysis to conducting.

The session will present Laban-Bartenieff movement as applied to conducting in the realms of space, weight, and time. Basic effort action combinations of float, punch, glide, slash, dab, wring, flick, and press will be demonstrated with musical examples to include audience participation. Throughout the clinic, the presenter will affirm the philosophy that a choral conductor's presence should be the reflection of a singer.

I. Laban-Bartenieff movement as applied to conducting

- A. Dimensional/Defense Scale
 - 1. Rising with lightness
 - 2. Sinking with strength
 - 3. Narrowing with directness
 - 4. Widening with flexibility
 - 5. Retreating with quickness
 - 6. Advancing with sustainment
- B. Basic effort action combinations
 - 1. Float
 - 2. Punch
 - 3. Glide
 - 4. Slash
 - 5. Dab
 - 6. Wring
 - 7. Flick
 - 8. Press
- C. Applications to music
 - 1. Musical drills
 - 2. "The Last Words of David" (Thompson)
 - 3. "See the chariot at hand" (Vaughan Williams)
 - 4. "Worthy is the Lamb" (Messiah – Handel)

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DEVELOPING A VOCAL COLOR PALETTE FOR VARIOUS CHORAL STYLES

Choral directors with a basic knowledge of vocal pedagogy can work very effectively within the rehearsal to develop the vocal ability of all singers. Vocal techniques can improve the tone quality and intonation of the entire ensemble and address the stylistic interpretation of choral repertoire from the Renaissance to the Contemporary as well as capture the sounds of other cultures. The voice is capable of changing tone color, singing with healthy technique in both the modal and head voice register, executing contrasting dynamics, performing melismatic passages with great agility, achieving precise intonation and blend, and producing non-traditional vocal sounds. This presentation will demonstrate techniques of posture and breathing, head-voice resonance, flexibility, range and dynamics, bright and dark vocal color as well as overtone singing, and will apply these techniques to specific choral works.

Technique

Posture and breathing:

Haste thee, nymph – Handel (Walton)

Head-voice resonance and choral blend

The Lamb – Tavener (Chester)

Flexibility:

Kyrie (Requiem)

Mozart (Hanssler)

Range & dynamics

Last words of David – Thompson (E. C. Schirmer)

Bright vocal color

Ngana – Stephen Leek (Morton)

Dark vocal color

Soon ah will be done – Loomer (Music 70)

Overtone singing

Past Life Melodies – Sarah Hopkins (Morton)

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THE ART OF SCORE PREPARATION

A method of score study presented as a three-phase process that reveals the depth and soul of choral literature and leads the way to creativity and confidence in the choral rehearsal.

PREPARING TWO CHORAL WORKS FOR REHEARSAL

The Last Words of David by Randall Thompson (1899-1984)

Jesus said to the Blind Man by Melchior Vulpius (1570-1615)

I. Phase one

1. Number the measures.
2. Type out the words to the music and attach to the octavo. Read the text aloud with great care for inflection and meaning. If the text is in a foreign language, write in a word for word translation and a pronunciation guide using the phonetic alphabet.
3. Play through the composition to determine the overall harmonic scheme and formal structure. Label the sections with A, B, or some other system. Draw vertical lines between measures to separate sections or phrases.
4. Analyze the piece with at least one chord per measure.
5. Circle or underscore all printed instructions and dynamics. Use a colored pencil marking system.
6. Mark important entrances of the voices and accompaniment.
7. Make a chart of the piece showing the formal plan, text, meter & tempo changes, harmonic flow, dynamic changes, texture, and accompaniment (if applicable).
8. Research the composer/arranger of the music and the source of the text. Write program notes and include a brief biographical sketch. Include three sources.

II. Phase two

1. Sing through each part and mark potential problem spots.
 - a. difficult intervals
 - b. places where voice crossing occurs
 - c. spots where there will be rhythmic insecurity
2. Mark all breaths in each voice part. Indicate where the choir will need to rewrite the notation to facilitate a more accurate singing of the note values.
3. Circle or highlight the words or syllables that need to be stressed.
Write in the word for word translation.
4. Determine the tempo the piece is to be sung and indicate a metronome marking in the score. Mark all ritards (those printed as well as those added.)
5. Look for suspensions that will require special attention to stress followed by a softening of the tone.
6. Determine if there are instances of word painting. If so, how can they be highlighted?
7. Study the rhythmic movement and write in accents and articulation or dynamic markings that will help to propel the motion forward or provide stylistic clarity.

III. Phase three

1. Develop a conducting approach according to the Laban/Bartenieff model and write in the styles: float, punch, dab, slash, flick, press, wring, or glide.
2. Work out specific gestures for: a. entrances b. releases c. dynamics d. tempo changes
3. PRACTICE your gestures in silence or by singing a part.

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DESIGNING VOCAL WARM-UPS FOR SPECIFIC CHORAL WORKS

Much can be done within the choral rehearsal to develop the vocal and aural skills of each singer, thereby improving the tone quality and intonation of the entire ensemble. In fact, the choral rehearsal may be the only place where such training takes place, since the ensemble members seldom have private voice lessons.

This presentation demonstrates a six-step sequential approach to choral warm-ups, providing exercises for relaxation, posture and breathing, developing head-voice resonance, vitality and flexibility, and intonation. Dr. Dettwiler creates warm-ups that prepare the singer for the style, mood, key, and technical difficulties in repertoire from various historical periods. The coordination of choral warm-ups in the rehearsal with specific choral works leads to greater musical understanding and more sensitive musical performances for choral singers.

I. A six-step sequential approach to choral warm-ups

- A. Physical exercises for relaxation and stimulation
- B. Posture and breathing
- C. Phonation (head-voice resonance, vowels and blend)
- D. Vitality and animation (dynamics, articulation, movement, and facial expression)
- E. Vocal technique (flexibility, range, and stylistic concepts)
- F. Aural skills (tonal and/or rhythm)

II. Application of the six-step approach to specific choral works

- A. Renaissance example: "If ye love me" (Tallis)
- B. Baroque example: "For unto us a child is born" (Handel)
- C. Classical example: "Kyrie" from Mass in D Minor (Haydn)
- D. Nineteenth-century example: "Neighbors Chorus" (Bruckner)
- E. Twentieth-century example: "Magnificat" (Part)
- F. Folk-song style: "Black is the color" (Churchill)

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GETTING “HEADY” WITH HIGH SCHOOL SINGERS!

Developing a freely-produced, well-supported head voice is the greatest factor towards achieving good intonation and blend in the high school choral ensemble. This presentation demonstrates techniques for developing a buoyant and lyric head tone in both female and male singers during the choral rehearsal. Recordings of four high school choirs will present examples of choral tone with and without the use of excellent head voice production. The audience will be invited to participate in the vocal exercises.

- I. Physiological characteristics
 - A. Registration
 - B. Head voice resonance
- II. Vocal techniques
 - A. Body alignment
 - B. Abdominal breathing
 - C. Palatal space
 - D. Vertical vowel formation
- III. Application to choral music

THE CHORAL DIRECTOR AS VOICE TEACHER

The majority of choral ensemble singers do not study voice privately. Many common performance problems result from underdeveloped vocal skills. Choral directors, who have a basic knowledge of vocal pedagogy, can work very effectively within the choral rehearsal to develop the vocal ability of each singer, thereby improving the tone quality and intonation of the entire ensemble as well the stylistic interpretation of choral repertoire. This presentation demonstrates techniques of breathing, resonance, range, dynamics, flexibility, intonation, and diction, and make applications to specific choral works.

Technique Choral selection

Breathing: Hallelujah, Amen – Handel

Head voice resonance: Black is the color – arr. Churchill

Vocal colors: Ngana/Soon ah will be done

Flexibility: Kyrie – Mozart

Range & dynamic contrast: The Last Words of David – Thompson

Intonation: The Lamb – Tavener

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN VOCAL TECHNIQUES FOR CHOIRS

This session demonstrates the similarities and differences in working with the female and male voice in a choral setting. Dr. Dettwiler incorporates vocalises and rehearsal methods using audience members as a choir. Participants learn about vocal techniques and choral tone through warm-ups, recordings, and with choral literature for the female and male voices, respectively.

- I. Exercises to develop good posture and breathing
- II. Differences in resonance and registration between men and women
 - A. Falsetto, head voice, and chest voice
 - B. Vowel placement
 - C. Vocal color
 - D. High range and low range
- III. Applications to choral literature
 - A. Women: Turot eszik a cigany – Kodaly
 - B. Men: Sometimes I feel like a motherless child – Gilbert

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GRADING THE CHORAL ENSEMBLE...NO MORE EXCUSES!

Assessment of the choral ensemble is often a challenging task for directors. Because much rehearsal time is spent with group activities that are difficult to measure objectively as individual contributions, many directors choose to grade their students on attendance alone. While this helps in building group cohesion, it does not address the issue of individual musical development. As we work to promote advocacy in the arts, it becomes increasingly important that we address assessment in the performing ensemble.

This session presents several examples of grading a choral ensemble: by attendance alone, through student self-assessment, with a rating-scale, and by incorporating a highly developed point-system. The presentation is based upon an article that was published in *The Choral Journal* in April 1995.

THE CHORAL REHEARSAL: PROCESS TO PRODUCT

Successful performances are grounded in a creative, yet systematic, rehearsal process that builds confidence through musical security and knowledge. The process should involve layers of learning centered upon the elements of music: rhythm, pitch, harmony, texture, and tone color, combined with articulation, dynamics, and cultural understanding.

This presentation will include a clinic involving the audience attending the session in a rehearsal of four selections of music in contrasting styles. The workshop will focus on specific concepts related to each piece and will demonstrate rehearsal techniques that define an efficient and effective rehearsal process resulting in a musical product that is grounded in healthy vocal technique and musical understanding.

» **Haste thee, nymph.....G. F. Handel (Walton W7007)**

Concepts: F major tonality, Baroque style, staccato diction, vocal flexibility

Techniques:

1. Incorporate solfege for tonal security
2. Emphasize breath connection with onset exercises
3. Include vocal exercises that develop agility
4. Unify diction through the "Shaw chord"
5. Encourage expressive faces with "lottery game"

» **Lux aurumque.....E. Whitacre (Walton WJMS1024)**

Concepts: c# minor tonality, contemporary style, legato diction, unified vowels, head-voice production, minimal vibrato

Techniques:

1. Incorporate solfege and count-singing in learning process
2. Vocalize for head-voice blend and minimal vibrato
3. Work for effective cluster chords through half and whole step exercises
4. Demonstrate ways to achieve balance on Whitacre's chord clusters

» **Pseudo-yoik.....J. Mäntyjärvi (Walton WW1272)**

Concepts: a minor to A major tonality, bright ethnic timbre, Finnish dialect, changing meter

Techniques:

1. Incorporate count-singing for rhythmic understanding
2. Vocalize using tongue vowels and consonants with nasal forward placement: ee, aa, ay, z, y, v, m, n, ng
3. Sing the text on the "Shaw chord" for uniformity
4. Incorporate vocalises featuring parallel 4ths & 5ths

» **Soon ah will be done.....D. Loomer (Alfred LG70600)**

Concepts: d minor tonality, dark vocal color, dynamic contrast, swinging rhythm, legato diction with dialect

Techniques:

1. Vocalize using lip vowels "oo, oh, ah" on various exercises
2. Sing pitches & rhythms on neutral syllable with dark tone color

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3. Strive for low breath connection with sustained singing
4. Teach healthy vocal production for forte and pianissimo dynamics
5. Rehearse text on Shaw chord for uniformity of dialect

» **Black is the color.....arr. Stuart Churchill (Shawnee Press)**

Concepts: f minor tonality, folk-song style, legato diction, head voice production

Techniques:

1. incorporate solfege into the learning process
2. work at a soft dynamic level with “oo” vowel to produce lilting head voice production
3. sing piece on “doo”
4. build phrasing with word stress and minimal “r”