

DrW's Choral Singing Tips (9-1-07)

Breath

- Good inhalation feels low in the torso, rather than high in the chest.
- Upon exhalation (singing) there is a generous release of air.
- Breathing well in advance leads to a poised onset of tone.

Posture

- The key to good seated posture is an expanded rib-cage. Lift the rib-cage up, off the hips.
- When standing, knees are slightly bent (unlocked) so that hips are directly beneath spine. Standing posture should feel athletic and poised for action.
- The head is always aligned so that ears are over the spine.

Pitch

- Initial pitches must be mentally prepared. Hear the pitch before singing. Mental preparation results in natural preparation of the breath, resonators, and vocal cords.
- Pitches are perfect when there is ample air flow, ample space in the mouth and throat, and mental focus on the vowel: air, space, and vowel.

Resonance

- The quality of resonance depends on the size of the space in the mouth and throat (pharynx); a raised palate (like the beginning of a yawn) creates a large space in the throat
- Adequate space in the throat often feels like too much space. Make more space than seems necessary.

Rhythm

- Rhythmic pulse must be internalized.
- Pick-up notes must not disturb the rhythmic pulse that proceeds.
- The pick-up note is the note of energy (departure); the downbeat is the note of poise (arrival).
- Dotted notes normally have a shape [\triangleleft]; be mindful so that the note that follows the dotted note is not late.

Phrasing

- A musical phrase is initiated by a gentle release of air.
- A musical phrase is dynamic and elastic, rather than static or stiff. A musical phrase unfolds both rhythmically and dynamically toward the peak of the phrase, which is often 3/4 of the way through.
- Notes tied across a bar generally crescendo.
- The final note of a phrase must be tapered and poised; it is never louder than the previous note.

Vowels

- Purify diphthongs—
[AI] as in 'high' is [A] as in 'hot' for 90% of the length of the note; then [I] as in 'hit'
[AU] as in 'now' is [A] as in 'not' for 90% of the length of the note
- [e] as in 'made' should be sung more closed (leaning toward 'ee' [i])
- Omit final [r]. Our Father who art in heaven.
- Infuse 'uh' sounds with 'ah' [a]. above, among, the love.

Consonants

- Consonants come ahead of the beat, vowels come on the beat
- Tone is sustained on vowels; delay consonants; final consonants are attached to the word that follows:
“I wa.....ntfor nothing,” “swee...tlo...vedo.....thno...winvite.”
- These consonants have exact pitch (voiced): BDGJKLPRTZ. They are joined with a neutral vowel (‘schwa). The nearest English sound is ‘uh.’ Example: If ye love me keep (uh) my command (uh) ments (uh)
- The nasal, or hummed, consonants [m] and [n] also have exact pitch. They are therapeutic for the voice and clarify diction
- Consonants [r] and [l] can stiffen the tongue and hinder easy production of tone; minimize and delay these consonants; use a flipped [r] and a European [l] that is made with the tip of the tongue.

Dynamics

- Dynamics markings are better understood as a color, mood, or *Affekt*, rather than simply as a level of volume.
- *Forte* is an Italian word that means ‘strong,’ rather than ‘loud.’
- Even the loudest sounds must be beautiful; never sing over the ‘beauty thresh-hold’.

Choral Score

- The markings on the page are most often a mere suggestion of what the composer intended. Realization of the composer’s intention requires imagination.
- There must be a balance between looking at the music and looking at the conductor. Look at the music to assimilate the next phrase, and then look at the conductor so that you are part of the ensemble. At the end of a phrase, look at the music again, etc.
- It is essential that every singer mark in his/her score every instruction from the conductor.
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Teamwork

- It is not appropriate to correct a fellow chorister. It will lead to hurt feelings. It is the job of the conductor to address musical concerns.
- It is not appropriate to talk during rehearsal. It causes inefficiency and wastes valuable rehearsal time. Even discussions about the music are confusing to others and make it hard to hear the instructions of the conductor.
- It is essential that every singer no where we are at all times, and be prepared to begin immediately.
- Rehearsals are not a time for note-learning. It is a time when we bring together the fruits of our musical labor at home with your rehearsal CD.

Sing Well - DrW