

The CHORAL DIRECTOR as the VOICE TEACHER

Exploring Rehearsal Strategies

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Dr. Derrick Fox is the Director of Choral Activities and Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Nebraska-Omaha and previously served as Assistant Professor of Music Education and Choral Conducting in the Ithaca College School of Music. Dr. Fox has also served on the faculties of MacArthur Junior HS in AR., Parkway North HS and Maryville University in MO. He earned a Bachelor of Music Education from Arkansas State University, a Master of Music in Choral Conducting from the University of Missouri – Columbia and a Doctor of Musical Arts in Choral Conducting from Michigan State University, where he was awarded the prestigious University Enrichment Graduate Fellowship Award.

Dr. Fox is an active adjudicator, clinician and conductor for regional, state, national and international organizations that represent singers from youth choirs to the collegiate and community choirs. He has presented sessions nationally and internationally that focus on assessment in the choral classroom, building classroom community, rehearsal strategies, diversity, choral conducting techniques and shape note singing in the African American community.

Dr. Fox is an active baritone soloist and as an author, he has written articles for many organizations and was a contributing author in the Hal Leonard/McGraw Hill choral textbook *Voices in Concert*. His compositions and arrangements are published by Hal Leonard and BriLee Music. His resource book, *Yes You Can: A Band Director's Guide to Teaching Choirs* is published by Brilee/Carl Fischer.



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. (should this be "of" and not "on"?)
 - 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 vowe, 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:

- a. Build stamina through increasing the duration of the sustained note.
- b. Breath management *NOT* control.
- c. Tone builder!
- d. Opportunity to incorporate kinesthetic learning.
- e. Builds musicianship
 1. single voice example
 2. 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(ibrato) 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, and contemporary tone.
- c. Modeling

4. Placement (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 - invite people
- 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. *Zigunerlieder*)
- b. Choral arrangements
 1. *Danza Danza Fanciulla* (choral)
- c. Mozart – accessible small choral works with solos
 1. *Veni Sancte Spiritus*
 2. KV 275 B \flat major



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DR. DERRICK FOX, CLINICIAN

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