

Building Beautiful Sound: Tools and Principles

Or...

How do I Make 'em Sing Better?

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Introduction

What is a quality sound?

1. Age Appropriate
2. Consistent in all registers
3. Flexible
4. Healthy
5. Stylistic Considerations

What is GREAT choral tone...Digging Deeper (could have a few video clips, perhaps, same song but 2 different choirs)

1. What changes from choir to choir? Age, training, styles, growing, vibrato, chiaroscuro balance. (Analogy of a car...one for gas mileage another for hauling a trailer), stylistic ideals
2. What doesn't change: healthy, consistent through registers, artful, expressive

Challenges we all face:

Models are important. Most singers have no models in their day to day experience. (most young singers listen to pop music exclusively, not a good model, usually)

1. Share great music, especially by singers that are exemplars of the type of ensemble you direct.
2. Celebrate the great singers in your program. Describe why you like their sound.

Age Appropriate Sound

1. We envy/admire great singing by fine choirs. Too often, we hear an older or more mature group and want our younger singers to emulate that sound. Find models that exemplify fine singing that are age appropriate and emulate those models.
2. always encourage/model to our singers to sing with tall round vowels and make the most mature sound for our age level.

Singers don't take voice lessons

1. We are the only voice teacher most of our singers will ever have. It is important to approach each lesson as an opportunity to improve their technical ability and understanding of how we sing well.

Other Barriers?

Vocal Pedagogy for Choral Directors

Practical Tools to Build Beautiful Voices:

Choirs singing beautifully is a learned skill. The singer is a vocal athlete and like all athletes, systematic training is the way we grow our ability. A regimen of warm-ups is essential to building sound. We have to coach our singers to the sound and healthy vocal production that we desire every day of rehearsal.

Posture and Breath: The foundation of tone

Breath starts with attention and posture. Do not lift the shoulders. Chest out is a fiction. Shoulders back is a fiction. Head balanced on the spine. Knees shoulder width apart and unlocked. Pelvis released and wide. Use active physical engagement at the beginning of rehearsal to reteach singers how to use their body when they sing. Revisit these as necessary to reset. We're developing HABITS...repeat, repeat, repeat until they become normal

(We live and die by our habits-the choral director must regularly scan the room to fix poor posture, ensure mentally-focused singers, and inspire greatness.)

Exercises: *Raggedy Ann and Andy, Spine, 1000 Stretches, Shake it Out, Show Me, Physical Cannons*

The Vocal Folds

Vocal folds have two functions anatomically; one, their adduction controls the rate of exhalation and two, creating the vibrations (glottal source) that is acted on by the resonators to make our sound.

Challenges with adduction/abduction: Avoid Glottal Stroke (tense) and Airy onset resulting in inefficient vibrations.

Sequencing Principles:

1. Legato exercises FIRST.
2. Start in the mid-low range and slowly expand using Vocalizes with a range of a 3rd or 5th.
3. Begin with liquids lip buzzes, nasals [m, n, ŋ]
4. Next use voiced fricatives followed by pure vowels. Ex., [v, f, z, ʒ θ] etc. followed by [a, i, o, u, ε]
5. Save highest and lowest range extension for the END of the warm-up (Exercise: 5+9 scale)
6. The Miracle of the Straw. *Balancing Sub and Supra glottic pressure.*

Developing Vibrato/Flexibility and Freedom

1. Build up to quick exercises. Remember, staccato/marcato singing, especially at loud dynamics and in extreme registers is the most challenging singing our singers are asked to do. SLOW DOWN. When they can do it really well...slowly speed up and expand range.
2. Utilizing Movement: *Salmon Swim, Energy Ball, Cello, Shift*
3. Putting it together...all exercises are cumulative...go backwards as needed: *Try this, Which is Better, Show Me,*

Building Volume Control

1. Loud singing should never be tense. Always use enough air...never muscle. Release. Problem Reduction: *Never Louder than Beautiful, Where is Your Audience?, Pointer Finger, Breath does the Work, Release.*

2. Soft Singing: Never Softer than Effective, always on the breath, always maintaining the singer's formant. Don't collapse the vowel. Soft singing is ENGAGED singing: *Pant, Start with your best sound..., Where is your audience? Piano voice...Forte Consonants, Imagery (What are you trying to say?)...aka, 'Why are you Singing soft?*

Issues with Space:

Oropharynx, Laryngopharynx. **Rundus** Resource (Tone Factory/Vowel Factory). Don't mess with the larynx placement...up or down. Illustrate with yawn and sigh. *Larynx Check, Check your Tongue, Vowels and larynx*. Independence of Articulators (Pair front/ back vowels, high/low vowels and different consonants that move the tongue/lips in different combinations.

1. Neutral Larynx: Don't engage swallowing or yawn muscles: *Larynx Check, Vowels change: tongue root is stable. Stay in your lane, Baby Bird and Diphthongs, Tone Factory...off limits, Vowel Factory...where we work*
2. The Problem with the Soft Palate: *Silent Breath, GAH GAH GAH (ligual palatal plosive for positional awareness)*
3. Tongue Position...GO HOME...lives against the bottom front teeth...90% of the time.: High/Low and Front/Back, Independence. *Fix the L, Four R's, Thuffering Thuckatash (Sylvester the Cat)*
4. The Velar Flap: Open or Closed and how do you know? *The MC and the Diva, M...illustration.*

The Articulators:

Tongue; back of the tongue is NOT shoved into the Tone Factory (larynx is stable) Stop talking about the Soft Palate....and the diaphragm.

Chiaroscuro Balance: Consistent sound requires consistent overtones. Overtones are the function of the glottal source, modified by the vocal tract (some frequencies attenuated, some frequencies amplified). The 'Tone Factory,' where we make vowel shapes, needs to be consistent to establish blend and balance. Artificially loud and muffled overtones cause individuals to stick out...even if volume is the same. *Woofers and Tweeters, Don Giovanni, Mama Made Me Mash My M&M's, 10 O'Clock- 3 O'clock, Nair Nair, Nyon Nyon*

Vibrato: Age appropriate. Healthy adult phonation will use vibrato...or not if they choose. How to build a healthy vibrato: It is NOT a result of moving the jaw or larynx. It is a result of electronic impulses, sent to the muscles, in cycles. The cycle rate is the rate of the vibrato (if everything else is relaxed and released) A consistent vibrato speed results from released and relaxed muscles operating efficiently with tonus (neither too hot nor too cold...) *Release, Shake it, Models, Allow,*

Some Specific Problems and How to FIX them:

R- *Four R's*

L- *Stop hiding*

The problem with oo...Vowel Exercises and sequences to optimize space and resonance

Spread [i]- *Awareness...hand signs, check your corners*

Add Space as You Ascend- Women- *oo, oh, ah*

Focus as you go Low- *Larynx Check, Elongate, Narrow, Relax and Release. Never Pressed*

(Exercise: ee oh ah)

Other Practical Strategies to Build Tone in Rehearsal:

- Avoid singing with less than an exemplary sound.
- Problem Reduction
- Transition warm-up into repertoire. Review warm-ups in transitions to other pieces. Stop and vocalize...teach tone as intentionally as we teach repertoire.
- Don't send spam mail...individual instructions.
- 'Catch' them being good...
- Don't sing high until everything else is learned.
- Do it on one note
- Speed it up/slow it down
- Out of Time

Clinician Bios-

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Ensembles under Eychaner's direction have been featured at nine state, divisional and national conventions. He has led performances of more than fifty honor choirs including all states in Missouri, Colorado and Kentucky. He has conducted dozens of major works with professional, school and community ensembles. The UTPB Choirs performed in Carnegie Hall in 2018.

Dr. Eychaner is an internationally recognized choral pedagogy, having presented over 100 interest sessions on diverse topics including vocal and choral pedagogy, rehearsal techniques, artistry, contemporary vocal ensembles, conducting, ensemble culture, leadership and more at NAFME and ACDA conventions and abroad in Korea, Mexico and Cuba.

In addition to numerous articles in the *Choral Journal* and various state journals, Eychaner's first book, ***Foundations of Conducting Technique***, was released by GIA Publications in January 2020.

He is the Artistic Director of the *Vocalterra International Choral Festival* held annually in Tlaxcala, Mexico.

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Dr. John Martin Petzet is Assistant Professor of Music and Director of Choral Activities at the University of Nebraska-Kearney. He conducts the Choraleers, Collegium, Men's and Women's Choruses, and teaches Secondary Choral Methods and Choral Conducting. He is a native of Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he taught middle school and high school for 5 years.

He has conducted honor choirs across Louisiana and in Colorado, was invited to teach at the West Texas Choral Workshop, and to teach, present, and conduct at La Universidad Autónoma De Ciudad Juárez and to work with the *Anáíma Ensemble Vocal* in Juárez, Mexico.

Dr. Petzet has also written two compact disc reviews for the *Choral Journal* and has presented interest sessions in Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah.

He also sang, toured, and recorded with the Kansas City Chorale under the direction of Charles Bruffy during the 2003-2004 season. While performing with the Chorale, he sang on the Chandos recording of Alexandre Grechaninov's *Passion Week*, which won a Grammy for Best Engineered Classical Album. He resides in Kearney, Nebraska with his lovely wife Jennifer and his 3 children: Zachary, Andrew, and Catherine.