

**WASHINGTON ACDA, DR. CHARLENE ARCHIBEQUE, JULY 2009**

**CHAR'S QUICK FIXES for Common Choral Ailments**

**POSTURE**

Crown on head  
Puppet pulling strings  
Champagne glass between hip and lowest rib  
Pull tape out of top of head  
Lift sternum  
Put shoulders over hips

**TONE**

Chicken wings  
Sharp fingernail  
Lifted eyebrows  
Add chords at piano during warm-ups  
Stir giant cauldron—faster, slower  
Spin plates on sticks like juggler  
Fingers in cheeks to open throat

**VIBRATO**

Shake hands to get it (Roger Wagner)  
Indian Love Call—top notes like a Theremin (electrophone)  
“Ride the vibrato”—fast runs or triplets—vary vowels ee, ay, ah, oh  
Straight arm to eliminate it

**MORE INTENSITY**

Bending knees  
Singing in a barrel  
Holding hands and arms high  
Left hand fist, thumb on top  
Thumbs up—hold plate glass in place against strong wind  
Rubber bone—pull it sideways  
Rubber band trick

**LINE**

Tai chi—never let weight settle  
Images—pull in 100 pound marlin on fishing line  
“Play” string instruments—basses--string bass, tenors cellos etc.  
Conductor must minimize rebound—connect beatpoints in figure 8  
See handout—“50 ways to teach line”

**LATE ENTRANCES**

Breathe one measure before song begins (or 2 beats through nose)  
Be sure conductor is breathing one full beat before entrance with open  
mouth and energy—prep gesture must be proactive with strong  
impulse of will  
Tap beats on shoulders of neighbors  
Check to make sure all singers are watching conductor for beginning of  
prep! Train singers to “sense” the breath with all other singers in  
section—listen and feel for breath uniformity

Conductor must make sure downbeat drives from top of beat to ictus  
(many conductors use double downbeat without being aware of it—hence  
singers are not sure when ictus is indicated)

### **BEHIND THE BEAT**

Have singers tap pulse on laps

Teach singers to internalize the beat: Count aloud 12345678 at 60mm—  
then silent count 1 thru 8, alternate—as conductor turns hand over singers  
count different number of beats silently eg, 123456781234567812345678

Insist that singers hold music up very high—and that they connect with  
conductor on all downbeats and at least once every measure. (Barry  
Green calls this strong sense of internal pulse of all members *entrainment*)

Memorize as much as possible

### **TUNING PROBLEMS**

Singing major scale—eliminate piano-- Point up on third and 7<sup>th</sup> (and lift  
eyebrows at same time)

Chromatic scale—Play giant piano in the air—as piano plays, then remove  
piano; close eyes and sing letter names (sharps up, flats down)

Whole Tone Scales—“She sells sea shells by the shore, She can’t sell  
them any more”

Mark half steps with tents, whole steps with tables—often singers are not  
thinking interval relationships. Isolate and rehearse out of tune  
intervals, eg. Major 6<sup>th</sup>, or minor 6<sup>th</sup>. Teach songs for both  
ascending and descending intervals.

Circle and identify intervals between parts, eg. Alto and tenor, sop & bass

Teach overtone system—eliminate beats in octaves and fifths

Double bass octaves

Repeat chords on piano on held notes

Walk around room while singing

Stand up to sing

Take a faster tempo, or a higher or lower key

Change seating positions—put basses behind sopranos

### **BLEND**

Match vowel shapes—use partnering

Use Weston Noble’s Voice Matching

Practice in circles—sections in small circles, women encircled by men

Close eyes while rehearsing a section

Divide choir in half—let every other singer sing while other half listens  
and critiques

### **ARTICULATION**

Play trumpet

Play piano on arm

### **BALANCE PROBLEMS**

Weak basses—double at upper 8ve with baritones—increase overtones

Double bass with piano

Have basses sing brighter & ahead of the beat

Stand basses in middle of choir and across front

Too many sopranos?

Move some to alto—always more altos than sopranos

Choose music with soprano divisi--SSA

Put sopranos along entire back of choir, place altos in front

#### **DYNAMIC CONTROL**

Count beats for crescendos and diminuendos—eg. 6 beats cresc. 2 beats diminuendo (AMEN of Bruckner *Ave Maria*)

Practice conducting and singing at 8 different levels—from ppp to fff

Speak numbers at different dynamic levels—1p up to 5 F

#### **LACK OF MUSICALITY**

Speak a poem or the text as a trained actor, with nuance, flexibility, contrast. EG, Ezekuhl saw de wheel

Teach musical ideas: No two consecutive notes, syllables or words can be sung exactly alike. Teach agogic accents, mark stress & release (SR) \_ ( )

Teach harmonic implications, change tone color to highlight important chords

#### **SOME SINGERS NOT ANIMATED?**

Divide choir into two long rows—put most alive faces on one side—have dead faces watch as they sing and imitate their favorite expressions

Put animated singers in middle of choir—less animated at edges

#### **FOCUS**

Silent mirroring—start with big motions, then smaller

Talk quietly, whisper

Write on board, direct attention to a word or a phrase

Use quotations, discuss their application to choir

Eg. *“We are what we repeatedly do, therefore, excellence is not an act but a habit.” Aristotle*

Put section leaders (and/or singers with laryngitis) in front of choir and have them take notes on what they see, and what they hear