

## Chapter 8—The First Five Minutes of Rehearsal

### Objectives:

Student conductors will demonstrate the ability to teach vocal tone in a group setting by teaching the following:

1. an appropriate posture for the singer
2. an appropriate approach to breathing
3. an appropriate concept of tone production

One of the most important abilities of the choral conductor is the ability to teach individuals to sing. Singing *is the essence* of the choral experience, and choirs made up of individuals who sing with a healthy and free tone move and inspire, even energize, those who hear them. Singers who have been taught to sing with a beautiful tone fueled by active breathing make up choirs that astound and captivate.

For many singers, the only guidance they receive in terms of vocal development is from the choral conductor. As a result, it is imperative that conductors plan daily activities that provide singers with the opportunity to grow vocally. It is not enough to address the mechanics and techniques of singing once every two or three weeks. Vocal development is a continuous pursuit and should be a part of every rehearsal.

What follows is a structure (which emphasizes vocal development) for teaching tone within the first 5 minutes of rehearsal. Utilized consistently, this structure will enhance a singer's understanding of the singing process and develop singing techniques that can be applied to the music being rehearsed.

The activities of the first 5 minutes are divided into three sections: (1) voice activation (60-90 seconds), (2) skill development (90-150 seconds), and (3) ensemble enhancement (60-120 seconds). Because it is essential that the time be filled with singing, explanations must be brief. It is also essential that the conductor provide feedback throughout the process: moving around the room offering individual feedback as well as group feedback (verbal and nonverbal), which can occur as the choir is singing. Below are one or more exercises that are appropriate for each of the phases described, but student conductors are encouraged to examine conducting text books, warm up books, and other books about singing as they prepare for Rehearsal Practice 6.

### *The Attitude of the Conductor*

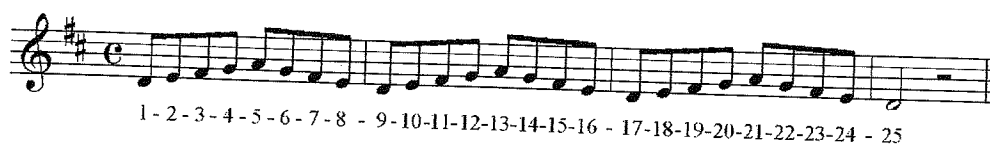
The attitude of the conductor during the first five minutes of rehearsal is critical—students must know in the first moments that there is a high level of expectation. The conductor who displays a *positive impatience*, which is created by implementing a well-organized plan in an energetic and enthusiastic manner, will inspire singers to desire to improve.



exhaling during the demonstration, the conductor should move their hand all the way back to the abdomen as if the balloon is deflating, and then repeat “do what I do.” The conductor inhales and exhales several times using the above-described gesture with the right hand at the abdomen each time. Then the conductor asks singers to inhale and count to 25 again. After they count to 25, the conductor increases the number to 35 and then 45. If at any time during the process the conductor notices an individual’s posture collapsing, the conductor should move toward the individual, establish eye contact and display a posture that will elicit the appropriate change in the singer.

The goal is to develop the ability to project count-speak to 65. Following these activities, sing Exercise 2, using multiple keys while modeling good posture. Provide individual feedback by establishing eye contact and displaying visual cues for improvement. This may be a four or five lesson process—remember the Voice Activation Phase only lasts for 60-90 seconds.

### Exercise 2



Because the purpose of the first 60-90 seconds of the rehearsal is voice activation, the primary concern of the conductor is to establish good posture and energetic participation. To keep singers engaged and to help them loosen up physically, it is useful to incorporate movements that will enhance the singing activities. Examples include (1) the use of a vigorous circling motion in the air with their hands in front of the body; (2) walking in place without lifting the toes; or (3) using the hand in a throwing motion as singers sing the highest pitch of an exercise. During the Vocal Activation phase, it is both appropriate and effective to establish routines; as this will allow choristers to focus on their own singing. In the Vocal Activation phase, most exercises should be descending in nature.

### *Skill Development Phase*

The purpose of the Skill Development Phase is to enhance the development of individual vocal technique. During this portion of the rehearsal, the exercises develop choristers’ ability to sing with a natural, free, and vibrant tone, efficient diction, and phrasing. During this phase, the conductor must continue to move around the rehearsal space listening and observing singers—providing individual feedback including reinforcement and instruction for improvement. The following are examples of exercises appropriate for the Skill Development Phase. Exercises 3 and 4 encourage relaxation of the jaw. Exercise 5 encourages equality of vowels.

### Exercise 3

Ma ma ma ma ma ma ma ma ma ma ma ma

### Exercise 4

Sec - ah - - - ah Sec - ah - - - ah

### Exercise 5

Ah-eh-ee-oh-oo ah-eh-ee-oh-oo ah-eh-ee-oh-oo ah-eh-ee-oh-oo ah-eh-ee-oh-oo

Exercise 6 focuses on forte consonant production. It should help singers develop dramatic consonants. During the exercises that follow, the conductor should encourage singers use active exhalation (bursts of energy from the abdomen) to create forte consonants followed by *mezzo forte* vowels. After singers experience success on Step 1, it is appropriate to move on. In Step 2, the rests indicate the slight division of consonant and vowel that is necessary to avoid 'splattering' the vowel. Encourage singers to perform the consonants at an equal volume as the vowels. Dramatic consonants are essential for expressive singing.

### Exercise 6

#### Step 1

K oh T oh P oh F oh SH oh TR oh CH oh

#### Step 2

K oh T oh P oh F oh SH oh TR oh CH oh

Exercise 7 develops in singers the ability to sing consistent crescendos and decrescendos.

### Exercise 7



## *Ensemble Enhancement*

During the Ensemble Enhancement Phase, conductors work to develop an ensemble sound. The conductor is aware of the overall sound of vocal parts and of the whole choir and singers become aware of their individual contribution to the sound of the section and of the choir.

The work accomplished in the Vocal Activation and Skill Development phases will provide a launching place for the work to be accomplished during the Ensemble Enhancement phase. Singers (with the guidance of the conductor) will work toward vowel unity, precise intonation, unified inhalation of air and attacks, and unified consonant production. Activities in the Ensemble Enhancement phase often relate directly to the music being rehearsed.

Below, Exercise 8 creates vowel unity and Exercise 9 encourages exact tuning. Other effective exercises in the Ensemble Enhancement phase of the rehearsal come directly from the music, such as singing a chord progression from a piece on the syllable “noo” or “nee.” Singing the text from a piece in rhythm but singing on a single pitch throughout, or singing a chord (Robert Shaw often used this technique with basses singing an E; the tenors singing a G#; the altos a D; and the sopranos a F#) can also be effective.

### Exercise 8



## Exercise 9

Maw - meh - mee - moh - moo

### Rehearsal Practice 6 Assignment (5 minutes)

During Rehearsal Practice Assignment 6, student conductors will lead a five minute warm up displaying understanding of the three phases of the first 5 minutes of rehearsal: voice activation, skill development, and ensemble enhancement. Students will be expected to find exercises that fit within each of these phases by referring to various sources (warm up books, conducting books, or books about singing). Students will be graded for the appropriateness of exercises selected for each phase of the warm up and for keeping each warm up phase within the time constraints.

#### *The first 5 minutes*

- (1) Voice Activation (60-90 seconds)
- (2) Skill Development (90-150 seconds)
- (3) Ensemble Enhancement (60-120 seconds)