

Vocal and Choral Techniques

"Powerful sources of spiritual enrichment spring from music... If the child is not filled at least once with the life-giving stream of music...it will hardly be of use to him later on. Often a single experience will open the young soul to music for a lifetime."

Zoltan Kodaly

"Musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and melody find their way into the inward places of the soul."

Plato

"Music is serious fun!"

Bobby McFerrin

GETTING STARTED – Just Do It!

We begin by singing appropriate, quality repertoire - the finest folk and composed music. This not only provides enjoyment, motivation and material with which to practice, it establishes our philosophical foundation - that through music we learn many things, first and foremost our diverse cultural heritage.

Great repertoire can then provide motivation for energetic singing! Only when the singer is committed can we begin the development of vocal technique and its application to the music, which then leads the singer toward mastery and the deeper joy that results from artistic performance. Energy and passion are key!

An important way to motivate and instruct a group of singers is to provide models of others performing with artistry. The teacher, other children, videos, CD's, tapes, live performances can inspire the children to feel "I want to do that!" Most children have the ability to perceive and imitate with a remarkable degree of complexity simply through modeling. Some refer to this as "beneath the surface knowledge" or "other than conscious learning".

The Components of Vocal Technique

1. posture/alignment
2. respiration – breathing motion and breath management
3. phonation and registers – heavy mechanism and light mechanism
4. resonance – vowels and the vocal tract
5. diction – articulation of vowels and consonants
6. expression – phrasing and dramatic communication of the text

The foundation of vocal technique for the very young singer (Grades K – 2) involves appropriate singing posture, a natural breathing motion, finding the "head voice" (a.k.a. vocal placement), and singing in tune ("on the bull's eye").

Posture/Alignment - Singing with good posture must become habitual if vocal development is to be successful. The key elements of good posture are 1) spine extended, 2) shoulders back and down, 3) sternum (or rib cage) lifted, 4) head level and held high, and 5) relaxation. Stretching and moving exercises can put the body in position "as a musical instrument." Henry Leck of the Indianapolis Children's Choir plays an imitation game for posture development. Why must we have good posture while singing? In one word - breathing.

Breathing - There are two aspects of respiration which are important to vocal development - breathing motion and breath management. Young singers must be instructed not to raise the shoulders or take in a shallow breath. Another key element is that the lower torso expands during inhalation and contracts during exhalation.

The next step is breath management and an awareness of the diaphragm and other abdominal muscles for breathing. The "cool air sip", long sizzling "sss" sounds, short explosive "sss" and "ch" sounds, a feather under the nose, panting "like a dog", blowing out candles, using pinwheels, etc. are some ways to develop breath support and control. The "motorboat" and "lip buzz" is excellent for connecting the breath to phonation.

Phonation/Registration/Placement - For the young singer, finding the "head voice" is the next crucial step and one which eludes some children for many years. In her book *Lifeline for Children's Choir Directors*, Jean Ashworth Bartle has a chapter titled "The Uncertain Singer" which begins with the following quote from Henry Van Dyke:

"Use what talents you possess;
the woods would be very silent if no birds sang there except those that sang best."

The reasons for an inability to match pitch generally fall into four categories:

- 1) environment - inexperience, lack of exposure to music, cultural differences
- 2) physical - vocal defects, maturation, nodules, illness
- 3) cognitive - tonal aptitude, pitch memory, self-esteem, attitude, connecting ear to voice
- 4) vocal coordination - lack of support/placement skills

For most uncertain singers the problem is experience. They must learn to understand the difference between the "speaking voice" and the "singing voice". Vocal exploration activities might include slides, sirens, ghost sounds, whimpering dogs, slide whistles, etc. The "oo" vowel is the easiest to focus clearly. Humming allows pitch to be perceived more easily. Other suggestions include:

- provide many opportunities to sing alone, without accompaniment
- sing softly
- work with tonal patterns rather than single pitches
- match teacher's pitch to that of child
- have other children model high voice
- remind students to "listen in while singing out"
- ask student to evaluate pitch accuracy

The general rule is to begin with the "head voice" and bring it down into the "chest voice". Finally, have patience! Most of the children whom you think will never "get it" will find their voice when they are ready. Continue to work for that breakthrough. And remember, that child might one day be sitting on the Board of Education!!

Tone production (resonation) which is rich and resonant can be addressed as opportunities occur in the repertoire (K – 2). Important concepts include:

- vowels sustain tone - pure and steady like a ****Laser Beam**** - "sing thru the notes"
- ****Open The Spaces** - raised soft palate and low, relaxed larynx
- ****Shape The Vowels** – unified; corners in; dropped jaw

In the upper grades, vocal training can take place in the warm-ups through the five basic vowels: ee – eh – ah – oh – ooo. The vocal tract must be configured in the most open way so as to maximize the shape and space required for each vowel at each specific pitch and dynamic level. Formants are frequency regions of the vocal tract. Each vowel is determined by its own arrangement of the vocal tract: the length (larynx and lip position); jaw, tongue and soft palate positions; and the expansion or contraction of the throat and mouth.

Forward resonance is crucial. Humming, singing "in the mask", feeling the vibrations "above the cheekbones", imagining the sound emanating from a cone at the forehead – these are all effective images to encourage forward resonance.

Diction is addressed primarily through attention to word meaning. (Ah poor bird, take thy fly??) Pronunciation of words (word inflection), enunciation of syllables (syllable inflection) and articulation of consonants must be carefully planned. Vowels carry the resonant tone and consonants convey the language. Vowels must be pure and focused. Diphthongs must be carefully executed, usually sustaining first vowel sound and quickly releasing the second. Consonants are produced with the articulators – the lips, teeth and tongue (as well as the palate). The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) identifies thirteen basic vowel colors, six diphthongs and twenty-five consonant sounds that make the study of diction easier and more thorough. Give attention to initial consonant (attack), sustain (vowel) and final consonant (release). No two consecutive notes, syllables or words should receive equal emphasis! Dramatic communication of the meaning of text is the goal.

Embedded throughout the process of vocal development is attention to the expressive elements of phrasing, dynamics, tempo, and style. Range and agility can be developed in many ways. One example is to take a short phrase or song and make it into a vocalise in ascending or descending keys. Another challenge is melismatic singing.

The Components of Choral Technique

1. choral tone
2. blend
3. balance
4. diction
5. intonation
6. rhythmic accuracy
7. interpretation
8. stage presence/deportment

Important issues

Energy, beauty, placement/resonance

The choral warm-up

Exercises for flexibility and control

Staggered breathing

Forward motion/phrasing

Dramatic communication of the text

1. understandability
2. depth of meaning
3. color
4. syllable inflection
5. word inflection

From Donald Neuen: "Energy must be the foundation of vocal production. We might go so far as to say that energy is 80 percent of great singing, and everything else is contained within the remaining 20 percent."

Choral Sequence - Holland Hill Fifth Grade Chorus

- An article entitled "Voice" from the children's magazine "Contact Kids." The focus is on how the voice produces sound and on energy, passion and motivation.
- The "Four Basics of Singing" – posture, breath, tone and diction; the 5 vowels
- Video: ACDA "On Location" with Doreen Rao and the Glen Ellyn CC
- Video: "Vocal Techniques for the Young Singer" by Henry Leck and the Indianapolis CC.
- Audiotape of middle school adjudication festival. Students are the judge.
- **Vocal exercises – standard warm-up from We Will Sing. (D. Rao)
- More detailed focus on "Four Basics" (Phillips book)
- Grade Five Vocal Competence Criteria
- Ensemble skills - choral adjudication form (revisit audiotape)
- Attack, sustain, release (following conductor)
- Heavy mechanism vs. light mechanism (registration)
- Application of technique to repertoire!!! (Energy, skill & concentration) – ongoing
- The choral score: page, system & measure
- Stage presence and deportment

Ear Training

- Echo tonal and rhythmic patterns with syllables
- Decode and improvise tonal and rhythmic patterns
- Major and minor scales; resting tone; determine major and minor by ear
- Songs in solfa: sing by ear; play on recorder and piano – much inner hearing (audiation)
- follow & echo 1 & 2 part hand signs
- Read and write music: flashcards, books, handouts – on board and on paper

The Development of Part Singing

Singing in harmony is interesting, motivating and rewarding for children (and adults!). It is a skill which should be developed sequentially by means of appropriate activities and materials. This section presents one possible sequence, with examples, for the development of part singing.

As music is a multifaceted phenomenon, it is necessary, to varying degrees, to 'separate the parts from the whole' in the process of teaching and learning. A comprehensive choral curriculum includes not only the performance of great repertoire and vocal/choral techniques; it must also address all aspects of musicianship (i.e. CPR: create, perform & respond via the national standards). It is self-evident that teaching our choristers to read music will greatly assist them to sing independently in parts. The main focus here, however, will be the development of aural and kinesthetic skills relating to melody, rhythm and harmony.

From the first grade student who sings independently in a round to the adult who sings in close and dissonant harmony in many parts, the principles and techniques presented here may be adapted to any level to help our singers foster the skills necessary to put the musical 'parts' together into a wonderful whole – that phenomenon we refer to as "the choral art."

Prerequisite skills and principles

- the ability to sing in tune, alone and unaccompanied (with correct vocal placement)
- the ability to keep a steady beat and perform rhythmic patterns
- the ability to audiate - tonally and rhythmically
- use movable 'do' solfege for melody and a rhythmic syllable system
- sing at a soft dynamic
- provide models (recordings, videos, live performances)
- develop the skill of "listening in while singing out" to oneself and others!
- perform both parts of two part music
- audiation and attention to intonation must take place at every level
- the goal is to build independence!!

Sequential Activities to Develop Part Singing

1. Sing/chant familiar songs/rhymes with basic beat & ostinati
 - keep the beat in various locations by rote (patschen, clap, snap, head, shoulders, palms up/down, etc.)
 - see Feierabend - *First Steps in Classical Music: Keeping the Beat*
 - varied meters
 - chants, raps (One, Two Buckle My Shoe; Humpty Dumpty; Engine #9; Eeny Meeny Miny Mo)
 - all songs

2. Perform dialogue, call & response, question & answer, echo and responsorial songs
 - Cuckoo; Who's That Tapping?; Hole in the Bucket; Swing Low, Sweet Chariot; Michael, Row the Boat; Hey Lolly; Charlie Over the Ocean; Quaker, Quaker; Who Killed Cock Robin?; Sail Away, Ladies
 - "circle singing" a.k.a. "relay game"

3. Differentiate beat and rhythm
 - "the beat is always steady"
 - "the rhythm is the sound of the words and syllables, (and rests)"
 - "a rest is a beat of silence"
 - Clap Your Hands - I say: "sing and clap anything", then I show them what they've done.
 - all songs: class/teacher; class ½ & ½; two small groups; individuals
 - step beat while clapping rhythm
 - switch between beat and rhythm at a signal
 - tap beat with one hand, rhythm with the other

4. Hand clapping games with ostinati – Mary Mack; My Landlord; Long Legged Sailor; Four White Horses; Clap Your Hands; Miss Lucy; Dutch Girl
 - also singing, ball bouncing and jump rope games (see Kenney, M.)

5. Perform rhythmic ostinati patterns to known songs (extension of beat ostinati)
 - perform Skip to My Lou, etc. while clapping: | □ | or □ | or | □ | |
 - perform many other songs and patterns, including rests
 - use rhythms that occur in the songs, or that contrast with the song
 - sing and conduct beat patterns in 2, 3 & 4 beats/measure
 - play ostinati on instruments (unpitched rhythmic patterns)

6. Perform melodic ostinati patterns to known songs
 - drones (pedal points)
 - easy 2/3 note melodic patterns
 - chord roots - Frere Jacques with do so, do (also Mahler Sym. #1, mvmt. 3)
 - Hanerot Hallelu
 - Bicinia Hungarica
 - play ostinati on instruments (pitched melodic patterns, bordun)
 - Summer Is a Coming In
 - most Orff arrangements

7. Sing a known song while reading a rhythm from notation, or:
 - read a melody while tapping another part
 - tap a two part score, one hand each
 - see Hindemith, *Elementary Training for Musicians*

8. Partner songs – songs that have the same chord progressions
 - sing in groups and individually
 - Skip Lou, Bow Belinda, Paw Paw Patch
 - Swing Low, Sweet Chariot & All Night, All Day
 - How Can I Keep From Singing, arr. Hugh

9. Descants/COUNTERMELODIES
 - Drunken Sailor; Go Tell It on the Mountain; Hand Me Down My Silver Trumpet; America the Beautiful; The Battle Hymn; Yonder Come Day; Sing Alleluia, Allelu; Blow Ye Winds; Al Shlosha; Ca the Yowes; Gesu Bambino; Do Di Li; A Zing a Za; It's a Small World; Silent Night
 - compose your own to songs with repeated chord patterns such as rounds

10. Rounds/Canons - simple to difficult
 - all simple pentatonic songs may be performed in canon
 - ex. Rain Rain; Lucy Locket; Texas Cowboy
 - see *Ride With Me, A Journey from Unison to Part-Singing* by John Barron
 - easy composed melodic canons
 - contrasting sections (polyphony) are the easiest: Frere Jacques
 - Body canon; lead to rhythmic canons
 - Ram Sam Sam, Haida & Kookaburra develop 3rds
 - scale exercises in canon – 3rds, 2nds, etc.
 - canon with different coda – Panis Angelicus – C. Franck
 - for a challenge: sing melody and tap in canon; part 2 with one hand; 3 parts
 - have students count off, by the number of parts, in each row - have all the ones start the canon, two's enter next, etc.
 - canon at the fifth/fourth: Non Nobis Domine-Byrd; Da Pacem Domine-M. Frank
 - augmentation/diminution – Old Abram Brown – Britten
 - canons where the entrances change each time: Hotaru Koi; Old Abram Brown
 - There are three basic ways to end a round: simply let each part finish in turn; have each part hold its last note until all parts have caught up to finish in a unison; each part stops at the same time at a cadence point.
 - choral repertoire: I'm Goin' Up A Yonder; The Water is Wide; fugues

11. Singing from hand signs
 - follow simultaneously
 - echo patterns (great for audiation!)
 - from two hand signs, begin with one part as a drone
 - focus on intervals and INTONATION
 - parallel 3rds
 - dissonances
 - **bi- and tri-tonality exercises – songs in parallel keys

12. Understanding harmonic functions - root singing
- define/discuss "melody & harmony"; "chord"
 - define and analyze chord changes
 - begin with tonic/dominant songs: Skip to My Lou; Go Tell Aunt Rhody; Long, Long Ago; London Bridge; Frere Jacques; Joshua; Haida; Ram Sam Sam; Hush Little Baby
 - tonic/dominant/sub-dominant: Oh Susanna; The Saints; Swing Low; blues
 - define "roots" & "bass lines"
 - children sing melody, teacher sings bass line; class $\frac{1}{2}$ & $\frac{1}{2}$
 - sing bass lines to known songs; Pachelbel Canon
 - sing melody while hand signing bass line
 - partner songs or rounds & bass line
 - add chordal background to songs
 - add a bass line and descant to a known song
 - Heart & Soul; 50's songs with I VI IV V chord patterns; The Lion Sleeps Tonight
 - Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy
13. Two part singing
- imitative, partner style or contrary motion
 - parallel 3rds & 6ths: Schubert – Maying Song; Arruru; Niska Banja; Hine Ma Tov
 - independent polyphony
 - homophony
 - Angels We Have Heard; The Water is Wide (Zanninelli)
 - Kodaly, Let Us Sing Correctly; other composed exercises
14. Three/four part singing
- imitative, partner style or contrary motion;
 - parallel 3rds & 6ths: Siyahamba; Freedom Is Coming
 - independent polyphony
 - homophony: The Lion Sleeps Tonight; Feel Good
 - Kodaly – Ladybird; Carol of the Bells; With A Voice Of Singing; I'm Goin' Up A Yonder
15. Improvisation – harmonizing by ear
- voice leading/chordal singing to two chord songs
 - Amazing Grace; This Is the Day; Kum Ba Yah; The Rose

Suggested list of rounds/canons (also see bibliography and repertoire list)

Frere Jacques; Ah Poor Bird; Scotland's Burning; White Sand & Gray Sand; Make New Friends; The Canoe Song (My Paddles); The Ghost of Tom; Oh How Lovely; Joan Glover; Charlottetown; Hashivenu; O Music Sweet Music; Rise Up O Flame; Ah Ri Rang; Viva La Musica; Music & Joy Shall Live; Moja Numba; The Duchess; The Greenwood Tree; Sing & Rejoice; The Friendship Song; White Coral Bells; Early As I Was Walking; Haida; Shalom Chaverim; This Pretty Planet; A Ram Sam Sam; Kookaburra; Dona Nobis Pacem; Jubilate Deo; Non Nobis Domine; Da Pacem Domine; Boyce - Alleluia; The Tallis Canon; Summer Is A Coming In

CONCERT PREPARATION INFO (presented 1/2 weeks prior to concerts)

- Dress code
- Posture - relating both to stage presence & singing technique (arms at sides; weight equal on both feet)
- * Eyes on conductor at all times (video) - for following conductor & visual effect
- *Facial expressions & body movement - match the music
- *Do not "telegraph" mistakes - go on as if nothing happened
- If you feel faint, sit down as discreetly as possible; bend knees - shift feet
- Eat well prior to the concert!
- Standing arrangement - line up by height; move calmly & efficiently; make way for soloists
- Practice a group bow
- Backstage/Audience Expectations - concert etiquette; discuss restrooms

Choral Repertoire

Hine Ma Tov SA	Allan Naplan Boosey & Hawkes OCTB6782
Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel SA	arr. Roger Emerson Jenson 40326209
Maying Song SA	Schubert Boosey & Hawkes OCTB6578
Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy SSA	Raye/Prince arr. Frank Metis Hal Leonard 00120657
The Turtle Dove SAB	arr. Spevacek Jenson 437-20070
Gesu Bambino SA	Pietro Yon J. Fischer & Bro. 4656-8
I Wonder As I Wander Two part w/ solo	arr. J.J. Niles/Horton G. Schirmer 9498
Jesu, Joy Of Man's Desiring SA	Bach arr. Lefebvre Galaxy Mus Corp 1.1223
A New Year Carol Unison	B. Britten Boosey & Hawkes OCTB5615

Bring A Torch, Jeanette, Isabella Two part treble	arr.Schultz Boosey & Hawkes OCTB6565
With A Voice Of Singing SA	Martin Shaw G. Schirmer, Inc. 10227
How Can I Keep From Singing 3 part treble	Lowry arr. Hugh Boosey & Hawkes OCTB6859
God Bless America 2 part treble	Irving Berlin Jenson 402-07012
It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That SSA	Swing Ellington arr. Huff Mills Music 66841C2X
Have You Seen But A White Lily Grow Unison	anon. Plymouth Music HL-508
The Water Is Wide two-part	arr. Zaninelli Shawnee Press E-83
The Raggle Taggle Gypsies two-part	arr. Hugh Boosey & Hawkes OCTB6747
Feel Good three-part	Tyson/Scott Boosey & Hawkes OCTB6711
I'm Goin' Up A Yonder SSAA	Hawkins/arr. Sirvatka Boosey & Hawkes OCTB6451
To The Ploughboy Unison with 2 part A Zing-A Za SSAA	R. Vaughn Williams Oxford University Press No. 54.264 arr. Goetze Boosey & Hawkes OC4B6276
Long, Long Ago SA	Carlisle Floyd Boosey & Hawkes OC2B5648
Velvet Shoes Unison	Randall Thompson E.C. Schirmer 2526
Art Thou Troubled? Unison	G.F. Handel ed. Bartle Hinshaw Music HMC1431
Al Shlosa D'varim 2 part treble	Allan Naplan Boosey & Hawkes OCTB6783
Yonder Come Day 3 part	arr. Tucker World Music Press (10)
Carol of the Bells SSA	Leontovich arr. Wilhousky Carl Fischer C.M. 5276
Freedom Is Coming 3 part treble	ed. Nyberg/Leck Walton Music Corp. WW 1149

Haida Unison/Two-part	arr. Leck Plymouth Music Co. HL-516
Arruru Two-part Treble	arr. Dwyer/Gerber Plymouth Music Co. HL-519
Go Tell It On The Mountain Two-part Treble	arr. Dwyer/Waller Plymouth Music Co. HL
Mayim, Mayim Two-part Treble	E. Amiran arr. Shields Earthsongs W-25
Go Where I Send Thee! SSA	arr. Caldwell/Ivory Earthsongs
S'vivon Two-part Treble	arr. Shields Earthsongs W-16
Hanerot Halalu Two-part	Baruch J. Cohon arr. Chass Mark Foster Music MF 877
Angels' Carol Two-part choir	John Rutter Hinshaw Music HMC-986
For The Beauty of the Earth Two-part choir	John Rutter Hinshaw Music HMC-469
Carol of the Children Unison	John Rutter Hinshaw Music HMC-605
All Things Bright And Beautiful Two-part choir	John Rutter Hinshaw Music HMC-663
Jingle Bell Swing Two-part	David Elliott Boosey & Hawkes OCTB6684
Appalachian Suite II SSAA	arr. Jordanoff Boosey & Hawkes OC4B 6523
Sing Alleluia, Allelu 3 part	Mary Goetze Boosey & Hawkes OCTB6126
At The River SA	arr. Copland Boosey OCTB5511
Sleep My Baby unison	arr. Rowley Boosey OCUB5449
The Drunken Sailor 2 part	arr. Crocker Jenson 42304012
Linden Lea unison	Vaughan Williams Boosey OCTB6635

Five Songs by Charles Ives choral part	Charles E. Ives, ed. Tagg (Circus Band) Peer International Corp. 02-093576-101
This Little Light Of Mine 2 part	arr. Harris Boosey OCTB6921
Bed In Summer unison	Larry Alan Smith Plymouth HL-513
Evening Song SSA	Zoltan Kodaly Boosey 5771
Bye Bye, Love SAB	Bryant arr. Besig Shawnee Press D-304
Dodi Li two-part treble	Nira Chen arr. Rao Boosey & Hawkes OCTB6679
O Sifuni Mungu Hal Leonard 40326303	Maddux, et. al. SAB
Bist Du Bei Mir Boosey & Hawkes OCTB6716	J.S. Bach unison
Longing For Spring Hal Leonard 08551384	W.A. Mozart, arr. Snyder 2-part
La Paloma Se Fue World Music Press 11	arr. Alejandro Jimenez unison or two-part

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Blood-Patterson, P. (1988) *Rise Up Singing* Bethlehem, PA: Sing Out Corp.

Feierabend, J. (1996) *The Book of Canons* Simsbury, CT: First Steps in Music, Inc.

- *101 Rounds for Singing* Burnsville, NC: World Around Songs, Inc.