

Musical Techniques for Small Choruses

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Objective: Provide tools to successfully teach barbershop harmony to small choruses

Goals:

- Brief physiology of the vocal instrument
- The individual singer's part in building the chorus
- Tools and techniques for good singing and improving small choruses
- Rehearsal tools for retention of skills
- Techniques for motivating chorus members to improve an individual commitment to learning

Physiology of the vocal instrument

Generator/motor: Respiratory system plus body alignment and breathing

Vibrator: Vocal folds – breathing and larynx coordination

Vocal onsets – hard, breathy, and soft/coordinated

Resonator: Vocal tract (laryngo-pharynx, oro-pharynx, naso-pharynx) provide resonating space for the voice

Singer's Formant – the very best place to sing!

Member's part in building the chorus

Warm-up to warm-up

Stamina/core building – have a personal fitness program

Develop, maintain and carry a tall axial alignment/raised sternum

Breathe to sing – make breathing correctly a priority

Don't over-sing; no "save the chorus" voices

Sing with an inner smile using the zygomatic muscles

Relax jaw, tongue, lips when articulating; no tight, prune lips;
always show a little teeth

Be prepared for each rehearsal; take personal responsibility for learning music

Avoid talking on the risers; show respect for others

Have a daily voice building routine; make a personal commitment

Take private lessons or work in sectionals/smaller groups

Develop personal vocal goals

Tools for good singing

Posture – Alexander Technique

Breathing exercises

Phonation - Bubble/hum exercises for mask identification

Resonance - Fog exercises for soft palate lift and muscle building

Articulation - Finger on larynx for relaxed tongue/jaw while singing

(especially leaps, octaves); keep larynx seated at all times, especially on the inhalation

Four part harmony singing - "Wee, wee, wee" exercise for solidifying ring in the tone, matching vowels, tuning, phrase extension, etc.

Rehearsal Technique #1

Everyone learns and sings the lead

Everyone learns breathing places, stressed words, vowel match, dynamics while singing lead

Harmony parts sing their part as a solo, then duet it with the lead for synchronization and agreement on dynamics, vowel match, tuning, articulation (all words are not created equal)

All parts duet with the other three parts until everyone has sung with everyone

While duetting, have one of the other parts sustains the keynote – human pitch pipe

While duetting, one of the other parts does the pat/clap to keep tempo (uptunes only) – human metronome technique

All four parts sing ONLY when all else is in place

Rehearsal Technique #2

Form a square, one part each side, leads across from basses; baris across from tenors

Director indicates which section sings, moving from section to section without stopping.

Each singer must audiate to be in the right place at the right time!

Director duets sections in same manner AFTER they successfully section sing

Director ups the difficulty factor by moving more quickly from section to section

Rehearsal Technique #3

Stand in a square as in technique #2

Assign numbers to each singer in the section (numbering depends on how many singers in the smallest section. If three tenors, then each singer would be a 1, 2, or 3)

Director indicates which singers will sing by holding up one, two or three fingers

Director moves through the song in same manner as in technique #2

Other Rehearsal Techniques

Sing in double quartets or quartets

Circle sectionals in a regular rehearsal

Sing in a circle with voice parts mixed

Sing in circles with tenors in the middle, baritones next; leads next, basses next

Line the chorus up in two lines facing each other, have them sing and sell different emotions

Round robin sectionals

Exercises for variety, and for developing focus and commitment to learning

Slabbing chords – walk through the chords slowly and listen for accuracy, vowel match, and resonance ring

Say a phrase three times with the correct emotion then immediately sing it

Human pitchpipe – one part holds the key note; others sing against it

Human metronome – one part keeps the beat; others sing

Silent singing – open palm directing means sing; left hand fist means audiate

Quartet in a parade fashion (a quartet line-up) or in a star formation (X).

Change rows of the chorus; front row becomes the back row and everyone steps down, keep rotating until all have been in the front row

Chorus members directs themselves

Sing with eyes closed, holding hands

Sing phrases on the tonic chord spread to the 10th (bass and lead on tonic an octave apart, baritones on the 5th and tenors on the 3rd)

Sing phrases on neutral syllables for tone flow and interval accuracy

Sing uptunes on staccato “doots” for synchronization accuracy