

Creating A Choral Handbook for Church Choirs

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Abstract

In order to address common musical and technical problems identified by conductors of area volunteer church choirs, I designed a choral handbook which offers easily accessible, time conscious exercises and vocalises to address each major area. After surveying ten area church choir directors, and observing choir rehearsals for four weeks, I found that there were many problems that came up consistently, and decided to address these common mistakes. A handbook with different vocalises and exercises that focus on each issue and can be easily implemented is the outcome.

Observations

After observing for 4 weeks at University Lutheran Church's choir rehearsal, I have made some pragmatic observations. Church choir warm-ups need to be:

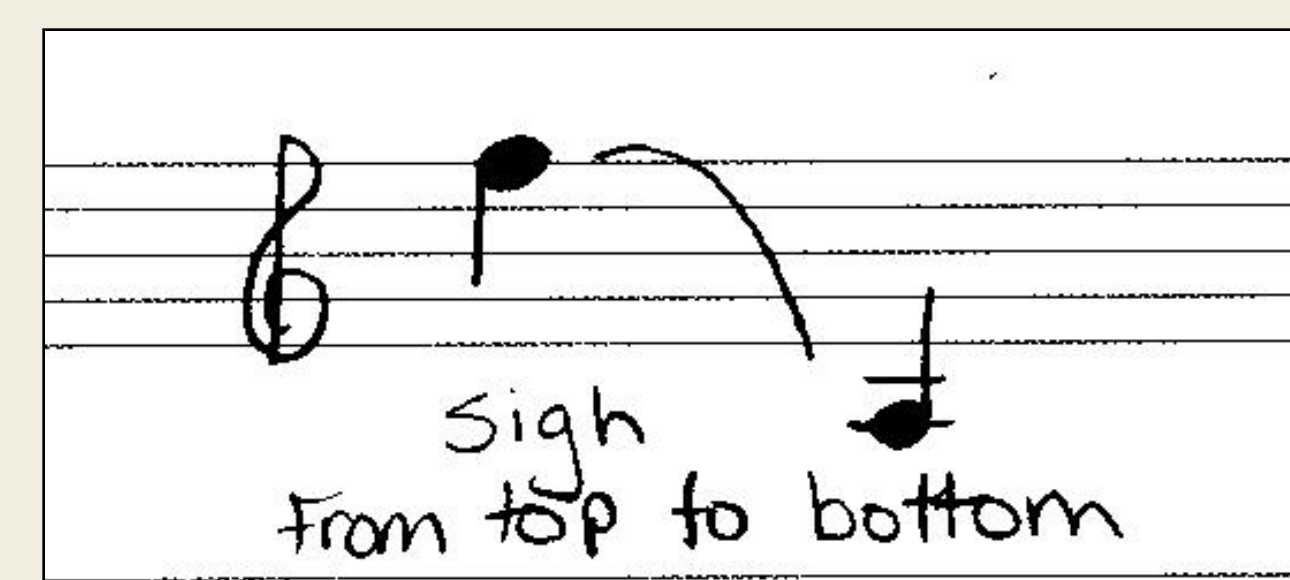
1. **Short.** In some choirs singers are often more interested in the music than in warm-ups.
2. **Simple.** Not all of the singers in a volunteer choir will have previous experience with singing.
3. **Easily Applied.** Warm-ups may be used at any point during the rehearsal to maximize the effectiveness of the exercise.

Objective

The main chapters addressed in the handbook are:

1. Tone (Posture, Breathing, Vowels)
2. Rhythm (Counting and Meter)
3. Balance and Blend
4. Motivation

Chapter 1, Tone, has three subcategories:
Posture, Breathing, and Vowels.



Acknowledgements:

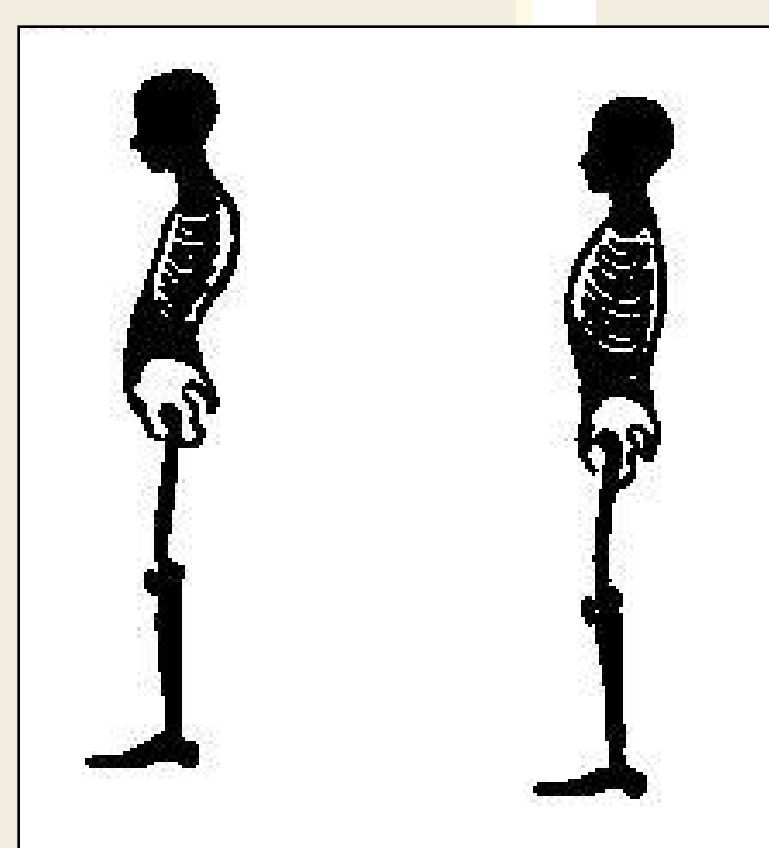
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Results: Chapter 1, Tone

Posture

Posture is crucial to the success of a choir. Not only does good posture help with breathing and creating good vowels, but it makes a choir look more professional. Here are a few tips for getting a choir to utilize good posture:

Incorrect Correct

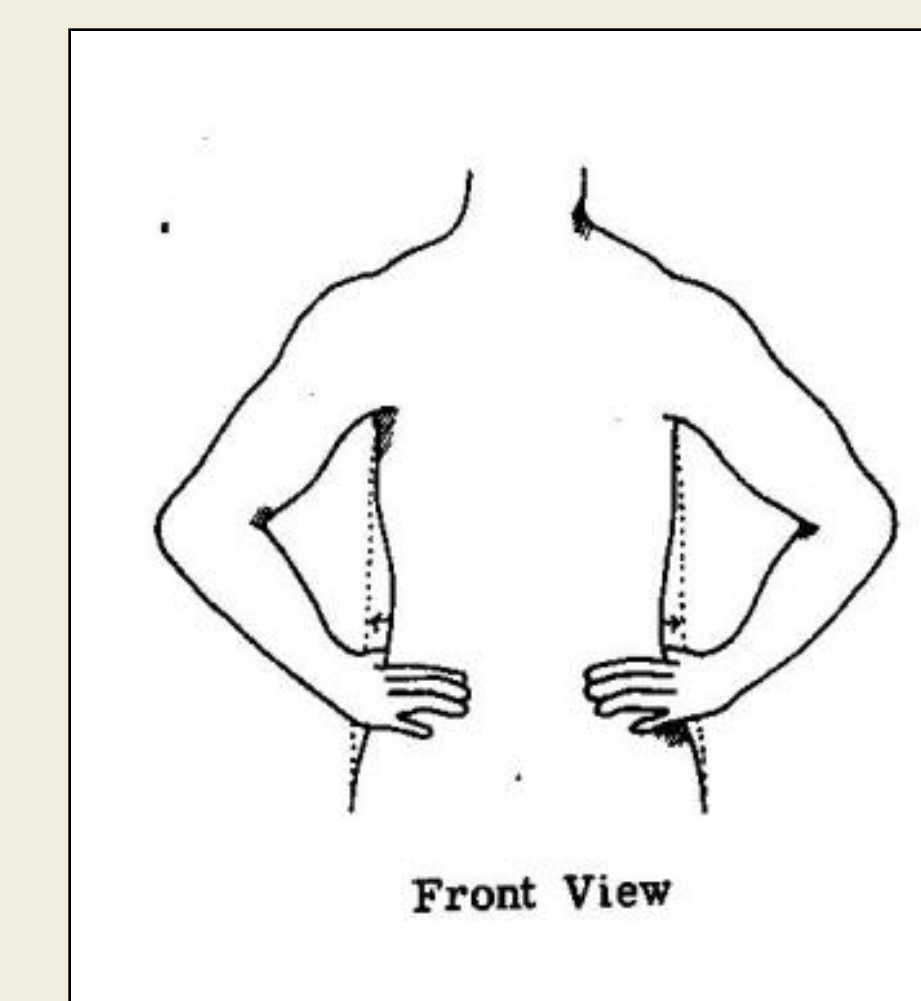


1. Have the choir stand. It becomes easier to engage your diaphragm when you stand.
2. Make sure feet are shoulder width apart, but with knees loose, not locked.
3. The singer's head should not be too far forward or back, but in line with the spine.

Breathing

Breathing is a fundamental part of singing, and is a crucial part of good tone production. Some helpful exercises to get your choir breathing correctly:

1. Have singers place hands below the ribcage and have them breathe into their hands. Have them note the expansion takes place the entire way around the body, not just the front.
2. Use visual images to help achieve proper breathing
 - a. Compare to a taffy pull
 - b. Compare breath to a balloon
3. Ask your choir to have a feeling of the "open throat," and a slight yawning feel.



Vowels

Once good posture and breathing are developed, it is time to address vowel sounds. Many choirs have trouble creating uniform sounds and open vowels, but here are some exercises to start correcting these problems.

1. Use sighs or sirens at the beginning of the rehearsal to reinforce the feeling of "space inside."
2. One of my favorite exercises is used in my college choir. On the tune "My Country Tis Of Thee" have singers remove the consonants so that only vowels are left.

Conclusion

By using these exercises habitually in your choir rehearsal, your singers will develop a full, rich, pleasing tone that will excite both your singers and your audience. As you develop your choir's tone, singing becomes easier, and more fun.