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PART 1:

Elementary Choirs

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Organizing and Developing a Program That Lasts

BY KAROL KIMMELL

Whether you are starting a children's choir for the first time, rebooting after a hiatus, looking for new ideas, or thinking ahead to the next school year in an established program, intentional planning is key to a strong and long-lasting choir program.

In today's busy world, parents are looking for meaningful activities for their children, but non-church activities compete for their time. To attract families to choir, you need to present a well-organized, well-planned, purposeful program that shows the creative, fun part of choir as well as the fellowship-providing, community-building, faith-growing, and musically excellent experiences a children's choir offers.

ORGANIZING YOUR PROGRAM

CLERGY & PROGRAM SUPPORT

Seek support for a children's choir program from clergy, the governing church group, your music associates, and the education staff. Cast a vision (or work together to create one) for the children's music ministry. Propose a budget; even though a children's choir is priceless, it takes financial support to be successful. Be willing to work within the overall church programming and calendar. Above all, be a positive and persistent advocate for a children's music ministry.

Statistics prove that a children's music ministry increases Sunday morning attendance and overall commitment to church.

ADVERTISE

Create an informational, colorful invitation flyer that includes pictures of children singing and playing instruments. Prepare a mid-summer communication campaign (via post and/or email) that includes the flyer and the choir schedule. Include all eligible singers from your church's database and create mailing labels and email distribution lists. Post the flyer on the church's social media platforms.

Design a colorful bulletin board that is easily seen by all at church. Don't forget church newsletters, bulletins, and video screen announcements, and ask your clergy to mention choir participation in church to show their support and excitement of children singing God's praises together. Old-fashioned phone calls - even if you have to leave a message - are appreciated and effective.

GET TO KNOW YOUR POTENTIAL SINGERS

Nothing can take the place of knowing your potential singers and their parents. Find and participate in church events to meet them: Vacation Bible School, Sunday School, church dinners, singing for nursery or preschool children. Set up a choir table on a Sunday in a common, heavily-trafficked area, displaying rhythm instruments, puppets, colorful scarves, photos and recordings of children singing, a choir robe, registration cards, pens, and choir schedules - - and don't forget a sweet treat bowl prominently placed! Welcome folks. Introduce yourself; be sure to speak directly to the children. Show your interest in them with honesty and authenticity. Make an effort to remember names, encourage them to bring a friend, tell each child you would like to see them in choir and to be on the lookout for a postcard from you. Ask parents for contact information then follow through with an interesting/funny postcard that week - addressed to the child.

Address mailing labels to the child.

CALENDARS

Plan well and show respect for busy families. Find all the area schools' (public and private) academic calendars online and create a master calendar for yourself that shows all first and last days of school, holidays, and breaks. Identify weekends and Sundays that assure you a full choir. Create a full school year's schedule for each choir. Be sure to allow enough time to learn and polish anthems between singing dates. Publish a downloadable choir calendar and make it easily accessible on the church website, in church communications, and in choir emails. Include the calendar link in your regular choir communications and consider mailing a hard copy to families. Be sure to alert families promptly to any calendar updates or changes during the year.

COMMUNICATION

Once rehearsals begin, set up email distribution lists by choirs. Keep emails short and easy to read. Send weekly or monthly choir news, including: upcoming choir activities, updates from the last rehearsal, lyrics to memorize, information about the church season, or just to remind folks that you look forward to seeing their child at choir rehearsals. If a child is sick on choir day, parents often reply to that most recent looking-forward-to-seeing-you email and will let you know about their child's absence.

Be aware of current communication methods for the parents and guardians of choir members. Many parents will opt-in to group texting through REMIND or GROUPME or the church's server. Posting to a private-access social media page can be a good way to share the choir experience with parents and grandparents. Include photos or video clips from choir rehearsals and performances, announcements of upcoming events; thank you's and general notes of appreciation; and interesting information about hymns, anthems, and composers of choir anthems.

Parents and guardians love glimpses of their children learning, playing, and growing.

CHOIR REGISTRATION

Be sure to get all the important information:

- Singer's name
- Date of birth
- Mailing address
- School name and grade
- Parent/guardian cell phone numbers and email addresses (indicate Parent #1 and Parent #2)
- Known allergies

If another adult will be involved with transportation, be sure to get their contact info, too. Include an opt-in statement giving permission to use photos and videos of singers.

If using online registration, have a good plan for printing and storing choir list information so it is easily accessible for you and your volunteer helpers. Individual student info cards printed on card stock can be handy for keeping track of music binder/robe/cross necklace numbers, and they can be easily handed to volunteers for various tasks.

GROUPING YOUR SINGERS

Each church will have a different collection of ages and grades of children. If starting out with smaller numbers, it may be necessary to group children together in a wider age span. Plan accordingly by adding something challenging for the older singers to do: play choir chimes or percussion, speak a narration, or sing sections in a smaller ensemble. Assign buddies to build relationships between the oldest and youngest singers in a multi-grade choir.

REPERTOIRE PLANNING

As you make plans for choir repertoire, refer to this topical/seasonal list which can span the program year. Utilize these foundational musical pieces and your choir year is planned for you!

- Two hymns
- Two communion songs
- Two anthems based on psalms

When sharing photos of singers in communications, be sure to blur out names visible on name tags.

Inspiring Singers: Best Practices in the Elementary Choir Rehearsal

BY ELIZABETH SHEPLEY

*"Our emphasis must be on the child, not the subject. Great music has no value itself; only when it penetrates the personality and has its influence there does it really live."
-Ruth Krehbiel Jacobs*

Three children ran down the crowded hallway like their pants were on fire, weaving around and through groups of youth and adults in various conversation clusters, and skirting others heading one way or another on a busy weeknight at church. Other children were skipping down the hall, laughing with their friends, creating their own wake for those who were to follow. In the back of this energetic whirlwind were several more shuffling on, looking to be a bit tired, shy, or perhaps apprehensive.

A varied collection of personalities, experiences, skills, and interests, this typical group of kids came from all walks of life. They were all headed toward the rehearsal room. The new year of church choir was about to begin.

The teacher/conductor's attitude about the arrival of this bunch will determine the "climate" in the rehearsal room on day one, and going forward. Will the group be scolded for its unruly arrival and warned about any repeat of their offenses, or will their energy be channeled? Will the rehearsal be focused, pleasant, and productive or riddled with interruptions, frustrations, and a sense of unease?

WHAT MAKES A GOOD TEACHER?

*"Often a single experience will open the young soul to music for a whole lifetime."
-Zoltán Kodály*

In approaching the new choir year, once the initial groundwork is laid: setting a schedule, advertising the program, and enlisting people to help with attendance, snacks, music library and so forth; all focus shifts to preparing for the children's total learning experience.

This experience begins with the children's choir director. Among the myriad qualities this person will find useful in leading the choir are musical proficiency, sincere love and genuine concern for their students, organizational competence, and communication skills. Also important - perhaps most important - is the teacher's attitude. There are teachers and conductors with technical knowledge and fine skills who struggle to make a positive connection with their choristers and colleagues.

Positive environments are created and nurtured, rehearsal by rehearsal, by passionate teachers. They understand that they are of service to the children and youth with whom they make music. They may even be someone who touches something deep down inside a student, something that changes the way the student approaches and interacts with the world.

Who were your great teachers? If you're fortunate, you've had a few. Perhaps you are where you are, doing what you're doing, or preparing to take on a new adventure because of them. Your teaching style may be modeled after them.

My handful of greats has taught me a number of things that have helped make my teaching career rewarding. Two of them were choir directors! Memories come to mind easily, beginning with Mr. Carson (names have been changed). Mr. C was the fearless leader of the church Cherub Choir: about 80 first, second, and third graders.

To the best of my recollection, he was easily capable of holding the attention of this wiggly, energetic crew, and he taught us to sing proudly and with such joy it makes me chuckle to recall my warm feelings about the whole situation. At the conclusion of a rehearsal, he impressed upon us the importance of our role in Sunday worship and challenged us to make sure our parents were “up and at it” in time to get us there for warm-ups (and suggested something about banging on pots & pans)! There was lots of little-kid laughter in those happy rehearsals.

I have been thankful for Mrs. Nordstrom nearly every day of my adult life. She was my community choir director for several formative years in upper elementary, junior high, and high school. Demanding, passionate, and tender all at once, working hard under her direction felt inspiring and limitless. She made a point to know each of us and invited input on everything from musical decision-making to tour planning.

Mrs. Nordstrom modeled a never-quit work ethic through her passion for sharing the art of choral music. She believed her students were capable of developing the discipline needed to read, interpret, and produce music expressively. This, in turn, gifted her students emotional and intellectual benefits reaching far beyond the choir experience.

Having passed away not long after my fortunate time with her, Mrs. Nordstrom lives on in my daily memory (her picture is in front of me on my desk as I write this!). What I remember vividly - besides how wonderful it felt to sing, play, explore, and create with choir friends - are those incredible moments in a piece of music where I felt transported to a place I can only describe as rapturous. Still today, I try to imagine how she would interpret a piece, creatively help the group navigate a difficult passage, or advise about an important life decision.

“I have come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized.”

-Haim Ginott

Author Rob Jenkins draws from his experience as a student, professor, and administrator to write about “*What Makes a Good Teacher*.” His list of attributes may very well look like a set of qualities you’d use to describe your treasured teachers:

- They are good-natured.
- They are professional without being aloof.
- They have a good sense of humor.
- They seem to enjoy what they do.
- They are demanding without being unkind.
- They seem comfortable in their own skin.
- They are tremendously creative.
- They make teaching look easy.

Jenkins believes we can work to develop such qualities in ourselves: “*We may never be as funny, approachable, or creative as our favorite teachers. But simply by recognizing those traits as desirable, by acknowledging that we don’t possess them to the degree we would like, and by committing ourselves to working on those areas, we can become more approachable, creative, and yes, funnier than we would be otherwise.*”

Additional attributes may benefit the successful children’s choir director:

- A genuine love and acceptance of children as they are
- A love for the sound of children singing
- A belief that children can sing sensitively and musically
- An awareness of where students are developmentally
- The ability to be flexible

Building Choral Technique and Tone: Elementary Voices

BY MARK PATTERSON, PHD

How do we begin to build or re-build a successful children's choir? How do we take the group of children in front of us, many of whom are embarking on their first choral experience, and transform them into a team that sings beautifully and expressively? Teaching your choir to sing with beautiful tone and technique is going to take some time and some intentional effort. It isn't the stuff of instant success. That's ok! Music-making provides one of the clearest ways to realize the results of our effort and commitment. Being part of a choir that sings well is one of the most deeply satisfying endeavors that someone can participate in, and the skills you teach your singers will last forever.

PLAN AHEAD TO MAXIMIZE SINGING TIME

Every choir director on the planet wishes they had more rehearsal time with their ensemble, but each of us only has the minutes that are allotted to us each week. The more those precious rehearsal minutes are utilized for actual *singing*, the more opportunities your singers will have to develop wonderful choral technique and tone. Be alert to things that can creep in and consume your choir's singing time: handing out folders or music, figuring out who is going to sit where, getting music together for a friend who is visiting, lengthy announcements, consulting with the accompanist, or trying to get your own materials together.

Each of these tasks can and should be completed before the rehearsal so that valuable singing time is not wasted. There are certainly going to be some important non-singing moments that deserve rehearsal time - essential information and reminders, prayer concerns, time to highlight your singers' joys and accomplishments, time for group members to connect with one another, and time to for you to provide focused feedback and instruction. Careful planning will help you accomplish all of those essential things and spend as much time as possible building beautiful choral sound with your ensemble.

FUNDAMENTALS OF POSTURE AND BREATH

Good posture enables a good breath, and that breath is the fuel for our singing tone. These are core values for singers of any age and can be taught rather quickly without a lot of fuss. Touch on posture and breath frequently but with brief, focused instruction and quick reminders. If you only see your singers once a week, you don't have time to spend ten minutes of the rehearsal on breathing! Here are the essential elements to teach and reinforce:

Singer's Posture: Sit on the front half of your chair with your head held high - make yourself as tall as you can while still seated. Roll shoulders back to a relaxed position and lift the ribcage so it's not sitting on your tummy. This is singer's posture and it is important because it allows and enables our best singer's breath. When standing, check that both feet are comfortably apart for a solid foundation and prepare head, shoulders, and ribcage in the same way.

*Can someone still sing without these posture adjustments?
Of course, but we want to prepare our vocal instruments for optimum
performance so we can make the best possible sound.*

Singer's Breath: Once you've arrived at singer's posture, let your excess air out and then take a filling breath that makes your tummy pooch out while still keeping shoulders relaxed. Let the tummy naturally contract inward as you slowly exhale over four, eight, twelve, or sixteen counts and repeat the cycle again by taking another singer's breath. To help your choristers understand, contrast this with the typical playground breath where we hunch our shoulders up and add tension at the neck. The singer's breath

keeps our vocal mechanism relaxed, allows us to better manage the flow of air, and gives our singing tone the support it needs.

As you rehearse, be sure to model the singer's breath at a few appropriate points in the repertoire so your singers can begin to put this idea into practice.

These two fundamentals will set your choristers up for success and facilitate a healthy singing tone. Do you need to go deeper into explanations of the larynx, vocal folds, diaphragm, etc. with elementary students? Those discussions center on things we cannot touch or see, so they become more complicated topics to cover. With older students, you might consider featuring a brief mini-lesson or two from you, a soloist you admire, or a respected voice teacher to help your singers understand more about the vocal mechanism and singing technique.

CULTIVATING THE SINGING VOICE

Children often come to our church choirs for their very first singing experience. Hallelujah! Rejoice in welcoming them and working with them. Sometimes our new singers have not yet discovered their singing voice. They are really speaking their way through the music on just one or two pitches. Or, they may sing some of the lower pitches but drop out or down when the notes get higher. More experienced singers may be skilled at matching the pitches, but haven't fully developed their upper register or discovered their most beautiful, resonant sound. Some group exploration of the singing voice is needed.

Plan one or two choral warm-ups for each rehearsal to help facilitate discovery of the singing voice. Here are a few ideas to try:

Whisper Voice / Speaking Voice / Singing Voice

1. Director whispers, "This is my whisper voice." Choir echoes in their whisper voice.
2. Director speaks, "This is my speaking voice." Choir echoes in their speaking voice.
3. Director sings on any sequence of pitches, "This is my singing voice." Choir echoes the same melodic pattern in their singing voice. Use a simple pattern at first (*sol-sol-la-sol-mi-do* is a great one to start with) and then try singing more challenging patterns for them to echo.

Singing Owls

Model the pitch sequence shown here and have your choir sing it back. Continue further into the upper register to help your singers discover their singing tone that is available in that range.

Continue up by half steps through C or Db major.



Alleluia

Use this warm up to continue developing the upper register and to build a supported singing tone with longer phrases. You can also work on shaping the various vowels as they sing. (tall **ah**, round **oo**, etc.)

Continue up by half steps through F major.



Why is it so important to develop the upper register or head voice for children? Because that is the "sweet spot" of their singing voice - the place where they can sing more beautifully than anyone else. Many children have learned to sing only in their chest voice or lower register and have never explored that beautiful upper range. Use the above warm-ups along with vocal sirens and other exercises to help them

Transitioning from Rote Learning to Note Reading

BY KATIE HOUTS

Music literacy is a key element in a child's development as a growing musician, and becoming a confident music reader opens the door to rich musical experiences. Bringing this new skill set to young people, however, can seem like a daunting task. Fewer children are learning piano and fewer schools have dedicated music staff to introduce music literacy to elementary classes. Now, more than ever, it is important for children's music ministries to nurture literacy skills. But within our limited rehearsal time, how do we transition rote learners to note readers?

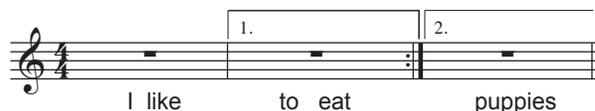
This article outlines five foundational areas of music literacy and offers a number of ideas and strategies for introducing children to the score. As with many skills and techniques involved in children's and youth choral programs (tone, expression, vocal exploration, etc.) meaningful literacy work is often best approached via brief, playful moments in rehearsal. Don't feel you need to spend a lot of time on any activity. Keep it light, positive, and collaborative. Exploring the score can be fun!

The following five areas of music literacy aren't meant to be sequentially addressed. I often work on a number of areas with singers at the same time; for example: identifying a rhythm, decoding a melody, and finding expression marks within the same rehearsal. The strategies listed under each literacy area are, however, loosely in sequential order - each section begins with introductory activities and continues with more specific, focused literacy exercises or experiences. Many of these ideas (especially after they have been introduced) can even be utilized as transitional elements during rehearsal.

1 - DISCOVERING THE MUSICAL ROAD MAP

Spend intentional rehearsal time teaching children how we navigate printed music.

1. Number the measures in the printed music together as you teach students about measures and bar lines.
2. Do a music scavenger hunt to pique the children's interest in exploring the score:
What is the first word in measure 12?
What measure has a word that rhymes with _____ ?
What is the last word on page 5?
3. When beginning a new song with a multi-age choir, partner an older, more experienced student with a younger child. Have the older child guide the younger one as they share the music and follow along together. After one or two rehearsals give the younger children their own copy of music to hold.
4. Give younger children colorful bookmarks to cover the piano accompaniment. Practice reading the entire text of the anthem from start to finish, helping young readers navigate jumping from system to system. You can also play the recording of the anthem as they practice following the printed music with their finger. Stop the recording at random spots and do a visual check to see that everyone is on the correct page and line.
5. Identify any repeated sections for the children. Consider placing a green and red sticker in the score as a visual reminder: green for the forward repeat sign (begin here), red for the backward repeat sign (stop and go back). Use funny sentences to practice reading first and second endings.



2 - LEARNING ABOUT MELODIC MOVEMENT

Help kids internalize the musical ladder and its relationship to a vocal staff.

1. Incorporate kinesthetic activities related to melodic movement in your warmups and vocal exploration time. Draw a straight or wavy line or a shape and invite the singers to follow it with their fingers, whole bodies, and/or voices. This helps prepare them to identify and distinguish ascending/descending melodic movement.
2. Build a human piano. Position 3-8 children at the front of the room by height (lowest pitch represented by the shortest child - use sitting, kneeling, or stools to help with this) and assign each a solfège syllable, number, or note name. Consider preparing visual aids which display their pitch assignment for the children to hold. Stand behind the children and gently tap them on the head or shoulder while the rest of the choir sings the pitch as you "play."
3. Ask the pianist to begin playing the melody line as children follow along with their "magic finger" in their music (or with an isolated melodic line displayed at the front of the room). The pianist should stop at random. Ask children to say the word on which the pianist stopped. Have the pianist start again, stopping at a different spot. *This serves two purposes:* 1) Children must follow the notes to answer correctly. 2) Singers hear the melody over and over. This is a great technique for introducing a new anthem.
4. Create a life-sized treble staff on your rehearsal room floor. Position a few children on a line or space and slowly sing together the melody they create (using solfège syllables, numbers, or note names). Begin with stepwise movement before incorporating larger intervals. As the children progress in their abilities, it's fun to invite a singer to position their peers in a melodic formation.
5. Talk about the ways melodies move: by step, skip or leap; repeated pitches, or moving in an upward or downward direction. Have children locate examples in their printed music.
6. Isolate short melody patterns and display them with solfège syllables or with actual notation. Point to or hold up a pattern and say, "Find this pattern on page (3)."

Choral anthems in the Rote to Note series from Choristers Guild have an enlarged vocal staff to help the singer identify their line in the score. These pieces are great resources to use with beginning note readers!

3 - UNDERSTANDING RHYTHMIC NOTATION

Build an understanding of steady beat, note values, and rhythmic patterns.

1. There are many different schools of thought regarding naming and labeling rhythms. You might be familiar with Kodály, Gordon, or Takadimi systems. Which is best to use? Do research with the local elementary schools to find out which is most widely used in your community - and use that method. This allows you to harness what the children are already learning and build on that foundation.
2. Introduce the concept of note values by having singers move to a fun, upbeat song. Have students follow you to start, and step to the beat around the room using quarter notes, half notes, whole notes, and eighth notes. Switch your note value every few measures. Once children are familiar with the names of those values, call out note values as students adjust their steps accordingly.
Variation: Have students assemble in two rows facing each other, with room in the middle for two people to walk. Play a song while two students dance/step/jump down the aisle between their peers, each choosing a note value. The rest of the choir watches and identifies the note value their peers selected. This activity can be a great way to introduce a new choir song and gives the children many chances to hear the music before singing it.
3. Incorporate a kinesthetic game ("JUMP!") to identify rhythmic values and combine them with steady beat (quarter note, eighth notes, quarter rest). Invite four students to the front to stand in a line. When you say "Jump!" the students should choose one position: feet together (quarter note), feet apart (eighth notes), turn to the side with knees bent and hands underneath chin like a bunny (quarter rest). Have the class chant or clap the rhythm their peers have created. Let the children in front change their positions a number of times before switching to a different set of singers.
4. A slight variation on #3 involves sidewalk chalk ("HOP!"). Have each singer draw a circle with chalk, large enough to stand inside. Next, ask them to write 2-4 specific note values (i.e. one quarter note and two barred eighth notes) inside the circle. The leader chants a rhythm pattern, and the singers echo while hopping onto the correct note value (i.e. "du, du, du-de, du!"). Once singers become familiar with the game, invite a student to create a rhythm for their peers to echo and hop.

I have:
 $\frac{2}{4}$ ♩ ♩ | ♩ ♩ |

Who has:
 $\frac{2}{4}$ ♩ ♩ | ♩ ♩ |

I have:
 $\frac{2}{4}$ ♩ ♩ ♩ | ♩ ♩ |

Who has:
 $\frac{2}{4}$ ♩ ♩ ♩ | ♩ ♩ |

I have:
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Who has:
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Who has:
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I have:
 $\frac{2}{4}$ ♩ ♩ ♩ | ♩ ♩ ♩ |

Who has:
 $\frac{2}{4}$ ♩ ♩ | ♩ ♩ |

When playing an 8 card game rather than 16 cards, use the card to the left in place of the card directly above.

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PART 2:

**Middle School
and High School
Choirs**

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Youth Choir Roundtable: How to Nurture Community and Connection

BY MARK BURROWS, EMILY FLOYD, AND TOM SHELTON

As elementary singers grow and graduate from a children's choir, there is an opportunity to continue nurturing these singers in a youth choir program. The community found in a church youth choir can forge important bonds of friendship, support, and accountability during the teen years. Many teens find strong purpose and a sense of belonging in artistic experiences - drama and theatre, music, art, and more. Personal expression is an important part of their self-discovery and self-awareness, and the arts are a meaningful outlet for this personal growth.

What are the foundational elements in a youth choir program? Beyond musical direction, what is important to prioritize and recognize when working with youth choirs? How do you build trusted relationships with teenagers?

Many thanks to Mark Burrows, Emily Floyd, and Tom Shelton for sharing their wisdom and experience for this article.

"Recruiting and motivating young people for the choir must be continual, as a never-ending process within and beyond the choir rehearsal context; compelling, with a genuine and fervent belief in the importance of the youth choir experience; creative, as we appeal to the imagination and energy of youth through dynamic approaches to choir rehearsals and performances; and conscientious, as we demonstrate a prevailing concern for the individual young person and as we provide an enthusiastic but realistic vision for the positive experience a youth choir can be."

- J. Phillip Landgrave

What do middle school and high school youth need most in a choir director?

Mark: Compassion and - God willing - genuine empathy. Youth are going through so much and are experiencing challenges I never had to face at their age. Given all the demands required of them, that they STILL make time to come to youth choir? What a gift! My call is to encourage them, listen to them, and treat them with the utmost respect and kindness.

Emily: Youth need our unconditional respect. They need someone who inspires artistry; someone who can make faith formation relevant, prioritized, and real. They need a safe space to grow and make mistakes.

Tom: They need a director who will set the groundwork for a strong sense of community and who works to build a safe space where all feel valued and appreciated. Choir is all about relationships - the connection we have with each other. You may have 200 people in your choir, but it truly is the one-on-one connection with your singers that is most important. Middle schoolers respond very well to a common routine within the rehearsal - this is one way you can help them feel safe and secure. Routine doesn't mean doing the same thing every rehearsal; it means following a sequence of events where the components in the sequence change. Youth want to feel a sense of accomplishment. As directors, we need to remember that positive reinforcement is VERY important. And: positive reinforcement is very DIFFERENT than false praise.

PART 3:

The Pastoral Musician

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Nurturing Faith and Community

BY JAMES WELLS

Body, mind, spirit, voice - it takes the whole person to sing and rejoice!

Helen Kemp's words have guided choir directors for generations, reminding us that singing involves far more than the voice. Singing - and in our context, the act of worship - involves the whole person. When our body, our mind, our spirit, and our voice are engaged and balanced in relationship with one another, something special happens.

In a similar way, providing a balanced and rich choir ministry means involving more than simply learning music. Randy Edwards outlined the Four Pillars of Choir as:

1. Spiritual Enrichment
2. Musical Learning, Growth, and Expression
3. Emotional Nurture
4. Social Interaction

When these four pillars are incorporated into a music ministry program, we move beyond notes and rhythms. Singers are empowered to embrace their own unique, beloved selves and sense how their gifts meet the needs of the world. I consider the four pillars of choir in my yearly curriculum and repertoire planning: How do the choral anthems, hymns, and spiritual songs we sing help to build a community that cares for one another? How do our activities encourage young people to explore and express their emotions? How does it challenge and affirm their faith journey? And, of course, how does it guide their musical development and growth?

Other articles in this resource have focused on pillar #2 - how we inspire and nurture the musical development of children and youth. So let's ponder what it means to nurture faith and community within a children's choir ministry using the Social, Emotional, and Spiritual pillars as a guide.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

By nature, music-making in a children's choir setting is a very social environment. We couldn't make it "not social" even if we wanted to! It is *what* we do with that social time that is so crucial: how can we make our choir time - whether it's rehearsal, worship, or outreach - a positive social experience? How do we take an intentional approach to the social interactions that happen and the social environment we wish to create?

A positive social experience can lead to a much greater chance to be musically successful and emotionally aware, and this creates room for spiritual growth.

From the moment our kids step into our rehearsal room, we have opportunities to nurture relationships. Make it a priority to nurture positive social interaction right from the start. How do you structure your arrival space? Is there a joyful process as kids come into the rehearsal room, mark themselves "here," and find their materials? Establish a good arrival rhythm and make singers (and grown-ups) aware of the process. Be OK with practicing certain rehearsal processes at the beginning of the year (you will thank yourself later). Have the rehearsal space set so you can greet singers, learn names, or engage them in an arrival activity. Use this arrival time to connect with a singer you didn't talk one-on-one with last week. Strike up a conversation with a shy singer and introduce them to a new friend in the process. When a child feels seen and known, they are more likely to be invested in what happens next.

PART 4:

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Teaching an Anthem: Rote Lesson

SIX-WEEK TEACHING SEQUENCE

GOD MADE IT SO!

Terry D. Taylor
CGA1048

Voicing: Unison with piano and optional C treble instrument

Vocal Range: D4- D5, Starts on G4

Theological Concept: The Creation Story

Musical Concepts: feeling 6/8, steady beat, crescendo, decrescendo, accelerando

Anticipated Musical Challenges: long phrases and sustained pitches; tempo and dynamic changes; finding the pitch at m38; anticipating the final entrance at m60.

BEFORE THE FIRST REHEARSAL

1. Give music to the pianist and flutist. Go over the music with them, if possible, to clarify tempo, dynamics, and other elements.
2. Learn the music thoroughly. Memorize it for the most effective teaching and conducting.
3. Prepare visual aids as indicated below; provide a take-home sheet with the song text to aid in memorization.
4. Consider producing a simple recording of the anthem to share with the children. Remember - you can purchase an inexpensive mechanical license to distribute publisher's demonstration recordings to your families.

A FEW NOTES BEFORE WE BEGIN

- Elementary children succeed when given ample opportunities to practice a skill. Purposeful repetition is key.
- As with students of all ages, the more senses engaged when learning a skill, the easier it is to become proficient.
- Children (and conductors) who memorize the music will typically have a more expressive, successful performance. If music is used, rehearse holding it up quietly, out of the face, while keeping an eye on the conductor.
- The warm-up activities listed in the lessons are intended to be incorporated into the choir's warm-up time, not necessarily immediately before work on the anthem.
- Transition activities are a way of moving from other rehearsal activities into focused work on this specific anthem.
- Free printable visuals related to this anthem are available on the anthem product page at choristersguild.org - take advantage of this free resource, which is referenced in Rehearsals 3 and 4.

REHEARSAL 1

GOALS:

1. Develop the buoyant feel of the piece.
2. Anticipate with a breath and perform the final phrase of each verse.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the Italian musical word *decrescendo*.

PREPARATION:

1. Verse 1 text written on a large sheet of paper or displayed on the board.
2. Anthem recording and/or accompaniment ready.
3. A large *decrescendo* symbol displayed.

WARM-UP STRETCHES:

Children hear *God Made It So!* (see Choristers Guild website for a sample recording, create a recording, or use the accompaniment) as places are taken, and the teacher's silent (no talking) stretches are mirrored.

WARM-UP EXERCISE:

1. Children echo "*Alleluia!*" (pickup to m15) in several keys while mirroring the musical shape of the word with their hand.
2. The teacher adds the "*God made it so*" pitches on a neutral syllable (i.e. doo) following each "*Alleluia!*" - modeling also the *decrescendo* at the end of the phrase. After hearing it several times, children are invited to sing the phrase as their hands draw the melodic shape.

ANTHEM FOCUS:

1. Keeping a beat in their feet as they sway from side to side, children listen for a familiar phrase while the teacher points to the text and sings the first verse. Hands are raised once the familiar phrase is heard, and the rest of the text ("...God made it so") is identified. The choir practices this phrase with the text and gestures. Observe the final note ("so") which *decrescendos* (new word!) and spins for two full sways!
2. A large *decrescendo* symbol is displayed and demonstrated. Children echo the demonstration of the final pitch of the phrase.
3. Continue the swaying beat while listening to the teacher sing the full anthem, and anticipate with a breath each time the known phrase is to be sung (the teacher assists by gesturing a down, out, and wide breath). Perform the phrase without the teacher's help.
4. A discussion about the piece follows (text is removed from sight!): How many times is "*Alleluia! God made it so! Alleluia! God made it so!*" sung in this song? What is this song about? Which creations of God will we be singing about in this piece?

REHEARSAL 2

GOALS:

1. Hear the new sounds of the B section.
2. Practice inner hearing with Mystery Melody challenge.
3. Memorize verse one.
4. Demonstrate the Italian musical word *crescendo*.

PREPARATION:

1. Using three large sheets of paper, draw an outline of the first three melodic phrases in a continual line.
2. Write the corresponding text on three additional sheets of paper, making sure the words line up with the shape of each phrase when the two sheets of paper are put together by the children.
3. A large *crescendo* symbol is added next to last week's *decrescendo* symbol.