

REHEARSAL STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS
MAXIMIZE YOUR TIME!

Colorado ACDA Summer Conference, July 21, 2009

Dr. Dana Ihm, Director of Choral Activities

Colorado State University-Pueblo

I. Score Study

Effective score study uncovers ways to be more efficient in our time management of rehearsals. The following list for score study is just one of many ways to approach your study of the choral music you have selected.

A. Procedures for Score Study (*The Choral Challenge* – Kemp)

- Read the text without regard for music and mark probable breathing spots.
- Transfer breathing marks to the music, making any necessary adjustments.
- Determine large and small structural divisions based primarily on the text analysis above.
- Determine the key and if it changes throughout the piece.
- Sight sing each part without the piano to determine problem notes and then circle these notes.
- Look through the score for instances when more than one problem note appears simultaneously.
- Note when any voice part hasn't been singing for some time and mark entrances.
- Note high points in each part for at least the first several phrases.
- Look at vocal parts in their relationship to each other.
- Determine melodic themes or fragments that are repeated elsewhere.
- At the beginning of the composition in the margin above the music, put a box indicating meter, tempo and opening dynamic level.
- Translate exactly any Italian or other terms, don't guess.
- Determine articulation that is best for the piece – legato, staccato, etc.
- Check the exact tempo with a metronome.
- Mark meter and tempo changes within the composition.
- Where there are multiple tempos within a composition, copy the meters and tempos onto another piece of paper in performance order and practice with a metronome finding the correct tempos.
- In a large scale work, determine and mark in your score, standing and sitting directions and the cueing of each.
- Check that all choir members have the same edition of the music. If not, use rehearsal letters and measure numbering.
- Research information on the composer and author of the text, the time and place of the composition, and other interesting facts about the piece.

B. Charting the Full Score (*Precision Conducting* – Sharp)

- Note the major sections of the score
- Include details such as keys, tempos, meters, form, and instrumentation.

C. Charting a Single Movement (*Precision Conducting* – Sharp)

The single movement chart includes three important elements:

- An indication of a group of measures that form a unit, ex. "m. 1-4".
- Analytical facts about the music found in the score study.
- Rehearsal considerations dictated by the analysis.

The single-movement chart is a listing of each measure or consecutive measures of a work, from beginning to end, with a prose description of the various characteristics that make up the music, followed by rehearsal suggestions and problems anticipated by the conductor.

D. Performers Marking Sheet (*Precision Conducting* – Sharp)

- Convert your analysis sheet into a handout to give to students for marking their scores. This saves a tremendous amount of rehearsal time.

II. Long Range Planning

A. Planning for the Concert

- Determine how many weeks or hours of rehearsal you have for the concert?
- Determine how many minutes of music you can successfully learn in the allotted time.
- Plan backwards from the concert to the first rehearsal.
- Set dates to have major items completed such as: all pieces introduced, all parts learned, when each piece is memorized, etc.

III. Evaluating Rehearsals

A. Evaluation during a Rehearsal

- Be watchful and listen to your chorus members, analyze their level of engagement in the rehearsal.
- Don't be afraid to alter your plan if things are not going well.
- Be able to speed up or slow down the rehearsal pace if needed.

B. Evaluation After the Rehearsal

- Be prepared to revise your weekly and daily plans.
- Take time to reflect after each rehearsal on what went well.
- Every 2-3 weeks revise your long range plan to reflect your current status in the learning process.

By spending more time on score study, long range planning, and evaluation of your rehearsals, you enable yourself to have more time to spend on the items you really need to work on in rehearsal. You will be more efficient and better prepared for rehearsal and thus waste less time with endless repetition of musical details we already know and to well. Maximize your time!

Bibliography

Kemp, Michael. *The Choral Challenge- Practical Paths to Solving Problems*.
Chicago: GIA Publications, 2009.

Sharp, Timothy W. *Precision Conducting: Seven Disciplines for Excellence in Conducting*. 2nd ed. Dayton, Ohio: Roger Dean Publishing Company, a division of Lorenze Corporation, 2003.

(Teachers Guide)
REHEARSAL STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS
MAXIMIZE YOUR TIME!

Introduction

Today we are going to look at some aspects of rehearsal technique that most of us probably don't spend as much time on as we should. We often are very adept at teaching parts, putting together warm-ups, even recruiting for our groups. But, I find for myself that I don't always take enough time to study and internalize the score, do long range planning, or evaluate my rehearsals daily. It is so easy to get caught up in the mad rush of starting a new school year that we jump into our first rehearsals not fully prepared to teach our students the depth of music that we could if we spent some additional quality time on these aspects of rehearsal.

I. Score Study

The first item I would like to address is score study. How many of you find yourself sight reading your music with your students during the first week or so of rehearsing a new piece? We are usually good enough at sight reading and conducting that we can get sloppy with this and say "Oh well, as long as I stay ahead of my students, it is ok." Many of you think you are too busy to devote enough time to score study, but you don't have to choose between score study and administration of your program – you can and should balance your time between both. Effective score study uncovers ways to be more efficient in our time management of rehearsals. The following list for score study is just one of many ways to approach your study of the choral music you have selected.

A. Procedures for Score Study (*The Choral Challenge* – Kemp)

- Read the text without regard for music and mark probable breathing spots.
- Transfer breathing marks to the music, making any necessary adjustments.
- Determine large and small structural divisions based primarily on the text analysis above.
- Determine the key and if it changes throughout the piece.
- Sight sing each part without the piano to determine problem notes and then circle these notes.
- Look through the score for instances when more than one problem note appears simultaneously.

- **Note when any voice part hasn't been singing for sometime and mark entrances.**
- **Note high points in each part for at least the first several phrases.**
- **Look at vocal parts in their relationship to each other.**
- **Determine melodic themes or fragments that are repeated elsewhere.**
- **At the beginning of the composition in the margin above the music, put a box indicating meter, tempo and opening dynamic level.**
- **Translate exactly any Italian or other terms, don't guess.**
- **Determine articulation that is best for the piece – legato, staccato, etc.**
- **Check the exact tempo with a metronome.**
- **Mark meter and tempo changes within the composition.**
- **Where there are multiple tempos within a composition, copy the meters and tempos onto another piece of paper in performance order and practice with a metronome finding the correct tempos.**
- **In a large scale work, determine and mark in your score, standing and sitting directions and the cueing of each.**
- **Check that all choir members have the same edition of the music. If not, use rehearsal letters and measure numbering.**
- **Research information on the composer and author of the text, the time and place of the composition, and other interesting facts about the piece.**

B. Charting the Full Score (*Precision Conducting* – Sharp)

Score analysis leads to an important practical process and tool called charting. This is a very helpful tool throughout your rehearsal and learning of the work. The analysis process begins by:

(Look at the handout, Sharp, on full score charting)

- **Noting the major sections of the score.**
- **Include details such as keys, tempos, meters, form, and instrumentation.**

After completion of the full score chart, it is imperative to do a more detailed analysis of each section of a multi-movement work.

C. Charting a Single Movement (*Precision Conducting – Sharp*)

The single movement chart includes three important elements:

(Look at the handout, Sharp, single movement chart)

- **An indication of a group of measures that form a unit, ex. “m. 1-4”.**
- **Analytical facts about the music found in the score study.**
- **Rehearsal considerations dictated by the analysis.**

The single-movement chart is a listing of each measure or consecutive measures of a work, from beginning to end, with a prose description of the various characteristics that make up the music, followed by rehearsal suggestions and problems anticipated by the conductor.

D. Performers Marking Sheet (*Precision Conducting – Sharp*)

(Look at the handout, Sharp, performers marking sheet)

- **Convert your analysis sheet into a handout to give to students for marking their scores. This saves a tremendous amount of rehearsal time.**

II. Long Range Planning

Most of us do short range planning (daily and weekly) because we know it is required by our school. But most of us don't really take the time to map out a long range strategy for our concert season or semester. Here are a few steps to help you be more proactive in your long range planning.

A. Planning for the Concert

- **Determine how many weeks or hours of rehearsal you have for the concert?**
- **Determine how many minutes of music you can successfully learn in the allotted time.**

*(Recycling music previously learned can help. *Also, it takes at least 30 minutes of rehearsal to prepare 1 minute of music.)*

- **Plan backwards from the concert to the first rehearsal.**

- Set dates to have major items completed such as: all pieces introduced, all parts learned, when each piece is memorized, etc.

Long range planning forces you to be more efficient in your rehearsals. It forces you to keep up with the major mile markers you have to accomplish before a concert.

III. Evaluating Rehearsals

E. Evaluation during a Rehearsal

- a. Be watchful and listen to your chorus members, analyze their level of engagement in the rehearsal.
- b. Don't be afraid to alter your plan if things are not going well.
(ex. Maybe a major sports event or other school function inhibits their ability to focus on the rehearsal)
- c. Be able to speed up or slow down the rehearsal pace if needed.

B. Evaluation After the Rehearsal

- Be prepared to revise your weekly and daily plans.
(Always know that the plans you put together for a weeks worth of rehearsals will most likely not be valid after your Monday rehearsal!)
- Take time to reflect after each rehearsal on what went well.
(Were you able to achieve your goals? Was your pacing of rehearsals good? How could you have communicated more clearly to your chorus members?)
- Every 2-3 weeks revise your long range plan to reflect your current status in the learning process.
(This will keep you focused on your target- the concert- and what still needs to happen in order to prepare for it.)

By spending more time on score study, long range planning, and evaluation of your rehearsals, you enable yourself to have more time to spend on the items you really need to work on in rehearsal. You will be more efficient and better prepared for rehearsal and thus waste less time with endless repetition of musical details we already know and to well. Maximize your time!

Bibliography

Kemp, Michael. *The Choral Challenge- Practical Paths to Solving Problems.*
Chicago: GIA Publications, 2009.

Sharp, Timothy W. *Precision Conducting: Seven Disciplines for Excellence in Conducting*. 2nd ed. Dayton, Ohio: Roger Dean Publishing Company, a division of Lorenze Corporation, 2003.