

Chapter 6

VOCAL PEDAGOGY AND MUSICIANSHIP SKILLS

6.1 The Vocal Instrument

Vocal pedagogy, the teaching of singing, is vitally important to a successful choral programme. Singing is a complex process that involves the whole body, as well as the mind, and the choral teacher needs to know how the vocal/singing mechanism works. Choral educators aim to develop good basic vocal skills in all the choristers and this can only be achieved if they have a clear understanding of the basic structure, function and strategies of the vocal instrument.

It is not necessary to burden the choristers in the Foundation phase with great detail about the anatomy and physiology of the vocal mechanism. The choristers produce good choral tone at this stage mostly as a result of imitating and following the choral educator's instruction and modelling in rehearsal. It is sufficient to ensure that the choristers are singing with a relaxed, dropped jaw, with the lips slightly flared (like the bell of a trumpet). (Refer to Figure II - 6-1, below.)



Figure II - 6-1 Vertical mouth position with the lips slightly flared (vocal “embouchure”)

This mouth position for singing is occasionally referred to as vocal “embouchure” (Jordanoff & Page 1994: 8).

In the Intermediate phase the choristers should be better informed about the physiological aspects of singing and the vocal mechanism. The vocal instrument includes those parts of the body with which we breathe, the larynx (or voice box) and the resonators.

Musical sounds are produced in the following way:

- From the lungs a stream of air flows up the trachea (wind pipe) and passes between the vocal folds (or cords), which in turn causes them to vibrate.
- This vibration creates a sound, which has pitch.
- For the pitch to have intensity and quality, the sound waves (which have been caused by the vibration of the vocal folds) depend on resonating space. (Refer to Figure II - 6-2, below.)

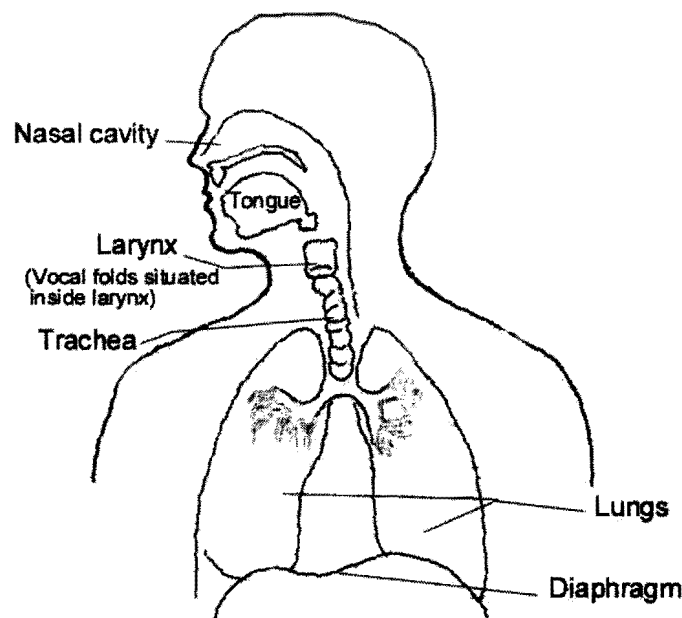


Figure II - 6-2 The vocal instrument

Without the breath as power source, the vocal folds cannot vibrate and no sound is possible. The lungs can thus be seen as the sound generator. When we breathe in correctly, the diaphragm moves down and out and the lungs are filled with air. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.4 “Breath Management”.)

The larynx (or Adam's apple) is the hard area, which can be seen and felt in the throat, at the top of the trachea (wind pipe). The two vocal folds are situated inside the larynx and they are the origin of phonation (tone or sound production) for both singing and speaking. The rise and fall of the pitch depends upon the length, tension and thickness of the vocal folds and how fast they vibrate. To produce a high pitch, the folds become tenser, thinner and they vibrate faster. In order to produce a low pitch, the folds become less tense, thicker and they vibrate more slowly. This can be compared to plucking a stretched elastic band; when it is taut, it produces a higher tone than plucking it when it is slacker.

The major resonators of the human voice are in the mouth, the pharynx and nasal cavity. The pharynx refers to the cavity above the larynx that extends upward behind the mouth and the nose. (Refer to Figure II - 6-5, "Resonance areas", below.) The shape/size and condition of the resonance cavities determine the tone colour (timbre). The position of the jaw and the movement of the tongue can modify the *shape/size* of these resonators. The *condition* of the resonating cavities refers to the healthy state, or the congestion from an infection or allergic reaction. A large, relaxed resonating space within the mouth and the pharynx area is conducive to good singing. Hence the oft repeated instruction: "sing with a relaxed, open throat". This is obtained by a relaxed, dropped jaw, the tongue in a forward, relaxed position (the tip of the tongue lightly resting at the base of the lower front teeth) and the soft palate slightly raised. (Refer to Figure II - 6-3, below.)

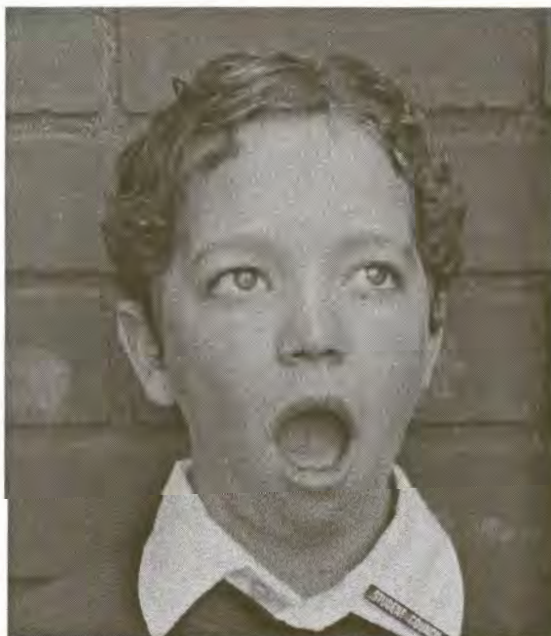


Figure II - 6-3 Tongue resting lightly at the base of the lower front teeth

Any rigidity will cause constriction, which will minimise the vocal tract's resonating space.
(Refer to Figure II - 6-4, below.)



Figure II - 6-4 Incorrect pulling back of the tongue

Singing or speaking is not complete without articulation. The articulators are the lips, teeth, tongue and palate. They are used to articulate the consonants, resulting in words being formed.
(Refer to **Part II**, 6.9 “Diction”.)

The act of singing requires greater exertion from the voice than does normal speech and the voice, therefore, has to be conditioned through training, to meet the demand. One could compare this to running, which necessitates greater exertion from the body than walking. To attain singing success, one has to practise and train extensively in order to meet the additional demand on the vocal mechanism and the body.

6.2 Choral Tone Quality

The choral educator should, first of all, have a mental concept of an ideal choral soundscape, tone quality or aural image, and then aim to re-create this in the choir. This process is a

perpetual quest. One stands to gain immensely by listening to other choirs performing both on recordings and in live performances.

The treble voice children's choir should have a distinct buoyancy and ethereal or uniquely clear, pure and resonant choral tone quality. The children are not yet able to produce a big sound and one therefore aims for quality of tone. The goal is a light, forward sound that is full of energy, vitality and personality. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.7 "The Importance of Head Voice".) There should be a total absence of harsh nasality or muffled throatiness. Forced singing, in an attempt to create a big sound, should be avoided at all costs because the sound becomes strident, rough and harsh. As the child grows, the vocal tract becomes longer and the quantity/volume of sound (depth and resonance) will increase.

The children must constantly think of singing with true beauty of tone. This is especially necessary when they are singing loudly. They should never sing louder than that which is beautiful. As they sing an ascending line, they should always try to reduce the volume of sound as they ascend into the top of their range. This should help to avoid a pinched, strident, tense or screeching tone.

A good choral tone quality in a children's choir is promoted, for the most part, by the following components:

- correct singing posture;
- proper breath management;
- tall/vertical, uniform vowel colours (refer to **Part II**, 6.8 "Italian Basic Pure Vowels, Uniform Vowel Colours and Vowel Modification");
- optimum use of resonating cavities;
- use of the head voice or register (light mechanism) (refer to **Part II**, 6.6 "Children's Vocal Ranges and Registers", and 6.7 "The Importance of Head Voice");
- the ability to use the voice with great agility and flexibility; and
- clear diction.

The resonating cavities are important for a beautiful tone. The pharynx (throat) and the mouth are the major resonators of the voice, but they are not the only ones. The chest, larynx, nasal cavity and sinuses also contribute to vocal resonance. Make the choristers aware of these

resonating cavities by asking them to hum on “n” or “ng” and to feel the vibration by placing the hand or fingers on the cheeks, bridge of the nose and the area of the larynx (Adam’s apple) in the throat.

The pharynx is the cavity above the larynx and extends further up behind the mouth and the nasal cavity. There are thus three pharyngeal areas:

- the laryngo-pharynx (the area above the larynx, below the tongue),
- the oro-pharynx (the area behind the mouth and tongue), and
- the naso-pharynx (the area behind the nasal cavity, above the soft palate).

(Refer to Figure II - 6-5, “Resonance areas”, below.)

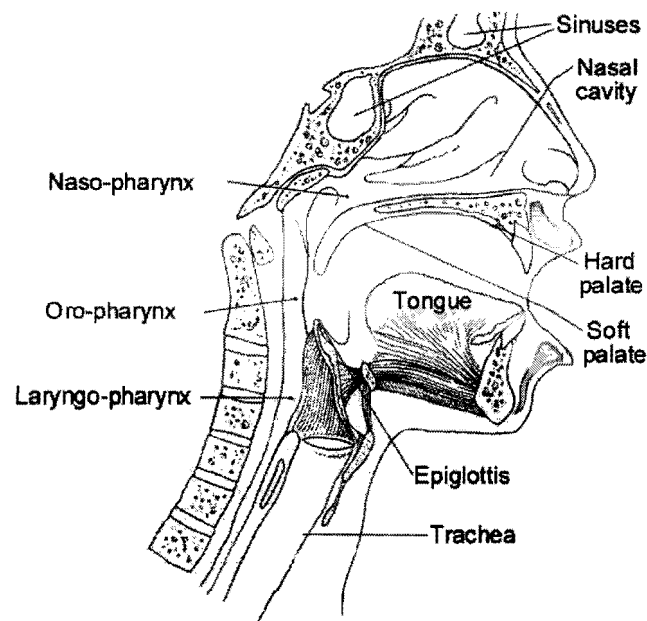


Figure II - 6-5 Resonance areas

6.3 Correct Singing Posture

The children need to be made aware of the fact that a correct body posture is absolutely essential for good breath management and hence, beautiful singing. Tell and show them to stand tall, proud and alert. The stance should be erect, but not “military-style” rigid. The entire body must be free and relaxed.

The feet should be comfortably (approximately shoulder width) apart, with one foot slightly ahead of the other and the weight balanced on both feet. The body weight should be distributed slightly forward, like a person who is “ready for action”. Another way of describing this to the choristers, is to tell them that “each chorister must have ten toes touching the floor” (this is to ensure that the weight is on the front part of the feet).

The knees must not be locked, but should be relaxed. Locking the knees impedes the blood flow and may cause people to faint. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.13 “Maintaining Vocal Health”.) The chest must be held high (the sternum lifted) with the spinal column stretched. (Another way of expressing this, is to tell the choristers that *the rib cage should be lifted*.) Ask the choristers to stand “tall and proud”. This should not be accompanied by any tension but should rather suggest a feeling of spaciousness (“tallness”) in the midriff area. The shoulders have to be in a natural position, i.e. down, back and relaxed. The arms hang loosely and relaxed at the sides. (Refer to Figures **II - 6-6** and **II - 6-7**, below, for the correct singing posture.)



Figure II - 6-6 Correct posture for singing when standing (front view)



Figure II - 6-7 Correct posture for singing when standing (side view)

The head should be vertically aligned with the spine, and not tilted back. The neck and shoulder area must be very relaxed. The chin may not project out and up, but the head should be tilted ever so slightly forward so that the chin is a little down (but not tucked in). A chin that projects, is an indication of undesirable vocal tension. (Refer to Figure II - 6-8, below.)



Figure II - 6-8 Undesirable tension in the throat area, with the chin jutting out and up

Overall, the body posture has to look poised, confident, intelligent, alert, energetic, buoyant and ready for action like an athlete anticipating the gunshot for the race. The choral educator must constantly model and monitor the correct body posture for singing and insist on everybody maintaining it while singing.

The following procedure may be used to promote good posture for singing. Ask the choristers to stand as if a string is attached from the crown of the head to the ceiling. This string is holding the head up like that of a marionette. Pull the imaginary string up and tell them that the string will break if the head or body should slouch or sag and that we want to maintain this posture.

Another procedure is to ask the choristers to stand with their back against the wall. The head, the shoulders, the small of the back and the heels should also touch the wall. Some choristers may have to move the head slightly away from the wall to avoid tenseness in the neck area. Step away from the wall and maintain this erect posture without any rigidity or tenseness.

When the choristers are sitting down, they should sit on the front half of the chair with the feet flat on the floor, maintaining the same erect position from the waist up. The legs should not cross at the knees or ankles. (Refer to Figure II - 6-9a, below.) It is important to allow the choristers to sit back and relax in the chairs between periods of singing.

The music folder should be held so that the chorister can comfortably see the conductor without lifting the head. The folder should never touch the body. Place one hand under the open music folder and the other hand on top to turn the pages and control the angle and height. The chorister should not hold the folder so high that it blocks the face. If the music is held too high, the audience and the conductor cannot see the mouth and face and the sound is cut off to some extent. Should the music folder be held too low, the correct singing posture cannot be maintained because the head is tilted down. The chorister will then be less inclined to watch the conductor because it involves too much effort to move the head up and down. In this case the sound will be directed towards the floor, instead of towards the audience and the audience will see the top of the singer's head instead of the face and the eyes. Should the chorister be sitting down, s/he must hold the folder *up and out* so that it does not touch the lap.



Figure II - 6-9a Correct posture for singing when sitting



Figure II - 6-9b Slouching, incorrect posture for singing when sitting

Good singing posture does not only *feel* good, it also *looks* good. A buoyant, vitalised singing posture not only ensures beautiful tone, but also contributes to general mental alertness and prevents the body from tiring too soon. Choristers will slump from time to time and they need to be constantly reminded about maintaining a good posture when singing. (Obviously, the teacher needs to model a good posture at all times.) Draw the choristers' attention to the fact that good posture is associated with self-confidence and success; two attributes much sought after in the corporate world.

6.4 Breath Management

Correct breath management is fundamental to good choral tone. The choristers in the Foundation phase should not be burdened with long explanations of anatomy and the physiological process of the breathing mechanism. At this stage the learning takes place mostly through imitating the example, and following the instructions of the choral teacher. In the Intermediate phase, however, the anatomy and function of the breathing process needs to be explained. (Refer to **Part I**, 3.5 “Choral Unit Standard: Voice/Tone Production”, General Outcomes number 4.)

The muscles of the upper chest and shoulders should be relaxed to prevent tension of the neck muscles around the larynx. The muscles around the mid-section of the body, i.e. the diaphragm, abdominal and inter-costal muscles, are the primary muscles used for correct breathing in singing. The exhaled air/breath has to be supported and controlled to ensure a steady and continuous flow.

When we sing, there are three different types of breathing that are employed:

- deep and full diaphragmatic-abdominal breathing;
- catch (or snatch) breathing; and
- staggered breathing.

These will now be discussed under separate headings.

6.4.1 Deep and Full Diaphragmatic-Abdominal Breathing

The diaphragm is dome-shaped and is situated under the lungs. One becomes aware of its action by placing the hand horizontally under the breastbone and giving a few sharp puffs in succession on “ch”, “ph” or “sh”. Alternatively, one could ask the children to pant like a dog for a few seconds.

When one breathes in, the diaphragm moves downward, allowing the air to flow into the lungs. The abdominal muscles relax and the waist area expands. For singing we inhale rapidly and exhale slowly and evenly. Breathing out, the abdominal muscles gradually contract while the diaphragm slowly relaxes and pushes up against the lungs, causing the air to flow out. (Refer to Figure II - 6-10, below.)

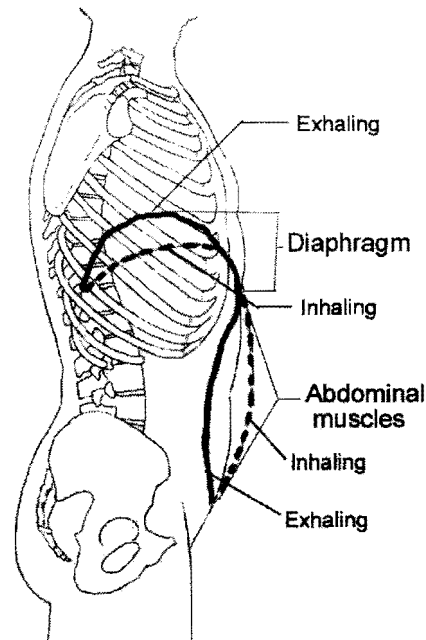


Figure II - 6-10 Position of the diaphragm when inhaling and exhaling

Before we can start singing, a deep breath has to be taken. Proper breath management for singing is essential for a well-supported, resonant tone that rings out. The children are inclined to breathe in the upper chest when they are singing. They often do not attain the deep and full diaphragmatic-abdominal breathing necessary for good support in singing. Shallow or clavicular (collar bone) breathing is evident when a child lifts the shoulders while inhaling. This must be corrected. Refrain from asking choristers to

take a “big” breath as this may result in clavicular breathing. Rather use the terms “deep breath” or “full breath”.

Tell the children that they need to fill their lungs with air all the way from the bottom up. One does not want to use only the upper part of the lungs. In teaching children in the Foundation phase to breathe correctly, one could use the analogy of having to inflate a tube around the waist (belt area) when they inhale. Ask the children to stand tall and to imagine that they are inhaling through their belly-buttons. Should they place their hands around their waist, they will feel the tube being inflated. This will promote the desired effect of low breathing as opposed to shallow, upper chest or clavicular breathing which can lead to muscular tension in the throat area. Remind the choristers that you do not want to hear them taking a breath.

In the Intermediate phase, ask the choristers to bend over from the waist with their hands around the waist. They should be able to feel the expansion of the abdomen and lower back areas during inhalation. Another way of making the choristers aware of low, abdominal breathing is to ask them to lie down on the floor, on their backs, with their hands placed horizontally just above their waists. Their shoulders are relaxed and it is impossible to slouch or to raise the shoulders when they inhale. If they take a deep breath, they will feel the expansion around the waist and abdominal area. They then breathe out slowly on a long, unbroken “ph” or “ss” sound, to the count of 10. Repeat this a few times and increase the count by 5 every time, taking it up to 25 or 30. Alternatively, chant the words of a well-known song or rhyme on one pitch.

When the pupils come to the choral rehearsal, their minds are pre-occupied with a plethora of incidents, commitments and problems that fill their (busy) lives. Before they can start singing, they need to warm up some muscles and clear their minds so that they can focus on musical learning. Any choral warm-up exercise that one selects should have a clear and specific purpose.

In order to produce a focussed, quiet atmosphere that is conducive to work and to attain better abdominal, low breathing, ask the choristers to spread out in the room. They must find sufficient space, at least an arm’s length apart, so that they will not touch

each other when they raise their arms. Remind them to stand tall, with the feet slightly apart and the arms hanging loosely next to their sides. Ask them to take a deep breath in through the nose and mouth *without* making a sound, like at the beginning of a yawn. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.7 “The Importance of Head Voice”.) At the same time, they raise their arms (sideways), over their heads, while you slowly count four. (The raising of the arms will prevent undesirable lifting of the shoulders.) Hold the breath for four counts while the arms are held above the head with the thumbs or hands linked. Release the hands and slowly exhale to a long, even “ph” or “ss” for eight counts whilst the arms are slowly lowered to the sides, keeping them straight and extended. Do this exercise four times. Remember to stand tall and proud with the shoulders back and relaxed and keeping the sternum (chest bone) high when they exhale; i.e. do not let the chest/rib cage collapse during the exhaling process. Nobody may talk and everybody strives to clear his or her mind of all extraneous clutter and to focus on the breathing exercise. The choristers are warming-up, both physically and mentally.

When we sing, we need to learn to support a consistent, energised flow of air in order to sustain phrases and to vary the intensity of the tone. In other words, the breath must be *controlled* as it is exhaled. To practise this, ask the children to blow the air slowly and steadily onto their hand, which is held up in front of the face, about 15cm away. We ask the choristers to blow onto their hand in order to *feel* the air as it is exhaled.

Deep breathing must become a habit if the choristers are to reach their full vocal potential. The choral teacher should constantly work on correct breathing and it may take a while before every choir member masters the technique. The choral teacher’s correct breathing needs to set a good example for the choristers. Furthermore, they need constant, gentle reminders about correct breathing measures.

6.4.2 Catch (or Snatch) Breathing

When there is not enough time to take a deep breath, and there is a need to continue the vocal line without a definite break, the singer will have to “snatch” a breath. This involves a quick, light, partial breath being taken.

6.4.3 Staggered Breathing

When a phrase in choral singing is too long to sing with a single breath, a special technique, *staggered breathing*, can be employed. Staggered breathing is also occasionally referred to as “choral breathing”. It is advisable to introduce staggered-breathing only in the Intermediate phase.

Staggered breathing involves the choristers breathing in turn and catching a quick new breath before running low on breath supply. Each chorister breathes at a different time so as not to interrupt the flow of the phrase. This should be done without any audible inhalation. The singer will take a quick snatch breath, preferably on a vowel sound. The mouth stays in the same position, during inhalation, and the singing comes back in on the same vowel that was left fleetingly. It is important to come back in softly, so as not to disturb the musical line. The listener should not be able to detect when a particular chorister is taking a breath. Remind the choristers that the idea is not to breathe when one’s neighbour is breathing and not to interrupt the flow of the musical phrase. The tone should not become harsh or strained and the volume should remain even.

6.5 Resonance

Children often sing as if they have “lockjaw”. They do not even realise that they are singing with their jaws tense/tight and their mouths relatively closed, resulting in a thin, shallow and insipid sound. Beautiful singing requires optimum resonance and we aim to expand and open the resonators as much as possible. The following procedures will promote greater resonance:

- Relax and loosely drop the lower jaw.
- The lips and facial muscles should be relaxed. The lips must never be spread or drawn back but rather be slightly flared, similar to the bell of a trumpet. (Refer to Figure II - 6-1, above.)
- Arch or lift the soft palate.

- The tongue should lie relaxed and comfortably low; not be pulled back and humped up in the back of the mouth, diminishing the space in the pharynx. The tip of the tongue should rest lightly at the base of the lower front teeth. (Refer to Figure II - 6-3, above.)
- There must be no undue constriction of the swallowing muscles.

These measures will enlarge the resonating space inside the mouth and result in an open, relaxed throat, which will enhance the tone.

Under no circumstances should the jaw be tense and jutting out; i.e. lifting the chin, thereby stretching and tightening the neck muscles. Tenseness in the throat area adversely affects the tone. (Refer to Figure II - 6-8, above.)

The following singing exercise (Example II - 6-1, below) may be used to demonstrate how the jaw feels when it is operating correctly and how dramatically the tone improves. Ask the choristers to put their index finger on their chins to ensure that they are dropping the lower jaw, when singing the second syllable, “nah”. Should the choristers repeat an exercise by singing it incorrectly and not dropping the lower jaw or arching the soft palate, they will marvel at the dramatic deterioration in the tone. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.8 “Italian Basic Pure Vowels, Uniform Vowel Colours and Vowel Modification”.) The exercise is sung to some of the following neutral syllables:

- “moo-nah”, “noo-nah”, “loo-nah”, for the [u] “u” (oo) vowel sound;
- “moh-nah”, “noh-nah”, “loh-nah”, for the [ɔ] “o” (oh) vowel sound;
- “mah-nah”, “nah-nah”, “lah-nah”, for the [ɑ] “a” (ah) vowel sound;
- “meh-nah”, “neh-nah”, “leh-nah”, for the [ɛ] “e” (eh) vowel sound; and
- “mee-nah”, “nee-nah”, “lee-nah”, for the [i] “i” (ee) vowel sound.

The jaw is in its lowest position for the [ɑ] “a” (ah) vowel, which is the most suitable vowel sound for opening up the vocal tract. The exercises are preceded with an *m*, *n* and *l*, alternatively, to bring the sound upward and forward and not to let it sound back in the throat. The “nah” syllable serves to achieve high, forward focus, and to develop a good head resonance. Repeat the exercise by ascending a semitone every time.



moo - nah moo - nah moo - nah moo - nah moo - nah

Sing on the following vowels: 1. "U" vowel: moo-nah
noo-nah
loo-nah

2. "O" vowel: moh-nah
noh-nah
loh-nah

3. "A" vowel: mah-nah
nah-nah
lah-nah

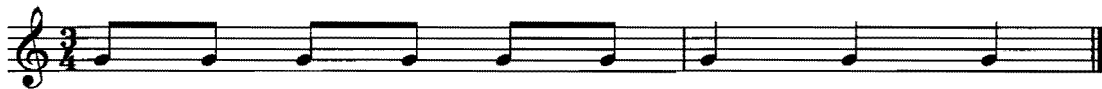
4. "E" vowel: meh-nah
neh-nah
leh-nah

5. "I" vowel: mee-nah
nee-nah
lee-nah

Example II - 6-1 Exercise to demonstrate how the jaw feels when it is operating correctly and how dramatically the tone improves

The exercises in Examples II - 6-2a and II - 6-2b, used and recommended by Professor Petru Gräbe (1999), are most useful for promoting resonance:

- When singing the exercise in Example II - 6-2a, ensure that the facial muscles are completely relaxed. The skin of the face is thought of as a “mask”. The sound is projected into the mask; i.e. the tone is focussed in the frontal resonance chambers. The concept of singing in the mask is most conducive to creating head resonance. The transition from the *m*, *d*, and *l* to the vowels following these consonants should be very smooth. The vowel sounds should be the basic, pure Italian vowel sounds. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.8 “Italian Basic Pure Vowels, Uniform Vowel Colours and Vowel Modification”.) The exercise should be sung *piano*. Repeat the exercise by ascending a semi-tone every time.



1. Mung - e, mong - e, mang - e, meng, ming, ming.
2. Dung - e, dong - e, dang - e, deng, ding, ding.
3. Lung - e, long e, lang - e, leng, ling, ling.

Example II - 6-2a Exercise promoting resonance (Gräbe 1999)

- The exercise in Example II - 6-2b should be sung legato with a strong suggestion of a “halo” above the singer’s head. The resonance on the first note should “bloom” before gliding to the next note.



1. Mu - o _____ mu - o _____
2. Lu - ah _____ lu - ah _____

Example II - 6-2b Additional exercise for promoting resonance (Gräbe 1999)

The use of an elastic or rubber band, stretched vertically, is a most useful visual aid to represent the dropped, relaxed jaw. (Refer to Figure II – 6-11a, below.) Should the elastic/rubber band be stretched in a horizontal direction, and the choristers also follow the example by “spreading” the sound, they will quickly become aware of the shrillness that ensues. (Refer to Figure II - 6-11b, below.) (The discussion on obtaining optimum resonance, above, and “Italian Basic Pure Vowels, Uniform Vowel Colours and Vowel Modification” in 6.8, below, inevitably have areas that overlap.)



Figure II - 6-11a Elastic band stretched vertically, representing the dropped, relaxed jaw for tall vowel sounds



Figure II - 6-11b Elastic band stretched horizontally, representing an incorrect “East-West” mouth position

6.6 Children's Vocal Ranges and Registers

The musical vocal range involves all the pitches, from the lowest to the highest, that a person can sing. This musical vocal range expands with age, experience and training. The voice can be divided into three registers:

- chest voice register (also known as the “lower adjustment”, “heavy mechanism”, or “modal register”);
- middle voice register (also known as the “middle adjustment”); and
- head voice register (also known as the “upper adjustment”, “light mechanism” or “loft register”).

The lower third of the vocal range, the chest voice register, is the speaking register. It is also used for loud singing. This chest voice register is well developed because it receives ample exercise as it is used for speaking. The chest voice is used for singing below **middle C** (Phillips 1992:43). Should the chest voice be used in higher pitches, it sounds coarse and heavy. If the chest voice is consistently over-used, vocal damage and the development of vocal nodules may be the result because of severe vocal fold collision. The chest voice involves the vocal folds coming into contact within their full length and width.

The middle register is used from $c^1 - c^2$, i.e. **middle C** to the **c**, one octave higher. The head register is used from c^2 and higher (Phillips 1992: 43). This is the vocal register that is the most restful and the one that safeguards against vocal damage. The head voice requires the vocal folds to only make contact within their inner edges. The upper, lighter head voice register needs to be extended and gives us the most beautiful tone quality in children's voices. Many children follow the example of pop singers and use the chest voice exclusively for singing which results in a heavy, lustreless tone quality. The head voice register is developed through singing and needs extra practice. By using vocalises that move downward, the head voice quality is brought further down into the middle register, lightening the weight of the voice as it descends.

A competent singer should pass from one register to the next without a noticeable break or unevenness in the quality. The chest voice and the head voice are blended in the middle register. The following exercises may be used to extend and develop the range upward.

(See Examples II - 6-3a, II - 6-3b and II - 6-3c, below.) Relax and drop the jaw for the upper register. Repeat each exercise by ascending a semitone every time it is sung. Remember to relax and drop the lower jaw even more on the high note. A larger resonating space is required for higher tones to avoid a pinched and shrill tone.



Example II - 6-3a Exercise to extend and develop the range upward (1st Ex.)



Example II - 6-3b Additional exercise to extend and develop the range upward (2nd Ex.)



Example II - 6-3c Additional exercise to extend and develop the range upward (3rd Ex.)

6.7 The Importance of Head Voice

In the Intermediate phase, the head voice needs to be developed to its full potential. The head voice involves the idea of placing the tone in the upper and front part of the head to produce a brilliant, focused, resonant sound. Imagery is the key to success here. Tell the choristers to imagine a column of air floating up the back of the neck on its way to the top of the head. The sound then resonates throughout the top of the entire head. The resonant, high, forward sound is then sent out from the area between the eyes and, like serving a tennis ball across the court, projected to the back of the hall. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.12 “Use of Imagery”.) Throughout this

process, the throat remains relaxed, free and open, while the singers imagine they are producing all sounds above the cheekbones. By telling the children that we want them to imagine “the sound above the cheekbones”, we are aiming for an open throat by having an arched soft palate and a relaxed tongue. The term, “singing with space”, may also be used.

The following imaginative suggestions may also be helpful in maximising the vocal tract. Ask the choristers to think of an “inner smile” as they are singing. It is important to make them aware of the arched (raised) soft palate and the relaxed, dropped jaw and to sustain this spacious quality while they are singing.

A similar idea would be to try a wide-eyed, open-mouthed, pleasantly surprised “ah”. As they are doing this, draw their attention to the idea of trying to raise or lift the upper back molars while inhaling. Tell the choristers to concentrate on this lifting sensation and to maintain the feeling of space in the throat and mouth.

Another analogy that may be employed in teaching the concept of singing with space is to have the choristers inhale the smell of a fragrant flower. Constantly remind them to concentrate on the physical sensation of the arched soft palate that occurs in the mouth and throat and to maintain this free and open feeling while they are singing.

Similar to this, would be to ask the choristers to inhale like at the beginning of a yawn. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.4.1 “Deep and Full Diaphragmatic-Abdominal Breathing”.) A yawn arches (raises) the soft palate and maximises the space in the pharynx. Tell them to maintain this open-throat, yawning sensation as they sing. This is coupled with the feeling of the dropped jaw. Watch their cheekbones lift and the nostrils flare ever so slightly.

6.8 Italian Basic Pure Vowels, Uniform Vowel Colours and Vowel Modification

The five basic pure vowel sounds in Italian each has a single sound, i.e. there are no diphthongs or mixture of sounds. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.9.5 “Diphthongs and Triphthongs”, below.) In Table **II** - 6-1, below, the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols are given, together with simplified phonetic spelling and English equivalents. A knowledge of the International Phonetic Alphabet will be useful to the choral educator in establishing exact

pronunciations. Choristers in the Intermediate phase need to know the basic vowel sounds.

IPA	English Equivalent	Simplified Phonetic Spelling
[u]	“u” is pronounced long as in <u>tr</u> ue, <u>thr</u> ough, <u>you</u> , <u>do</u> , <u>who</u> , etc.	(oo)
[ɔ]	“o” is pronounced long as in <u>for</u> , <u>gl</u> ory, <u>m</u> ore, <u>law</u> , <u>all</u> , etc.	(oh)
[ɑ]	“a” is pronounced long as in <u>f</u> ather, <u>a</u> rmy, <u>far</u> , <u>heart</u> , etc.	(ah)
[ɛ]	“e” is pronounced short as in <u>e</u> ducate, <u>e</u> nter, <u>e</u> ver, <u>e</u> nd, etc.	(eh)
[i]	“i” is pronounced long as in <u>ea</u> t, <u>gl</u> ee, <u>fr</u> ee, <u>gr</u> een, <u>fe</u> t, etc.	(ee)

Table II – 6-1 Italian basic pure vowels

One of the most important aspects of a good choral tone is a homogeneous sound. Uniform vowel formation is a vital contributing factor in obtaining this sought after sound. The vowels carry the choral sound and we aim for tall, vertical vowels. Most choristers do not realise that we need more space in the mouth and throat when we sing, than when we talk. They sing with their mouths in a horizontal (East-West) position as in Figure II - 6-12a, below. (Also refer to Figure II - 6-11b, above.) This causes the soft palate to drop, which in turn causes a nasal tone. The vowels then have an excessively strident and shallow sound because there is not sufficient space in the mouth and throat for resonant tall, rounded vowels.



Figure II - 6-12a Horizontal, East-West, mouth position



Figure II - 6-12b Vertical, North-South, mouth position

Resonating, tall vowels are achieved by relaxing and dropping the lower jaw and having the mouth in a vertical, North-South, position as in Figure II -6-12b, above. (Also refer to Figure II - 6-11a, above.) The soft palate lifts and this enlarges the resonating space in the mouth and throat. The result is a warm, resonating and mature sound with vitality. One should constantly strive for this vertical positioning of vowels. To assist choristers with the tall, vertical

positioning of vowels, make sure that the lips are slightly flared and not spread in a horizontal position. Ask them to relax and drop the jaw and do one of the following:

- Place the index fingers gently on the cheeks, next to the corners of the mouth. (Refer to Figure II - 6-13a, below.) Relax the jaw and tongue as much as possible.

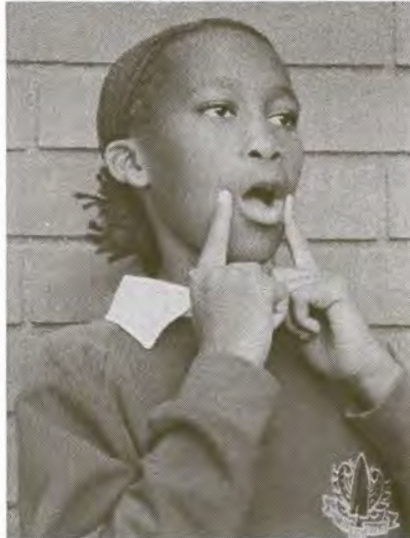


Figure II - 6-13a Index fingers gently at the corners of the mouth, promoting a vertical mouth position for tall vowels

- Place two fingers on the cheeks and ever so slightly press the corners of the mouth in. (Refer to Figure II - 6-13a, below.)

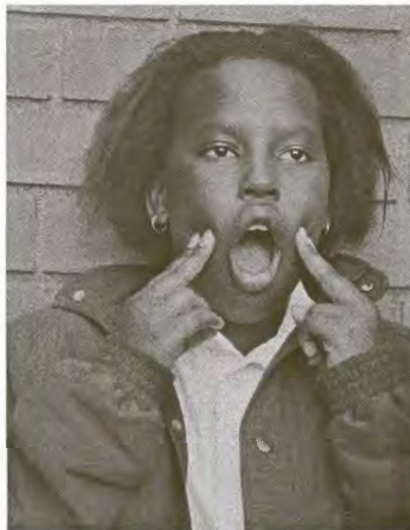


Figure II - 6-13b Two fingers on cheeks, promoting a vertical mouth position for tall vowels



- Gently place the fists on the cheeks with the knuckles resting under the cheekbones promoting a vertical mouth position for tall vowels. (Refer to Figure II - 6-13c, below.)



Figure II - 6-13c Fists on cheeks, promoting a vertical mouth position for tall vowels

- Use one hand with the fingers and thumb on either side of the mouth and the palm of the hand holding the chin. (Refer to Figure II - 6-13d, below.)



Figure II - 6-13d One hand, with fingers and thumb on either side of the mouth, promoting a vertical mouth position for tall vowels

Vowel sounds vary in colour from dark to bright. The darkest vowel sound, [u] “u” (oo), is the one that is produced furthest back in the mouth area. The [ɔ] “o” (oh) originates from a position slightly more forward in the mouth. The jaw is at its lowest and the tongue most relaxed on the [ɑ] “a” (ah) vowel, which is formed in the roof area of the mouth. The [ɛ] “e” (eh) vowel sound is formed more forward in the mouth. The brightest vowel sound, [i] “i” (ee), is formed in the front part of the mouth. Hence, the dome-like illustration in Figure II - 6-14, representing the mouth opening from the inside, with the [u] “u” (oo) in the back of the mouth area and the [i] “i” (ee) closer to the lips.

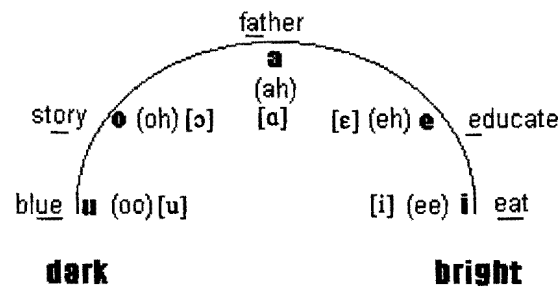


Figure II - 6-14 Dark to bright vowel sounds

This could be simplified for the choristers by using physical metaphor. Ask the choristers to hold a hand up with the palm facing down and fingers curved (forming a dome) so that the hand represents the roof of the mouth. The [u] “u” (oo) vowel sound will fall at the wrist, the [ɑ] “a” (ah) at the highest point of the hand and the [i] “i” (ee) vowel sound occurs at the finger tips. Allow the choristers to feel the progression of the placement of the vowels from the back of the mouth to the front, at the same time indicating the position on their hands.

The vowel sounds that are most likely to spread into a horizontal, East-West, mouth position are the bright vowels, [ɛ] “e” (eh) and [i] “i” (ee). Remind and encourage the choristers to:

- relax and drop the jaw;
- arch the soft palate;
- sing with a relaxed tongue lightly touching the lower front teeth;
- sing with slightly flared lips (correct vocal “embouchure”); and

- sing with a vertical, North-South, mouth position.

Ask them to think [u] “u” (oo) but to sing [ɛ] “e” (eh) or [i] “i” (ee). (Refer below to Figure II - 6-15d for the [ɛ] “e” (eh) and Figure II - 6-15e for the [i] “i” (ee) vowel mouth positions.)

Choristers sometimes tend to make the [ɑ] “a” (ah) vowel sound too shallow. Once again, this can be corrected by employing the above suggestions and thinking an [ɔ] “o” (oh) into the sound. (Refer to Figure II - 6-15c, below, for the [ɑ] “a” (ah) vowel mouth position.)

Choristers often tense the lips for the [ɔ] “o” (oh) vowel sound. Remind them to relax the lips and to drop the jaw. (Refer to Figure II - 6-15b, below, for the [ɔ] “o” (oh) vowel mouth position.)



Figure II - 6-15a Mouth position for [u] “u” (oo)



Figure II - 6-15b Mouth position for [ɔ] “o” (oh)



Figure II - 6-15c Mouth position for [ɑ] “a” (ah)



Figure II - 6-15d Mouth position for [ɛ] “e” (eh)



Figure II - 6-15e Mouth position for [i] “i” (ee)

Vowel Modification refers to the practice in singing of adjusting vowels. Spoken vowels often have to be modified or adjusted for singing, i.e. one cannot always sing the vowel that the spoken word requires. When singing an ascending line, one needs to consider the vowels that are sung in the upper range and employ vowel modification. This is to ensure that the quality of sound is uniform throughout the vocal range and to avoid a tense, pinched, or strident tone in the upper range; i.e. adding more head tone to the vowel sound. Vowel modification is also employed to ensure good intonation and diction.

The front (bright or lateral) vowels [i] “i” (ee) and [ɛ] “e” (eh) are compromised toward the darker [ɑ] “a” (ah) vowel-sound in the upper range of the voice. For instance, the word “men” on a high note will sound too strident if vowel modification is not employed. One should, therefore, compromise the vowel towards the “ah” vowel-sound and will thus sing “men” as “mahn”, creating an aural illusion. The listener hears the “mahn” as “men” because the vowel that is sung migrates on a high frequency.

The choristers need to relax and drop the lower jaw more as the melodic line ascends. This will lift the soft palate. Encourage the children to find the soft palate by gently sliding the index fingertip backward along the roof of the mouth. Remind them to keep the tongue relaxed with the tip of the tongue lightly touching the fleshy ridge at the base of the lower front teeth for all vowel sounds. If the tongue is not relaxed and is pulled back, it reduces the space in the mouth and throat and interferes with the tone. Choristers are inclined to spread the corners of the mouth in a horizontal position and to pull the tongue back for the bright [i] “i” (ee) and the [ɛ] “e” (eh) vowel sounds. (Refer to Figures II - 6-11a and II - 6-11b, as well as II - 6-12a and II - 6-12b, above.)

Modifying vowels is necessary to produce a free and resonant tone. In the middle of the vocal range, less vowel modification is necessary and the vowels will remain more true to the spoken word.

6.9 Diction

Good diction is a prerequisite for a good singer. Diction is the means by which the words of a song are conveyed by the performer to the listener. In the Foundation phase, choristers demonstrate good diction mostly as a result of following, imitating and repeating the choral director's instruction and modelling in rehearsal. The choristers' input in rehearsal, however, should be regularly sought in order to develop independent ability in good diction. At this stage the skill is mostly demonstrated because of "rote learning" (or skill gained through imitation and repetition). In the Intermediate phase, however, the choristers' greater maturity level requires a more informed procedure. (Refer to **Part I**, 3.4 "Choral Unit Standard: Diction".)

6.9.1 Pronunciation

Pronunciation refers to the manner of uttering the words, and the rhythmic grouping of words and syllables within a phrase, i.e. the stressed syllables and word accents. Correct pronunciation is important for the text to be intelligible to the listeners.

Choirs should not sing with regional, colloquial accents but rather conform to standard, professional, universally accepted pronunciation, which has for some time been accepted as the norm. This does not apply to songs that may need a dialectical treatment in order to maintain authenticity in performance, like in regional folksongs for instance.

6.9.2 Enunciation of Vowels and Articulation of Consonants

Good diction refers to the clarity with which the vowels are enunciated and the consonants are articulated. It is often said that vowels carry the sound, while consonants convey the sense; i.e. the intelligibility of the text is primarily dependent on clear articulation of the consonants. When we sustain a pitch, it is the vowel which is sustained. In fact, singers must sustain the vowel sound as long as possible and not

move to the consonant too quickly. When one sings, the elongation of vowel sounds can obscure the meaning of the text. One therefore has to exaggerate articulation of the consonants so that the audience can understand the words.

In the Intermediate phase, the enunciation of vowels and the articulation of consonants can be explained to the choristers by writing the following words on a board: “lips, teeth, tip of the tongue.” Ask the children to say it only on the vowels. They will quickly understand that we need the consonants for it to be intelligible.

6.9.3 Clear Articulation of Consonants

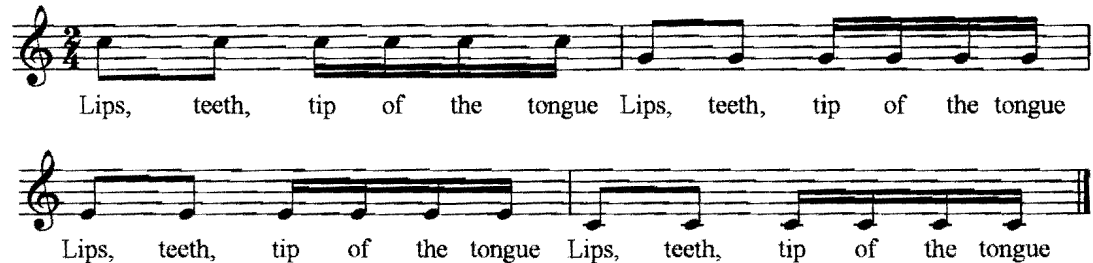
To ensure that consonants are clearly articulated, ask the children to “spit out” their consonants. This applies to both the beginning and the ending of words. Tell the choristers to exaggerate every consonant to the point of silliness. Should they overdo this, it is easy to soften the consonants in order to obtain the desired effect. With aggressive articulation, the words become clearer and the placement of the tone is brought forward in the mouth.

Some music requires energetic, rhythmic precision, and for this, exceptionally well-articulated consonants are required. Music that requires a smooth *legato* line, needs some consonants to be minimised so as not to disrupt the vocal *legato* line too much. Final consonants of all words need to be clearly articulated, without becoming obtrusive.

A fine line exists between consonants that are clearly articulated and consonants that are overdone. If the consonants are exaggerated too much it will interfere with the smooth line of the sound. The consonants should be clear without being obtrusive. They should be pronounced quickly and distinctly to preserve the *legato* line as much as possible.

Even if the audience does not understand the language of the work being sung, they can still hear the difference between careless and precise articulation. Consonants are

formed with the lips, teeth, tongue and both the hard and soft palates. In the Intermediate phase, the following exercise may be used to promote more precise articulation. (See Example II - 6-4, below.) Repeat it a few times by ascending by a semi-tone each time.



Lips, teeth, tip of the tongue Lips, teeth, tip of the tongue

Lips, teeth, tip of the tongue Lips, teeth, tip of the tongue

Example II - 6-4 Exercise to promote clear articulation of consonants

The consonant “r” at the end of a word (e.g. fair, dear, poor, where, more) or when it occurs just before another consonant (e.g. Lord) is omitted or, alternatively, we just “think” the “r”. If a word demands more intensity, the “r” is rolled (e.g. cruel, praise, rage).

Another potential problem is the “s” sound at the end of a word as it may produce a series of hisses within choral singing. Sing the “s” very short, quickly and rhythmically to avoid this hissing, especially at the end of a phrase, i.e. everybody coming off at the precise moment with the “s” sound.

The release at the end of a phrase, ending on a consonant, needs extra special care. (Refer to **Part II**, 5.8 “Attacks and Releases”.) The choristers should watch the conductor very carefully in order to obtain complete precision in the final release of the consonant. “T, d, p, k” and “f” are consonants that need particular emphasis. Ask the choristers to sing the word “toot” on a specific pitch and insist on meticulous attack and release on the “t”. The choir has to come off *as one* on the final “t”. Practise this a few times. The following rhyme spoken or sung may also be used to practise the final release. (See Example II - 6-5, below.) The final “t” occurs on the rest.



Example II - 6-5 Final release of consonant at end of phrase

6.9.4 Voiceless and Voiced Consonants

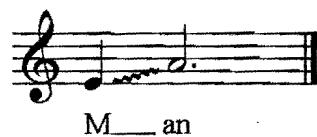
Consonants are either voiceless (unpitched) or voiced (pitched/tuned). A voiceless or unpitched consonant requires aspiration (blowing) without sound, e.g. “p, h, s, k, t” and “f”. A voiced or pitched consonant can actually be sung and the sound elongated instead of being aspirated. Hum “m, n, ng, l, r, z, v”, for instance, and you will detect a pitch. The vocal folds are drawn together and set into vibration for a voiced consonant. One can test for voiceless or voiced consonants by placing a finger gently on the larynx (Adam’s apple). If vibration can be felt when the consonant is pronounced softly, it is a voiced consonant. There is no perceptible movement of the vocal folds for voiceless consonants.

Inexperienced/untrained choirs often scoop on initial voiced (pitched) consonants; i.e. the consonant is being sung at a different pitch from the vowel which follows, resulting in an unacceptable “scoop” (see Example II - 6-6b, below). For instance:



Example II - 6-6a Singing of initial voiced consonant

is sung as:



Example II - 6-6b Scooping of initial voiced consonant

This can be avoided if the choristers are told to take a breath with the mouth shaped for the vowel which follows the consonant. The consonant is then quickly articulated before the vowel is sounded.

6.9.5 Diphthongs and Triphthongs

In the Foundation phase, choristers demonstrate skills mostly as a result of “rote learning”; i.e. they learn mostly through imitating and repeating the teacher’s example. In the Intermediate phase, the concepts are explained to the choristers and their own recommendations and input are expected to a greater degree.

A diphthong (pronounced: diff-thong) is a compound vowel which consists of two sounds; one sustained, the other vanishing. The word “sky”, is pronounced as *skah+ee*. The “ah” is the sustained sound and the “ee”, which is quickly sung at the end of the tone, is the vanishing sound.

The following are diphthong examples where the vanishing sound is at the end:

- how, brown, bound, round = [a+u] “a+u” (ah+oo);
- I, like, my, right, they, lie = [a+i] “a+i” (ah+ee);
- boy, toy, toil, noise = [o+i] “o+i” (oh+ee); and
- say, may = [e+i] “e+i” (eh+ee).

An exception to this is the [i+u] “i+u” (ee+oo) sound, in which the vanishing sound is at the beginning and the sustained sound is at the end. One has to quickly move from the [i] “i”(ee) to the [u] “u” (oo) sound. The following are examples of this: new, few, dew, beauty, view.

Particularly on notes that are sustained for several beats, all the choristers should be sustaining the same vowel sound. When the choir sings, it is important to ensure that

all the choristers sustain the correct sound and that the final, vanishing sound is performed quickly at the termination of the syllable.

A triphthong (pronounced: triff-thong) is a compound vowel which is made up of three sounds. The vowel sounds in the word “choir”, is pronounced as [ɑ+i+ə] *ah+ee+uh*. The first vowel sound, [ɑ] *ah*, should be sustained and the other two vowel sounds, [i+ə] *ee+uh*, treated as vanishing sounds. (The schwa [ə], or neutral vowel, is found in words like father, refrigerator, vowel, heaven.)

(Compare these diphthongs, or compound vowel sounds with the pure or primary vowels as they are pronounced in Italian. Refer to **Part II**, 6.8 “Italian Basic Pure Vowels, Uniform Vowel Colours and Vowel Modification”.)

6.10 Agility and Flexibility

A pre-requisite for vocal flexibility, is lack of strain and tension. Fast-moving passages that demand vocal agility and flexibility require the use of a light “touch”. Head tones that are well developed, but not forced, give greater flexibility to the voice. Agility and flexibility may be improved by well-chosen singing exercises (vocalises). (Refer to **Part II**, 6.11 “Use of Vocalises”, and specifically the exercise in Example II - 6-9.) Agility and flexibility, furthermore, increase with physical and mental maturity; choristers in the Intermediate phase will have greater facility in vocal agility and flexibility than choristers in the Foundation phase.

6.11 Use of Vocalises

Vocalises, or vocal exercises, ideally, should be directly related to problems within the music being learnt. Vocalises are only introduced in the Intermediate phase. It is, more or less, standard practice to do vocalises for about five minutes at the beginning of every rehearsal, in order to warm up the voices gradually, to increase vocal flexibility, and to build vocal technique. One should, however, guard against this becoming mere routine and unrelated to the music being studied. The repeated use of a particular exercise may result in a loss of

effectiveness. It is therefore essential to customise vocal exercises according to the demands of the repertoire being studied. Rehearsals could also commence with the singing of a song/work and then introduce a specific vocalisation technique if a problem presents itself.

Before starting with voice exercises, correct body posture for singing and good breath management has to be established. Physical exercises to address this may be included and this should lead to an alert mental attitude. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.3 “Correct Singing Posture” and 6.4 “Breath Management”.)

It is important that both the conductor and the choristers know exactly what the aim of a particular vocal exercise is. Every vocal exercise should have a specific purpose, musical goal or intention, and the choristers should be well-aware of that purpose. In order to vary vocal exercises according to the demands of the repertoire being studied, either one of the following two ways may be implemented:

- Common warm-up patterns in use may be altered or adjusted to mirror the general characteristics, like articulation, dynamics, rhythm or tonality of the repertoire being studied; or
- A passage (from the repertoire being studied) that presents either rhythmic or pitch problems could be isolated and an exercise devised around it. Do not devise/write an exercise by combining a complicated pitch sequence with an intricate rhythm. Separate the two musical elements and even out the complexity: e.g. complicated pitch sequence + simple rhythmic pattern, or intricate rhythm + simple pitch sequence.

All the choristers should apply themselves to productive vocal exercising and nobody may fool around. The children’s voices should not be strained in any way whatsoever.

The exercises in Examples **II - 6-7a** and **II - 6-7b**, below, are used specifically to focus on correct vocal embouchure, i.e. with the lips relaxed and slightly flared. The lower jaw must be relaxed and dropped and the soft palate arched. The [u] “u” and the [ɔ] “o” vowel sounds are used because they are functional aids for a low, relaxed larynx position. Sing these exercises slowly and repeat a semi-tone higher each time. The range may also be extended upward.



1. Moo _____
2. Loo _____
3. Noo _____
4. Moh _____
5. Loh _____
6. Noh _____

Example II - 6-7a Exercise to focus on correct vocal embouchure



1. Moo moh moo moh moo
 2. Loo loh loo loh loo
 3. Noo noh noo nah noo
 4. Moo moh mah meh mee
- etc.

Example II - 6-7b Additional exercise to focus on correct vocal embouchure

The following two exercises (Examples II - 6-8a and II - 6-8b, below) may be used to extend the range upward. Every time the exercise is repeated, raise it by a semi-tone. Take this up to G (or even A[□]) major. Use different neutral syllables alternatively, like:

- “moo”, “moh”, “mah”;
- “noo”, “noh”, “nah”;
- “loo”, “loh”, “lah”;
- “zoo”, “zoh”, “zah”;
- “boo”, “boh”, “bah”; and
- “doo”, “doh”, “dah”.



- | | | |
|--------------|-----------|------|
| 1. Moo _____ | Moo _____ | Moo. |
| 2. Moh _____ | Moh _____ | Moh. |
| 3. Mah _____ | Mah _____ | Mah. |

Example II - 6-8a Exercise to extend the range upward



- | | |
|--------------|-----------|
| 1. Moo _____ | moo _____ |
| 2. Moh _____ | moh _____ |
| 3. Mah _____ | mah _____ |
| 4. Noo _____ | noo _____ |
| 5. Loo _____ | loo _____ |

Example II - 6-8b Additional exercise to extend the range upward

The following exercise (Example II - 6-9, below) may be used to improve vocal agility and flexibility that are required for fast passages. Every time the exercise is repeated, raise it by a semi-tone. The exercise is also useful for extending the range upward. Gradually increase the tempo and sing it to neutral syllables like: “doo-bee”, “mi-nah”, “lo-rah”, etc.



- | |
|--|
| 1. Doo - bee, doo - bee, doo - bee, doo - bee, doo bee, doo bee, doo bee, doo bee, |
| 2. Mi - nah, mi - nah, mi - nah, mi - nah, mi nah, mi-nah, mi-nah, mi-nah, |
| 3. Lo - rah, lo - rah, lo - rah, lo - rah, lo rah, lo-rah, lo-rah, lo-rah, |



- | |
|--|
| doo bee, doo - bee, doo - bee, doo - bee, doo. |
| mi nah, mi - nah, mi - nah, mi - nah, mi. |
| lo rah, lo - rah, lo - rah, lo - rah, lo. |

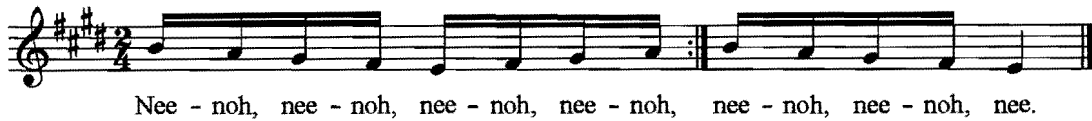
Example II - 6-9 Exercise to improve vocal agility and flexibility that are required for fast passages

The following two exercises (Examples II - 6-10a and II - 6-10b, below) will aid agility and loosen the tongue. Every time the exercise is repeated, raise it by a semi-tone.



- Rrah, rrah, rrah, rrah, rrah.

Example II - 6-10a Exercise to aid agility and loosen the tongue



Example II - 6-10b Additional exercise to aid agility and loosen the tongue

6.12 Use of Imagery

The conductor has to find a myriad of techniques to explain the abstract, technical concepts that are inherently present in the music. The use of imagery-laden, colourful language and mental suggestion, i.e. imagery, metaphor, simile and analogies, achieves dramatic and instant results with children. It conveys ideas in a clear, meaningful way and leads to a greater understanding of the music. The imaginative idea that works for one pupil, however, may prove to be not as successful with another. One therefore has to employ several imaginative suggestions in order to reach all the choristers.

The use of physical metaphor would involve identifying a gesture or activity that describes the essence of the musical idea, e.g. “use your fingers to lift the pitch”, when the choir is singing flat. In certain instances this may prove to be more meaningful than just asking them to “raise the pitch”. When the choir is inclined to go flat on a descending passage, ask them to slowly raise their hand as the passage is descending. In performance they must think “up” whilst singing the descending passage. The opposite is also applicable, i.e. think “down” when singing an ascending passage that is inclined to become sharp. Physical metaphor thus relates to:

any gesture or movement that is able to get at the essence of the musical idea and involve singers in a concrete, bodily way. Like verbal metaphor, physical metaphor capitalizes on the natural predisposition of the human mind to connect experiences – concrete with abstract, known with unknown – but does so in a more natural, meaningful, and enjoyable way (Wis 1999: 25).

The use of a rubber band, stretched vertically, to represent the dropped, relaxed jaw for better resonance in the higher register, is an effective visual metaphor. One could also refer to this as the sought-after “North-South” mouth position. (Refer to Figure II - 6-11a, above.) Should

one stretch the rubber band horizontally, the sound “spreads”. This could be referred to as the undesirable “East-West” mouth position. (Refer to Figure II - 6-11b, above.)

Another example would be to ask the choristers to “serve the voice, like a tennis ball, right to the back of the hall” when you want the choir to project their voices. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.7 “The Importance of Head Voice”.) This, again, may produce a better result than the straightforward instruction, “project your voice”.

The use of physical metaphor has many advantages. For one thing, the choristers are more involved with the “polishing” of the selection that they are learning and they take greater ownership of the creative process. The most important advantage, however, is that it helps both the choristers and the conductor to discover more about the music itself and the interpretative possibilities that are inherent in the selection.

6.13 Maintaining Vocal Health

The voice has to be treated with great deference as this is the singer’s prized instrument. The choral teacher needs to give the choristers guidance regarding vocal health so that they know how to adequately take care of their voices. Choristers who are indisposed because of a cold, hoarseness or sore throat, must refrain from singing. They should, however, attend the rehearsal in order to learn the music. This, obviously, does not apply in severe cases, which require bed rest.

Under no circumstances should choristers be yelling and screaming at school athletics or other sport events. They need to be informed about the highly detrimental effect this abuse of the vocal mechanism can have on the voice.

One needs adequate rest to ensure optimum vocal health. Physical fatigue and mental stress can have a detrimental effect on the singing voice. Choristers should have ample rest in the afternoon if they are performing in the evening.

It is important to eat a well-balanced diet of food and to drink plenty of water since it contributes to overall good health and maintaining vocal health. If the body is well hydrated, the mucous linings of the vocal tract are adequately lubricated, thereby reducing friction. A well-lubricated vocal tract also reduces one's susceptibility to colds and sore throats.

Choristers should be encouraged to bring a bottle of water to the rehearsal so that they can sip water whenever an opportunity arises. The water has to be at room temperature since cold liquids before and during singing should be avoided as it tends to constrict the vocal tract muscles.

Dairy products should be avoided shortly before a performance as they are inclined to thicken mucous secretions and this can affect singing performance. Remind the choristers to only eat a light meal before a performance.

During a performance choristers sometimes have to stand for an extended period. Should choristers start feeling dizzy, they need to sit down immediately and put their heads down between the legs. This will allow the blood to flow to the head. In order to prevent dizziness or fainting during rehearsal or performance, choristers should be reminded to:

- Keep their knees flexed, which will ensure proper blood circulation. The knees should never be rigid, stiff or locked.
- Occasionally wriggle the toes and exercise non-locomotor leg movements like tensing the muscles in the thighs and calves. Between choral selections and audience applause, choristers should avail themselves of the opportunity for movement by shifting their body weight alternately from one foot to the other. These movements help to facilitate the pumping of blood back to the heart and prevent blood from pooling in the lower extremities of the body.

Excessive harsh throat clearing and coughing causes damage to the vocal folds and should be avoided. By repeatedly clearing the throat or coughing, one can actually rupture blood vessels.

The adolescent voice change and its ramifications need to be discussed with the children in the Intermediate phase. It is not just the boys' voices that undergo this change. The girls' voices

Chapter 7

CONCERT PREPARATION

7.1 Pre-Concert Rehearsals

Approximately two weeks before the performance is an opportune time to make a video or audio recording for the choristers and the teacher to evaluate themselves. (Refer to **Part II**, 3.12 “Audio and Video Aids”.) Watch and/or listen carefully for aspects that need extra attention and set these right. One is often pressed for time at this stage and often feels that there is no time to look at a video (or listen to a tape) with the choristers. It is well worth the effort and time, though. The videoing process does not take up any extra rehearsal time as this is done while the choristers are actually rehearsing. Suggest to the choristers that they come before or after school or even during break to watch the video (or listen to the tape) with you. They will be quite willing to give up their break to watch (or listen to) themselves performing. Be sure to solicit their suggestions for improvement.

At this stage, provided the teacher planned the previous rehearsals well, there should be a minimum of major problems to be corrected. It would probably only involve a few last-minute finishing touches. The choir should now be performing in its concert formation so that the choristers are completely familiar with it.

7.2 The Final Rehearsal

It is important to congratulate the choristers at this final rehearsal on how hard they have worked. The children like to know that their efforts are appreciated. Tell them that they know the songs well, and now all that remains is to share this beautiful music with the audience.

The ideal would be to have the final rehearsal in the venue where the performance is to take place. This, however, is not always possible. The alternative is for the choir to arrive early for the performance so that they can have a quick practice in order to familiarise themselves with

the environment and to adjust to the acoustics in the venue. One has to prepare the choristers for the unexpected and for singing in circumstances that may not be as conducive as those to which they are accustomed. It is also necessary to practise the leading on and off the risers so that this may be accomplished with maximum efficiency.

One would be placing oneself in a precarious position should one attempt to implement radical changes at the final rehearsal. It is more beneficial for the children to be secure in what they have been practising during the preceding weeks. Should any alterations be called for, these must be minor. The final rehearsal should boost the choristers' confidence and not destroy it.

With a primary school choir, it is advisable to sing through the entire programme without stopping. This is necessary to acquaint the choristers with the order of the selections and the flow of the programme. A well-organised final rehearsal that is conducted with competence, efficiency and thoroughness will have a positive effect on the self-esteem of the choristers and the conductor. This will decidedly have a beneficial effect on the performance.

The rationale behind the saying “a poor rehearsal means a good performance” is that the choristers and the conductor, being aware of the poor rehearsal, will as a result be super-alert and they will try extra-hard in the performance. The opposite, namely “a good rehearsal can lead to a poor performance”, has also been said. Here, it is inferred that the choristers would be too relaxed or casual, and would not be trying hard enough in the performance. This is not necessarily true by any means. A competent conductor would have planned the preceding rehearsals in such a way that the choir is neither under- nor over-rehearsed, and that the final rehearsal is the last rung of the ladder that leads to the platform of success. The teacher should, however, guard against allowing the choristers to become over-excited or tense in this final rehearsal. The choir should peak in the performance.

Towards the end of the rehearsal, the choristers need to be informed about final arrangements. Remind them that they should rest before the concert and that they should avoid all dairy products as these are inclined to produce a short-term build-up of phlegm in the throat. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.13 “Maintaining Vocal Health”.) Tell the choristers that they represent the school and that they have to exhibit exemplary behaviour and not let the school down. This involves their behaviour both on and offstage. They must be well-behaved and absolutely quiet

backstage while they are waiting their turn to lead on for the performance. Remind them about being correctly dressed, transport arrangements, arrival time before the concert, and any other applicable points of information.

7.3 Pre-Concert Activities

Shortly before the choir has to perform, the choristers should assemble in a rehearsal room to focus and prepare themselves mentally and emotionally for the actual performance. With Foundation phase children it is also necessary to remind them to go to the toilet before they go on stage. Physical tension and tightness should be lessened by a few loosening-up exercises. These may include:

- raising the shoulders excessively high and dropping them a few times;
- rotating the shoulders;
- choir members massaging each other's shoulder and back muscles;
- dropping the chin to the chest and rolling the head slowly and gently in a circular motion from side to side;
- raising and lowering the heels;
- stretching by standing on tip-toe, trying to reach the ceiling, and kneeling down into a small bundle;
- shaking the hands vigorously;
- shaking the arms vigorously, first separately, then simultaneously;
- shaking the legs vigorously;
- taking a few deep breaths, holding in and then slowly exhaling to a "ph" sound, while the teacher is steadily counting, etc.

These exercises will help to promote relaxation and good posture. It is essential to do these exercises in silence so as not to over-excite the choristers and to ensure that everybody is focussing on the task ahead.

Unless the performance is taking place in the early part of the morning, a few, short vocal warm-up exercises will suffice. These exercises also contribute to focus energy, both mentally and emotionally.

It is essential to review the general procedure for the choristers. They need to be informed about the order of the selections and the specific mood required for each. It may be advantageous to start each selection and sing the first phrase or two. Should the choristers be apprehensive about the performance, they should be re-assured and calmed and reminded that it is essential to relax and *enjoy* the performance.

7.4 Performance Attire

It is taken for granted that the quality of the repertoire and the singing are the most important aspects of the choir's performance. If the choir, however, looks good on stage, it provides a psychological boost to both the choristers and the audience. The choristers should be tidy, well groomed, and uniformly attired. Uniformity of dress contributes to creating a unified and cohesive whole. This adds to the musical uniformity that every choral group strives to attain.

It is most definitely not essential to have a special or extravagant choir outfit. A school choir may as well wear their regulation school uniform. The main considerations are, "uniformity" of dress, and tidiness. The clothing should be conducive to singing and not distract from the performance. If the choristers are uniformly dressed, they will feel more professional and consequently be more confident. This can only have a positive effect on their performance.

7.5 Stage Deportment

Attitude and deportment of the choristers as they enter and leave the stage are important. The entrance and exit procedure of the choir should be practised several times beforehand until it flows smoothly. From the time the choristers walk on stage until the time they walk off, they are "on show". It is essential to stress the need to walk with purpose and not to amble along. The choristers should look proud, confident, dignified, and happy to be on stage. The audience/adjudicator forms an opinion of the choir before a note has been sung, based on their stage deportment and their appearance. "To work a posture miracle on choir entrances, have each student draw in a deep breath, hold it, and walk briskly into place on the stage" (Roe 1970: 351).

Formation and spacing of choristers on stage should be functionally optimal, both visually and aurally. It is customary for the front row to enter first and to remain standing in front of the risers. In this way they will “shield” the entrance of the rest of the choristers. The front row is followed by the back row and then the other rows. On leaving the stage, the front row will move a step forward and remain standing in their arranged order to, once more, act as a screen for the other rows. The second row will lead off first, followed by the third, etc., with the front row leading off last.

The accompanist enters after the choir and sits down at the piano or other accompaniment instrument. The conductor should be the last person to come on stage. Walk briskly and confidently, look friendly and take a bow as a form of “greeting the audience”. Turn around and face the choir with an encouraging smile. Wait for the audience to settle. Raise the arms in a “conductor’s set” position to gain the choristers’ attention. Do not begin until all the choristers are focussed and ready to start. Establish fleeting eye contact with the accompanist and give the preparatory beat. (Refer to **Part II**, 5.7 “The Preparatory Beat”.)

Remind the choristers that one of the most important aspects of their performance is to show the audience that they are fully “involved” and that they enjoy their singing. By relating an interesting “story” to the audience and capturing their imaginations, the choristers are displaying total involvement. They need to reflect the mood of the music through their body attitudes and their facial expressions. Their faces, and especially their eyes, need to be animated; otherwise the “story” would become dull and boring. They have to capture the audience’s attention from the very beginning of the song, right up to the end. The performance is an extraordinary, precious, wonderful and exciting opportunity and the choristers need to show the audience that they are happy about this.

The choristers should not react by waving or talking to parents, grannies or friends in the audience. They need to be reminded that they must watch the conductor very carefully and that there should not be any casting of furtive glances towards the audience while they are singing. They must maintain their correct, proud posture throughout the performance and constantly watch the conductor and give their unqualified attention and dedication while they are performing. (Refer to **Part I**, 3.9 “Choral Unit Standard: Timing”, “General Outcomes” number 5.)

They must behave like professionals and not call attention to any mistakes by losing poise or momentum. They have to remain quiet between the selections and stand tall and proud because the audience is constantly watching them while they are standing on stage. Talking or fidgeting, of any description, is strictly forbidden. They must refrain from any uncalled for sprucing activities like pulling up of socks or tidying of hair. After the performance, the choristers must leave the performance area in a quiet and orderly fashion. The performance has only ended once the last person leaves the stage. It is important to stress the point that absolutely impeccable behaviour has to be maintained even after the performance. A successful performance should not be spoiled backstage by one or two choristers who do not know how to behave appropriately.

The conductor must also practise to acknowledge applause graciously. The accompanist(s), soloist(s) and the choir should be included in this process. The conductor steps to the side and includes them, alternately, with a sweep of the arm, pointing with an outstretched hand towards them, as they take a bow.

7.6 Placement of the Piano

The correct balance between the piano and the choir is important. It may be necessary to move the piano to another position in order to secure a better balance. The conductor must ensure that the choristers can all hear the piano well enough to retain pitch. Should a grand piano be available, it may prove expedient to place the piano just off centre and in front of the choir so that, should the lid be partially lifted, it opens towards the choir. (Refer to Figure II - 7-1, below.)

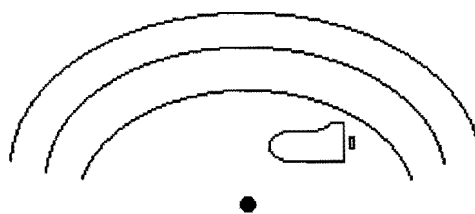


Figure II - 7-1 Placement of grand piano

The choristers are in a better position to hear the piano and it is less likely to overpower the choral sound. Should it be deemed necessary to open the lid by using the full, or even half stick, the piano will have to be moved further to the right, so as not to conceal some of the

choristers. In most instances the lid of a grand piano will not have to be lifted. It may, however, prove expedient to, instead of closing the lid completely, to place an eraser, a book or a little wooden block under the lid to keep it slightly open, thereby giving better support.

It may be best to place an upright piano in the centre, between the choristers, where the accompanist can still see the conductor comfortably. In this instance, one would have to divide the choir more or less in half. (Refer to Figure II - 7-2, below.)

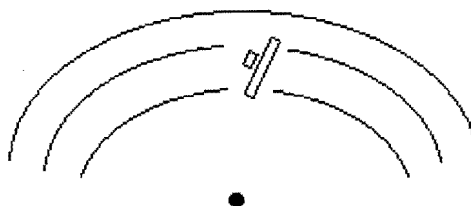


Figure II - 7-2 Placement of upright piano

7.7 Acoustics

The acoustical properties of the performance venue have an important influence on the effectiveness of a performance. (Refer to **Part II**, 4.2, “Intonation”; also to **Part I**, 3.9 “Choral Unit Standard: Timing”, “General Outcomes” number 3.) An empty hall will have more reverberation than when the audience is seated. In a hall with dry acoustics (little reverberation), there will be insufficient connection between the various tones in a phrase, and this generally results in a lifeless tone quality. In such a case it would be advisable to perform the music at a slightly faster tempo. Consonants in dry acoustics need to be articulated with more emphasis. The choristers should also stand slightly closer to each other so that they can better hear each other. This will help to boost their confidence levels.

Conversely, when the choir has to perform in a venue with live acoustical properties (substantial reverberation), the tempi may have to be slightly restrained to accommodate the echo effect. Enunciation should be intensified and the choristers spaced slightly further apart. When performing on a stage which has a high roof and heavy curtains, the sound is inclined to be absorbed by the curtains or it “evaporates” into the roof of the stage. Try to move the choir as far forward as possible on the stage, so that the sound will be projected to the audience. It

may even be necessary to put a strong, solid table in front of the stage to serve as a podium for the conductor to stand on. This is to avoid standing too close to the choir.

If the final rehearsal is held in the performance venue, it is essential to listen to the choir from the back of the hall or auditorium to assess the balance, blend and general effect. (Refer to **Part II**, 4.8 “Balance and Blend”.) Both the balance between sections within the choir and the balance between the choir and the piano (or other accompaniment instruments) need to be assessed.

7.8 Compiling a Programme

When choosing a programme for a performance, one has to be attuned to the needs of the audience. The mood of the music must also be appropriate to the occasion. (Refer to **Part I**, 3.9 “Choral Unit Standard: Timing”, “General Outcomes” number 4.) Choose repertoire that you personally find exciting and rewarding so that you can, in turn, stimulate and inspire the choristers, who then can communicate this interest to the audience. One strives to compile a programme that is both entertaining and educational, and provides emotional and aesthetic experiences for the audience. Angela Broecker (2000: 29) compares a programme for performance to “a musical journey”. She continues as follows: “It is up to the conductor to program a concert that takes listeners on an expedition through many musical landscapes with different hues and terrain.”

In the Foundation phase, one may very well include a song from one of the other South African language groups, provided the text is not too complicated. (Refer to **Part II**, 2.5 “Selecting Appropriate Repertoire” also to **Part I**, 3.2, “Choral Unit Standard: Intonation”, “General Outcomes” number 1.) In the Intermediate phase, apart from selections from other South African language groups, it is always a good idea to include a song in a foreign language. (Refer to **Part I**, 3.2 “Choral Unit Standard: Intonation”, Range Statement: “varied repertoire”; also **Part II**, 2.5 “Selecting Appropriate Repertoire” and 4.9 “Historical/Stylistic Guidelines and Cultural Context”.) It is, however, absolutely essential to ensure that, both in the local and the foreign selection, the pronunciation is correct. One could ask a teacher at the school that teaches that particular language or a parent that speaks the language, to help with

the pronunciation. It is a good idea to provide the audience with translations or explanations for works in a foreign language.

It is not wise to choose pieces that are performed often and have become hackneyed. One should select repertoire that has aesthetic merit, but which has not been performed too frequently as this would prove to be more interesting for the adjudicator and/or the audience.

The programme needs to provide variety in pacing. A sense of flow and momentum is closely related to the different tempi and moods of the songs. Differences in rhythmic intensity will also lend greater contrast between feelings of tension and release. The programme should sustain attention by alternating moments of momentum (lively, exciting, crisp songs) with moments of repose (slower, peaceful, lyrical songs). One has to select music representing a variety of styles, composers, and periods. The choir should be able to perform a variety of music confidently and with a good sense of style.

It is, furthermore, essential to select songs that contrast in mode, key and metre. The keys should not be too unrelated. One should also guard against the choir singing in the same key for too long: key fatigue may set in, which often results in intonation problems. (Refer to **Part II**, 4.2 “Intonation”.) Similarly, the choir may experience intonation problems with the second selection, if two consecutive selections are either a half tone or a tri-tone apart, e.g. e^{\flat} to e is a half tone apart, and e^{\flat} to a is a tri-tone apart.

Variations in the type of accompaniment greatly enhance the appeal of a choir programme. One could also include a solo (or small group of singers) within a composition. It is always a good idea to include a song that is sung without accompaniment (*a cappella* singing). (Refer to **Part II**, 2.5 “Selecting Appropriate Repertoire”.) One could also consider using classroom instruments, recorders or non-melodic percussion to enhance the performance.

It may be a good idea to start and end the programme with the two songs that the choir performs best. The first selection is important because it is during this time that the choir adjusts to the performance area. This selection, furthermore, has to “capture” the audience’s attention. The concert opener should demonstrate the strengths of the choir and the enthusiasm of the choristers. The final selection, especially, needs to be climactic and memorable, giving

an aesthetic conclusion to the programme. This is the aural impression that the audience is inclined to remember most clearly and it concludes the programme with an aesthetic, thrilling result.

When planning the programme, bear in mind that it is more or less accepted practice in choral performance to move from sacred to secular music, in addition to going from serious compositions to music of a lighter quality. There is, however, no definite ruling on this and there are many possibilities.

When selecting repertoire for a contest, it is always better to select music that the choir will be able to perform with relative ease, enthusiasm and expression. The idea is to show what the choir can do; not what they cannot do, or are still struggling with.

When the choir is participating in a contest, it is essential to inform the adjudicator should there be even a *slight* alteration or deviation from the score. This would include transposition into a different key, adding a non-melodic percussion part, deleting a voice part, omitting the repetition of a section, or altering the music in any way. A short note to the adjudicator would suffice. It is important to stress that the choral director certainly does not have the liberty to implement major changes to a selection and may certainly not change the notation without the consent of the composer.

7.9 Contests, Eisteddfodau and Festivals

Despite the fact that the school choral programme is inherently performance based, choral teachers must realise that they are primarily educators and that the responsibility to a total, all-round music education programme is paramount. This should not be jeopardised for the end result in the form of an immaculate and perfect performance.

To excel at a contest, at *any* cost, is contrary to a sound music education programme. Presenting a perfect, flawless performance and winning the first prize at a competition is a remarkable achievement, but this significance is lost when it is accomplished at the expense of a well-rounded choral curriculum. School principals should never put undue pressure on choral teachers to win the competition at all costs. The emphasis should not be on winning,

but on the experience itself. Linda Swears (1985: 183/4) remarks most eloquently on this issue:

[the] key to success in such situations is to value the quality of experience for your students above perfection in performance. When you work toward a positive experience for your students instead of impressing the audience, you are likely to accomplish both.

Participation in music contests, eisteddfodau and festivals have many advantages that form a worthy educational medium, if implemented in the right spirit. These “platforms” provide the choristers and the choral educator the opportunity to hear other choirs and they find out how their own particular choir compares with other choirs. This broadens their perspective on choral music, in general, and on their own efforts, in particular. Both the choral teacher and the choristers have the opportunity to hear a wide variety of choral repertoire. Music contests allow the choristers and the teacher the experience and the excitement of competition. Every choir needs the stimulus of public performance. Most choristers enjoy the “spot light” and look forward to, and thoroughly enjoy performing in concerts. These festivals/contests allow extra opportunities for the choir to display the results of their hard work in a concert situation.

Performance challenges both the singers and the conductor to improve, to move away from the ordinary and mundane to that which is on a higher, exalted, superior plane. The performance gives them a goal to work toward, and this lends extra inspiration and drive to work for excellence. The choral teacher has to ensure that the choir’s repertoire for the performance is *thoroughly* prepared.

Choral teachers need to impress upon the children that winning a prize or some other rating, should not be the end goal, but rather, striving to perform the music in the most beautiful way and to the best of their ability. The most important “prize” that one can hope to attain from participating in a contest is the personal satisfaction gained from knowing one has satisfactorily met a challenge. It is also necessary to prepare the choristers to be receptive to responsible, professional and constructive feedback. Only then can one strive to achieve superior levels of musical depth and artistry.

After the performance or contest, it is important to follow up on the experience with the choristers. Share the adjudicator's comments with them and find out what they thought of their own performance. What have they learnt from listening and watching other choirs perform? A group discussion of an adjudicator's assessment and commentary and general review of what has transpired in the performance, may prove to be most beneficial for musical development, artistic refinement and choral education. One should use the performance experience to educate and to enhance the choristers' musical development.