

## Chapter 1

# STARTING A CHOIR

### 1.1 The Rationale for Choral Singing

It is absolutely essential to have a clearly defined rationale (or purpose) formulated for a choral programme. This gives a sense of direction and contributes to a well-organised, efficient and productive programme. We have to know where we are coming from (a basic philosophy) to be able to know where we are going to. Every choral educator has to decide what the choir's basic function is to be. The benefits that a chorister acquires from singing in a choir will now be discussed under two separate headings: *Musical Benefits* and *Non-Musical Benefits*.

#### 1.1.1 Musical Benefits

The Primary School Choir has the wonderful potential for laying the foundation for **a life-long love of choral music**. The choral educator's goal is to provide the choristers with a challenging, musical and artistic choral programme. The choristers deserve the most enriching musical experiences possible: to make every choral work they perform fresh and exciting – a moving and aesthetically memorable moment. Singing in a choir can be such a tremendously great force. In some cases it may even be considered as a life transformation experience. It provides avenues for the choristers to grow emotionally and intellectually. The choral educator has many opportunities to show the choristers the exquisite beauty of life through music. Mary Goetze, a highly respected figure in music education in the USA, states the following:

As one who has been active with a children's chorus for ten years, I am convinced that participating in this activity has a profound effect on the musical attitude and achievement of my choristers. While there are numerous sources for the positive effects choral experience has, it seems

to me that this success may result in large part from the children's active participation in music-making, refining music for performance, learning its system of symbols, and knowing the work of composers from the inside out (American Choral Directors' Association National Committee 1989:17).

It should be every choral teacher's goal to develop to the utmost each chorister's ability to enjoy music with perception, sensitivity and discrimination. Teaching choristers the skill of fine listening and the ability to perceive (and articulate) the subtleties of an outstanding performance, is of paramount importance. The **music appreciation skills** thus gained will aid the development of sensitive citizens who are involved in musically aesthetic and satisfying experiences for the rest of their lives. (Refer to **Part I**, 3.10 "Choral Unit Standard: Critical Evaluation".)

Aesthetically sensitive people have a more rewarding, interesting, fuller life: people who are insensitive to aesthetic experiences are confined to a sombre and lack-lustre existence (Wolff 1992:1).

Music touches the soul and is therefore one of the **vital components** or basic elements in our lives.

Just how basic became apparent in a most powerful way when Americans first entered Somalia. The nightly news programs showed hundreds of starving, naked Somalis and their children waiting for death. Yet they sang and tried to move as if to dance. It appeared to be the only sustaining force in their nearly spent lives (Miller & Coen 1995: 10).

**Development of musicianship and music reading ability** are some of the vitally important skills that a chorister gleans from singing in a choir. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.14 "Aural and Music-Reading Skills".) Singing in the choir provides the children with the opportunity to practise the fundamentals of good singing, which leads to choral artistry. Healthy vocal production and artistic interpretation should be taught and nurtured in the choral rehearsal.

### 1.1.2 Non-Musical Benefits

Some of the **non-musical benefits** of being in a school choir include being able to:

- perform,
- travel with the group,
- wear a special choir outfit, and
- hear the applause of an appreciative audience.

The choir, thus, offers a unique opportunity to develop a strong sense of group solidarity and cohesion, of social interaction with other children, and pride in accomplishment. A choir performance takes place in a co-operative setting. The success of the performance depends on the co-operation of the individuals within the group. They learn about each other and bonding occurs; this builds a tremendous sense of **esprit-de-corps**.

The beauty of group singing in a classroom or choir lies in its corporate nature. There are few places in life or the school curriculum where people actively join together in a group effort to share their feelings and thoughts about life. Whatever its benefits, expressive group singing is a tradition of humankind that has as its basis this need to share and express what makes people human. These affective elements are a natural extension of this innate need to share and are powerful in a group effort, especially among adolescents. The expressive elements of vocal music should not be ignored (Phillips 1992: 336-337).

John Rutter writes as follows in the foreword to Ronald Corp's book:

Choral singing remains one of the most richly rewarding of corporate experiences. In an age where the solitude of the computer screen drives people apart and threatens to oust real group activity, the world needs its choirs more than ever before, in church, in school, in the concert hall, and in the community (Corp 2000: 3).

The choristers gain life orientation skills, that enable them to function optimally in life, like:

- sense of community,
- respect for others and the ability to blend in with the group,

- civil behaviour as an exemplary and contributing citizen.

Choristers engage in emotional aspects such as self-understanding by developing sensitivity to inner feelings, self-esteem, poise, confidence and identity. Whilst singing in the choir, one is inclined to lose the sense of *self* and to experience a congenial, amicable bond of harmony with the rest of the choir. **Self-esteem and self-confidence** are nurtured and strengthened as a result. The choristers, thus, learn more about themselves and more about the world around them.

Before we can attain harmony, balance and blend within the music, we must establish it with one another. To build and strengthen our musical performances, we have to build and strengthen our personal relationships within the group (Lautzenheiser & White 2000: 15).

According to the American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi one of the most important benefits of singing in a choir, is growth in the form of *self-knowledge*. He says that “you forget yourself while you sing, but if you master an unfamiliar, difficult work and you think back on what you have done, you feel that you have grown” (Csikszentmihalyi 1995:17).

Music participation can be crucial to a pupil’s overall **intellectual development**. The study of music heightens critical thinking skills and stimulates the creative part of the brain. In speaking of his renowned *Theory of Relativity*, Albert Einstein said: “It occurred to me by intuition that music was the driving force behind that intuition and my discovery was the result of my musical perception” (Lautzenheiser & White 2000: 12).

Within the choral framework, choristers engage in profound intellectual, emotional and aesthetic activities such as:

- Kindling or intensifying of multi-dimensional thinking that reinforces the highest level of intellect – i.e. discernment/judgement/discretion, subtlety, refinement, reflection, breadth of view, depth, profoundness, open-mindedness, tolerance/consideration;
- Memorising;

- Stimulation of the creative mind;
- Fine nuances of non-verbal communication;
- The ability to cope with unforeseen circumstances in performance (wisdom in action);
- Inquiry and expression of human feelings;
- A sense of order and prioritising;
- Speaking clearly and eloquently; and
- Expressing ideas in other languages.

One often hears choir members remarking on how well, exhilarated or energised they feel after a choir rehearsal. This is partly due to correct diaphragmatic breathing that ensures an abundant oxygen supply into the bloodstream. Singing is indeed **potent medicine** for health and general well-being.

The study of music (and choir participation) cultivates **better-disciplined** and **harder working** citizens. The choristers soon become aware of just how hard one has to work to attain a modicum of success and they consistently expect of themselves the highest standards attainable. This persistence in working towards and attaining goals inculcates and reinforces a standard of excellence that is a vital component for success in all of life. Most former pupils that had the privilege to study music (sing in a choir), will tell you that the one subject that teaches **perseverance, hard work and** the importance of **self-discipline** better than any other subject, is music.

The choristers learn about their own **cultural heritage** and the world around them. Doors to the musical heritage of other cultures within South Africa's diverse society ("rainbow nation") are opened and this discovery instils respect, which diminishes racial and cultural differences. Thus we are acknowledging the fact that, in spite of our variance and diversity, we are one country. Educators are obligated to establish a harmonious culture for all learners in South Africa. The following quote is an extract from a speech made at a Heritage Day assembly at Redhill School:

Diversity is not about agreement. We do not have to share a common culture, a common political ideal, a common world view. But it is vital that we make the effort to understand and embrace our differences. The motto of the old SA was ‘Unity is Strength’. I do not think that this is accurate. Rather, I believe our strength will be found in our differences. [...] May our children go forward without fear. May our children go forward with hope. May our children go forward with the courage to be different (Mitchell 2001).

The choristers also learn that music is a powerful force in the everyday life of people around the world. (Refer to **Part I**, 3.2 “Choral Unit Standard: Intonation”, Range Statement: “varied repertoire”.) The *Global Village* is becoming a reality at an ever-increasing pace. Television and information technology puts us in contact with people all over the world and challenges us to find common ground for mutual understanding.

Singing in the choir challenges the intellect, stimulates the imagination and expands musical appreciation. The choristers learn to set goals and have high aspirations. It is an aid to giving cultural perspective and gaining greater sensitivity, appreciation and understanding of other cultures. The choir also gives members the opportunities for self-expression and developing self-esteem, confidence and poise.

## **1.2 What Skills do I need to be an Effective Choral Educator?**

The effective and successful choral teacher must not only be a competent musician and a skilful educator, but also a pleasant, genial and amicable person. Some of the skills that are required by the choral educator will now be discussed and are classified under the following two headings: *Musical Skills* and *Non-Musical Skills*.

### **1.2.1 Musical Skills**

Dynamic and effective choral teachers need to be thoroughly **trained musicians**, possessing **excellent musicianship**. They should be able to analyse the musical components of the choral work to be studied. These include the overall form; the

harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic structure; text and style. Furthermore, they should have an inner sense about music and its expressive powers and possess a musical imagination. They are, thus, very sensitive to the “magic” within the music. They are charismatic and gifted teachers and they can express beauty in the music with their choristers.

The choral teacher has to fully **grasp the meaning and emotion in the text and the music**. (Refer to **Part II**, 4.4.2 “Expression of Text” and 4.4.3 “The Musical Phrase”. Also refer to **Part I**, 3.8 “Choral Unit Standard: Expression” and 3.3 “Choral Unit Standard: Phrasing”.) This knowledge is then transferred to the choristers. If the teacher speaks clearly, precisely and eloquently, uses poetic expression and has a supply of colourful, descriptive, captivating and imaginative ideas, the choristers are more likely to understand and grasp the meaning and emotion of the song. With children one cannot deal too much in abstract technical concepts and terms. One, therefore, has to resort to linguistic tools like metaphor, simile, imagery and life analogy. The children love to have their imaginations stimulated. The choral educator needs to inspire them to sing the music with passion, to love the music and share its beauty with the audience.

To direct a successful choir, the choral teacher needs to have an in-depth **understanding of the vocal instrument** and needs to be able to model/demonstrate healthy vocal technique. The choral teacher does not necessarily have to be an extremely talented singer. Many of the most successful choral conductors are or were merely average singers. They should, however, have an exceptionally **good ear**. The development of aural sensitivity is an on-going, life-long process.

Knowledge about the physiology of the human voice enables one to diagnose a vocal problem and to prescribe an appropriate remedy. One has to constantly study by reading extensively and attending choral training workshops in order to find new ways of teaching and gaining insights and specific ideas on how to solve choral problems. (Refer to **Part II**, 1.3 “Membership of the South African Choral Society”, below.)

It is necessary to have an in-depth **knowledge of a variety of choral music** from different historical periods, cultures, and different styles and genres. The musical menu has to provide the choristers with a balanced programme from these historical periods, cultures and musical styles. Knowledge of these styles and sensitivity to the interpretation practices is needed. (Refer to **Part II**, 4.9 “Historical/Stylistic Guidelines and Cultural Context”.)

Excellent **keyboard skills** are a great advantage to the choral teacher. The ability to sing or play any vocal line or rhythm accurately is absolutely essential. If a good accompanist is available, however, only elementary keyboard skills are required.

### 1.2.2 Non-Musical Skills

The conductor’s **personality and teaching style** play a tremendously important role in the development of group dynamics. A warm, friendly, sincere and understanding choral teacher who creates a nurturing environment is more likely to succeed than one who is merely concerned with musical perfection. The choristers will learn more readily if they like and respect the teacher.

The choral teacher’s **speaking voice should be strong or clear** enough to be heard by all the choristers. It should be pleasant, versatile and well-modulated so that it can be raised and lowered to retain attention. It should possess a quality of confidence, assurance and decisiveness – an aura of firm, yet genial, authority.

The choral educator needs to **motivate** the children so that they *want* to sing. To be able to do this, one has to be highly resourceful and even crafty at times. The teacher’s ingenuity and gentle persuasion will establish a positive rapport with the pupils. This, in turn, will hopefully have the result that the children increasingly develop a positive rapport with the music. One should be demanding and not



accept second rate effort or results but, at the same time, one has to be patient and sensitive to the children's rate of progress.

**Imagination, resourcefulness** and the ability to be **stimulating** is absolutely essential in order to hold the choristers' attention. Facial expressions, tone of voice, posture and gestures are used to emphasise, elaborate or anticipate and establish greater contact with the group. The teacher's **enthusiasm** for the art of choral singing should rub off on the choristers to create a passionate love for and involvement with the choral programme.

An effective choral teacher should have excellent **organisational skills** in order to give firm direction and to attain specific goals. Without good organisational skills, rehearsals would probably be meaningless and become unruly. The choral programme will suffer and the choristers will lose interest.

It is essential that the choral teacher **acknowledges the immense value and impact of choral music** as a life-enriching, aesthetic experience involving both the intellect and the emotions. Music has the amazing ability to transform, to elevate, to enhance and enrich the lives of those that perform and hear it. Unless the teacher firmly believes in the inherent power of music, there will be scant hope for the development of a dynamic and successful choir in that particular school.

The successful choral educator needs to be **pro-active**. That means that one has to search for ways to prevent a situation developing that might give rise to a problem. Should one plan meticulously for a rehearsal, one is more likely to avoid becoming re-active by trying to solve a problem after it has occurred.

The choral teacher needs to be **in command** of the rehearsal. Body language and stance goes a long way to project confidence. A "drooping daisy" stance will most definitely not succeed, whereas an alive, enthusiastic and confident stance will arrest the attention of the choristers and they will be more readily prepared to cooperate. Confidence, obviously, is also fostered through musical and pedagogical preparation. The secret lies in thorough score analysis and careful planning of a

logical sequence of teaching strategies. (Refer to **Part II**, 3.2 “Score Study” and 3.1 “Preparing for Rehearsal”.)

The Primary School choral teacher should have a sincere and infectious **enthusiasm for music, children, and teaching**. A genuine fondness of children this age is indispensable. They have to be respected as individuals and be challenged to attain their full potential – to be the best they can be.

The ability to use third-rate talent and to succeed in producing a second-rate performance is the mark of a good teacher. This refers to teachers who seem to be able to **extract greatness out of ordinary children** by touching their souls and inspiring them to reach for the outer limits of their ability.

The conducting and directing of a choir is an enormous human and musical responsibility. At the same time it is a most interesting, stimulating and rewarding task. Nevertheless, it is highly challenging and is definitely not for the faint-hearted, apathetic or lazy teacher.

### **1.3 Membership of the South African Choral Society**

The successful choral teacher should have an attitude of intellectual curiosity and the potential to *continue to learn* in the field of choral singing. It is essential not to become complacent, but to continually develop, augment and broaden one’s expertise by attending choral workshops, clinics or courses. This will result in greater competence in implementing the choral programme. By becoming a member of the South African Choral Society one receives their regular newsletter and information about upcoming choral events and courses. The South African Choral Society contact details are as follows:

Postal Address: SACS  
P.O. Box 31950  
Fichardtpark  
BLOEMFONTEIN  
9317

The e-mail address: [sachoral@xsinet.co.za](mailto:sachoral@xsinet.co.za)

Telephone number: 082 954 6637

Fax number: (051) 448 2003

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#### 1.4 Who will Sing in the Choir and how Large should the Choir be?

There are a number of elements to consider when deciding how to group choirs in the Primary School. The following are some important indicators that may influence the decision:

- Obviously, the **number of children** available to sing in the choir will have an impact on how the choirs are structured. Children, especially in the Foundation phase, are inhibited when they have to perform in a small group (less than 30 children). On the other hand, a large group (more than 60 members) may become difficult to handle which may lead to discipline problems.
- Child **development characteristics** need to be taken into account when different age groups are grouped together in the same choir. The age differential should not be too great. The maturity levels of the children will determine their interests and mental and physical abilities.
- The way in which the school's **timetable** is compiled may influence choir grouping because of the available rehearsal time. Extra-mural activities, likewise, may affect the decision.

The Primary School Choir should ideally be divided into two separate choirs, namely the Foundation Phase choir (i.e. grades 1-3, excluding the Reception year) and the Intermediate Phase choir (i.e. grades 4-6) with the grade 7s incorporated into either the Intermediate Phase Choir or the Senior School Choir. These groupings are by no means unalterably fixed, but have been found to be reasonably compatible. Should the school have a pre-school choir, it may prove to be a better arrangement to have the grade 1s singing in this particular choir. The grade 1's reading skills are undeveloped, especially at the beginning of the year, and this grouping may be more convenient. If the grade 1s, however, were grouped with the Foundation Phase Choir, one would have to spend extra time with them to help them learn the repertoire.

## 1.5 Financial Budget

If the school choir's conductor and accompanist are staff members from the particular school, then the choral programme is probably seen as their extra-curricular duty to the school or, alternatively, they volunteer their services and they are not remunerated for their time and effort. Should this not be the case, appropriate payment will have to be budgeted for.

**Purchasing** tentative **repertoire** selections for the year can be costly, but once the choir is established, the music library increases and subsequent additions incur less expense.

**Duplicating costs** for forms, letters, notices, certificates, etc. may be a significant cost and will have to be budgeted for. The school may provide this service. One would, however, have to give an estimate of this anticipated expenditure.

An interesting and dynamic choral programme in the primary school requires **posters, visual aids, and recordings** of choral singing. These may not be an urgent requirement but certainly would make it much more exciting and informative for the choristers.

**Affiliation** fees and/or **entry fees** for eisteddfodau, contests, festivals or concerts for the year need to be budgeted for. One needs to decide in advance which activities the choir is going to participate in, and determine the costs involved.

**Copyright fees** that are due to SARRAL (South African Recording Rights Association) or SAMRO (South African Music Rights Organisation) for recordings that the choir may wish to do or concerts for the public where an entrance fee is charged. Schools, universities, eisteddfod bodies, town and city halls usually have a general license that covers the performance of music on their properties. Should there be any uncertainty about these matters, SAMRO and/or SARRAL may be contacted for the necessary information at the following addresses or telephone numbers:

Postal Address: SAMRO  
P.O. Box 31609  
BRAAMFONTEIN  
2017

Telephone number: (011) 489-5000

Fax number: (011) 403-1934

Postal Address: SARRAL  
P.O. Box 31091  
BRAAMFONTEIN  
2017

Telephone number: (011) 339-1333

Fax number: (011) 339-1403

**Transportation** costs can be substantial if the school does not have a bus to help with the transport to and from performances. Parents may also be approached to help with transport, as this will greatly relieve the choral department's financial responsibilities. Another alternative is to charge the choristers bus fare if a bus has to be specially hired for transport. If there are children whose parents cannot afford the expense, this situation should be dealt with great solicitude and circumspection. In a letter to parents it could be mentioned that the school does not want any choristers deprived of choral performance experiences for financial reasons. Should parents therefore experience problems in contributing towards the travelling expense, they must feel free to come and discuss this with the teacher.

**Large expenditures** such as the purchase of a new piano, choral risers, stereo equipment, etc. may be covered in the budget for the entire school. If this were not the case, the choral teacher would have to draw up a written justification for the purchase. The educational benefits and experiences to the children need to be stressed. Information about suitable brands on the market and prices should also be furnished. Obtain brochures and specifications from manufacturers and/or dealers. Shop around so that an informed choice can be made. Do not sacrifice quality for lowest cost.

If the monies allocated for the choral programme are insufficient, consider the possibility of **fund-raising** projects like charging admission to a concert produced by the choir,

possibly in combination with the music department. The printed programme for the concert may contain advertising, which had been sold to interested parties. One could also approach companies to solicit corporate donations or grants. Each school, however, has its own fiscal policies in place and it is important to consult the principal first, before embarking on any fund raising campaign.

The choir budget needs to be implemented with considerable care and efficiency. Records need to be kept accurately and meticulously. Equipment and materials must be well looked after and frugal housekeeping needs to be the order of the day. If it becomes evident to the principal and the administration that the choral teacher is spending the allocated money wisely and that the equipment and materials are carefully looked after, they would be more inclined to grant a request for an increased budget.

#### **1.6 Consultation with the School Principal and other Staff Members**

The choir teacher should make every effort to build **positive co-operative relations** with the school principal and other staff members. Friendly and close working relationships with the school staff can be most beneficial throughout the year. Poor relationships, on the other hand, can be most unpleasant and prove to be a great disadvantage to the choir and the choral teacher. The use of a little tact and diplomacy will indeed pay rich dividends.

All school staff members need to become aware of the advantages, value and merit of the choir. The choral teacher should discuss the choir activities with other staff members and elicit their support. It is important to get to know the class teachers personally. They can often influence and encourage pupils to remain in the choir should they experience a difficult period. They may assist the pupils in their class in various ways to smooth the way for choir participation, like reminding them to attend choir rehearsals regularly and on time. The class teacher is better informed about the pupil's problems at school and at home and can thus inform one of potential problems the pupil may be having in the class, with peers or at home.

The choral teacher has to meet with the principal to discuss all the necessary arrangements and requirements of a choir. The choral teacher's enthusiasm and positive approach will go a long way in gaining the positive support necessary from the headmaster for a choral programme in the school. It would be expedient for the choral teacher to draw up a scheme for the choral programme which furnishes the following guidelines or criteria:

- A programme with high expectations;
- A programme that aims to produce quality performances;
- An activity that offers aesthetic and cultural enrichment to the pupils; and
- Other clearly observable results.

Support from the principal and time allocation for choir practices are bound to be forthcoming with a well-formulated and clearly defined strategy.

### **1.7 Rehearsal Time, Venue and Equipment**

Finding a suitable rehearsal time may often prove to be difficult and frustrating. It is important that choir rehearsals are scheduled so that there are **no clashes** with other classes or activities, which may prevent some children from singing in the choir.

Choristers should not be put in the position where they have to choose between choir participation and some other favourite activity. Ideally, the choir rehearsal should take place *during* school hours, rather than *before* or *after* school.

**Physical conditions** are important and one would like an attractive room that is large enough to accommodate the choir comfortably. Adequate and comfortable seating is essential. A black/whiteboard is indispensable for illustration and explanations. The overhead projector is more and more becoming a replacement for the blackboard and it has several advantages over the blackboard. For one thing, the teacher can face the choir while writing instead of having to turn his/her back on the group. Written examples can also be prepared in advance, thereby making optimum use of rehearsal time.

A **well-tuned piano** is a necessity; insist on having it tuned regularly. It is counter-productive to work with an inadequate instrument. The conductor should have a sturdy music stand that can be adjusted. Adequate storage space is essential, especially if the room is to be shared by other personnel.

## **1.8 Gaining Support and Public Relations**

One of the best ways to gain support for the choir, to boost the morale of the choir and to gain a reputation as a capable choral educator is to present a **good first performance**. Arrange a short performance as soon as possible to be presented at a general school assembly and invite the parents. This serves to show the choir at work to other staff members, pupils and parents. It may even attract several prospective choir members. Use music that will be upbeat and attractive to the choristers as well as to the audience, but keep the quality high.

It is the duty of the choral educator to communicate the philosophy, goals and standards of the choir to the school staff, parents and the pupils. With dwindling budgets for the arts, the advocacy of music education and active participation in music making has to be approached with great urgency. The lobbying for the choral programme and the advocating of its value in the development of the children is an important responsibility of the choral educator. Only if the people concerned are aware of, and understand, the tremendous impact and value of a solid choral programme in the development of the youth, will they be able to support the endeavour.



## Chapter 2

# PLANNING AND ORGANISATION

### 2.1 Recruitment and Retention of Choristers

One of the most important requirements for obtaining recognition for the choir is to help the choristers feel successful. It is a good idea to schedule a **performance early in the year** in order to increase the motivation of the choristers and their parents. Towards the end of the first term the choir should have a short programme ready for performance. Performing this programme successfully will help to give the children and their parents a sense of achievement and positive reinforcement. Success breeds success and the choristers will be eager to dedicate themselves to a cause in which they experience a high level of accomplishment.

Recruiting and retaining **boys in the choir** requires extra ingenuity. Boys need to be convinced that choir is not a “sissy activity”. Elicit the sport master’s help (or that of another suitable male role model) and ask them to address the boys on this matter.

A very important component in preventing children leaving the choir, is to build healthy relationships with the choristers. Becoming a member of the school choir initially is often a novelty that is prestigious, challenging and interesting. It is important to point out to the children that singing in the choir is fun and can be most stimulating. However, it involves hard work and they may experience periods of frustration. Encourage them to **persevere through difficult times**. The rewards are inestimable. Hopefully they will ultimately enjoy choir participation so much that they get caught up in it and want to continue singing in the choir.

If a child wants to **quit choir**, one has to discuss this rationally with the child and find out what the true causes and reasons may be. Ask the child not to make a hasty decision that s/he may regret for years to come. A note or telephone call to parents to solicit their extra support and encouragement at this time would be most appropriate. Remind them of the valuable role that choral participation plays in the chorister’s life, and the immense value it has on the child’s overall intellectual development. (Refer to **Part II**, 1.1 “The Rationale for Choral Singing”.)

Should one find that several children are quitting choir, then one has to re-evaluate the choir activities and one's teaching style. Some of the issues that need to be addressed are the following:

- Is the choir repertoire sufficiently appealing to and interesting for the children?
- Is the discipline in rehearsals conducive to developing learning?
- Does the discipline foster a sense of self-respect and security?
- Is one's teaching style too abrasive?

Knowing where there are areas that need improvement will help to remedy one's effectiveness in future.

## 2.2 Development of the Child Voice

The choral educator in the primary school needs to be well informed about the development of the child voice in order to structure an educationally and aesthetically discerning choral programme for the choristers' musical growth. This important knowledge is necessary to be able to, amongst other things, conduct auditions successfully or to select appropriate and relevant repertoire. (Refer to **Part II**, 2.4 "Auditions" and 2.5 "Selecting Appropriate Repertoire", below.)

Positive musical experiences must begin in early childhood with many opportunities for singing. The **pre-school years** are vitally important for the musical growth of the child. The pre-school child needs many opportunities to hear, feel and demonstrate the difference between speaking and singing. Research has confirmed that the use of one's singing voice is a learned, complex process (Phillips 1992). Children learn through imitation, and parents, teachers and others should present them with a good model of clear, soft, in-tune singing. Should they be singing loudly, the chest voice will be used and one specifically wants to encourage the cultivation of the head voice. The universal childhood chant, *soh-mi-lah*, should be used for many sing-song chants. Chant-like songs and other songs should be pitched between  $d^1 - a^1$  ( $b^1$ ). Below  $c^1$  the chest voice is used. Songs should generally be short with much repetition of melodic and rhythmic patterns.

In grade 1 of the **Foundation phase** there is advancement from the pre-school years in the singing voice, although there will still be a wide diversity of singing abilities amongst the children. Several children can now sing in tune and the singing range for the group has extended from the pre-school stage which may now be from approximately  $d^1 - d^2$  (McRae 1991: 43) or  $c^1 - d^2$  (Swears 1985: 29). By the end of the Foundation phase, grade 3, the range is extended to include  $c^1 - e^2$ . (Refer to **Part II**, 2.5 “Selecting Appropriate Repertoire”. Also refer to **Part I**, 3.2 “Choral Unit Standard: Intonation”, Range Statement: “suitable range”.)

The choristers in the Foundation phase enjoy imitating rhythms and melodies demonstrated by the teacher and they are able to remember longer rhythmic and tonal patterns than that which was possible in the pre-school years. Furthermore, language development and the child’s widening interest allow for more demanding, and greater diversity in, song material.

In the Foundation phase the children become more aware of singing in-tune and are better able to sing in unison with the rest of the group. “Most children should be able to sing on pitch by ages eight or nine, and they understand the meaning of singing in tune with others” (McRae 1991: 44). The children should be encouraged to discover the expressive qualities of their voices by using varied dynamics, tempi, phrasing, and timbre. The singing in the Foundation phase should still be kept light and not too loud to encourage a light head-tone quality. Phillips (1992: 73) states that:

The lower register should not be suppressed as it naturally emerges, but the singing should be kept light so as to minimise its predominance. The range of songs must be kept above middle C, below which the chest voice takes over.

By the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, **Intermediate phase**, children who have had good vocal instruction and numerous opportunities to sing will have voices developed in character and clarity. The emergence of a beautiful singing tone, which is so unique to the child voice, will be evident at this stage. McRae (1991: 46) states that:

The child voice reaches its peak of development and, in boys, is its most brilliant just prior to change. The timbre is enhanced by more resonance throughout the range.

The vocal timbre of the head-voice should be developed to its full potential. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.7 “The Importance of Head Voice”.) The children’s sense of tonality is well-developed and part-singing (harmonising) should be commenced at the beginning of grade 4. (Refer to

**Part II**, 4.3 “Unison and Part Singing”.) The vocal range for the group has expanded since the Foundation phase, both upwards and downwards and rich chest tones may also be developing. While vocal ranges vary, a range of two octaves is quite possible (i.e.  $g - g^2$ ) with “many children sing(ing) accurately in a range from  $b^{\square}$  to  $f^2$ ” (Swears 1985: 31). (Refer to **Part II**, 6.6 “Children’s Vocal Ranges and Registers”.) Phillips (1992: 74) states that:

Vocal development and beauty peaks in the child’s voice in the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. A range of up to two octaves ( $g$  to  $g^2$ ) is possible, which results in a flutelike upper register, a warm lower register (below middle C) and a middle register ( $c^1$  to  $c^2$ ) that brings into balance the head and chest timbres.

The greater physical, intellectual (including musical) and emotional development of the child in the Intermediate phase makes it possible to sing more expressively and the expressive qualities should be emphasised. Several soloists will emerge in the Intermediate phase.

### 2.3 The Changing Voice

In grade 7 (and occasionally in grade 6) some boys may already experience the psychological and physiological changes, which occur during puberty, and the dramatic and sometimes very abrupt effect that these have on the vocal mechanism. Some boys may find it embarrassing when their voices start to “play tricks” on them when they are singing. Songs that could be sung with reasonable accuracy up to now all of a sudden present problems. The physiological change that is taking place involves the **larynx**, which is virtually doubling in size and the adjoining muscles and fibrous tissues which are thickening and becoming stronger. As a result, the vocal folds now produce tones that are lower in pitch and heavier in quality.

The choral tradition in Europe was rooted for centuries in the monasteries of the early Christian Church. These choirs consisted **entirely of male choristers** with boy sopranos being sought after for their celestially pure, bell-like timbres. Females were forbidden to sing in the churches until the early seventeenth century (Eshelman 1992). Young boys, from a variety of backgrounds, clamoured after positions in these cathedral choirs where they were fed, clothed, and given an education in both academic studies and in music, with the emphasis on singing. As soon as the boy’s voice started changing, and could no longer sing the high notes, the boy

was discharged from the choir. They were instructed to stop singing altogether if they wanted to protect the developing adult voice.

Throughout the twentieth century several researchers made significant contributions to the study of the changing voice. Many started to criticise the practises of the traditional choral education that had been in place in Europe for several centuries. This resulted in choirs no longer dismissing boys with changing voices and allowing them to sing “through the change”.

Several researchers claim that **both males and females experience vocal changes** during adolescence. The changing process is not nearly as noticeable or dramatic in females as it is in males, but females also experience a certain re-aligning of the voice (Phillips 1995, Hook 1998). During adolescence, the female vocal folds also increase in size that results in a general lowering in range capabilities combined with an upper limit that rises slightly. The new sound produced by the adolescent girl gains in richness and body. The vocal folds’ increase in size in males is far more pronounced, however, than that of the females.

A boy’s larynx increases in length and width as he develops into an adult, while a girl’s larynx increases only in length. In both sexes, the vocal cords thicken and lengthen, leading to a fuller, adult vocal quality (Friar 1999:28).

Some boys experience a gradual change and they could be accommodated in the treble choir by letting them sing the same part as those girls who have been assigned to the alto section. If the voice changes abruptly, the boy should be transferred to the Senior School Choir.

## **2.4 Auditions**

Competition and selection are two basic elements that have to be dealt with throughout life. Not all the boys succeed in being selected for the first rugby or cricket team. The girls do not all qualify for the netball or swimming team. Some educators feel that the Junior School choir should be open to all the pupils and that one should not audition the children for the choir. This is a noble ideal that does not necessarily work in practice.

In the **class music milieu** *all* the pupils have the opportunity to sing and to receive a music education. It would be a good idea for the class music teacher to arrange performances for a class as a whole at a school general assembly or an inter-class singing competition. Every pupil is then expected to perform. The choral singing in this instance may be highly enthusiastic, but it is seldom of distinguished or notable quality.

Yet another possibility would be to establish a **“training” choir**. Pupils who do not succeed for the choir audition and are keen to sing, join this group. Remedial help for inaccurate singing and more individual attention is possible with this arrangement. These pupils can then be taken up into the main choir as soon as their development warrants this.

Choral educators may not, however, ignore the needs of the more talented pupils by denying them the opportunity to experience the aesthetics of choral art and truly well-performed music. Should one *not* audition pupils for a choir, one runs the risk of losing the musically talented pupils because the singing does not transcend the ordinary. The music performances by the choir need to challenge the pupils to greater musical achievement. They need to strive for a **performance that exceeds the mundane** – that rises above mediocrity. This cannot happen if there are choir members present that cannot sing expressively or even sing “in-tune”. Furthermore, the musically gifted child should be learning more challenging, artistic choral music than that which is covered in the class music lessons.

If the auditions are handled properly, it does not have to be a devastating and traumatic experience for the unsuccessful candidates. One needs to keep the standards high for selection and inform the pupils as soon as possible as to the outcome of the audition. This will prevent the unsuccessful candidates from building up false expectations over an extended period, which may only magnify the disappointment. Tell the children that we cannot all run fast like the best athletes in school. We cannot all become “Miss South Africa” beauty queens or “Mr Iron Man” super-fit athletes. We are not all gifted Einsteins, neither are we all capable of singing like Pavarotti. We are all, however, good at something or other. Should somebody not qualify for the school choir, it is not the end of the world. The **voice and ear keeps on growing and improving** and they may possibly qualify at a later stage. They should keep on enjoying their singing and participate in the class-music lessons and develop their musicality.

The audition provides information about the child's personality, background, musicianship and vocal ability (i.e. vocal range and voice quality). This information will assist the teacher in placing the singers that qualify in the most suitable vocal section.

**Auditioning for a Foundation Phase Choir** (grades 1-3), the initial stage of the audition, i.e. the singing of "Happy Birthday", both with accompaniment and without, is probably sufficient for this early stage. (See example II - 2-2, below.)

The following **auditioning procedure** is suitable for **children in grades 4-7** or even an older group. It is essential to hold a general **pre-audition meeting** for all the children wanting to audition in order to explain and demonstrate the procedure. The children will then know exactly what to expect. It is important to establish a friendly, informal atmosphere and to set them at ease. Use this opportunity to discuss rehearsal and concert schedules and generally what is expected from a choir member. Point out to the children that singing in the choir is great fun but it involves hard work and is definitely not for those who want to fool around.

If there is a large turnout of children to audition for the choir, one could conduct a quick screening in order to eliminate the growling "teddy-bears". This would be similar to auditioning for the Foundation Phase Choir. Only those who can "carry a tune" and sing "Happy Birthday" on pitch, with the melody played on the piano, come back for the subsequent, more thorough audition.

The following aspects need to be covered in the pre-audition meeting:

- Tell the children to be auditioned that they will be expected to sing "**Happy Birthday**". Practise this with them. (See example II - 2-2, below.) Caution them about the difficult leap in "Happy Birthday" and practise it with them. This is the octave leap between "*Happy*" and "*birth*" (end of bar 4 and the beginning of bar 5). Remind them that it takes effort to reach the top note. Demonstrate and practise this octave leap with the group.
- Another song that they can be expected to sing is "**Silent Night**". (See example II - 2-3, below.) Alternatively, they may bring their own song, but then they must supply the sheet music for the song. Practise "Silent Night" with the group. Make sure that they all have a copy of the song or use an overhead projector with the song on a transparency. Tell them

that you will only play the bass accompaniment while they sing the melody, and practise it in this way with them.

- Divide the group in two and sing the round, “**Are You Sleeping?**” (“Brother John”) with them. (See example **II - 2-4**, below.) Once more, supply a copy of the music. Remind them that it is important to concentrate on their own singing while at the same time listening to the other voice-part.
- The last exercise that needs to be covered in the pre-audition session is the **ascending scale passage** sung by the teacher and the second voice-part by the child. (See example **II - 2-5**, below.) Practise this a few times.

The children can now be auditioned privately, which will help to alleviate nervousness and avoid embarrassment. Arrange times for the children to come and audition. It saves time if they come in small groups and wait their turn with a person that is appointed to help with the auditioning. This could be a responsible senior choir pupil. **An assistant** to help at the audition would greatly contribute to the smooth running of the arrangements. The assistant can fill in the first part of the audition form while the children are waiting their turn to audition. They also facilitate a smooth flow of children in and out of the audition room.

The following is an example of an audition form (Form **II - 2-1a** and **II - 2-1b**, below):





### CHOIR AUDITION FORM

(Section a)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Tel. No. (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (w) \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax No. \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Birthday \_\_\_\_\_

Have you sung in a choir before? Yes\_\_ No\_\_ When? \_\_\_\_\_ Where? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you play a music instrument(s)? Yes\_\_ No\_\_ What instrument(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you taken music lessons? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is your teacher? \_\_\_\_\_  
.....

**The following to be filled in by parent or guardian:**

Would you be able to assist in any way with the management of the choir? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do either of the parents play a music instrument? (Please specify the instrument and indicate if you would be prepared to assist with accompaniment or sectional rehearsals.)  
\_\_\_\_\_

## CHOIR AUDITION FORM

(Section b)

(The following information is for the choral educator's information only)

**Voice Quality:**      breathy \_\_\_\_      nasal \_\_\_\_      piercing \_\_\_\_  
                         resonant \_\_\_\_      dark \_\_\_\_      light \_\_\_\_  
                         small \_\_\_\_      big/strong \_\_\_\_  
                         changing \_\_\_\_      soloist \_\_\_\_

**Tonal Memory:**      excellent \_\_\_\_      good \_\_\_\_      fair \_\_\_\_      poor \_\_\_\_

**Rhythmic Memory:**      excellent \_\_\_\_      good \_\_\_\_      fair \_\_\_\_      poor \_\_\_\_

**Intonation:**      excellent \_\_\_\_      good \_\_\_\_      fair \_\_\_\_      poor \_\_\_\_

**Vocal Independence:**      excellent \_\_\_\_      good \_\_\_\_      fair \_\_\_\_      poor \_\_\_\_  
(singing in harmony)

**Musicality:**      excellent \_\_\_\_      good \_\_\_\_      fair \_\_\_\_      poor \_\_\_\_

**Choir Candidate:**      yes \_\_\_\_      no \_\_\_\_      try again at later stage \_\_\_\_

**Vocal Range:**      \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

**Tessitura:**      \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
(comfortable range)

**Voice Part Allocation:**      S<sub>1</sub> \_\_\_\_ S<sub>2</sub> \_\_\_\_ A \_\_\_\_

**Personality:**      enthusiastic \_\_\_\_      confident \_\_\_\_      lethargic \_\_\_\_      anxious \_\_\_\_

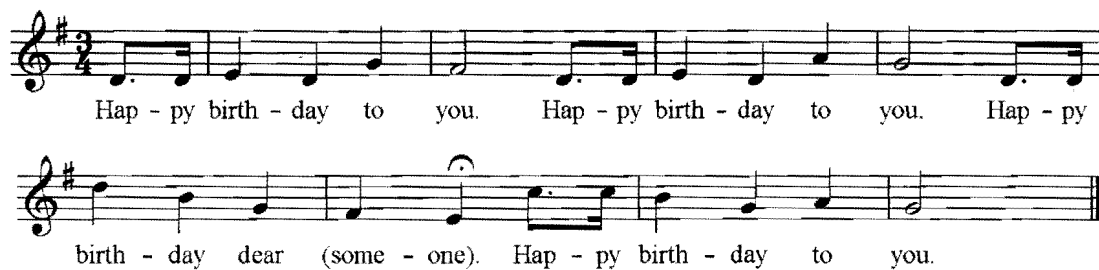
**Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Form II - 2-1b Choir Audition form (Section b)**

The following procedures may be followed at the audition. These are by no means prescriptive and choral educators should feel free to develop their own auditioning procedures or, alternatively, only use some of these ideas.

Ask the child to sing “Happy Birthday” while you play the melody as accompaniment on the piano. (See example II - 2-1, below.) This will set the child at ease and also gives them a comfortable pitch for the song and establishes a moderate tempo. (Children are inclined to rush the tempo when singing “Happy Birthday”.) One can also determine if the child is able to sing in tune with support from the piano.

## Happy Birthday to You



Hap - py birth - day to you. Hap - py birth - day to you. Hap - py  
birth - day dear (some - one). Hap - py birth - day to you.

### Example II - 2-1 Happy Birthday

Repeat the singing of “Happy Birthday” but without *any* accompaniment. Listen for pitch accuracy and the ability to stay in key. A “dependent” singer cannot sing on pitch when singing alone. One needs to focus and concentrate a little bit more in order to sing accurately by oneself.

The next step is to ask the child to sing “Silent Night” while you play chordal harmonic support, or the left-hand accompaniment only. It is important *not* to duplicate the melodic line on the piano. (See example II - 2-2, below.) The idea is to determine if the child can carry the melody while you are playing the harmony line beneath the melody. Listen for pitch accuracy (intonation) and vocal quality. Play a two bar introduction and the first bar of the song itself and continue with only the left-hand accompaniment. (Supply a copy of the words if necessary.)



## Silent Night

Words by Joseph Mohr  
Music by Frans Grüber  
Arranged by Nita Wolff

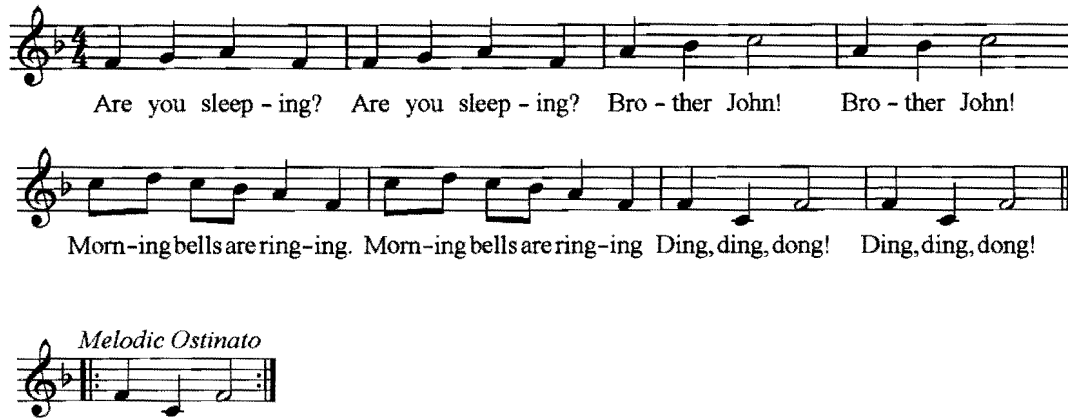
Si - lent night. Ho - ly night. All is calm,  
all is bright. Round yon vir - gin moth - er and child Ho - ly in - fant so  
ten - der and mild. Sleep in heav - en - ly peace. Sleep in heav - en - ly peace

The image shows a musical score for the song "Silent Night" in 6/8 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The score is arranged for piano and voice. It consists of three systems of music. Each system has a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Si - lent night. Ho - ly night. All is calm, all is bright. Round yon vir - gin moth - er and child Ho - ly in - fant so ten - der and mild. Sleep in heav - en - ly peace. Sleep in heav - en - ly peace".

### Example II - 2-2 Silent Night

Ask the child to sing a familiar round with you, e.g. "Are You Sleeping?" (See example II - 2-3, below.) Note how well the pupil carries his/her part. The child's vocal independence is thus assessed. If you wish, play a melodic ostinato softly to accompany the singing.

## Are you sleeping?



Are you sleep - ing? Are you sleep - ing? Bro - ther John! Bro - ther John!

Morn - ing bells are ring - ing. Morn - ing bells are ring - ing Ding, ding, dong! Ding, ding, dong!

*Melodic Ostinato*

### Example II - 2-3 Are You Sleeping? (Brother John)

Another test for vocal independence is to ask the child to sing the second voice part in the following example (II - 2-4). Sing to a neutral syllable like “loo” or “lah”.



Part 1

Part 2

Sing to a natural syllable like: "loo", or "lah"

### Example II - 2-4 Ascending scale passage with a second voice-part

Have the child imitate/echo short melodic patterns, which you sing to a neutral syllable like “loo”. These melodic patterns should progress in difficulty. (Refer to example II - 2-5, below.) This exercise serves to assess the child’s melodic memory. Several researchers have found that children are more successful with melodic patterns and songs than with single tones or scales.

Melodic patterns are inherently more musical and, thus, may captivate the child’s attention, making the patterns easier to perform accurately (Goetze et al 1990: 25).



s s m s m m s s m s m l s m  
m s m m s s l s m d d d r m s l s m  
s l s f m r d m s d' d r m f s s s l s m d  
d' t l s f m r d m s d'

**Example II - 2-5 Patterns to assess melodic memory**

To assess the child's rhythmic memory, clap a rhythmic pattern once, which the child then echoes/imitates. Do a few of these rhythmic patterns, which should progress in difficulty. (Example II - 2-7, below.)



**Example II - 2-6 Patterns to assess rhythmic memory**

One has to determine both the extremes of the vocal range and the most comfortable singing range (tessitura). To determine the lower singing range extreme, ask the child to sing a descending arpeggio. (See example II - 2-7a, below.) (An arpeggio, or broken chord, involves playing the notes of a chord in succession rather than simultaneously.) Proceed by



low level of selectivity, it is probably only necessary to test the ability to sing on pitch and the range so that the child could be assigned to the correct voice section.

The following vocal ranges serve as a guideline for assignment to the proper voice section. (See example II - 2-8, below.) In the primary school one seldom finds a genuine alto voice, the lower voices being mezzo-sopranos. One therefore has to choose the alto section from the mezzo-sopranos (second sopranos) that can manage the alto voice part.



### Example II - 2-8 Vocal ranges

It is beneficial to audition existing choir members two or three times per year to assess and celebrate their development regarding aural and vocal abilities and growth in self-confidence. Choristers should be informed and congratulated about their progress. This audition is also valuable in determining any changes in the chorister's vocal range and possible relocation to another voice group.

## 2.5 Selecting Appropriate Repertoire

Every choir conductor has the important task of selecting choir repertoire that is appropriate for that particular choir. This involves selecting music that does not only have entertainment value, but also has a basis for musical growth and education. Erkki Pohjola, the founder and former director of the world renowned Tapiola Choir from Finland, remarks on the choice of repertoire as follows:

One of the first conditions for successful choir work is the ability to choose your program correctly. This is at the heart of the conductor's professional skills. One could almost say – tell me what you sing, and I'll tell you what sort of conductor you are (Pohjola 1992: 194).



We need to select material that challenges the choristers' intellectual, literary, emotional and musical abilities. "The students' technical readiness, maturity, and expressive capabilities must be accommodated" (Apfelstadt 2001: 33).

The following guidelines for the selection of repertoire are not exhaustive by any means; they merely serve as a point of departure.

When selecting repertoire, one needs to look at a **variety of styles, historical periods and musics of different cultures and languages**. The choice should be of the highest possible quality and that which would contribute to:

- the development of healthy vocal technique;
- basic skills of listening and sight-reading;
- music theory, history, and appreciation; and
- musical sensitivity, expression, and aesthetic response.

The musical menu should be varied and facilitate the **broadest educational experience** possible. The time and effort spent on critically and carefully selecting music of substance and quality which is appropriate to the age and understanding of the choristers, is of paramount importance. This task is often under-estimated and neglected. Should the choral educator, however, make this careful selection, it is bound to pay back liberally in satisfaction and success, knowing that it is an investment in the further musical, artistic and creative development of the choristers. Repertoire of high quality is described by Hilary Apfelstadt as music that possesses "craftsmanship" and "expressivity". She continues as follows:

Well-written music finds that balance of tension and release, of structural symmetry and asymmetry, of expectancy and surprise, that makes listening and performing a worthwhile experience. Expressivity means that the music expresses in its form and content something of depth, something that draws humans to its artistic qualities (2001: 31).

The following aspects will influence the selection of repertoire:

- size of the choir;
- distribution of voices, e.g. unison, two or three-part arrangements;

- performance commitments and opportunities;
- amount of rehearsal time available; and
- budget available for the purchase of repertoire.

The choral educator must also bear in mind the objectives, goals, and philosophy that underpin the choral programme.

One should **refrain from repeating repertoire from year to year**. There is such a wealth of choral repertoire to explore and choose from, which adds to the challenge, fascination and excitement of choir work. Besides, the choristers are in one's care for a very limited period and one owes them the opportunity to learn as wide a range of fine choral music as possible.

In selecting repertoire, one needs to have high standards and one has to strive to attain them. **The repertoire should be meaningful and challenging, while at the same time it has to be accessible and successful and commensurate with the potential of the choristers.** The art is in finding the correct balance. One must not consistently select music which is very easy for the choristers simply because they will be able to learn it quickly; in the process quality may be sacrificed. Music which is essentially easy and that has a supposed popular appeal, i.e. music that is *trite*, is simply not challenging. Do not under-estimate the children's potential, or your own, for that matter. Choristers can just about learn to perform any song (which has been carefully researched and wisely chosen) that a confident and competent choral teacher presents to them. Having said that, it needs to be pointed out that, should we make a haphazard choice and select music that is far too difficult, it can result in feelings of anxiety or frustration.

Initially one has to select music that is appropriate to the choristers' current level of musical development. Slowly but surely one can then **increase the level of difficulty** to a more challenging level. One of the basic tenets of teaching, namely, meet the choristers where they are and take them to places yet unvisited, is applicable here. The choral teacher's choice of repertoire determines the musical growth of the choristers.

Choral educators have the crucially important task of enhancing the choristers' perceptions of musical meanings and how those meanings relate to their lives. One has to be very careful not to put **undue emphasis on pop music**. In an age where instant and shallow gratification is more the rule than the exception, it is absolutely imperative that aesthetic value is not

compromised. One needs to offer the members in one's choir only that which is truly beautiful: music that has depth and substance and is intellectually significant. Do not limit the choice to songs that are transparent, light and entertaining. One has to select music with qualities that are lasting and will help the choristers to grow musically. The Americans use a term that describes third rate music as "fluff". Music which is "here today and gone tomorrow". Choral educators are, first and foremost, educators and we may not resort to including only music that has immediate appeal to pupils and the mission of solely being entertainers.

As regards **the text**, one has to decide whether the children can understand its general meaning and if it has value or significance for the choristers. One has to decide if it is meaningful, appropriate and relevant to the particular age group. Love song texts are, on the whole, inappropriate for both the Foundation and Intermediate phase child. It would also be inadvisable to choose a song with a text that is too childish for the Intermediate phase. The text should not be trite and poorly constructed but rather have poetic merit, literary integrity and value. (Refer to **Part II**, 4.4.2 "Expression of Text".)

**Folk music** represents an excellent and valuable source of material and can be considered as a safe choice to be included in the choir's repertoire. It is absolutely essential that children learn the folk songs from their own culture and also be exposed to the traditional music from other cultures within this country's diverse and rich cultural heritage. As the choristers' horizons expand, they are also introduced to some of the folk songs of other countries. (Refer to **Part I**, 3.2 "Choral Unit Standard: Intonation", Range Statement: "varied repertoire"; 3.7 "Choral Unit Standard: Stylistic Authenticity"; and **Part II**, 4.9 "Historical/Stylistic Guidelines and Cultural Context".)

In the Foundation phase, the choristers are introduced to **songs from various South African language groups** that have simple language texts and preferably with a text refrain that repeats. This would be more accessible than songs that contain many different verses. (Refer to **Part II**, 7.8 "Compiling a Programme".) In the Intermediate phase, in addition to the Western repertoire and songs/works from other South African languages and cultures, International repertoire with simple **foreign language texts** is introduced. (Refer to **Part I**, 3.2 "Choral Unit Standard: Intonation", Range Statement: "varied repertoire".) Because the

pronunciation in Latin is relatively easy (although it is no longer a spoken language), this is a good starting place. Texts in foreign languages are an excellent way of introducing choristers to the global village. It is vitally important that the choristers fully understand the *meaning* of the foreign text. One also has to make absolutely sure that the pronunciation is correct. (Refer to **Part II**, 4.9 “Historical/Stylistic Guidelines and Cultural Context”.)

The **range and tessitura** of the voice parts has to be appropriate for the choristers and their level of development; i.e. neither too high, nor too low. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.6 “Children’s Vocal Ranges and Registers”.) The tessitura of *the voice* refers to the *core* of the voice; i.e. where it is most comfortable for the choristers to sing and where the most efficient sound is produced. The tessitura of *a song* refers to the song’s prevailing register, or the pitch of the majority of the notes. The following are the recommended tessituras and ranges for songs in the Foundation and Intermediate phases:

- In the Foundation phase, the tessitura for repertoire (in grade 3) should lie between  $d^1 - c^2$ . The range lies between  $c^1 - e^2$ . ( $c^1 =$  **middle C**). (Refer to **Part I**, 3.2 “Choral Unit Standard: Intonation”, Range Statement: “suitable range”. Also refer to **Part II**, 6.6 “Children’s Vocal Ranges and Registers”.)
- In the Intermediate phase, the tessitura for repertoire should lie between  $d^1 - d^2$ . A range of two octaves is possible at this stage. Vocal ranges, however, vary, and thus the separation of the recommended range for alto and soprano. The range for alto is from  $a - e^2$  ( $a = 1\frac{1}{2}$  tones below **middle C**) and for soprano from  $c^1 - g^2$ . In the alto part there should only be a very occasional  $a$  ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  tones below **middle C**) as this is the lowest extreme for most Intermediate phase choristers. In the soprano part there should only be a few high  $f$ ’s and  $g$ ’s and vowel modification should be implemented for the bright vowel sounds (i.e. [ɛ] “e” and [i] “i”) on these high notes. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.8 “Italian Basic Pure Vowels, Uniform Vowel Colours and Vowel Modification.”)

For most Intermediate phase choristers, the music should definitely not go below the  $a$ ,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  tones below **middle C**, or above  $g^2$ . (Refer to **Part I**, 3.2 “Choral Unit Standard: Intonation”, Range Statement: “suitable range”. Also refer to **Part II**, 6.6 “Children’s Vocal Ranges and Registers”.) The choristers, however, will be better able to project if the vocal line is centred in the middle to upper part of their voices which allows them to use their head register. One

should avoid repertoire where the vocal line remains extremely high or low for too prolonged a period.

Do not hesitate to **transpose the song** to a key that is more suitable for the children's voices. More often than not, this involves transposing into a higher key. One should not immediately transpose a song into a lower key simply because there are a few high notes within the melody. If these high notes occur on the darker, open vowels ([u] "u", [ɔ] "o" and [ɑ] "a"), and the general tessitura is acceptable, there should be no problem, provided the jaw is relaxed and dropped. (Refer to **Part II**, 6.8 "Italian Basic Pure Vowels, Uniform Vowel Colours and Vowel Modification" and 6.5 "Resonance"). Should the choir be participating at a competition, it is important to enquire in advance to ascertain if it is permissible to transpose repertoire. This is specifically important in the case of *prescribed* repertoire.

The **melodic lines** should be melodious, i.e. conjunct rather than disjunct or angular. Avoid songs with too many awkward or difficult intervals. In both the Foundation and the Intermediate phase, melodies which contain extensive use of chromaticism should be avoided. Diatonic melodies with predictable patterns are more appropriate for the Foundation phase. In the Intermediate phase occasional chromaticism may be attempted.

Avoid choosing repertoire with themes and motives that repeat with slight variation; i.e. themes and motives that are similar, but not *exactly* the same. These are confusing for the children. It is better to have **the themes and motives as exact repetition** consistently throughout a selection.

The length of the musical line and the **choristers' breath support ability** has to be considered. (Refer to **Part I**, 3.3 "Choral Unit Standard: Phrasing". Also refer to **Part II**, 6.4 "Breath Management".) The tempo of the work will also be a contributing factor as to whether or not the length of the musical line will be appropriate for the young choristers.

The music has to be intellectually and aesthetically pleasing. **The accompaniment** (if applicable) should be interesting and well written to enhance the meaning of the text. (Refer to **Part I**, 3.2 "Choral Unit Standard: Intonation", "Western Music Specifics" number 2.) The voice parts and the accompaniment must form a cohesive whole. The accompaniment must be

musically interesting on its own without confusing the singers. Try to avoid accompaniments that consistently double the melodic line or over-shadow the singing. Voices need to hold their own independent musical lines as much as possible. Another aspect that one needs to address relates to the accompaniment and whether it is within the capabilities of the accompanist. (Refer to **Part II**, 3.14 “Accompaniment and the Role of the Accompanist”.)

In the selection of repertoire, it is imperative to include a cappella (unaccompanied) songs or works. The singing of unaccompanied pieces enables the development of good intonation without being dependent on the piano. (Refer to **Part II**, 7.8 “Compiling a Programme”, and 3.13 “Use of the Piano”.)

Choral educators are responsible for the aesthetic development and growth of their choir members. It is their duty to put the choristers in touch with music that matters and gradually leads them to a higher degree of refinement.

Quality repertoire encourages young singers to become better at what they do. It stimulates their imaginations, expands their appreciation, and refines their musical skills. It challenges them intellectually, whets their appetite for further challenge, and motivates them to excel (Brunner 1992: 32).

There is a vast amount of good quality choral literature, both historical and contemporary, that can be stimulating and challenging to the choristers in the Primary school. Careful selection of, and diligence in the presentation of this literature will ensure choral rehearsals and concerts that are “life-enriching” occurrences.

## **2.6 Involving Parents**

A school/children’s choir mission or endeavour cannot be successful without the support of the parents. Parents should be informed about the immense value music has in the positive development of their child. The investment of time, effort and energy in music will produce lifelong dividends. If the parents are informed, they will be more involved, and the child is more likely to take the responsibility with a greater degree of dedication. It is essential to inform parents about choir activities and to give adequate advance notice of performances.

Send a letter home to parents whose children have been selected for the choir and congratulate them. Inform them about the benefits of singing in the choir and ask for their co-operation and support. At a later stage you will find that parents of choristers who are contemplating quitting the choir will, in most cases, support your efforts to keep their child in the choir if they are convinced about the benefits this involves. It is vitally important that children develop a habit of persistence that will help them through difficult, trying or tough times in life; skills that will help them stay on course when it would be easier to quit. The following is a letter that may be used to send to parents of children that qualified for choir membership:

Dear Parents,

I am writing to congratulate you on (*name of chorister*)'s selection for the (*name of choir*). I set high expectations for choir participation. Choir is a commitment that requires dedication and hard work. The benefits and rewards, however, are inestimable and extend far beyond the performance. Allow me to point out some of these:

- Choristers learn vitally essential life orientation skills like cohesiveness in being part of a close-knit group and the ability to work with others. Through musical experiences they grow in self-understanding by developing sensitivity to inner feelings and self-esteem. They also gain composure and confidence in appearing before others in performance or leadership roles.
- They learn self-discipline and co-operation or suffer the disapproval of their fellow-choristers (or the choral teacher!). The commitment to regular attendance and individual responsibility to the success of the group inculcates a discipline that is self-directed.
- Singing in the choir makes children aware of the tremendous effort that is required for success. It teaches them the value of hard work and perseverance. It whets their appetite for further challenge and motivates them to excel.
- Introverted or shy children are helped in performance through the support system of the group. Within the group, they can explore their vocal abilities without fear of personal failure.
- The choir improves a chorister's general musicianship and aural skills, and helps to develop good basic singing habits.
- Singing in the choir builds a vocal repertoire of quality music from a variety of periods and styles (i.e. folk songs, art songs, sacred songs, songs of other cultures, and songs of the current genre).
- Children in the choir experience a vast store of emotional release in music, i.e. joy, sorrow, love, protest, worship, entertainment, etc. This has an important part to play in creating a set of personal values that allow a successful and fulfilling journey through life.
- Choristers learn to identify and appreciate their own cultural heritage. They also learn to adapt to and respect the musical heritage of other cultures and this helps to diminish racial and language differences and softens national boundaries.

- Singing in the choir helps to bridge the gap between the verbal and the non-verbal; that which is important to feel, but nearly impossible to say. It helps to develop intuition, it challenges the intellect, stimulates the imagination and may inculcate a lifelong need and love for musical participation. The aesthetic benefits gained through positive musical experiences in the choir are invaluable in forming sensitive and beauty-loving human beings.

Regarding the commitment to the choir, I need to point out that a choir member is required to attend choir practice on a (*specify the day*) from (*specify the time*). I am requesting parents to please assist me in this and not to make arrangements necessitating pupils missing part or all of a practice.

The choir cannot attain good results without your co-operation and support. The parents' attitude towards the choir is reflected in the choir members and determines, to a large extent, a good morale within the choir. I seek your help in ensuring a wonderful experience for your child. By working together, we can make choral participation a memorable and most valuable adventure for him/her.

I am fully aware that you are faced with an incredibly busy schedule in your personal and professional life, but the importance of your presence at the choir's performances is in the interest of your child. It means so much to a chorister to have their parents and family present at a performance. The choir's performance at a concert or festival should be a family affair that gives the family members an opportunity to celebrate the child's musical talent.

The absence of a single choir member at either a choir rehearsal or a performance is noticeable. A choir is a team and cannot function without *all* the players. I need your support in this.

Please feel free to come and discuss any problem(s) you may encounter regarding your child's participation in the choir. I am looking forward to meeting you.

Kind regards,

(*Name of choral educator*)

## **Form II - 2-2 Letter to Parents**

Some choral teachers may need to canvass parents that are prepared to help with the numerous tasks involved with the running of a choir. The various tasks and responsibilities may include some (or all) of the following:

- Parent Committee;
  - Chairperson



- Secretary (to be in charge of a choir newsletter, letters to parents informing them about upcoming performances, invitations, and surveys)
- Bursar (handles all financial matters)
- Music;
  - Accompaniment (should there be a parent available to fulfil this role)
  - Assisting in the teaching of parts in sectional practices
- Supervision of choristers during and after a concert;
- Choir camp (or week-end away for choir rehearsals);
  - Organising/steering committee
  - Supervision
  - Entertainment and games
  - Meals and refreshments
  - First aid
- Choir tours;
- Choir outings (attending concerts, movies and other social events);
- Concerts;
  - Publicity (printing, posters, notices, photographs, programmes and tickets)
  - Ticket sales
  - Ushers/usherettes
  - Video or audio recording
  - Refreshments
  - Decoration/flower arrangements for stage and foyer
- Fund raising (soliciting corporate donations, grants, etc.)
- Performance attire
  - Sewing and making of outfits
  - Maintenance
  - Swop shop.

The choral teacher may have to (or wish to) fulfil all the above functions without assistance from parents. The feasibility of such an arrangement would depend on the profile of the choir and the number of performances that are scheduled in any one year.



## 2.7 Planning Performances

It is important to schedule performances early in the year. This will prevent last minute panic, mishaps and tension and will ensure adequate preparation time and attention to detail.

Planning performances well in advance ensures better co-ordination between all the other school activities. This has the added advantage of ensuring better attendance at the choir's performances. Parents will also appreciate the advance notification, which enables them to schedule their children's commitments. It is inevitable, however, for the choir to receive invitations to perform at functions that were not included in the scheduled performances earlier on. Should these performances hold educational promise for the choristers, it would be a pity to miss out on them simply because they did not appear in the schedule that was drawn up earlier in the year. This needs to be explained to parents in a special letter.

The choir should perform as often as possible, provided that they are adequately prepared. According to Paul Roe (1970:328):

Preparing for performances maintains interest and keeps the choir members in the mood for work. A group that performs very little, or not at all, is usually a dying organization, because the desire for perfection and feelings of accomplishment and organizational pride are not aroused.