

Art of Choral Techniques

SCORE AND REHEARSAL PREPARATION

The following is a step-by-step list of suggestions for preparing a musical score for rehearsal and performance. While there is room for personal interpretation and preference for implementation and chronology, each of the following steps must be accomplished so that the conductor is familiar with the score to begin the process of memorization and to plan the rehearsal process.

I. Information Gathering

- A. “Walking” through the score (3 or 4 “walks” will be necessary)
 - 1. Text: meaning, general mood: uplifting, introspective, etc.; interpretation
 - 2. Main sections: fermati, double bars, through-composed, tempo markings, etc.
 - 3. Key signature(s): beginning sonority, modulations, final sonority
 - 4. Time signature(s): meter change(s), conducting pattern(s), predominant rhythm(s)
 - 5. Vocal ranges
 - 6. Dynamics
 - 7. Translate any foreign terms
- B. Number the entire score from beginning to end
- C. Write out the text on a separate sheet of paper
 - 1. If in another language, write original text and translation
 - 2. Poetry (analyze)
 - 3. Secular/Sacred
 - 4. Use I.P.A.
 - 5. Does the text influence the form? phrases? dynamics?
 - 6. Interpret the text as it stands on its own
 - 7. Ideas regarding pronunciation, interpretation, alliteration, rhyme, meter, etc.
 - 8. Write the translation above each work, and in a sentence at the top of the page
- D. Score Marking – **as you mark, sing (or play) the part so that this does not become a mindless exercise.** This allows you to truly “dig” into the score!
 - 1. Devise your own system
 - a. Be consistent
 - b. Make it your own – whatever works for you...but do it!!
 - 2. Color Code
 - a. Dynamics
 - i. louds = red
 - ii. softs = blue
 - b. Entrances – Yes – all of them (find pairs/duets) = green
 - c. Accents = bright orange
 - d. Meter = bright yellow
 - e. Style
 - f. Voice parts
 - g. Extra instruments
 - h. Are there any inconsistencies from part to part? Other editorial issues?
 - i. Accidentals
 - j. Anything that might give your singers trouble? . . .troubleshoot and anticipate!
 - 3. Include and refine everything from your “walk” through the score.
- E. Harmonic Analysis
 - 1. This is where Theory and Solfege comes in most handy!
 - 2. Analyze all vertical sonorities
 - 3. Circle all non-harmonic tones
 - 4. Modulations
 - 5. Closed and open cadences
 - 6. Doublings (emphasis on intonation)
 - 7. Difficult whole and half steps
 - 8. Who’s got the major third?
 - 9. Is the piece in a mode? (Renaissance, Contemporary) If so, proceed to F.

F. Melodic Analysis

1. If there is a melody, highlight it
2. Highlight various motives in different, corresponding colors
3. Trace thematic/melodic development throughout the piece
4. Begin to analyze phrases
5. Notate breath marks for the entire piece – don't leave this to chance
6. If in a mode, analyze cadences and determine mode; sing modes in warm-ups

G. Graphic Analysis or Barline Analysis (Macro Structure/Phrases)

1. Write on score
2. Count groups of measures, determine the following
 - a. Phrases
 - b. Periods
 - c. Groups of phrases
 - d. Are there repetitions that could be taught together easily?
 - e. How do the periods/phrases make a larger section?
 - f. Outline the larger forms from the smaller
 - g. Are there standard musical forms present?
 - i. ABA
 - ii. Rondo
 - iii. Rounded Binary
 - iv. Bar form
 - v. Strophic
 - vi. ???
3. On a separate paper or graph paper, chart a graph of the piece.

[NOTE: At this point, your preparation has only begun. Now the difficult “woodshedding” portion of the job begins. Use solfege and sing and/or get to the piano and play-and-sing!!!]

II. Preparing for the Rehearsal

A. Sing each part individually ... do it!!!

1. Just like Solfege and Ear Training
2. Practice each part until it's perfect – don't model parts incorrectly in rehearsal!
3. Prepare using solfege and hand signs
4. Circle in the score those notes/intervals/passages that give you trouble. Circle them!!!
Your singers will probably have trouble there, too. Find solutions to these problems.
and be prepared to use them in rehearsal.
5. Play one part, sing another, etc.
6. Play two parts, sing another, etc.
7. Be able to move quickly from part to part – this is what you must do in rehearsal
8. Hear all the parts simultaneously in your head
9. Finally, play at the piano to hear all vertical sonorities

B. Begin to develop your interpretation of the piece

1. How do you hear it in your head?
 - a. Tempo
 - b. Climaxes
 - c. Style
 - d. Ornaments
 - e. Accompaniment
 - f. Every phrase and dynamic
 - g. Vowels – diction
2. Actualize your aural image of the piece: it's your job to get your singers to sound like that “perfect” version you've created in your head.

C. Prepare for rehearsal

1. Discover where the piece sings most easily
 - a. At what point(s) in the score will your singers most easily and quickly feel good about this music? Find it exciting? Make them want to sing more?
 - b. This is where you begin your rehearsal!

C. Prepare for rehearsal (cont'd)

2. At what point(s) is the music really difficult?
 - a. What point is harmonically challenging?
 - b. Where will a lot of work need to be accomplished?
3. Devise your rehearsals so that the exciting is combined with the difficult, and reward with those sections the singers like to sing!
4. Using your barline/graphic analysis, create a chart of all sections of the piece
 - a. Mark which are the most difficult and will need the most rehearsing
 - b. Medium difficulty?
 - c. Easier, but still need to be rehearse?

D. When is your concert?

1. How many rehearsals to you have?
2. Count backwards
3. Delete a couple of rehearsals to account for emergencies, school cancellations, or sickness
4. At what point do you want to be “running” and “cleaning”?
5. At what point do you want memory?
6. How fast does your choir learn?

III. Do the above (I, II) for each piece and every concert for the rest of your career!