

# ***Creating Ensemble Synergy!***

## **How to Plan and Actualize a Synergistic Choral Rehearsal with a Functional Unity Foundation for Singing**

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### **Simply put...**

**Synergy:** the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

#### **Score preparation: Text + Context + SHMRF**

- **Text:** *explore meaningful textual-musical connections.*
- **Context:** *research extra-musical info. and performance practice.*
- **Sound:** *devise an aural image of the work.*
- **Harmony:** *know the vertical structures.*
- **Melody:** *sing each part on solfege to internalize pitches.*
- **Rhythm:** *isolate/devise strategies to teach (count-sing).*
- **Form:** *map overall structure to navigate efficient rehearsals.*

#### **General To-Do:**

1. Know your score and Lesson Plan.
2. Strive to keep the choir singing.
3. Listen!! Repeat for a reason.
4. Use directives of five to seven words.
5. Refine musicianship.
6. Refine vocal technique.
7. Make music! Once again, with feeling!

## **Choral Lesson Plan Template**

### **Conceptual/Behavioral Objectives:**

**1. Music Literacy.** Explore designated musical concept(s) including rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, structural, etc. elements throughout execution of specific musical activities related to singing and ensemble artistry. Textual/ contextual elements may also be addressed to relate repertoire to musical style periods, other fine arts (poetry, literature), or history as relevant to period, composer, and genre.

**2. Group Vocal Technique/Ensemble:** Make a difference in students' singing and ensemble sound. Explore Functional Unity vocal concepts (Posture and Alignment, Breath Management, Phonation, Resonation, and Articulation) by internalization through specific and effective vocal instruction (e.g., singing in appropriate register(s), vowel production, breath energy and flow, flexible consonants, etc.).

**Procedure:** (focused activities designed to teach musical concepts and vocal technique for this lesson; suggested time %'s)

#### **1. (c. 20%) Vocalises, Kinesthetics, Vocal Instruction:**

- Posture and Alignment, Breath Management, Phonation, Resonation, Articulation

#### **2. (c. 15%) Tuning/Intonation Activities:** (rounds/canons, etc. or isolated tuning activities)

#### **3. (c. 15%) Other Familiar Repertoire:** (previous selections, sections of current piece already learned, or other related songs)

#### **4. (c. 50%) Core Activities:** (be as specific as possible and script your transition statements for good flow and pacing)

**a. (c. 10%) Experience:** Introduce selection with an activity that focuses on as complete an experience of the piece as possible (see some specific options on next page).

**b. (c. 30%) Analysis:** Explore musical and vocal-choral aspects as listed above (see more specific options on next page); plan your lesson steps with emphasis on logical sequence, smooth and rapid pacing, and continuous student involvement. Avoid excessive teacher talk -- use 5- to 7-word directives -- and keep the students singing and listening.

**c. (c. 10%) Experience:** Lesson (or portion of lesson) concludes with a final experience to provide closure and a means for assessment to see/hear if concepts were learned. Generally, a final performance of the piece (or portion rehearsed) without interruption works well. Appropriate to augment singing with kinesthetics to add expression and encourage a physical connection to singing.

#### **5. Closure/Assessment:** Repeat E-A-E for each selection. Conclude with a quality Experience and final words to wrap.

# Strategies for Experience (Synthesis) and Analysis

## Experience (Synthesis)

*Engage students immediately and provide as complete a musical experience as possible.*

*Choose appropriate technique(s) to encourage a positive first impression and to inspire the desire to learn!*

- Active participation will focus, motivate, and inspire.
- Sight-read a complete section (entire piece or excerpt or a few phrases) in unison or parts.
- Sing piece to choir yourself to demonstrate feeling of whole and to model style.
- Teach section through call and response.
- If the piece is too difficult to sight-read, listen to a recording of the piece to develop “listenership.”
- Play a recording of a piece in a similar style.
- Show art works that relate or a video to immerse students in time/style period.
- Read text (e.g., chant freely and expressively or consider using melodic rhythm of melody).
- Move while listening (e.g., conduct, keep steady beat by clapping, patsching, stepping, etc.).
- Discuss historical background and/or inspire with an interesting story.
- Make meaningful connections for students to “get into it.” Teach historical context of the work.

## Analysis

*Analyze possible problems, listen for them, isolate and work on them.*

*Increase students’ awareness and sensitivity to the musical material.*

- Use score study (sing every part) to develop your aural image of the piece and anticipate problems.
- Teach with energy to accomplish these formal learnings.
- Use research to build your foundation of knowledge about the piece and share interesting tidbits.
- Use a rehearsal plan and be as specific in your preparation as possible.
- Avoid boring mechanical repetition; make this phase educational, enjoyable, and musical.
- Use “warm-ups” to teach vocal technique, ensemble sensitivity (listening, tuning, vowel modification, etc.) and to introduce new concepts to be encountered in the repertoire; build repertoire of canons, patriotic songs, folksongs, Gregorian chant, madrigals, vocal jazz favorites, etc. to include in this portion of the lesson.
- Use solfege and Curwen hand signs to internalize pitches and tonal relationships and to improve reading skills.
- Use neutral syllables (e.g., [du], [da], [tu], [lu], [ta], [du bi], etc.) to refine pitch and rhythm.
- Use staccato [du] or text to refine articulation and enunciation; this reinforces economical and direct expression.
- Use “shadow singing” for parts not actively in focus; keep everyone busy!!
- Use movement to heighten awareness of pulse, rhythm, and other musical elements.
- Use pulsing [du] or count-singing to energize singing and feel inner pulse.
- Use [zing] to encourage zesty breath energy and flow.
- Use raspberries or lips bubbles (on pitch) to find connection to low breath energy and to encourage breath flow and free phonation.
- Use music and singing (and less talk) to teach musical concepts, vocal technique, style and feeling.
- Use fewer words in directives and explanations; let the music do the teaching!
- Use piano as a scaffolding device, if necessary, especially to establish early musical momentum; fade it ASAP to lessen student reliance on this percussion instrument!
- Use conversational call/response or rote singing to teach subtleties: vocal model = 1,000 words.
- Use effective imagery, metaphors, and similes to help students relate to musical concepts, including vocal techniques, timbre, style; be interesting, creative, and immediate.

## Experience (Synthesis)

*As complete a musical experience as possible; should be better than the first experience!*

**Artful Expression** = Musical energy (line) flowing through time and space via sound and feeling<sup>1</sup>

### • Three Modes of Movement:

1. Gesture (e.g., keep beat; tap melodic rhythm; show sound and phrasing; etc.)
2. Movement in Place (e.g., step beat; step melodic rhythm; step rests; step accents; etc.)
3. Movement in Space (e.g., walk beat or melodic rhythm; tug-of-war for suspensions; etc.)

### • Three Performance Factors:

1. Singing and sound (vocal technique: group and individual)
2. Individual musical awareness (details in the score)
3. Ensemble artistry (interaction and sensitivity to collaboration)

## **Movement Brings Things Together! Your (Whole) Body is Your Instrument!**

- Unifies choral sound and interpretation; encourages functional unity and freedom of vocal technique; strengthens individual and ensemble artistry and expression; stimulates understanding and connection to musical material; bonds ensemble personally and musically.

<sup>1</sup> See Jacques-Dalcroze, Emile. *Rhythm, Music, and Education*. Translation by Harold F. Rubinstein. New York: B. Blom, 1972.

## Guidelines for Movement: Musical Exploration and Discovery

*With the creation of a “safe” rehearsal environment, using kinesthetic activities while singing are a natural physical and feelingful response to musical perception. Our improved ability to respond to music reinforces our ease and freedom of singing, our artistry, and our ability to collaborate as an ensemble.*

- 1) Strive to be centered and balanced. Anticipate movement, think ahead, and be prepared!
- 2) Be ready! Use balls of feet, not heels. Step artistically, like a dance.
- 3) Feel connection to your “core” – a buoyant center of support and breath energy.
- 4) Use your eyes to communicate, your animated face to express yourself, and your ears to listen to others. Share your sound (and feelings) with others.
- 5) Coordinate upper body with lower body to retain balance and physical inner harmony and flow.
- 6) Make sure all movements remain music-centered, mindful, and artful. Focus on the music and its expression. Use your thoughts and feelings to guide your physical actions.

## Let’s Get Moving! The Movement/Singing Cycle

*Begin with Gestures (incl. conducting patterns), proceed to Movement in Place, and then Movement in Space.*

- 1) Ready
- 2) Preparation (Breath)
- 3) Initiation
- 4) Travel (show/feel musical flow through gesture)
- 5) Sustain
- 6) Release

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## Why Is Teaching Vocal Technique Important?

*Every art consists of a technical-mechanical part and an aesthetical part.  
A singer who cannot overcome the difficulties of the first can never attain perfection in the second,  
not even a genius.*

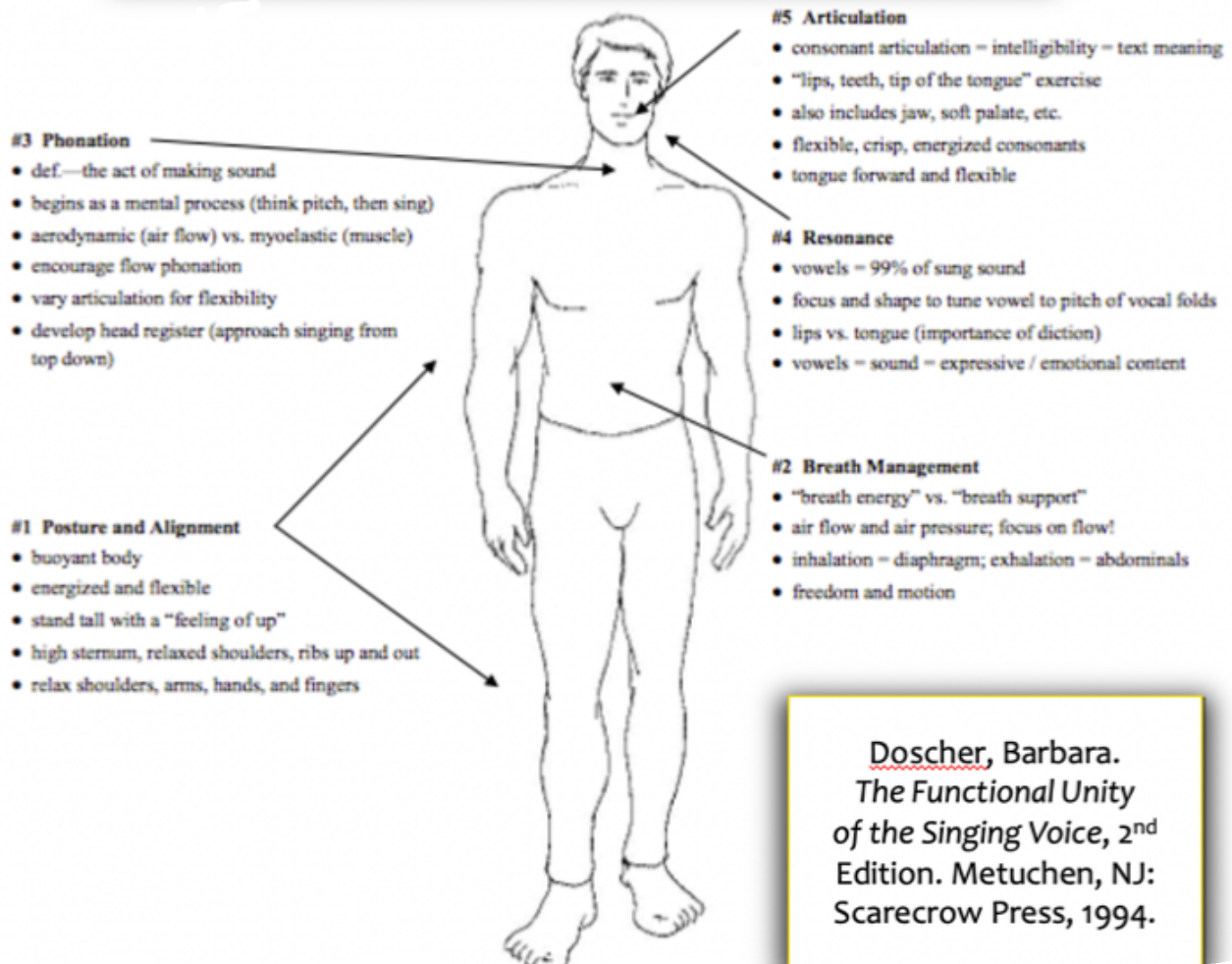
Mathilde Marchesi, 1821-1913

*When the voice works as a functional unit, it allows singers to develop an extended range with an even scale,  
a seamless legato, secure intonation regardless of vowel, tessitura, and dynamic,  
sufficient transmission or projection of sound and a wide palette of colors.*

*These are the sensuous building blocks of their art ....  
to achieve the gestalt or functional unity of the singing voice is the goal of all singers.*


Barbara Doscher, 1922-1996

### Functional Unity Concept




# Vocalises and Tuning Exercises - 1

PMEA State Conference, April 21, 2023

(1)   
lip bubbles, raspberries, or hum      bah - loon

**Concepts:** Forward placement; keep open space on closed vowel; feeling of "up" on descending interval.

**Kinesthetics:** Gestures- show breath with downward outward expansion to right; L to R horizontal gesture on m.1; feel balloon rise on descent.

(2)   
ee - oh - ee - oh - ee - oh.  
(or "oo") (or "oo") (or "oo")

**Concepts:** Focused, ringing sound on smooth air stream. Feel free to use "shee" before to increase air flow. "Shoo-be-doo-bee" also works well.

**Kinesthetics:** Large, vertical circles to encourage breath flow and feeling of tall resonating spaces.

(3)   
thee oh ah

**Concepts:** Buoyant, energized, lean sound; detached articulation with singing on breath; tenuto vs. staccato.

**Kinesthetics:** "Martini shaker"

(4)   
ah - eh - ee - oh - oo


**Concepts:** Pure, well-produced vowel sounds.

**Kinesthetics:** Vowel gestures; see Jeff Johnson's video: *Ready, Set, Sing* (Santa Barbara Music Press).

(5)   
d r m f s l t d la d t l r f m

**Concepts:** Solfege; tuning in context of scale.

**Kinesthetics:** Gestures-Curwen hand signs approached with awareness of tone production.

(6)   
thah thah thah thee hah hah hah hah hah  
(or could be legato "ah")

**Concepts:** Flexibility; buoyancy

**Kinesthetics:** "Martini shaker"

(7)   
lah beh dah meh nee poh too lah beh

**Concepts:** Legato line; tuning of open and more focused vowels

**Kinesthetics:** Figure 8 gesture

(8)   
Sing with con-fi-dence the con-so-nants in front of the vowel.


**Concept:** Consonant and musical articulation.

**Kinesthetics:** Appropriate gesture for melodic rhythm.

(9)   
zee ah

**Concept:** Good vocal technique; keep air moving; low connection to breath on high note; focus middle voice, open resonating spaces (modify vowels) as pitch ascends.

**Kinesthetics:** Appropriate gestures to expand downward and outward for inhalation; wide sternum, tall posture; step half-note pulse; bend knees into top to ground physical connection to breath energy.

(10)   
Oh, I love to sing and dance for move - ment brings my voice to life!

**Seque** into more involved movement; step pulse and make words come to life. Sound convincing!

# Vocalises and Tuning Exercises - 2

PMEA State Conference, April 21, 2023

## 1. When We Sing in English

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With joy!

When we sing in Eng-lish, it's like I - ta - lia - no, with beau-ti - ful vowels so pure-ly pro-duced, with con - so - nants clear, ar - ti - cu - la - tors loose, a flu - id le - ga - to we sing: pa - sta, — la - sa - gna, piz - za!

The musical notation is in 4/4 time. It features various rhythmic patterns including eighth notes, quarter notes, and triplets. There are also dynamic markings like accents and slurs.

## 2. Morning Bicycle Ride (Tuning Canon)

With motion (and in tune!)

J. Gemmell

1. Rid - ing bikes is so much fun, climb - ing hills up to the sun.  
s m s m s l s s l s l t d r d

2. Down the road we like to coast, then back home to eat some toast.  
m r d w t l s f s b f h m t r e d t d

3. 4.

The musical notation is in 4/4 time. It consists of four parts, each with a different melody. The lyrics are written below the notes, and there are some small letters (s, m, l, s, l, t, d, r, d) under the notes in the first two parts.

## 3. Tuning Exercise: *One, one, one* w/thanks to Scott Tucker, Cornell University

Sustain pitch in Bases;  
Listen for overtones  
(8ve, 5th, 4th, M3, m3)

Continue ascend/descend by 1/2 steps;  
vary dynamics and articulations, etc.

For SATB: B (root), T (5th), A (3rd), S (root)

One, one, one, one, One, one, one, one, One, one, one, one, One, one, one, one, One, Day, Night, High, Low \_\_\_\_

Hum, [u], [i], [o], [a]

The musical notation is in 4/4 time. It shows a series of chords for SATB voices. The notes are sustained, and there are some markings like '8vb' and '8va'.

## 4. Tuning Exercise: *Scale and Chords*. Use solfege, numbers, vowels, neutral syllables, etc.

Tutti choir ascends to *ti* (S hold) (B hold) (A hold) (B hold) Resolve (S hold, ATB move downward)

do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti, do, ti, la, sol, fa, mi, re, do

The musical notation is in 4/4 time. It shows a scale ascending to 'ti' and then descending. There are markings for 'S hold', 'B hold', 'A hold', and 'B hold'.

## 5. Canon: *Viva, viva la musica*

Traditional

(1) Vi - va, vi - va la mu - si - ca, (2) vi - va, vi - va la mu - si - ca, (3) vi - va la mu - si - ca.

The musical notation is in 4/4 time. It shows a canon with three parts. The notes are written in a simple, clear style.

# Non nobis, Domine

*Not unto us, O Lord, but to Thy name be glory given.*

**William Byrd (1543-1623)**

Edited by J. Gemmell

Psalms 115:1

[♩ = c. 92]

1 Non no - bis, Do = mi-ne, non no - bis, sed mi-ni tu = o da

2 Non no - bis, Do = mi - ne, non no - bis, sed

3 Non no - bis, Do = mi - ne, non no - bis, sed mi-ni tu =

6 glo - ri-am, sed no-mi-ni tu = o da glo - ri-am. Non no - bis,

mi-ni tu = o da glo - ri - am, sed no-mi-ni tu = o da glo - ri -

o da glo - ri - am, sed no-mi-ni tu = o da glo - ri - am. Non

11 Do = mi-ne, non no - bis, sed mi-ni tu = o da glo - ri-am,

am. Non no - bis, Do = mi - ne, non no - bis, sed mi-ni tu =

no - bis, Do = mi - ne, non no - bis, sed mi-ni tu = o da glo - ri -

16 sed no-mi-ni tu = o da glo - ri-am. Non no-bis, Do - mi ne, non non. 1. 2. +

o da glo - ri - am, sed no-mi-ni tu = o da glo - ri - am. Non am. Non. 1. 2. +

am, sed no-mi-ni tu = o da glo - ri - am. Non no-bis, Do = mi - no-bis, non.





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