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# The Complete Choral Warm-Up Book

A Sourcebook for Choral Directors

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All high school choirs should be able to sing SATB literature. If yours is a group just starting out, or a ninth grade or beginning chorus, SAB literature may be appropriate. The diversity of the literature high school choirs can sing is amazing. There is much quality music for high school choirs (as well as a lot of poor quality music) and the ambitious choral director should have little problem finding appropriate music each year.

The following are some considerations for high school groups in warm-ups and rehearsal.

1. Over-plan your rehearsal so that you have the flexibility to move to different parts of a lesson. And always have your plan written down.
2. Write the planned songs and warm-ups on the board.
3. Emphasize correct posture. Given the opportunity, high school students will slump or slouch in their chairs.
4. Have a routine for getting focus at the beginning of the rehearsal so the students know that class begins on time and with a musical task.
5. Use physical warm-ups. However, avoid overuse of having the students touch each other.
6. Remember that the guys' voices are only recently changed, and are still in a changing stage. Treat the male voices with care so their voices aren't pushed and forced.
7. Establish small ensemble experiences that allow for those students who want to excel individually and independently.
8. Establish an esprit de corps with such morale builders as student leaders, some elected, some appointed. Many high school students have strong leadership potential just waiting to be developed.
9. Remain positive and never lose your enthusiasm in front of your students. Remember: their attitude can never be better than yours!

*Don't start your rehearsals by taking roll. Appoint a secretary or student helper to do that task or have some other means of taking attendance. Begin your rehearsal with a musical event.*

## Church Youth Choirs

In today's church scene, youth choirs take various forms, ranging from a traditional group (a young chancel choir) to pop or rock ensembles. As with all choral groups, fundamental choral singing is essential. Warm-ups can be extremely important for church youth choirs because rehearsals are generally in the evening or at a time when the singers have come from all sorts of other activities. After introductory remarks or a prayer, get the students right into warm-ups that relate directly to the pieces you'll be rehearsing.

Repertoire for church youth choirs can be much more fun and thematic in nature than school repertoire because the academic rigors and the performance or repertoire standards are not as pressured as in the public school environment. With these groups, tours, special church concerts and activities are as much a part of establishing high morale as anything you do. Often the youth choir will be the most significant recruiter for other church activities. Here are a few suggestions for warm-ups and rehearsals with church youth choirs.

1. Get into a warm-up routine as quickly as possible, recognizing that the singers have not been in a "school" situation when they come to you. Get them focused early in the rehearsal.
2. Choose repertoire that has a wide variety. Don't hesitate to use a rhythm section and/or a horn section.
3. Make the musical experience fun, yet make sure students sing in a healthy manner.
4. Remember that some of the students may be there because they *have* to (parental pressure, etc.). Your goal is to get them to sing because they *want* to.
5. Don't permit the group to perform at a Sunday service or a concert unless and until they are well prepared.

*Although some singers in a church youth choir may be pushed to participate by their parents, they need to become self-motivated for the group to become successful.*

**M**any of the vocal problems that singers and choirs encounter are due to a lack of rest for the voice. Although the effects of lack of rest can show up at any time, they frequently occur in two specific choral scenarios:

1. Adjudication or Evaluation Festival Performances, and
2. Honor Choirs or Camps.

## **Adjudication or Evaluation Festival Performances**

These performances include district or state adjudications or out-of-town performances for private, national, or regional festivals. In such situations singers frequently travel long hours, usually on a bus, and sometimes spend the night before the performance in a motel. Students might go to activities such as theme parks and get very little sleep. After these exhilarating and tiring experiences we then expect them to sing at their optimum level of performance. In these situations the voice gets very little rest and is most fatigued at the time of the performance.

Remember, the vocal cords are nothing more than muscle which is stretched and pulled each time we talk, sing, or yell. As with any other muscle, overuse or lack of rest causes fatigue and poor performance. Without rest and adequate recovery time the voice cannot perform at its best.

The following are a few suggestions which can help (notice we did not say guarantee) the voice get as much rest as possible prior to adjudication and festival performances.

1. If traveling by bus, try to rent busses with a video system so that the singers have the option to watch movies while traveling. Encourage them to bring playing cards, personal stereos (with headphones), other games and activities. Given nothing to do on the bus, junior high and high school singers will opt to talk loudly and perhaps scream. Remember, they are talking or yelling over the sound of a bus engine which is why they can't speak softly to be heard. Rather than getting into a "Stop talking!" or "Stop yelling!" mode, have activities planned to keep students occupied.

Also, tell singers to bring pillows. And don't allow singing on the bus until after the performance, if then.

2. If you have a choice of when to perform, schedule your performance shortly after you arrive, i.e., the next morning. This way, your activities, such as a trip to a theme park, will be after your performance. When we judge groups, we can usually tell by listening and looking at them whether this is the end of their trip or the beginning.
3. Make the students' "call" for bed one hour earlier than usual the night before your performance. For example, if you want them in bed by 11:00 the night before a performance, have them in their rooms by 10:00. A voice cannot perform on less than four hours' sleep. Try to get at least eight hours before the performance.
4. Encourage students to drink plenty of water. Have water on the busses and in the warm-up room. Water is the voice's lubricant; without it, the voice will become scratchy.

## **Honor Choirs and Camps**

Honor choir rehearsal schedules (all-state, district, and all-county choirs, etc.) can be grueling. We usually require that these highly auditioned singers have the music learned or even memorized before showing up at the event. Then we rehearse them six, eight, or more hours a day for two or more days and expect them to sing at their best at the culminating concert. Usually the group reaches its optimal performance level in the middle of the second day of rehearsals. The rest is overkill.

Everyone involved in these festivals wants the best from the singers, not worn-out and abused voices. As conductors we must continually encourage vocal health throughout these festivals.

The choral camp is another area in which both students and teachers are involved during the summer months. At these camps and workshops the schedules are frequently planned with little consideration for the voice. Often, students sing for three hours in the morning,

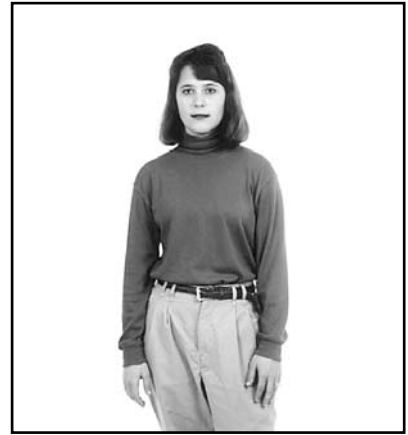
**Standing Posture  
Without Folder—Front**

When standing, singers should strive to have their chest high, the feet slightly apart, the hands comfortably to the sides, and the head nice and tall (as if a string is pulling it to the top of the ceiling—see “puppet posture,” p. 16). The hands should be relaxed and loose if not holding music. The music should be held by one hand, allowing the other hand freedom to turn pages. This posture promotes proper breathing and ease of singing.

**Good**



**Poor**



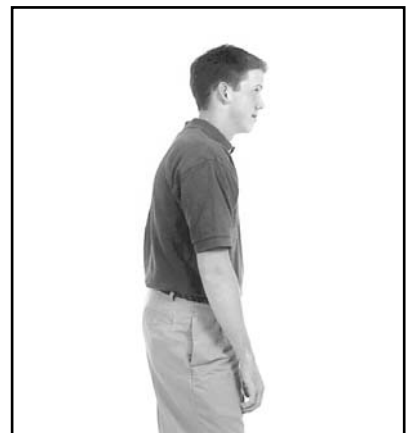
**Good**



**Poor**



**Standing Posture  
Without Folder—Side**



**47**

This is an excellent warm-up for learning the interval of the ascending fourth. It's also effective for working on final consonants such as the "t" in "hat" and "cat." Try to achieve nice, long, vertical vowels on "board" and "Lord." Don't sing it too fast, though after you've learned it you might want to increase the tempo as a motivational tool.

**48**

This is an excellent warm-up for ear training work on major triads. Notice the I triad in the first measure, the IV triad in the second measure, the I triad in the second inversion in the third measure, and the diminished vii triad in the fourth measure. Sing this to the choir and see who can sing it back on the first hearing. This really gets their attention and improves their tonal memory.

**49**

For this warm-up, try to get the consonants forward with a lot of accents on the "Zing's." The tendency here, especially with young or untrained singers, will be to run the four syllables into each other. Each syllable must be articulated with clarity. Make sure good articulation skills carry over into your rehearsal.

F C F B $\flat$

The cat wore a hat and the bee had a flea and they

F/C C F C $\sharp$

jumped on a board, oh my Lord. The cat etc.

C F

Zoo ma zoo ma zoo ma ma, zoo ma zoo ma zoo ma ma,

C/G G $^7$  C

zoo ma zoo ma zoo ma ma, zoo ma zoo ma zoo ma ma ma.  $\uparrow$

F B $\flat$  F/C C $^7$  F

Zing-a-ma-ma, zing-a-ma-ma, zing-a-ma-ma, zing-a-ma-ma, zing zing zing.  $\uparrow\downarrow$

## Chordal Warm-Ups

When your choir begins to warm up in parts they move into the realm of true choral singing. With chordal warm-ups you can work on:

- Choral blend
- Tone production
- Unification of vowels
- Dynamics
- Phrasing
- Developing a harmonic vocabulary
- Suspensions
- Intonation

Choral singers have so many things to think about. The list above includes some of the most important. As a director, don't try to work on or improve all of them at once. Emphasize only one choral technique per warmup. Don't work on choral blend and intonation at the same time. Pick one, and focus on it while singing a particular warm-up. Then move on to another warm-up and isolate another technique or problem.

Singing in a choir is like swinging a golf club. There are many things to remember and failure to execute any of those things can cause a problem. But most golf teachers advise their students to focus on just one thing during the golf swing. Practice that one thing until it becomes second nature, then move on to another. Do the same with your warm-ups.

Remember, you don't have to do chordal warm-ups (or any warm-up, for that matter) *only* at the beginning of the rehearsal. You can do them in the middle of a rehearsal, between rehearsing two numbers...anytime.

Most of the exercises in this section are written for SATB voices, but many can be sung by SAB or Three-Part Mixed choirs by omitting the bass part. For additional chordal warm-ups for Three Part Mixed and SSA choirs, and for Two-Part warm-ups, see the special sections devoted to warm-ups for these choirs.

As with all warm-ups, we recommend that the choir sing them from memory rather than reading a printed page. To teach chordal warm-ups, we suggest you write them on the blackboard where the choir can read the notes. Repeat a few warm-ups in this manner at several rehearsals until they're learned. Once they're learned, you can refresh the singers' memory by playing the warm-up at the piano once through. Then give the starting pitches and off you go.

