

## Recording Availability

Many of you asked for information concerning recordings of the UNT A Cappella Choir.

The following recordings of the University of North Texas A Cappella Choir, Jerry McCoy, conductor, are available by emailing Dr. McCoy at [mccoy@music.unt.edu](mailto:mccoy@music.unt.edu) (\$18.75 each – payable by check only)

### ***peace I leave with you (2002)***

Ave Maris Stella – Otto Olsson  
Benedictus – Carl Nielsen  
Stabat Mater – Trond Kverno  
A Girl for the Blue – Patrick Larley  
Rytmus – Ivan Hrusovsky  
Auringon Noustessa – Toivo Kuula  
Trois Chansons – Claude Debussy  
Three Stephen Foster Portraits – Edwin Fissinger  
Come Away To The Skies – Alice Parker  
Peace I Leave with You – Knut Nystedt

### ***Imaginings (2004)***

Richte mich, Gott - Mendelssohn  
Ad majorem Dei gloriam (mvts 2, 3, 4, 5) – Britten  
Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen – Mahler/Gottwald  
All meine Herzgedanken – Brahms  
Flanders Fields – Paul Aitken  
Take Him, Earth, for Cherishing – Howells  
MLK – Chilcott  
Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine – Whitacre  
Rotola – Juris Karlsons

**Carmina Burana** –in a new edition for wind symphony and chorus, Eugene Corporon, conductor; Jerry McCoy, chorus master; with the UNT Wind Symphony and Grand Chorus. Available from **Klavier Records**.

**In addition**, GIA will release a new disc by the North Texas Chamber Choir, Jerry McCoy, conductor, in the fall of 2005 in association with their new choral resource book Teaching Music Through Performance In Choir. Contact **GIA Music Publications** to purchase copies of the new compact disc.

Continued...

# Building A Sound deal

## Building Aural Sensibilities

### Why Doesn't My Choir Sound Like That?

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## Creating a Sound Ideal

**The sound of the choir is in large measure defined by the following:**

### **Tone**

Composite qualities: color/timbre, vibrato, amplitude, height/depth, ring, focus, vibrancy; i.e., the conductor's and the individual singer's concepts of tone production, or at least their success in achieving a desired model.

### **Intonation**

Linear – intervallic relationships in melody of individual lines

Vertical – exactitude and positioning of each pitch in the vertical collection (chord), i.e., the role of each pitch in every vertical collection. (What and how the singer/conductor decides to align.)

**Unity** within *and* between voice sections

#### **Concepts**

- 1) Each section shares common principles of color and placement = a continuum of color from the bottom of the choir to the top; each voice section is an extension of the ones beneath and above it.
- 2) Or, each section develops its own distinctive color and presence

**Blend** (a word I don't use very much) – based in large measure on the philosophy of the preceding.

#### **Concepts**

- 1) Each singer brings to the section/choir his/her best singing voice and the conductor melds the various distinctive properties of each voice into a cohesive unit – success lies in the audition process and placement of the singer in the choir/section. **Definition:** The fusion of tones of a diverse group of voices whose various qualities and characteristics mix so as to result in one, specific, predetermined, desired quality. **Question:** Will the choir sound the same from year to year?
- 2) Uniformity of quality within and between sections, i.e., all voices sound the same, either by choices made during the audition process or by force of will/teaching of the conductor.
- 3) Vowel consistency and consonant shape affect every other parameter of ensemble achievement
- 4) Seating arrangements within sections and of sections (mixed, quartets, section)

### **Balances**

3 basic shapes: 1) | |                      2) / \                      3) \ /

My primary shape is a mix of #1 and #2 depending upon the needs of the score --tuning and building from the bottom up

**Rhythmic Synchronicity** – the simultaneity of group articulation of vowel/vowel group (diphthongs and the like) and consonants and the understanding of immediacy of vocal on-set

**Interpretive requirements of the score** – including period performance practice considerations, harmonic vocabulary, phrase shape and expressive coloring of text

**Technical requirements of the score** –overt dynamic indications, marked or expressive indications, range, divisi, tessitura

**Conducting gesture** influences amplitude, height of tone as well as breath flow and ease of singing. Research tells us that gestures deeper into the body tend to support tone and air management. Vertical gestures engender height in tone. Connect the conducting gesture to the tone of the choir by design, not by default.

## **TONE – Definitions**

There is no standard of vocal beauty that is accepted by all musicians. There are a few principles that could perhaps be agreed upon for choral singing in the western hemisphere.

- 1) Tone should never be breathy –except for specific descriptive purposes
- 2) Tone should possess some degree of intensity and ease of production
- 3) Tone should be sung in the middle of the pitch

## **Definition of Good Choral tone (GTC)**

GTC is comprised of the following basic elements apart from those we've previously listed. But how do we describe the desired tone? **Make a list of adjectives**

**Mine:** peaches and cream, stable, rich, tall, full, focused, depth w/ forward resonance, pliant, supple, amplitude/height, a vertical pillar of sound.

## **Some Hints for developing your concepts of GTC**

- 1) Define your models – who are they? Solo/choral – be able to express the concepts both clinically and metaphorically
- 2) Define your concepts of vocal techniques.
- 3) Develop a consistent, perseverant approach.
- 4) Practice to modify the extremes.
  - a) Wobbles, tremolos, extraneous noise, stridency, tension
  - b) Balance dark/bright
    - Dark = warmth, bright = focus
    - Dark can add weight and maturity, bright can add buoyancy and pitch definition
    - Dark more easily lies under pitch, bright is harder to unify
    - Balance - a balance is easier to tune.
- 5) Encourage freeness in tone in each singer.
- 6) Utilize warm-ups that engender air flow, body energy and healthy tone – build the ears and the voice.
- 7) Develop student ears. (Play recordings; host other choirs/singers; take them to concerts; model)  
**THEY CANNOT DO WHAT THEY CANNOT IMAGINE.**
- 8) Tape your rehearsals, if not daily then on a regular basis (and concerts); spend time reviewing the results with the choir – let them listen and comment.
- 9) Cross-index
- 10) Practice exactitude of diphthongs and elisions
- 11) Learn the rules of voice placement - experiment

## **What destroys vocal unity and tone?**

- 1) lack of vocal talent
- 2) lack of teacher preparation
- 3) lack of defined concepts
- 4) over or under singing (HS pp)
- 5) lack of attentive rehearsal pacing
- 6) choice of literature
- 7) lack of participatory listening – singer and director
- 8) lack of a plan!!!!

## Defining the Process

**Audition** – I fill vacancies first through a solo audition, which includes sight-reading, vocalizing and an excerpt from an art song or aria.

**What I seek in the audition:** beauty, pliancy, expressive color, intonation throughout the range, flexibility, stability of vibrato, the ability to sing a modified vibrato, willingness to modify, musicality and expressiveness

**What I listen for:** tone, tuning, where is the break(s), stability, ease of passaggio, size and where it is located in the range, the best part of the voice, highest and lowest useable note(s), colors (flute, oboe, mix, clarinet), problem areas

**Recalls** – I have prospective members sing with returning members of the section using either a vocalise or an excerpt from a piece the returning members know, swapping voices and positions until I find the default color combination and continuity within ranges of the section that I desire. **DO THE EXERCISE using *My Country*...**

### Numbers and types of singers

- flute/oboe/cl
- role of mezzos
- swing voices
- sound absorbers

### Color choices

Each singer brings to the ensemble his/her best voice. But, we do exercise options. At UNT the conducting faculty teaches our singers to develop expressive options in their voices – but we never tell them how to do so technically. In public school situations the conductor is often the voice teacher and the role is different there. But the basic premise is: Their first obligation is to sing well. They are encouraged to SING!! One of the difficult realizations to master when someone comes to us from another program is that we require them to use the entire voice. Sing into the core of the section tone and the ensemble. Everybody leads. But everybody also listens.

**Vibrato** - I rarely use the term *straight tone*. It is a very loaded phrase. We do however talk about modified vibrato. We modify in some instances and we use the full vibrato in others. **Aside:** I know of no pathology that supports the claim that limited vibrato singing is detrimental to the development of the voice. What research does reveal is that any single, exclusive type of singing limits the development of the color palette of the voice, i.e., training a set of muscles to do a single thing.

**TUNING** – what effect does it have on tone and the sound of the choir?

## Questions

What is the difference in *just* versus *tempered* tuning?

What are you after? What are your choices?

## What influences tuning?

Singers' concepts of what is in tune

Their (and your) inner ears --audiation skills

Interval recognition

Vocal technique/vowel creation

Over or under singing

Falling/rising intervals – larger/smaller

Awareness of role of any given pitch in the vertical collection (chord)

Characteristics of the piece itself

## Learning processes:

Tune from the bottom up:

Shaw exercises

1) unison tone while hearing the 5<sup>th</sup> as overtone.

2) tune 5<sup>th</sup> in men and create 3<sup>rd</sup> as overtone

3) raise pitch ½ step over 8, 12, 16 counts, repeat and lower by ½ step,  
combine the two exercises

4) raise pitch center ½ step in rising octave major scale

5) practice chromatic scale

6/ work warm-ups in falling minor 3rds.

Practice tonal memory exercises

Rehearse unaccompanied works without piano

Limit rehearsal of unaccompanied pieces w/piano

Air sing/target chord

Create rounds that become increasingly more complex, vocalizing in parallel 4ths/5ths,  
2nds, 3rds, 7ths or chords (major, minor, added tone) (Row your boat exercise in  
vocal warm-up lecture)

Tune chords by raising/lowering components (3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, etc.) until students recognize the  
desired outcome.

Chromatic scales over a unison pedal --sing a phrase over a unison pedal matching the  
recurrent pitch.

Whole tone scales over pedal

Mix scales: whole tone, semitone, Major/minor within open 5<sup>th</sup> or over pedal.

Octave scales – descending and ascending – mix with pedals

Scales: up major, down minor; reverse

Ascending intervals (major or minor 3rds)

Establish home chord. Move parts around, tuning each new chord. Confuse the tonality.  
Then ask choir to sing original chord.

Contrary motion intervals and exercises

Rounds in several keys at a time

Build your and their imaginations – experiment

LISTEN to recordings of choirs that do sing in tune. Create a model

Begin by tuning cadence figures or target chords, then work backwards.

Define the character of added tone chords – who is the root, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, etc.  
Balances influence tuning as well.  
Practice Just Tuning – do not rehearse unaccompanied pieces with piano.  
Practice hearing low/high 3rds and 5ths.

## Seating Arrangements and Benefits

S1      S2      A1      A2      T1      T2      B1      B2      **In 2-4 rows**

Allows section melding (Swing T1 up to A2, etc.). Works best w/ orchestra (reflects high to low, left to right set-up of orchestra)

S1      S2      B1      B2  
A1      A2      T1      T2

Works best for music that utilizes men/women divisi. Also assists tuning by placing primary melody and fundamental pitch behind. Also adds strength if A or T are weak.

T1      T2      B1      B2  
A2      A1      S2      S1

Strengthens pitch of polarities (S/B). Keeps swing concept in tact.

S1      B      A1      **or**      SSAA  
S2      T      A2                      STBA

Puts weaker or smaller sections in front.

T1      T2      B1      B2  
S1      S2      A1      A2

Strengthens music in which like voices are paired (ST/AB)

Antiphonal Music

SATB BATS or SB BS or BT TB  
AT TA SA AS

### Other factors to consider:

Quartets: Fun to sing in and develops choir blend in some ways. Enhances individual responsibility. But, sections cannot be controlled during performance. Weakens contrapuntal music.

Placement of stronger/weaker voices

strong behind weaker

pair strong reader w/ weaker reader

stronger voice(s) in middle of section as core

Do not let choir stand shoulder to shoulder – keep at least 2 feet between singers to act as a resonator.

Keep choir in an arch as much as possible. Horseshoe may be best, but it limits facial contact w/ audience.

Conductor position: stand at least 15 feet away from choir; place piano between you and choir or to side (never behind you!) Use music stand. Piano is not a music stand! (Lid is not a soft pedal!)

Rotate rows front to back during rehearsals. Rotate inside out as well. Experiment.