



Georgia Newsletter

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From the President

Roger Waters

By the time you read this article school will have been in session several weeks, churches will have begun their new choir year with all its activity, community choirs will have begun rehearsing their seasonal programs. All of us will be feeling the pressures of performance and time constraints. As busy a time as this can be, I hope you are making plans to attend the Southern Division Convention in Savannah on March 11-14, 1992.

Southern division president, Mitzi Groom, and her convention committee have constructed what promises to be one of the finest Southern Division conventions to date. Historic Savannah will serve the convention well with its adequate performance facilities, accommodations, restaurants, and southern charm. The convention will be a great place to be inspired, motivated, renewed, and recommitted. If you have attended ACDA conventions in the past, you know how valuable this experience will be. If you have not attended one before, this will be a wonderful opportunity to get acquainted with your Southern Division colleagues.

This newsletter is the first during my term as your president. I do not take the position lightly. I am aware of the tremendous responsibility and work that accompanies the office. I must admit that at times the panorama is overwhelming. I am open to your suggestions and your help. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I may be of assistance to you, and please be willing to share your gifts and talents when I call on you. Together we can make Georgia Chapter ACDA a stronger and more effective professional organization.

I wish for you and your singers an extremely successful year and look forward to seeing you at choral events throughout the year. I trust that I will see you in Savannah in March.



**Southern Division Convention
March 12-14, 1992
Savannah, GA**

The Unauditioned Choir

*Tips for Effective,
Efficient Rehearsals*

by Sue Ellen Page

(Sue Ellen Page is the youth and childrens' choir director at Nassau Presbyterian Church in Princeton. You may have heard her Bach choir at the 1991 national ACDA convention. She writes and arranges music for childrens' choirs and has just started a choir for children from inner-city Trenton, N.J.)

We see our choristers for such a brief time each week that the following basic premise is crucial, particularly with unauditioned choirs: What we do in each rehearsal must be effective and memorable..... The trip we are offering our choristers must be one that they are eager to take with us.

Here is a checklist of 34 techniques and reminders compiled from experiences in participating, observing, and conducting volunteer choirs. There is little new or remarkable about this list; however, it is hoped that this format will be helpful. Some of the items are obvious.....most will apply to any choral organization.

The Unauditioned Choir

(continued from first page)

These ideas will not substitute for more rehearsal time, but they can exact a high quality product in severely limited time frames.

The Director

- After preparing a rehearsal sketch, spend time alone in the rehearsal space to think through pacing, placement of visual teaching aids, movement possibilities, seating changes, and so forth.

- Provide at least one visually beautiful spot in the rehearsal space, no matter how hopeless it may appear.

- Have chairs the right size and shape for the singers. Use the chairs sparingly...there should be a lot of standing for readiness activities, warm-ups and singing.

- The younger the singers, the more necessary is the space for locomotor activity, not just "on the spot" movement.

- Develop an efficient way to distribute and hand in music, to take attendance, to find seats...all those little details.

- Use choir parents or officers effectively. Be sure they know their jobs. Have a job description visible as a handy check list. This is especially important for substitutes.

- Prepare handouts to go home in advance-with each chorister's name on a sheet. If one is left behind, you'll know whom to contact. Arrange handouts in seating order for ease in distribution at the end of the rehearsal. This could be a task for choir parents or officers.

- Make audio cassettes of pieces for choristers who have pitch matching problems. Work with these choristers individually using anthems before they are begun with the rest of the group. Surround uncertain singers with secure voices in a consistently followed seating plan.

- With children and youth, have a plan for possible behavior problems. Set boundaries and develop a decorum code-perhaps with their input. Be fair. Be consistent. Be firm.

- Try to use insight with chronic discipline problems. Is there something the singer is not saying that may need to be attended to in order to handle the problem, such as learning problems or strife at home?

- Begin promptly, no matter how many are late. Have an opening activity no one wants to miss. End promptly.

- Give instructions simply, clearly and only once. Give the choir time to follow the instructions. Train the singers to find the place in the score by page, system or line, measure, and word. Do not give directions to an inattentive group.

- Develop smooth transitions so the group's attention is kept from one activity to the next.

- Don't wear an activity out. Leave it before interest starts to slip.

- Try to keep everyone interested at all times. Find legitimate ways to occupy a section while rehearsing with another... pulsing the beat or analyzing what they hear are effective activities.

- Rehearse in the performance space regularly.

- Look for occasions to involve the singer in decisions of tempi and dynamics. This increases their musicianship and level of artistry, and gives them a sense of "ownership" in the music making.

The Director

- Efficient, effective conductors bring their best selves to rehearsals. Leave problems, frustrations, and pettiness outside the rehearsal space. Our work is more important than those things - at this moment.

- Know the music! Spend time studying

all aspects of the selections, read texts aloud as poetry, look for ways to troubleshoot potential problem spots, etc.

- Use snatches from current selections as vocalises.

- Tie in a mini-literacy lesson whenever the opportunity presents itself.

- Model and gently insist upon beautiful vowels and spinning consonants as the pitches and rhythms are being taught, for they are no less a part of the music.

- Breathe with the singers as the preparatory beat is given. It must prepare them to give the right sound.

- Keep the conducting gesture low and wide to aid the singer's breath. For a fourth beat preparation, use an extended third beat rather than the typical up beat.

- Make your own facial expressions, posture, diction and tone something you want your choristers to emulate. If the results are not pleasing, the admonition we often give our singers, "watch the director!" may need to be applied to ourselves.

- Use the piano only a little. Encourage the singers to find their own pitch. We need to work consciously at developing our own personal relative pitch sense as we assist the singers in developing theirs.

- Keep singing with the choir to a minimum. Demonstrate the tone desired, but remember that when we sing with our choristers we do not hear them accurately. (Singing along may cover up errors, but it usually will not fix them. The same is true for over-reliance on the piano.)

- Efficient conductors have developed diagnostic abilities so that they can decide quickly what isn't working and what is causing a problem. Have tricks on instant recall- to help solve intonation inaccuracies, vowel thinness, breathiness, missed rhythms and pitches.

The Unauditioned Singer

(continued from page 2)

- Listen! Listen to the choristers, to ourselves, to our accompanists. Have super ears-not only the cultivated and highly trained ear of the musician but ability to hear with honesty what is truly occurring. Try taping rehearsals. Don't just "hear what you want to hear."

- Be certain that repetitions are meaningful. Drill is deadly. Do it again, but in a different way-on non-sense syllables, for example, or with a different tempo.

- Keep your talking to a minimum and use body language effectively. Never explain something which doesn't need explaining. Don't stall. Bring the group to attention by some positive device... perhaps clapping a rhythm to be echoed. Never yell for any reason.

- Pace rehearsals intelligently in planning, but don't be afraid to change if need be when "going live." Cultivate and trust your intuition and creative instincts.

- Consciously make eye contact with each singer at least once during every rehearsal.

- Develop a sense of the dramatic, a sense of humor, a willingness to play as part of your rehearsal style. Acknowledge the artist in each chorister.

- Gently insist on the singers' best....even as you make sure to give your best to the singers.

Reprinted from the KANSAS NEWS-LETTER, 1990, Terry Barham, Editor.

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" The Life of the Arts, far from being an interruption, a distraction, in the life of a nation, is very close to the center of a nation's purpose - and is a test of the quality of a nation's civilization."

John F. Kennedy

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1991
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