

Rehearsal Techniques for Unauditioned Choirs

There are two main elements that I consider when preparing a rehearsal. One is preparing the music and the other is teaching it. Obviously, as you prepare the music it will inform how you then go on to teach it so the two go hand in hand.

Preparing Your Music

1. Know your music inside out.

We bang on about this on SfP courses but it really is true. The better you know your music, the more successful your rehearsal will be. Bluffing your way through can often be fun (it keeps you on your toes and all that) but it rarely produces a good quality rehearsal. Here's my tick list for learning music:

- ✓ Can I sing all the voice parts, not just the tune?
- ✓ Which voice part is the most important in a particular phrase?
- ✓ Can I bring in all the key entries without looking at my music?
- ✓ Have I prepared and practiced a gesture for that specific moment?
- ✓ What can I tell the choir about the music or the composer to get them excited about singing it? (especially if it's a piece they don't want to do...!)

2. Look for patterns to help teach the piece efficiently

- ✓ What's the structure of the song?
- ✓ Are the notes the same in every chorus or annoyingly different? Don't you hate it when the final chorus has different notes to all the other choruses you've spent weeks embedding?!
- ✓ Where is the tune? Shocking truth... it's not always with the Sops...!

3. Find the best 'way in' for each piece

This is my favourite thing about getting to know a piece of music. How am I going to introduce it to my choir?

- ✓ Are you going to start at the beginning or with the chorus or perhaps there's an awesome hook towards the end of the piece that would be the perfect way in.



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4. Anticipate the challenging bits and have teaching strategies ready to fix them

This is particularly important if you're working in the virtual world and you can't hear anyone to know if they've got it right.

As a rule, if I'm learning a piece and I get a bit wrong, the chances are the choir will also get the same bit wrong. Therefore, get ready to fix it and have different strategies in case the first one didn't work!

5. Create an achievable and realistic plan but be ready with a Plan B...

6. Consider your choir sound as you prepare

Each choir has a different sound and a lot of that will be down to you as the conductor. The choir is your putty and you can mould them into a unified sound.

Favourite Teaching Strategies

Note Check

Sing the end of one section and pause on the first note of the next section. Really useful for key changes

Move with me

Sing a short phrase one note at a time, pausing on each note. Brilliant for locking into harmonies

The shoulder moment

Great for remembering semitones or 'bluesy' notes

Break it Down

Take a tricky section and pull it apart. Speak the rhythm of the words whilst keeping a pulse. Focus on the words – is there a word we don't know the meaning of?

Tempo Challenge

Sing it much faster than it'll ever need to go! Great for tricky rhythms or awkward phrases

Techniques for Developing the Choral Sound

Baked bean tin

Good for stopping children sliding off notes, eg. *Over the Rainbow*. Don't drop the tin, place it on the shelf!

Rainbow phrase

You're not allowed to breathe until the end of the rainbow, eg. *Love Shone Down*



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Sing just the vowels

Good for thinking about the direction and line of sound as well as for working on vowel shapes

What's the word?

Singers close their eyes whilst you demonstrate a phrase and they guess which was your favourite word.

'Wow!' or 'Caveman' face

Good for accessing higher notes

Final Thought

My choir might not always be perfect or even in tune, but it's the little wins I love. If they shaped their 'ah's' in the right way or if they did a wonderfully long phrase with great staggered breathing, I'll be a very happy conductor!

Thanks everyone!

Ula Weber October 2020



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