

Vocal Techniques for Choirs

Aim of this session:

- ✓ Understand the importance of warming up from a technical point of view.
- ✓ Develop an understanding of voice timbre.
- ✓ Be creative with your voice and experiment.

The Importance of Warm-Ups

I like to call them ‘technical exercises’ NOT ‘warm ups’

As a choir leader it is important to understand why we use specific ‘warm up’ exercises and what part of our vocal technique we are developing when we sing them.

Singing uses the whole body so it is important to get physical at the start of a singing session. The muscles around the mouth need to be loose and free, so lots of facial stretching and horsey ‘brrrrrrr’s and chewing is really good practice before singing. You want to the blood flowing and that sense of being fully engaged, focused and awake so other examples of this for the body are: Wake-up slaps – Gently pat head, face, shoulders, arms, tummy and legs. You can also make big circles with shoulders forwards and backwards.

Consider the **main elements to a vocal technique session**. I’ve highlighted some examples from my session below, but each exercise should tick a box of what you want to achieve to improve the vocal technique of your singers. Some exercises tick many boxes:

- Brain gym **12345....54321 (* see below)**

(focus, energise, multi-tasking, co-ordination)

- Relaxation and posture **Pendulum in a clock**

Allocate numbers 1-4 to sitting posture

(straight line of air, aware of body, help control “support” area, good choral discipline. Prepare the body, singing needs a relaxed body)



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- Breathing and Support

Lifting your ribs exercise

Blowing out candle

(relax tummy muscles on “in” and engage on “out”, improving breath flow, alternating quick and slow breathing, maintaining support)

- Sirening

Fireworks

(vocalising and stretching the vocal cords safely and gently, connecting voice to support, low impact vocal use, having fun!)

- Vocalising and vowels

Hello there (intervals of major 2nd, perf 4th then perf 5th)

(opening up space, moving through the registers, adapting vowels on high notes)



The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, key of D major. The first staff contains five measures of music with lyrics '1, 2, 3, 4, 5', '5, 4, 3, 2, 1', '1, 2, 3, 4, 5', '5, 4, 3, 2, 1', and '1, 5, 1' respectively. The second staff starts with a '6' above the first measure and contains four measures of music with lyrics '1, 5, 4, 5, 3, 5, 2, 5', '1, 5, 4, 5, 3, 2, 1', '1, 5, 4, 5, 3, 5, 2, 5', and '1, 5, 4, 5, 3, 2, 1'.

* play around with replacing some of the numbers with actions to help develop thinking voice.

Ask singers to sing the first line of Somewhere Over the Rainbow. Now as them to sing it in the style of: wicked witch, opera singer, astronaut, mix of all three: “witchy operanaut”.

Voice

Brand New Sound

Suzzie Vango

A



Ah _____ Clap and move your bo_ dy! Ah _____

4



Shake, shake turn a round. Ah _____ I feel kind 'a fun_ ny! Ah _____

B



8 What's the brand new_ sound? leader: tutti: Ooo_ (echo)_

10 leader: tutti: leader: tutti: Ooo_ (echo)_ Ooh_ (echo)_ That's the brand new sound!

repeat B as many times as you like (replacing the "ooh with improvised sounds) then return to letter A

Encourage your singers to come up with their own sounds to explore different voices used in singing:

- ✓ Twang
- ✓ Head voice
- ✓ Chest voice
- ✓ Airy/strong



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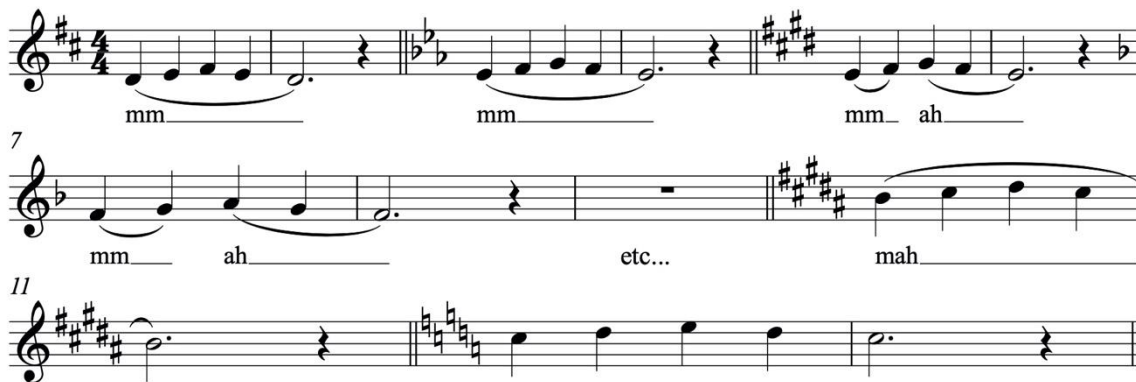
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Vocalising and Vowels

Start at a comfortable, low pitch and gently hum up and down a three-note scale, really engaging the support muscles to gently drive the sound. Start to open up to an “ah” at the top. Eventually, when you reach the upper part of your range, sing it to “mah” but use the “mmm” to help you connect to your support.



Think about the vowels in this exercise and ensure they are nice and open, particularly on the ‘ah’ of the word “love”. As you reach the upper part of your range, hold this word and enjoy the space and resonance:



Get the Mouth Moving

Try and keep this as energetic but smooth as possible. Keep the space open in the back of the mouth rather than tensing the jaw and closing up, making the front of the mouth do all the work. Keep the support nice and steady:



mi-ni mi-ni ma, mi-ni mi-ni ma, mi-ni mi-ni ma ma ma ma ma

3
mi-ni mi-ni ma, mi-ni mi-ni ma, mi-ni mi-ni ma ma ma ma ma etc...

Make sure that you articulate the 'Buh' sound at the start of each quaver in this exercise but keep it nice and legato so you don't start to sound like a chicken!



ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba bah ba bah ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba bah ba bah etc...

All of these exercises have been copied, adapted and created from watching and working with other vocal practitioners over the years. They are supposed to be shared and developed! However, it is vital that when you use them, their purpose remains to help develop the technical singing abilities of your choir. Practise/sing through each exercise and ask yourself, 'what part of the body/voice am I using, and how?' then you will have a much better chance of making them 'your own' and improving the sound of your singers.

Have fun!

Suzzie Vango, Sep 2020