

## Musical Techniques for Small Choruses – Dede Nibler

Objective: To share successful teaching tools for barbershop harmony for small choruses.

Goals:

- Brief physiology of the vocal instrument
- The individual singer's part in building the chorus
- Tools and techniques for good singing and improving a small chorus
- Rehearsal tools for retention of skills
- Techniques for motivating the chorus members to improve their individual commitment to learning

### 1. **Physiology of the vocal instrument**

- a. Generator/motor: Respiratory system plus body alignment and breathing
- b. Vibrator: Vocal folds – breathing and larynx coordination
  1. Vocal onsets – hard, breathy, and soft/coordinated
- c. Resonator: Vocal tract (laryngo-pharynx, oro-pharynx, naso-pharynx) provide resonating space for the voice
- d. Singer's Formant – the very best place to sing!

### 2. **Member's part in building the chorus**

- a. Warm-up to warm-up
- b. Stamina/core building – have a personal fitness program
- c. Develop, maintain and carry a tall axial alignment/raised sternum
- d. Breathe to sing – make breathing correctly a priority
- e. Don't over-sing; no "save the chorus" voices
- f. Sing with an inner smile using the zygomatic muscles
- g. Relax jaw, tongue and lips when articulating; no tight, prune lips; always show a little teeth.
- h. Be prepared for each rehearsal; take personal responsibility for learning music
- i. Avoid talking on the risers; show respect for others
- j. Have a daily voice building routine; make a personal commitment
- k. Take private lessons or work in sectionals/smaller groups
- l. Develop personal vocal goals

### 3. **Tools for good singing**

- a. Posture – Alexander Technique
- b. Breathing exercises
- c. Phonation - Bubble/hum exercises for mask identification
- d. Resonance - Fog exercises for soft palate lift and muscle building
- e. Articulation - Finger on larynx for relaxed tongue/jaw while singing (especially leaps, octaves); keep larynx seated at all times, especially on the inhalation
- f. Four part harmony singing - "Wee, wee, wee" exercise for solidifying ring in the tone, matching vowels, tuning, phrase extension, etc.

### 4. **Rehearsal Technique #1**

- a. Everyone learns and sings the lead.
- b. Everyone learns the breathing places, stressed words, vowel match and dynamics while singing lead.
- c. Other three parts sing their part as a solo, then duet it with the lead for synchronization and agreement on dynamics, vowel match, tuning, and articulation (all words are not created equal).

- d. All parts duet with the other three parts until everyone has sung with everyone.
  - e. While duetting, have one of the other parts sustains the keynote – human pitch pipe technique
  - f. While duetting, one of the other parts does the patsch/clap to keep tempo (this is only for uptunes) – human metronome technique.
  - g. Use four parts only when all else is in place.
- 5. Rehearsal Technique #2**
- a. Stand in a square, one part on each side, leads across from basses; baris across from tenors
  - b. Director indicates which section sings, moving from section to section without stopping. Each singer must be audiating to be in the right place at the right time.
  - c. Director has sections duet in the same manner AFTER they are successful at the section singing
  - d. Director ups the difficulty factor by moving more quickly from sections to sections
- 6. Rehearsal Technique #3**
- a. Stand in a square as in technique #2
  - b. Assign a number to each singer in the section. The numbering will depend on how many singers are in your smallest section. If you have three tenors, then each singer in the chorus would either be a 1, a 2, or a 3.
  - c. Director indicates which singers will sing by holding up one finger, two fingers or three fingers
  - d. Director moves through the song in the same manner as in technique #2
- 8. Other Rehearsal Techniques**
- a. Sing in double quartets or quartets
  - b. Circle sectionals in a regular rehearsal
  - c. Sing in a circle with voice parts mixed
  - d. Sing in circles with tenors in the middle, baritones next; leads next, basses next
  - e. Line the chorus up in two lines facing each other, have them sing and sell different emotions
  - f. Round robin sectionals
- 9. Exercises for variety, and for developing focus and commitment to learning**
- e. Slabbing chords – walk through the chords slowly and listen for accuracy, vowel match, and resonance ring
  - f. Say a phrase three times with the correct emotion then immediately sing it.
  - g. Human pitchpipe – one part holds the key note; others sing against it
  - h. Human metronome – one part keeps the beat; others sing
  - i. Silent singing – open palm directing means sing; left hand fist means audiate.
  - j. Quartet in a parade fashion (a quartet line-up) or in a star formation (X).
  - k. Change rows of the chorus; front row becomes the back row and everyone steps down, keep rotating until all have been in the front row
  - l. Chorus members directs themselves
  - m. Sing with eyes closed, holding hands
  - n. Sing phrases on the tonic chord spread to the 10<sup>th</sup> (bass and lead on tonic an octave apart, baritones on the 5<sup>th</sup> and tenors on the 3<sup>rd</sup>)
  - o. Sing phrases on neutral syllables for tone flow and interval accuracy
  - p. Sing uptunes on staccato “doots” for synchronization accuracy