

Literature Research Report

Question: What makes an effective choral warm-up?

An effective choral rehearsal always begins with an effective warm-up, and an effective warm-up is not an easy feat to accomplish. Different instructors have different philosophies on preparing warm-ups, but no one denies the necessity of allotting time to ready the chorus for a successful rehearsal.

Guillermo Rosabal-Coto's article, "Meaningful Vocal Development through Purposeful Warm-ups," is a generalized description of the structure that a warm-up session should follow; the article goes into different aspects that a warm-up should encompass, including posture, breathing, vowels, and resonance. He also provides specific examples for further examination, which would be helpful for a new teacher looking to experiment and discover new techniques.

The introduction of Rosabal-Coto's article is very well written, and it provides some very key descriptions of the vocal warm-up and the instructor that are even more helpful than the concepts that he dives into. He states that "a choral conductor may need to be prepared to be the only ear training or voice teacher the chorister will have in his/her life," which is a sobering statement that gives even greater emphasis on the importance of having clear and concise warm-ups. Furthermore, Rosabal-Coto pushes the value of using warm-ups as a tool to help students become engaged in identifying and solving their own vocal problems in order to "avoid the mindless application of a recipe or prescription or the so-called vocal gymnastics."

Patrick Freer goes into a more specific age range regarding warm-ups, and his article, "Choral Warm-Ups for Changing Adolescent Voices," discusses what forms an effective warm-up session for adolescents. Right from the start of his article, he makes a clear statement: "If we know one thing about middle school students, we know that they are constantly changing...why is it that our warm-ups usually don't reflect those changes?" Freer points out the problem of choral instructors requesting the same set of warm-ups week after week, and notes the ineffectiveness of this, especially for groups in middle school. Because of the limits of the changing voices, there is only a limited composite unison range of the entire group, and Freer states the detrimental effect of warm-ups to students who are unable to perform them simply because of their physical changes. He offers a suggestion of inviting the children to sing rather than demanding, which is key in encouraging students who are less confident and comfortable with their changing voices. Through the article, Freer goes into unique ideas and suggestions that are more suitable for the needs of middle school choristers.

In the article, Freer provides four main concepts of warm-ups: logical sequence, student choice and experimentation, pedagogical relationship, and variety of activities and groupings. Freer also places special emphasis on the small composite unison range of a middle school choir, and bases several of his ideas around this trait. He recommends the use of warm-ups that are non-pitch-specific so as to encourage success out of each student right from the beginning. Like Rosabol-Coto, Freer lists out aspects of a warm-up, but Freer does so in a series of sequential stages: relaxation, alignment, breathing, phonation, and vocalization/sung exercises. Having a sequence is helpful, as it shows

what is given a priority by the author; Freer shows the significance he places on having the students doing non-pitch-related exercises first before heading into the sung exercises.

Freer also encourages the use of improvisation in middle school groups. Through the article, there are a couple of text boxes that contain activities that can be used by a choral instructor to challenge and push students to work on their skill of vocal improvisation. He notes the need for a jumpstart by the instructor, especially for students who have never had any experience in improvisation. As an example, in scat singing, he encourages teachers to provide texts from every day items and to record students so they can listen back and discuss the importance and connections of vowels and consonants. Freer closes the article with an “A-B-C” concept that is perfect for the changing state of the middle school student: adapt, build, and challenge.

The final article is “How and Why Vocal Solo and Choral Warm-ups Differ” by Sally Louise Glover, which delves into the ways the warm-up activity is used in the solo setting as well as the choral group setting. After providing a short introduction on what a warm-up is, Glover discusses the difference in purpose between the solo and choral group warm-up. For vocal soloists, there is a push for promoting uniform vocal quality and a refinement of the sound. For choral groups, there is a similar goal, but there is also the added dimension of focusing on the ensemble, balance, and blend of the multiple voices.

Glover then explains how to achieve these purposes for the two different environments. She writes that the solo voice warm-up starts with simple scales and arpeggios, using particular consonants to improve the diction and articulation of the

singer. Phonemes can then be used to activate the jaw, lips, tongue, and soft palate. In choral groups, she places importance on keeping the session varied and interesting in order to keep the brains engaged and not on an autopilot sort of mode. Glover discusses physical exercises and unison warm-ups, and also briefly talks of the problem of vowel production. She encourages choral teachers to allow each student to discover his or her own personal way to form a vowel, as long as it is within reason.

In the end of the article, Glover ventures into some core reasons for the differences between solo and choral settings. Whereas solo warm-ups are one-on-one, choral groups are one-on-many, which makes it much more difficult for the teacher to be able to be aware of exactly what each voice needs; there is a bit of responsibility on the choristers' parts for their own development. Motivation is also harder to drive in the choral setting, as many students in these groups will often not be in the choral group necessarily by desire, but more by academic necessity. Additionally, solo warm-ups are much longer in length, allowing for more detailed work; on the other hand, choral warm-ups require efficiency and should encompass as many elements as possible. Choral warm-ups can easily tend to be rushed and over-generalized, and the focus will definitely be more on the group than on the individual. These are two different entities, and though they share similarities, they require different approaches in order to create an effective warm-up.

Out of the three articles, Freer's article brought out the most helpful ideas in creating a warm-up session. Although it is primarily geared towards the middle school level, the goals and thoughts of the article can easily be applied to many other groups.

Glover's article is helpful in its comparison of a choral group to a solo voice, and it shows extra dimension that a choral setting adds to a warm-up session. The way Glover structures her article into purpose and achievement of the purpose gives it an outline that is easy to follow and read. Rosabal-Coto's article was the least helpful of the three; though it provided an excellent outline of the concepts required in a warm-up, it simply seemed too general and did not go into very much detail about specific ways to really make the warm-up effective. Rosabal-Coto does write some very helpful motivations for creating an effective warm-up routine and really pushes and encourages choral teachers.

References

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