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CONDUCTING CHORAL MUSIC

Robert L. Garretson / Fifth Edition



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Conducting Choral Music
Fifth Edition

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Fort Collins

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Boston London Sydney Toronto



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Preface

In this fifth edition of *Conducting Choral Music*, the book begins with the aspiring conductor's most immediate concerns dealing with conducting techniques, progresses through specific and practical matters dealing with the rehearsal of choirs and choruses, and ends with topics pertaining to various planning and managerial procedures.

Portions of all chapters have been revised and elaborated upon and illustrated with additional examples. In particular, additional information has been added on controlling tempo and dynamics, vocal pedagogy, style and interpretation, and the evaluation of chorus members. The chapter, "The Jazz/Show Choir," however, has been completely revised and expanded to take into account the needs of directors and the diversity of expectations placed upon them, as jazz and show choirs are undeniably an integral part of secondary school music curricula throughout the United States.

Additionally, the list of references at the end of each chapter has been updated. The source information in the Appendix has also been revised and updated, with special attention being given to the inclusion of new choral octavo publications and extended choral works, current addresses of music publishers, educational films relating to choral music, and sources for obtaining various types of musical equipment.

Results of a study by the author focus attention upon the inadequacy with which many choral conductors regard their professional training. It was the consensus of a large group of conductors, whose views were sought, that their training should have been of a more practical nature. With this guiding thought in mind, the author has endeavored to present an approach to the solution of particular problems that the conductor is likely to meet, especially during his first few years of conducting experience. Specific practices and techniques have

been presented to give the reader the utmost assistance. Since few teaching situations are identical, the inclusion of basic principles will be found helpful in increasing the conductor's insight and in providing a general approach for meeting and solving problems as they arise.

This book is addressed to conductors of school choirs and choruses, to church choir directors, to leaders of community choral groups, and to students who wish to improve their understanding of the art of choral singing. It may also be of interest and help to administrators and other individuals seeking a knowledge of the aims and problems of the choral conductor. Its design and content are intended to deal with the principles and techniques studied in college and university courses in choral conducting, choral methods and materials, and secondary school music.

Areas of particular concern to the choral conductor and necessary in his professional training are: conducting techniques, tone and diction, style and interpretation, rehearsal techniques, the jazz/show choir, programs and concerts, and planning and organization. A chapter, therefore, is devoted to each of these areas. It is hoped that this book, based upon the teaching needs of numerous choral conductors, will contribute to the betterment of choral singing.

The author is well aware that many women are active today as choral conductors, and their contributions to choral music education in schools, churches, and community groups is well known. Throughout the book, however, the reader will note the use of the words "he," "his," and "him" when reference is made to "the director." No denigration of women conductors is meant; the style was adopted because the words appear so frequently that use of "he and she" or "him and her" throughout would have resulted in awkward writing and difficult reading.

Many persons have contributed to the author's concepts as presented in this book. Some of the ideas have been formulated through observation and discussion with choral conductors throughout the country. The techniques suggested have crystallized during the author's application of them while working with various groups: with school choirs and choruses,

church choirs, and choral groups on the university level. To all concerned—conductors and singers—I express my gratitude.

For permission to use excerpts from their choral publications, I am indebted to the following music publishers: AMSI, Associated Music Publishers, Inc., Augsburg Publishing House, Belwin-Mills Publishing Corp., Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., Broude Brothers, Ltd., Galaxy Music Corp., Famous Music Corp., Neil A. Kjos Music Co., Edward B. Marks Music Corp., MCA Music, Inc., Nordiska Musikforlaget (Stockholm, Sweden), Otto Heinrich Noetzel Verlag (Wilhelmshaven BRD), Plymouth Music Co., Theodore Presser Co., E. C. Schirmer Music Co., G. Schirmer, Inc., Shapiro Bernstein & Co., Shawnee Press, Inc., Walton Music Corp., and World Library Publications.

For permission to quote from their publications, I express appreciation to Oxford University Press, W. W. Norton & Co., *The NATS Bulletin*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., Macmillan (London and Basingstoke), and Collegiate Cap and Gown Company.

To friends and colleagues Ippocrates Pappoutsakis, R. Robert Hornyak, Ira Singleton, Simon V. Anderson, Scott Huston, Mary Swift, Robert Shewan, Edward D. Anderson, Michael Weiker, and Ron Revier for their helpful suggestions in various editions I am especially indebted, and to my wife Aretha, who typed the original manuscript and has offered continual encouragement, I am particularly grateful.

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Introduction

During the twentieth century, particularly since World War I, choral singing has assumed a position of increasing importance and popularity in our society. School and college choirs and choruses, church choirs, community choruses, and choruses sponsored by industrial and commercial firms have increased in size and in quality. Individuals are quite naturally drawn to activities that they enjoy. Let us, however, examine some of the underlying reasons for this increase and development of choral singing.

Considerable credit should be given schools and colleges for this phenomenal growth. In the past several decades choral music has progressed from a largely extracurricular activity to an integral part of the school curriculum. This would not have occurred without at least some degree of recognition of the values of music participation. Without attempting an exhaustive consideration of these values, for our purpose they may be summarized as follows.

Although the benefits of choral singing are many, the *aesthetic* and *expressive* values of music are considered to be the most important. All persons need to develop a sensitivity to beauty in music and other art forms, as understanding and appreciation of them may serve to refine and humanize their entire

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existence. As music is a significant and integral part of man's culture, it is the school's responsibility to help students become more intelligent consumers of music. Participation in musical activities can serve as a means through which individual musical taste may be improved. Through a study of the vast wealth of music literature, students may learn to discriminate between the musically trite and the rich musical heritage that is the right and privilege of every individual. All people have a need for individual self-expression in as many varied ways as possible. Although many concepts and ideas may be expressed through language, other aspects of one's experience can be best expressed through various other art forms. The aesthetic and expressive values of music are, therefore, the principal justifications for its inclusion in the school curriculum.

The *personal-social* values of choral singing also deserve consideration. All individuals need opportunity to engage in activities that promote physical development and that feeling of well-being which is characteristic of good mental health. Music participation can contribute to these ends. Correct posture and proper breathing techniques are emphasized as an adjunct of choral singing and are a necessary attainment of the well-trained choral group. Music also serves as a wholesome outlet and expression of individual emotions. Through music, individuals not only can express themselves, but also can release pent-up feelings of frustration so common in our present-day society.

By contributing time and talent to various social organizations, and through being accepted by other members of such groups, people fulfill their need "to belong": their social beings find expression. A characteristic of the adolescent, as he or she strives to become a social being, is the strong desire to belong to the "gang," inasmuch as membership in various groups usually results in satisfaction and acceptance by members of the peer group. Through cooperative group endeavor, the chorus or choir provides additional opportunity for the development of democratic attitudes and a wholesome channeling of interests toward members of the opposite sex. Students in music activities develop pride in being identified with a fine musical orga-

nization and make many social adjustments through the close association with their peers. Certain critics of present-day society say that it has become too individually oriented and that what we need are activities necessitating more group effort. Choral singing certainly fulfills this need.

Finally, and not to be overlooked, are the *avocational* and *vocational* values that accrue from music participation. Changes in the attitudes of our society, coupled with many modern living improvements, have resulted in a greater amount of leisure time for most individuals. These changes are highly desirable and offer increased opportunity for individuals to explore many possible areas. As a result of improved educational programs, many persons have discovered music to be an area from which they may derive great personal enjoyment and satisfaction. If continuing programs of music instruction are to be maintained in our society, vocational needs must also be met. In addition to pursuing a teaching career, opportunities also exist in the area of professional music. If one is to be eminently successful in these areas of endeavor, knowledge and skills must be developed at a reasonably early age.

Many institutions in our society other than schools have also contributed to influencing the status of choral music. Increasing awareness of the importance of music as a force in religious worship has resulted in a resurgence of emphasis upon church music programs. An increasing number of churches have employed full-time persons to assume responsibility for the development of the music program. Often these individuals carry the title of Minister of Music, and in effect their duties reflect this title. Choirs for children of elementary school age, for junior and senior high school youth, and for adults are maintained to meet the musical and social needs of all age groups.

Industry's increasing awareness of the importance of rapport in a cohesive, closely knit organization has prompted the establishment of numerous company choruses and other related music activities. Under capable leadership, these organizations have improved employees' morale, developed a feeling of belonging, improved labor and management relationships, and through periodic concerts have strengthened community ties.

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The media of radio, television, motion pictures, and recordings have considerably influenced the tastes of the listening public in recent years. Radio has promoted greater understanding and has brought various sections of the country closer together. Remote and isolated areas have reaped a particular benefit. Music of many types has been made available to interested listeners at a minimum cost. Many FM stations, in particular, continue to present music of a high quality.

The impact of television has been overwhelming but its cumulative effects have not been fully evaluated. Although an increase in the quality and quantity of musical programs seems desirable, a limited number of excellent programs are being presented. Forward-looking teachers have brought these programs to their students' attention and have utilized them as a valuable educational tool.


Some choirs and choruses have been fortunate enough to make periodic appearances on television. Such experiences, by motivating a choral organization toward maximum group effort, can contribute substantially to the attainment of higher musical standards. The increased use of video tape for such programs also provides a choral group with opportunities to observe and to evaluate the visual as well as the musical aspects of their performance. Educational television especially has utilized the talents of amateur choral groups, and has presented a number of other programs designed to promote musical understanding and appreciation. Since choral music programs may be televised with a minimum of staging and production costs, further possibilities will undoubtedly be explored in the future.

Music has served effectively to heighten the intensity of dramatic situations in motion pictures; and the public is currently experiencing a barrage of tonal sounds and effects associated with theatrical and television productions and the modern dance. Although choral music per se has been too infrequently featured, this background music has perhaps to some extent developed a general tonal awareness of a variety of vocal tone qualities and instrumental tone colors.

Recorded music, especially since the advent of the long-playing record, has made available to the listening public more

music of a high quality than ever before. Numerous recordings of college and university choirs, church choirs, and professional choruses from the United States and Europe are presently available. Previously produced recordings of choral organizations number in the hundreds, and new recordings are being released periodically. Especially strong interest was developed with the advent of high-fidelity and stereophonic recordings. Although some of this interest may stem from mechanical or engineering factors, rather than musical aspects, this development has been generally beneficial to the improvement of musical tastes. Inherent in choral recordings are tremendous educational possibilities which, if effectively utilized in educational programs, may further improve the quality of choral singing in America.

Choral music has grown considerably and is still growing in America. However, the previously discussed influences are bound to reap a desirable cumulative harvest. Capable and inspired leadership—emphasizing wide participation and high musical standards—will ultimately place choral music in its proper sphere as a social and aesthetic art.

A graphic of a musical staff with five lines, a treble clef on the left, and a key signature of one sharp (F#) on the first line. The staff is divided into three measures by vertical bar lines. The title "Conducting Techniques" is written in a large, elegant, black serif font, centered below the staff.

Conducting Techniques

The basic function of the conductor is to interpret the music for the singers. Through varied means he endeavors to instill life and vitality into the music—the end result of which can be a truly thrilling and genuinely aesthetic experience for both the participants and the listening audience.

The conductor must be more than a mere time beater. His musical knowledge and interpretative wishes should be conveyed through his conducting technique. Of course, the value and importance of demonstrations and verbal explanations should not be minimized. During rehearsals, however, lengthy verbal explanations should be kept to a minimum, for through his technique¹ the experienced conductor can more quickly help the group achieve the desired interpretation.

Fundamental Conducting Patterns

Each conductor is likely to have his own methods, but the fundamental patterns are the same. Time should be devoted to

¹ *Technique* in this context refers to the multitude of devices used by a conductor to convey the intent of the music and to achieve musical and artistic results. Fundamental conducting patterns, important as they are, are really subservient to the bodily and facial expressions that reflect the mood of the music. Nevertheless, they provide a necessary basis from which to start.