



Here is the practical working companion for the practicing choral director who wants musical excellence in performances!

CHORAL DIRECTOR'S COMPLETE HANDBOOK

by Lewis Gordon

This comprehensive guide covers every important aspect of building a successful choral program. It gives you tested and proven methods and techniques for creating and developing a choral ensemble—from rehearsal hall to concert stage.

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To A.K.

A Word from the Author on the Practical Value of This Book

This book provides a single, comprehensive source of information for the experienced choral director. It is written for those whose mastery of basic skills and concepts has created a need for an advanced yet practical guide.

Both the conductor's personal development and crucial aspects of the choral program are treated with clarity and perspective. Each chapter has been placed in logical order so that, in following this sequence of guidelines and procedures, you will be shown in a step-by-step way how to improve your present professional standing and effectively channel your efforts to achieve a superior choral program.

This handbook is innovative. Many important ideas and concepts are presented and discussed fully for the first time. For example, have you ever stopped to think how pertinent the subject of body language could be for conductors? Chapter 1 discusses this and also includes methods for developing flexible and expressive conducting.

The psychological and sociological aspects of working with singers is another interesting and useful topic, but it has received little attention until now. This subject is fully discussed in Chapter 2 along with specific ways to motivate your vocal performers.

Recently, taxonomies have been used to classify various types of goals and objectives. Chapter 3 makes use of this important tool to help you assess your present status as a choral director. Methods for developing professional skills and gaining useful knowledge are also presented.

The *Choral Director's Complete Handbook* is truly practical, because it provides proven solutions to problems of immediate concern. By reading Chapter 4 you will know how to build your choral program

from the ground up through improved methods of recruitment, auditioning, and planning.

Chapter 5 deals with the actual day-to-day management of your organization. This chapter is full of such essential information as how to test the acoustics of a rehearsal room and organizing for public relations. Of particular interest is a section entitled "Raising Money."

Besides being practical, a book of this scope should address itself to artistic matters. Chapter 6 shows you how to choose interesting repertoire and program with maximum musical impact for the conditions under which you will perform. Creative designing of the printed program is also discussed.

If a handbook is to be called complete, it should include sound information based on responsible research. Chapter 7 gives specific guidelines for performing choral music with stylistic accuracy. These insights are based on scholarly evidence but presented in a straightforward, useful way.

Score analysis has often posed problems for choral directors. Either the topic has received superficial coverage in choral books, or the director has had to take a general course in analysis and then find ways to apply what has been learned to his own situation. Chapter 8 takes a thorough look at choral score preparation and features a performance-oriented approach called "Character Analysis."

This book is also technical in the best sense of the word. Chapter 9 offers highly specific, clinical advice for improving vocal performance. This information is based on acceptable teaching practices and tempered by proven success. Of particular concern is a complete listing of vocal ailments encountered along with suggestions for preventing their occurrence or minimizing their severity.

Chapter 10 emphasizes the need for structure, direction, and guidance in rehearsals. Worksheets for immediate and long-range planning are included. The bulk of the chapter outlines a sure-fire approach for learning and polishing music through three phases of development.

Last, but not least, the *Choral Director's Complete Handbook* is thorough. Chapter 11 discusses those factors necessary to bridge the gap from rehearsal room to concert stage. The coordination of instruments with singers and the preparation of the ensemble for another conductor are highlights in this final chapter.

In short, the *Choral Director's Complete Handbook* is a compendium of the latest ideas and concepts necessary to bring both you and your choral program up to maximum effectiveness. Checklists and charts have been provided for direct access to important topics; examples and illustrations have been included for clarification.

Lewis Gordon

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1

Developing Expressive Conducting and Communication Skills

THE CHORAL DIRECTOR IS A DIVERSIFIED COMMUNICATOR

The choral director is a highly diversified individual. Besides devoting a musical career to the mastery of choral-vocal techniques, he must achieve practical competence in the areas of human relations, organizational management, and the psychology of learning. Obviously, the director must fulfill several important roles. And, undoubtedly, one of the paramount duties is that of "multidimensional communicator." Four basic modes of communication are continually utilized in this capacity.

- Gesticulation
- Verbalization
- Demonstration
- Written communication

Gesticulation

The choral director, as a *conductor*, guides his ensemble in performance through the use of mutually understandable gestures. This functional sign language must satisfy the following requirements:

- Account for time and place within music
- Prepare performers for musical action

- Coordinate and regulate technical aspects of the performance
- Inspire performers to sing artistically and enthusiastically

The conductor must develop his technical abilities beyond the manipulation of beat patterns. The mastery of conducting requires a subconscious integration of right-hand diagrams within a larger framework of expressive gesticulation.

Verbalization

The competent choral director must learn how to transmit verbal information with conciseness. Through the vehicle of speech, he achieves the following:

- Gives directions for implementation
- Explains and clarifies
- Persuades and convinces
- Corrects and offers solutions

In the interest of maintaining momentum and efficiency during rehearsal, the director should avoid unnecessary conversation. Like oil and water, musical performance and long-winded discussions do not usually mix.

On the other hand, verbal communication with the concert audience *is* sometimes desirable for the following reasons:

- To announce last-minute program changes
- To clarify or augment printed program information
- To provide short, paraphrased translations of works to be performed in a foreign language
- To inform the audience of some unusual or salient feature in a particular work

Care must be taken, however, not to disrupt the mood of the concert with trivial talk. Sentences should be well chosen and geared to the nature of the program and its audience.

The director must cultivate an ability to deliver verbal information to performers and listeners with clarity, coherence, and confidence. Sometimes otherwise good directors give an impression of insecurity or disorganization because they have not developed this skill.