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作者: Lamb, G. H.

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gordon h. lamb
university of texas at san antonio

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CONSULTING EDITOR

Frederick W. Westphal
California State University, Sacramento

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preface

In preparing this 2nd edition of CHORAL TECHNIQUES, consideration was given to suggestions made by many professors using the book as a text, former students and colleagues. The book is designed to offer practical advice and guidance to assist in the development of choral conductors. The format of the 1st edition was thought by all to serve this purpose and it has been retained. Errors have been corrected, material determined to be unnecessary has been deleted, and material has been edited for greater clarity. More projects and discussion questions have been included at the end of chapters, and dated material has been removed or updated.

Additional material has been added to the chapter on daily rehearsals including more exercises and a section on pitch awareness and rehearsal solutions to pitch problems. More explanatory material has been added to the diction chapter and the format of that chapter altered slightly for easier study. A list of recommended compositions for women's and men's voices has also been added. Additional illustrations have been included where needed to reinforce the narrative.

Where the personal pronoun he is used, it is used to include all persons, male and female. It is used here to provide better flow and continuity for the reader.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One, Rehearsal Techniques, is a discussion of audition and rehearsal procedures, choral diction, and tone. Part Two, The Score and the Conductor, includes information about selection and programming of repertoire, score study, conducting techniques, and interpretation. Part Three, Organization and Management, includes chapters on choral department management, contests and festivals, organizing chamber ensembles, teacher relationships, student teaching, and securing a teaching position.

This book is written for conductors of high school, college, church, and community choirs and for students preparing for such positions. It may also be of interest to music supervisors, principals, and others who desire information about the formation and operation of a choral department. It is especially de-

signed to serve as a textbook for college and university choral methods and conducting classes.

The material contained in this book is the result of this author's research and experience with high school, university, and community choirs. The contents are also being used by former students and serve as the basis for this author's choral techniques course at the university level.

I wish to thank the following companies and professional associations for permission to use excerpts from their choral publications or to quote from their publications: American Choral Directors Association; American Composers Alliance; Belwin-Mills Publishing Corporation; Mark Foster Music Company; E. C. Schirmer Music Company; G. Schirmer, Inc.; Schott and Company; Shawnee Press, Inc.; Texas Education Agency; Walton Music Corporation; and Wenger Corporation.

I also wish to express my appreciation to my colleagues and my former students who have made suggestions for this 2nd edition. Special thanks are due my wife, Nancy, for her continued encouragement and valuable assistance during the complete project.

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rehearsal techniques

part **1**

selection and placement of voices

The choral audition has two primary purposes: (1) to determine membership and, (2) to place singers in sections. Auditions for a select ensemble will involve both purposes, whereas the audition for a nonselect training choir will be used mostly as a tool to place voices in sections. Other information of value is also gleaned from the audition, including: student attitudes, experience, general health, soloistic qualities, and other information the director determines necessary.

Everybody faces auditions with a certain amount of trepidation, particularly young singers. Generally, the auditioning students have had little private voice study or experience singing alone. The knowledge that the audition will determine their admission to an ensemble makes them even more nervous. There is always a feeling of insecurity knowing that they might not be selected.

Because of this, the director should bend over backwards to make the student feel as much at ease as possible during an audition. A friendly word or two at the beginning of the audition can help the student relax and decide that the audition is not going to be the ordeal he thought it would be.

Personal Data Card

It is necessary to obtain some information about the student, not only to aid the director in making an objective decision about the audition, but also to have phone numbers, addresses, and the like on file for future reference. A sample data card is given in figure 1. Often, local situations will warrant the inclusion of additional information and a variation of this card may be used.

It is best to use cards rather than paper for this information because they file easier and are more durable. A 4" x 6" card will serve well. As you can see, the card in figure 1 (p. 2) is minimal in the information requested about the student's personal or family background. Some directors recommend that more information be obtained that can be used later to evaluate the student's possibilities regarding smaller groups chosen from the choir. At the outset, this information is

Name _____		Class _____	
last	first	middle	
Address _____		Phone _____	
Previous choral experience _____			

List instruments you play _____			

Do not write below this line			
Range	PR 1	2	3 4 5 6 Total _____
_____	Quality	_____	Chorus _____
_____	Rhythm	_____	Girls Cho. _____
_____	Intonation	_____	Boys Cho. _____
	Part Assigned	_____	Pvt. Voice _____
Comments _____			

Figure 1a Personal data card

unnecessary and clutters the file card, a card that you want to be as simple and direct as possible. This information, which will be necessary for only a small number of the students, can be obtained later when you need it, and on a form solely for that purpose. You can then obtain information about the student's other school activities, outside involvements, transportation, and any other pertinent information, when it is most appropriate and up-to-date. The student's schedule can be completed on the reverse side of the Personal Data Card (See figure 1b).

Have a small filing case available where the personal data cards can be filed. Keep each card until the student is no longer in school. A student may not be selected one year but may reaudition the following year. It will be worthwhile to be able to refer to his previous audition card and your comments on his earlier audition. A director will also have occasional students, who, for one reason or another, will sing in choir one year and not the next. The card should be kept on this student as he may return to sing the third year. The comments on the card

Schedule		
Period	Class	Room Number
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

Figure 1b Reverse side of personal data card

will serve better than your memory as a reminder of the student's capabilities and contributions while a member of the choir.

It is generally not the practice to meet with all of the auditioning students to discuss the audition and the choir's goals and activities prior to the auditions. In many situations it will be helpful to type a brief description of the activities of the choir including: dates of the known concerts, possible number of extra concerts, smaller ensembles to be selected from this group, fund-raising campaigns in which students are expected to participate, required wearing apparel, trips, and your expectations of each student beyond the regularly scheduled rehearsals. This handout should be brief, to the point and restrained but truthful in its demands described for the student. Indications of extra rehearsals, for example, can look quite foreboding in writing; whereas in reality, they may not require very much extra time at all. It is best not to make the choir appear that it will require almost all of the student's free time. This could discourage excellent students from auditioning.

The Audition for a Select Ensemble

The audition begins when the student enters the room. Remember, he has probably been waiting for several minutes while you finished the preceding audition, and has had more opportunity to become nervous. Greet the student, take the audition card and quickly scan it to be sure it is legible and contains all the requested information. This is a good time to say something to the student to help

him feel as comfortable as possible. It is a good idea to read his name aloud, helping you to learn to pronounce it correctly and to remember it. It also helps the student if you call him by name during the audition. All of this should take only about half a minute.

Ask the student to stand several feet from the piano, facing you, but unable to see the keyboard. This will allow you to have the student sing in various parts of his range without his knowing the actual pitches he is singing, therefore not being able to become psychologically thwarted by specific pitches he believes to be too high or too low for him. It will also eliminate asking him to move later when you come to the pitch retention part of the audition.



Figure 2

The exercise shown in figure 2, in the middle part of the student's probable range, works well for the first part of the audition. Let the singer gain some confidence in his singing, keeping in the middle range, for eight to ten repetitions of the sequence.

This can be followed by the second exercise (fig. 3) which requires the singer to negotiate easy intervals (the triad), followed by step-wise notes, related to the first exercise.



Figure 3

After ten to twelve repetitions of exercise two, the third exercise may be used (fig. 4). It too is related to the previous exercises, but instead of beginning with a downward motion triad it begins at the root of the triad. The *yah* syllable will help the singer place more emphasis on the notes and create more intensity and volume in the voice. This is what you will want to hear at this point. You need to know the volume capabilities of the voice as well as the quality at several volume levels. Ask the student to accent the first three notes of this exercise and maintain a *forte* level throughout. Move the student to the top and bottom of his range with this exercise.



Figure 4

Pitch Retention Test

The pitch retention test is one of the best determinants of the student's possibilities for success in a choral ensemble. It will tell you, quite accurately, of the student's potential to learn to sight-read and to learn choral repertoire. This method of auditioning is used by a number of leading high school, college, and university choral directors.¹

To require sight-reading at choral auditions may be of value when auditioning very experienced and well trained singers, but a sight reading test in a choral audition of younger, rather inexperienced singers is of little value. It generally reveals what a nervous person, faced with a new piece of music with unfamiliar words, cannot do while under the watchful eye (and ear) of the choral director. It does not indicate the potential of the person to read music or to learn choral repertoire in a choral rehearsal situation. This author's experience, and the experience of others, has shown conclusively that a pitch retention test is a reliable guide for the selection of choir members. It has been found that, when good voices with low scores on the PR were admitted to a very select ensemble with high performance demands, it was usually regretted later. On the other hand, when a student with little background but with a high score on the PR was admitted, even in place of a more experienced person whose PR score was lower, that decision was never regretted. The PR also indicates to the choral director persons who will have difficulty singing in tune. Since intonation is such a crucial factor in a choral ensemble, this information is very useful at the time selection is made. A director may have to use a PR test for some time before he will place full confidence in it, but eventually he will be able to rely on it as an accurate guide to a student's potential as a choral singer. After using a pitch retention test the choral director will most likely wish to eliminate sight-reading from the auditions completely.

The pitch retention test given in figure 5 has proved successful at the high school, college and university levels.

1. Similar tests were originally used by Louis Diercks, former choral director at Ohio State University.