

Regional Music Workshop – How to build a Ward Choir: Communication and Performance

Need: handouts, hymn books and copies of Seek the Lord. Borrow Ward Choir folders. Collect email addresses to send electronic handouts.

Bring: Christmas In Song, Hymnal Plus, Carols Plus, ChoirBook.

Accompanist: Rebecca Jones

My background: began piano lessons at 7 years, voice lessons at 15 years; 16 years old Jr. Sunday School Chorister; Primary Chorister; Ward Choir Director for 30+ years interspersed by other callings; Taught music in BSD 30 years: 26 years at Westview High School – late start 38 years old. I've learned enough to know how little I know. My weakness is technology. Suggestions and successes from you will be most welcome.

Vowel Unification Exercise:

oo as in boot – point index under nose, pucker lips to touch the finger. Sing pure oo

ee as in beet – index finger and thumb push corners of lips in making puckered lips. Avoid spread ee.

eh as in bet – parallel index fingers pointing from corners of mouth to eyes indicating a tall, vertical vowel

oh as in boat – circle lips and draw circle with one index finger in front of lips. Spin the oh.

ah as in father – draw line from jaw joint to corners of lips and drop jaw to create a tall, spacious ah.

Sometimes demonstrating an exaggerated vowel that is too bright, closed or strident will convince your singers to alter their sound.

Communication:

1. Create an email list to communicate weekly with the choir. Start by having people that come to choir practice give you their email address and mobile phone number (for possible text messages.) Include Bishop's counselor, Ward Music Chair, and bulletin person. You may choose social media rather than email for weekly reminders but remember some of your singers don't use Social Media. Invite.
2. Put announcements in the ward bulletin welcoming new singers and giving rehearsal information. Invite youth 12 years and older.
3. Plan the year's rehearsals and literature in August. Check out the calendar for Easter dates – sometimes March, sometimes April. Remember this plan has to be flexible. Things always come up, including discovering a song is harder than you expected and you need to postpone its performance. For example, below is a link to one of my past plans:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PjX_9CoKs-uuLt8FvKxBfW5I0MiU4v8/edit?usp=sharing&oid=107687600940822029110&rtpof=true&sd=true
4. Get dates of Primary Program, Ward Conference, Stake Conferences, General Conference, other special Sacrament Meetings.
5. Sing at least once a month. Consider singing Fast Sunday prelude hymns. Performances motivate people to practice/rehearse.
6. Expect absences from Ward Choir practice. Everyone has a full plate and deals with some family illness, travel, etc. At Christmas we performed with 26 singers but many rehearsals had 8-16 singers.
7. Express appreciation for this extra service every singer provides for the ward in addition to Ward and Stake callings. Acknowledge the contribution of their performance to the Spirit in Sacrament Meeting and doctrine that is taught through music.
8. Expect Bishoprics and other leadership to **not** understand how much time it takes to prepare a 3 minute song. Weekly rehearsal is not much practice time.

Conducting & Performance:

Always offer yourself patience while conducting. Smile at errors. Appreciate your improvement. Enjoy what others do well that inspires you without judgment or comparison. You and your choir are making a significant addition to the Spirit felt in your Sacrament Meetings. For some, music is their easiest way to feel the Spirit.

1. Practice time signatures. How to start? *Give choir a gesture to breathe.* 4/4 Hymn no. 301 “I Am a Child of God;” 6/8 Hymn no. 105 “Master, the Tempest is Raging” – tricky entrance. Use circling hands if you get lost.
2. Help conducting: Can you find the downbeat? – one on one, shadow leading, circle your hands, What is your biggest concern? Try circling hands, conducting upbeat entrance using hymn no. 97 “Lead, Kindly Light.”
3. Indicating a breath: at beginning of song; after a fermata – Use Hymn no. 110 Cast Thy Burden & no. 89 The Lord is My Light
4. Changing meter: hymn no. 30 “Come, Come Ye Saints.”
5. Know the choir you are conducting. Choose appropriate literature for your singers: ChoirBook; Christmas in Song (lyrics issue). Chandler Sheet Music: 800.445.6874, 928.541.0522, <chandlermusic@aol.com>
6. Accompanists vs solo pianists, private rehearsal
7. Pacing & Practice deliberately looking at the conductor for entrances, cut offs, dynamics. Use “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,” arr. by Marshall McDonald & “Seek the Lord”
8. Vowel unification exercise* – then use “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.” to implement vowels and address “r” pronounced with English accent
9. “Impromptu Choir” – Announcement to be made by conducting Bishopric member: “You may have noticed “Impromptu Choir” on the program. Any adult or youth that likes to sing is invited to come up to the choir seats and sing Hymn no. 110, “Cast Thy Burden” for our congregation. Yes, this is unrehearsed. You do not need to be a member of the Ward Choir to participate. Maybe Ward Choir doesn’t fit in your schedule but you enjoy singing. Please feel welcome to join us and bring a hymnal with you, turned to no. 110.”

Any questions, thoughts or suggestions?

Below are some suggestions that were made during class and discussion:

Hymnal Plus is a book of hymn arrangements by Robert Cundick and John Longhurst. The choir can use the hymnal so you only need to buy a copy for the Director and the Pianist. There were several books. I also love *Carols Plus* by the same composers. I hope they are still in print from publisher Sonos music.

Check out websites with these titles:

1. Sally Deford - <https://defordmusic.com/song-list/>
2. Free Sacred Sheet Music - <http://sacredsheetsmusic.org/>
3. Ronald Staheli - <http://www.ronaldstaheli.com/arrangements/>