

Musical Toolbox for Rehearsals for DIRECTORS

Unit #1 ***“Welcome” warm-up***

Areas of Focus: - Welcome guests

- Develop further skills: showmanship in faces; physical energy while singing; in-tune interval singing; taking the space into every note; singing in the “ring spot” on every note; using breath energy to create a wall of sound instead of choppiness.

Teaching Method:

1. Teach the bass line
2. Teach the lead line
3. Sing those 2 parts together
4. Teach the tenor line
5. Sing those 3 parts together
6. Teach the baritone line
7. Sing all 4 parts together

Choose the particular skill that you want to work on this night and focus on that area as the chorus moves up and/or down by ½ steps. As they move into higher or lower ranges, make sure they are creating the space needed to resonate appropriately at that pitch level.

Unit #2 ***Building Breath Support***

Areas of Focus: Breathing in Warm-Ups; Song Rehearsal Techniques to emphasize breath support

Warm-ups:

1. **ch ch ch ch.....**- air used like a train sound with different rhythms. Leader can do a rhythm; chorus echos. This will not only focus their attention on how to access the breath, but can also teach rhythmic patterns from your songs when applied to this rhythmic breathing exercise.

2. **Hiss while they pretend to lift themselves up on to a stage** – Using the arms, lift them up to chest height while knees bend a bit. Do this as they take the breath. Then, with energy in the arms and legs, pretend to lift themselves on to a stage with their arm strength (knees will also straighten up while they do this). All this is done while they hiss. Then they take a breath and return to the lifted arm/bent knee position and do it again. You can vary the length of time they hiss (8 counts, 12 counts, etc. or through particular phrases in your music.) ***Make sure they keep their chin parallel to the floor (not sticking out).

3. **“ffff” with arm extension moving** -
Extend arms straight out from body. As you bring arms back in and touch waist, vocalize and energized “FFFF” strongly. Picture the arms as the “gate” that pops open (arms straight out) and close (forearms slowly move in to cross each other with elbows still extended out). This is good for feeling strength and lift of the abdominal muscles and the return to the resting position.

4. **Bark or Pant** – Use the bark or pant (like a dog) technique to combine the abdominal lift and the rib expansion connection. Use any rhythmic pattern while they get the feel of moving the breath.

Song Rehearsal Techniques

Use the above methods while speaking the words of the song. Then add the vocal parts while using method #1 or #2 breathing techniques. These will reinforce consistent breath support and quick, relaxed breaths.

Unit #3 Working through Rhythmic/Tempo Challenges

Areas of Focus: Warm-Ups that build unity in rhythms; Methods to use in learning a song to help synchronization and unity in rhythmic delivery.

Warm-Ups:

1. Chose a warm-up of any kind. In order to maintain tempo throughout the exercise, have half the chorus (or a certain row or group) clap the steady beat (use 2 fingers on each hand so it won't be so loud).
2. Bring in "rhythm sticks" for the chorus to use in warm-ups as above or for ½ the group to play while the rest sing the up-tune. Cheap Chinese chopsticks work great for this. One hand drum (or trash can) will work as well, but more than one or two gets too loud for comfort.
3. **Put problematic song rhythms into your warm-ups.** Have them echo-clap the rhythms with you. Sing them on a "tah, tah, tah" syllable. Apply unison pitch to the rhythms. Then put the correct words from your song in unison. Later in rehearsal, you'll be able to review this and add harmony parts.

Song Rehearsal Techniques

1. Speak the song in rhythm without the real words, but using the word "book" or "pop" for each word/syllable. Listening for areas that lack unity will be much easier when there are only staccato rhythms.
2. If the chorus as a whole is losing tempo, line them up in spikes (straight lines from the bottom to the top of the risers – there are no "windows"). Placing their hands gently on the person's shoulders in front of them, have them lightly tap the steady beat of the song while they sing. If there are a few particularly tempo challenged singers, make sure they have a strong rhythmic person tapping on their shoulders.
3. Use the rhythm instruments mentioned above to keep the steady beat while you sing. Dedicate certain singers to only play the steady beat (not singing) that can maintain that original tempo even when the chorus varies.
4. Keep in mind that the easiest tempos to maintain are close to a normal heartbeat. Choosing a radically faster tempo requires a higher level of accomplishment from the singers.

Unit #4 Developing Resonance

Areas of Focus: Warm-ups that emphasize resonating space; Rehearsal reminders

Warm-Up Preparation

1. Resonance is the by-product of an open and free vocal tract coupled with sufficient breath energy. With EVERY warm-up, direct their thoughts to relaxation in the jaw, throat and shoulders while using the breathing techniques used in Unit #2. Then add pitch to the exercises incorporating both areas of freedom and breath.
2. Check the Body Alignment – are the ears aligned over the shoulders? (back of neck is elongated; front of neck is short)
3. Recognize and emphasize that all pitch levels require the space created with a soft-palate lift. HOWEVER, different pitch levels require varying amounts of mouth opening. Higher notes require "inside space" and slightly more mouth opening. Lower notes require "inside space" and LESS mouth space.
4. Breathe for resonance – gently breathe through the nose with the mouth open (air will go through both areas). This automatically prepares the space for resonation to happen.

Remember: It's not a particular warm-up that makes your warm-ups effective.
It's how you FOCUS THEIR ATTENTION
and CONTINUE TO REINFORCE the objective that will make it work.

Warm-Ups

1. Putting Your Fist to Good Use – make a fist with one hand and bring it to the mouth while inhaling. Place the upper front teeth on the tip of the middle joint of the fingers while keeping the tongue relaxed and resting on the lower gum ridge. With the fist to the mouth, sing a 5-note descending scale. Begin the exercise in the lower part of the range, modulating by half-steps higher. Observe how the throat opens by reflex action as the fist is brought to the teeth.
2. Close the nostrils – have the singers sing a 5 note scale or other simple exercise while holding their nostrils closed. That will allow the soft palate to lift upon inhalation and help them feel the “inside space” we’re talking about.
3. Visualize the tone spinning on a column of air from the lungs up through the vocal mechanism. Tongue should remain resting and free.
4. Visualize and create more space between the back molars as you inhale.
5. “Sing Each Note You Sing...” vocalize and round
6. “Ee Eh Ah Oh Oo” – scale tones 1,3,5,3 on each vowel and end on scale tone 1
7. “Nah, Neh, Nee, Noh, Noo” two part vocalize

Unit #5 Energy Boosters

Areas of Focus: Exercises and Changes to aid gaining and retaining energy at rehearsals

Energy Boosters for any Rehearsal

1. Laughter – Laugh high, laugh low, laugh like a “character”. Laughter will release physical tension, supply new energy and can even be used to explain vocal “space” needed (society woman ‘fake’ laugh vs. ‘hehehe’ laugh).
2. Implode/Explode – to implode, scrunch your body in every way possible – arms, torso, and especially the face. Then on the count of 3, “explode” out into a showy, stage presence.
3. Build Electricity – have each member vigorously run their hands together for 30 seconds. Then slow open and spread the arms/hands out to share the electricity created. They will be able to feel the “buzz”.
4. Sing a fun round or other warm-up and change the words to fit the occasion or season – Follow, Follow, Follow me, Christmas is Coming, Flexibility, etc. – Be creative!
5. Bravo, Bravo exercise - sing while “performing” for one another. Use body movement, energy, facial involvement and convince everyone that people are either saying “Bravo!” to you or you are saying it to someone else.
6. Change standing positions by moving rows – have row 2 become row 1 and bring all rows down so that row 1 goes to the back row. Continue to change the rows. Then talk about what different things they heard, experienced and learned.
7. Have a Quartet do a short performance
8. Run off and back on to the risers quickly to a count of 10. If you have members that cannot move on and off the risers easily, ask them to “pretend” – moving arms, getting ‘breathless’
9. Switch Directors – have the asst. director come down and direct a song while the director coaches. This helps the chorus re-focus and allows the director to really be able to hear what is happening more easily and to coach. Director and Chorus will share new energy!
10. Hugs and Conversation – Invite everyone to hug 3 people in 1 minute; Give them guided questions to ask their neighbor for 2 minutes – “what is the best part of your day?”; “what is your favorite performance experience?”; “what do you think about when you sing this song?” – anything positive!

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