



REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES FOR JAZZ CHOIR

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I. GENERAL POINTS

A. Until the notes are learned, there's not much else you can do with the literature. It pays to figure out how to get the group to learn notes, fast! Ideally, students should be responsible to learn their own notes *before* rehearsal.

B. A choir that doesn't *listen* well is a choir that probably doesn't sound good. Singers must get into the habit of active listening, both horizontally (melodically) and vertically (harmonically), all the time when they sing.

C. The better the musicianship of both students and director, the better the group. Encourage study of piano or other instruments, practice at home, and so on.

D. It's important for the director to be very familiar with *both* choral and jazz concepts. For directors with a primarily choral background, taking jazz piano lessons, or, any other form of study in jazz may be appropriate.

II. DEVELOPING THE GROUP

A. The responsibilities of the singers include: being on time to rehearsals, staying attentive during rehearsal, knowing their parts well, attending weekly sectional rehearsals, participating in the set up and tear down of sound equipment, leaving personal problems outside of rehearsal.

B. The responsibilities of the director include: knowing what the music is supposed to sound like (by locating recordings, playing the pieces on piano, and so on), literature analysis in preparation for rehearsing difficult passages, teaching the students musicianship skills (not just spoon feeding notes,) improving their own musicianship or knowledge base as needed.

C. Daily warm-ups can be used in part as an opportunity for the practice of sight reading, theory, ear training, improvisation, listening, and so on.

D. Develop a support group (parents, friends, school administration, and so on) to help with fundraising, tour planning, and so on.

III. INTERPRETATION OF SWING TUNES

A. The inner rhythm of swing feel must be strongly internalized, and felt independently of the rhythm section. Swing feel is based on and underlying feeling of triplet eighth notes.

B. At medium and slower tempos, "lay back" behind the beat slightly. At fast tempos, stay more "on top" of the beat.

C. Use a metronome to develop a very strong sense of steady tempo. All grooves and tempos have a slightly different relationship to the steady beat. Nothing will "groove" until the steady beat is strongly internalized.

D. Generally, breathe and release in tempo.

"MICKEY'S DINER" (ruffi) ARR. MICHELE WEIR (AVAILABLE WWW.MICHMUSIC.COM)

15 *mf* SOME ARE COM - I - CAL OTH - ERS ARE SIN-IS-TER

18 *mf* SOME AIN'T WRAPPED TOO TIGHT CO - LOR - FUL CIR - CUS OF CHAR -

21 *mf* ACT - ERS AT MIC - KEY'S DI - NER TO - NIGHT *mf* QUEEN

IV. INTERPRETATION OF BALLADS

A. Choral concepts for jazz ballads include: a vocal tone quality that is appropriate to the mood of the piece, vowel shapes and consonants that are rarely modified from their conversational form, mitigation of vibrato, utilizing natural word stresses as an expressive tool, legato singing, and shaping each phrase, dynamically and emotionally.

B. Careful attention must be paid in rehearsal to the choir learning to hear/sing dissonances in chord voicings. Part of that process will involve the singer's awareness of chords with dissonance, and developing an understanding of the nature of the dissonance. There are two forms of dissonance that are very common in vocal jazz:

1. Half step between two notes

2. Interval of a major 7th between two notes

Chord voicings shown: $D^{\flat}maj7$, $C-9$, $Dmaj7$, $E^{\flat}7(\#9)$

C. Generally, in difficult musical passages, rehearse slowly and vertically. Ultimately, singers must sing the music horizontally, with a sense of linear forward motion.

"DREAM WITH THE ANGELS"

ARR. MICHELE WEIR (AVAILABLE WWW.MICHMUSIC.COM)

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B

DREAM WITH THE ANGELS MY DARLING ONE

S
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B

REST HERE BE-SIDE ME YOUR DAY IS DONE.

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REACH FOR A RAIN-BOW AND SAVE THE MOON - - -

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GLOW. LET YOUR FEARS DIS-AP-PEAR AND TAKE FLIGHT,

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AND DREAM WITH THE ANGELS TO -

TEMPO ♩ = 72

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NIGHT TO -
DREAM WITH THE ANGELS DREAM WITH THE ANGELS
DREAM AN-ANGELS DREAM AN-ANGELS
DREAM DREAM

V. INTERPRETATION OF STRAIGHT 8TH TUNES (BRIGHT TEMPO)

- A. Again, singers must feel the inner rhythm of the groove independently of the rhythm section.
- B. Unlike swing, don't "lay back." At brighter tempos, there should be a slight sense of almost pushing the beat forward. (Generally, the faster the tempo, the lighter the vocal quality needs to be.)

"SO DANCO SAMBA" ARR. MICHELE WEIR (AVAILABLE WWW.MICHMUSIC.COM)

The image shows a musical score for the song "So Danco Samba" arranged by Michele Weir. It consists of two systems of music. The first system starts at measure 31 and the second at measure 35. Each system has two staves: Soprano/Alto (SOP./ALTO) and Tenor/Bass (TEN./BASS). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The tempo is marked "SO" (Samba). The lyrics are: "SO DAN-CO SAM - BA SO DAN-CO SAM - BA VAI VAI VAI VAI VAI". The score includes vocal lines with lyrics and piano accompaniment for both parts. There are first endings marked with "1." at the end of the second system.

VI. RHYTHM SECTION

- A. Get one! Avoid using recorded accompaniments if possible; this is not a part of the jazz tradition. Also, avoid using piano and drums only! If you have no bass player (and can't beg, borrow or steal one), try to at least have a synth keyboardist play the bass parts.
- B. The quality of the rhythm section playing is just as important as the quality of the choir's singing. They are a very important part of the group, and can make or break the overall sound of the ensemble!
- C. The rhythm section should hold weekly sectional rehearsals, and be very well prepared on every note of every chart, just as with the singers. Rhythm section should practice with choir at least several times prior to any performance. (Preferably more.)
- D. When time allows, feature the rhythm section on one or two tunes on their own. Add a horn player possibly also.
- E. Common problems within the rhythm section:
 1. Wrong notes in the piano or bass parts.
 2. Time feel not locked. Bassist and drummer are a team: they should listen *intently* to each other in an effort to totally lock up the sense of quarter note pulse.
 3. Mushy playing by bassist and/or drummer. Bass player should "pull" a little with right hand to get clear articulation, while still connecting notes in swing feel. The drummer needs a tight/clean hi-hat sound, and should play with a strong and energized ride cymbal pattern. The drummer is the energy hub of the rhythm section.
 4. Drummer not playing kicks or set-ups to support what the singers are doing. It may be a good idea for the drummer (or any rhythm section player) to take a few lessons with a pro.

VII. PERFORMANCE

- A. The singer's faces and body language should reflect the style and mood of the piece.
- B. Microphones should be no more than 1-2 inches from the singer's mouths, except when sopranos are singing a particularly high or loud passage.
- C. It's ideal to have a dedicated sound person to attend a few rehearsals and run sound at concerts. That person should become familiar with the music, turn up appropriate soloists at the appropriate times, make adjustments for any voices that may be particularly loud or soft, and so on.

D. For concert preparation, allow ample time for set up of sound, sound check, and singing on the system for the singer's ears to acclimate. (A couple of hours, minimum.) Ideally you would have one monitor for every 3-4 singers, and at least two monitors for the rhythm section.

E. Sound check in concert venues should include the following:

1. Checking to be sure all of the signal routing is correct and everything is working. (For example, 'is the piano coming thru the vocal monitors?')
2. A test (by one person) of each mic to make sure all levels are "flat." (The same volume) Test first the monitors, then the main speakers for this. (Later, you can make slight adjustments for that quiet soprano, or the bass singer with the big booming voice.)
3. The choir should sing part of an a capella tune while director is in the house listening to tone (EQ), balance, reverb levels, volume levels, and so on. Make adjustments as necessary.
4. Rhythm section should play alone with the director listening in the house again.
5. Choir and rhythm section should play together while the director again is in the house. Singers and instrumentalists need to give feedback to the director about the level of their monitors. Adjust as necessary.
6. Once all of the above basics are in places, spend some time singing thru several of the concert pieces. It often takes a little time for the singer's ears to completely adjust to a new venue. This extra time spent can make all the difference in the singer's aural comfort level, and consequently, the success of your performance!

VIII. RESOURCES

A. Publishers of Vocal Jazz Arrangements and Other Materials

PRIMARILY A CAPELLA www.singers.com	MAINLEY A CAPELLA www.a-cappella.com
JAMEY AEBERSOLD CATALOG www.jazzbooks.com	ALFRED PUBLISHING www.alfred.com
ADVANCE MUSIC www.advance.com	MICHMUSIC www.michmusic.com
HAL LEONARD www.halleonard.com	UNC JAZZ PRESS http://usonia.unco.edu
WARNER BROTHERS www.warnerbrospublications.com	SOUND MUSIC PUBLICATIONS www.smpjazz.com
MICHMUSIC www.michmusic.com	SHAWNEE PRESS www.shawneepress.com

B. Vocal Jazz Groups

New York Voices	Clare Fischer and 2 + 2
Take Six	M-Pact
The Real Group	The Double Six of Paris
The Manhattan Transfer	Lambert, Hendricks and Ross
The Hi-Lo's	Voice Trek
The Swingle Singers	The Singers Unlimited
The Four Freshmen	Beachfront Property
The Idea of North	Phil Mattson and the PM Singers