

Warm Up Sequence
Engaging Choirs of All Ages
OMEA Inservice Conference - January 14, 2011
Dr. Christopher Peterson
California State University, Fullerton
cpeterson@fullerton.edu

1. **Mirroring**

The conductor faces the choir and moves, stretches, and gestures while the choir “mirrors” those gestures. If the conductor raises the right hand, the choir will raise their left hand. Do this exercise until everyone in the room is anticipating and watching and moving in unison. Vary the pattern of movements continuously.

2. **Clap/Step**

The conductor steps side-to-side in a steady rhythm, for example: left foot left and right foot steps to the left, then right foot steps right and left foot steps right. Keep a steady pulse and have the choir mirror the movements. Begin to hold up different numbers of fingers to indicate how many claps the choir will perform on each side. For example, step left with the left foot while holding up the index finger on each hand, and then as the right foot joins the left, clap once. Then as the right foot steps to the right, maybe hold up two fingers on each hand to indicate two claps as the left foot joins the right. The claps should be subdivisions of the stepping pulse. Vary the number of claps on each side between 1 and 4 and keep the choir watching, engaged, and on task. Also use two fists to indicate no claps.

3. **Humm on vowels: u, o, a, eh, i with movement**

Starting on a middle-range note like G, have the choir humm the pitch while you have them mirror your gestures. You should demonstrate good posture, movements that expand the space in the mouth and resonators, and any gesture that helps them sing freely and consistently on the pitch. Move up and down by half or whole steps. Move to an “u” vowel (like the word “food”) as they circle the lips with the index finger. Move back to a humm. Change the pitch up or down. Move to an “o” vowel (like the word “go”) as they circle the whole face with the whole hand. Work in all the vowels this way, including “a” (as in “father”) using a vertical hand position in front of the mouth; the “eh” vowel (like the word “set”) using the thumb and index finger near the corners of the mouth; and the “ee” vowel (like the word “see”) using two extended index fingers by the sides of the mouth like “goal posts.” Finally, sing all vowels using the gestures without returning to the humm.

4. **Hiss with piano (C-D), then Gliss**

Instruct the choir to make a short hiss connected to the abdominal area with a short burst of air, like a wet finger on a hot stove. Have them do it on a cue consisting of holding your left palm up while the right index finger touches it from above, cueing the hiss. When the hiss is strong and unified, play the piano exercise below as they hiss. The hissing should half in rhythmic value as it is performed, so that it is on every beat, then on every eighth note subdivision, and then to sixteenth notes. At the end, have each choir member sustain the hiss and cut themselves off with a “conductor’s gesture” when each

singer runs out of breath. Finish this section off with glissandos from low to high to low, tracing a circle in front of the torso.

Steady Beat ♩ = 120

5. On 1 & 1 (Clap mind exercise)

Instruct the choir to clap on the number you call out, and then you should count to the number as they clap. At first, count outloud all the way to the number. For example, you will say “On 3 and 1&2&3” and the choir members should clap on three. Don’t clap yourself or they will only watch your gesture for the cue. Vary the tempo of the exercise, and call out different numbers as well. If they catch on quickly, start counting outloud, but them finish the count silently. For example, you can say “On 6 and 1&2&3&.....” and see if they can audiate the pulse and still clap together. For more challenge, have them clap the off beats. You would say “on the and of 5, and 1&2&3&4&5&.” If they are good with rhythm, challenge them to clap the second and fourth subdivisions of the sixteenth note subdivisions as well.

6. **“Sing a Little” exercise.** Have the choir sing the exercise below. Then sing it again and ask them to be “opera conductors” as they sing, encouraging them to gesture and support the singing with sweeping movements. Move up by half steps. Try the exercise a cappella. It also works as a round, with each section coming in on beat one.

a gesture with both hands near the front of the face, making small circles that “wipe away tension.” The movement can best be described as “fanning the face lightly.” This is an autopilot exercise because we do not want the singers to think about how high they are singing. Vocalize them up to at least high C.

11. **Bum Biddly Bum.** This is a lower-range extender. Instruct singers to sit down when the lowest note is too low for their voice. Have them sing with a gesture that starts with one palm cupped horizontally over the other in front of the torso, and then switching positions on beat 3 and then on 1 of the next measure. On the fermata, arms hang to the sides and make small circles toward the ground. Close to the “M” on the fermata and ask the singers to chew and engage the mask and nose. Have them open to a vowel on the final note as it gets lower. Clap for the few remaining people standing at the end. Your warm-up is complete and has been fun and engaging!

Unison Voices

Bum biddley biddley biddley bum Bum biddley biddley biddley bum