

## Southern Regional ACDA Conference: Lift *EVERY* Voice

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### *Audition Them Out or Teach Them In?*

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#### **TRANSFER: Rules for Expressive Singing**

Use of Bloom's taxonomy provides a wonderful means of structuring independence in singing expressively: start with basic knowledge and successively ask students to perform/evaluate more sophisticated tasks with the music. One method that works very well with middle school choirs is the use of rules to structure transfer of knowledge (we do not have to start over with expressive singing on every piece, as the students will know things they learned from the previous piece). Following are some ideas that can be used to help students look at music and have some ideas about what they might do to perform well. Granted, these are baby steps on a long journey, but the foundations for musical independence can quickly be established in a positive, nurturing way.

- **The Rule of the Steady Beat.** When singing any note value longer than the steady beat value, singers should crescendo. Establishing a general principle saves rehearsal time and limits frustration by preventing errors with a rule that is applicable for much of the piece. The teacher/conductor must address only those instances when a crescendo is not desired or when the rule was implemented incorrectly.
- **The Rule of Consonant Releases.** Though this rule can be implemented throughout the rehearsal or applied differently to each song, it serves as a guideline for most of the final consonant releases. The rule might structure using the last full beat, or the last half of the beat, or whatever is appropriate for the song and counting ability of the ensemble. Students assume some responsibility for releases by using the rule, which permits the conductor to address only those unique releases not suitable for rule application.
- **The Rule of Diphthongs.** Beginning singers who do not yet self-monitor their vowel sounds can quickly apply this rule. Identifying diphthongs and prescribing a method for performance (e.g., sing the first sound throughout most of the value and then quickly add the second sound) serves to educate and prevent most errors. When the teacher/conductor stops to address incorrect singing, this rule serves to foster student analysis of the problem (listen, identify, analyze, evaluate).
- **The Rule of Punctuation.** This rule contributes greatly to phrase awareness of beginning singers. The rule requires a lift or break for every punctuation mark throughout the piece. The reverse is also true: do not break if no punctuation exists. (This rule is extremely effective for correcting phrasing with beginners.) While there is certainly punctuation in text that is ignored for musical reasons, having this rule makes singers aware that a decision must be made and allows the teacher/conductor to teach only the exceptions to the rule.
- **The Rule of the Slur (and other articulations).** Although most students can explain a slur, a surprising number of singers cannot sing one correctly. This rule requires a *tenuto* over the first note under the slur, followed by all other notes in the pattern sung without a *tenuto* marking.

• **The Rule of Word Stress.** Informing students about *singing* words as we might *speak* words addresses the issue of word stress. Singing louder or with slight emphasis on important words or syllables is a simple idea, but not something that automatically occurs with all novice singers. Implementing this one rule can immediately improve musical line and the overall artistry of the performance.

Each example serves to demonstrate a general concept, but every composition programmed also may have specific performance needs that could become a rule for only that selection. Other rules a teacher might opt to use include:

- the Rule of Dissonance (crescendo and resolve);
- the Rule of Dynamic Contrast (for some music, this is the key variable for expressive performance);
- the Rule of Voicing (bring out important motifs from the choral texture);
- the Rule of Repetition (dynamic scheme for a text or music sequence).

Young singers may not know every important aspect about the music they are performing, but given information by the teacher, it is very possible for them to make decisions, be held accountable (assessment), and sing beautifully.

### **A Hierarchy for Independent Singing**

1. Sing a melody [Middle School Mixed Choirs: (1) Use **PHRASE METHOD** that allows teacher to select phrases that fit each section, and (2) adapt treble music and **RE-VOICE** to sing as SATB]
2. Add an ostinato (rhythmic, melodic)
3. Use partner songs
4. Add a descant
5. Sing chord roots
6. Add vocal chording, as possible (sample I IV V, below)
 

MM//	FF//	MM//	RR//
SS//	LL//	SS//	SS//
DD//	DD//	DD//	TT//
7. Sing phrases or sections of a round
8. Sing rounds and canons
9. Sing "Transition" pieces (elements from above appear in score) Ostinato, Descant, Partner Song, Canonic entrances, Call/Response, etc.
10. Sing Part Songs---2-4 voices

## Application to Choral Repertoire

### 1. **Developmental Mixed Choir: SATB**

O Praise the Mighty Lord (from *Joshua*)

G. F. Handel/Arr. Patrick M. Liebergen

Carl Fischer CM8384

Planning Notes: (Is the accompaniment friendly? Is the form helpful to student success?)

Rules: Voicing, Baroque Style, Consonant Releases, Dynamic Contrast with Texture and/or Melodic Line or Repetition, Call and Response(ish), ritardando built in through note values.

Teaching Sequence: Theme A, Theme B, Layer in solfege, Isolate similar phrases to determine same/different

**Theme A** (melodic): ms 5 Alto; ms 12 Soprano; ms 15 Bass; ms 19 Tenor; ms 31, Alto

**Theme B** (rhythmic): ms 8 Alto/Tenor; ms 9 Bass/Soprano; ms 10 Alto/Bass; ms 13 Alto; ms 15 Tenor; ms 16 Soprano; ms 20 Alto; ms 22 Alto/Tenor/Bass; etc.

### 2. **Somewhat Independent Mixed Choir:**

Spirit

Rawn Harbor/arr. Barbara W. Baker

Alliance Music AMP 1025

Planning Notes: (Is the accompaniment friendly? Is the form helpful to student success (perhaps repeated sections)? Are there ostinato sections?)

Rules: Articulation, Dissonance, Steady Beat, Texture Dynamics,

Teaching Sequence:

- Locate Sections with 1 chord measures (and extrapolate!);
- Learn ostinato-like section, pages 9-13;
- Isolate the challenging note in the 5 part chords (at letter C, page 7) and layer from 1 pitch to 5 pitches:
  - **step 1**, all sing S2;
  - **step 2**, trebles sing S2 and male parts sing T;
  - **step 3**, add B, thus TB are on the parts and ALL women are still singing S2;
  - **step 4** add Alto to S2/T/B;
  - **step 5**, finally, add S1 (T should be secure with TS dissonance, and S2 should be secure as well)
  - **step 6**, learn coda

### 3. **Mixed Choir Contemporary Acapella:**

Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye

Gary DeCarlo, Paul Leka, and Dale Frashuer/arr. Deke Sharon and Anne Raugh

M. R. C. Music, Inc.

Planning Notes: New Rules for this Genre (all other rules still apply, we're just adding to the knowledge)

Rule of Individual Expression - Contemporary Acapella is more successful when you find opportunities for

individual expression, so in this piece we will change the verses to solos and have your other tenors sing the alto part at pitch, or the soprano part down an octave (or create a new tenor part). In the same spirit, the last chorus may be repeated ad libitum while layering improvisation/ostinatos over the refrain. This takes time to get going, but it is very effective, and it really builds confidence in your singers.

Rule of the Groove – Since this style is often imitating a rhythm section, articulations should be based on contributing to a groove, rather than being strictly text based, i.e. accent and decay should be much more extreme and used throughout. Also, accent strong beats consistently, but make sure it is appropriate to the genre (Rock will have different accented beats than Reggae or R &B). This song has a very strong accent on beat one and a medium strong accent on beat three.

Rule of Vowel Modification – In parts that are imitating actual vocals from the song (versus imitating instruments) we want to use brighter vowels. Specifically, in this song, the syllable “Nah” should be sung closer to the æ vowel (as in “cat”). This moves the sound to a more chest-based mix without being too vocally taxing.

Teaching Sequence:

- Speak through text in rhythm of first section
- Sightread first section on pitches (may break up in to upper voices and bass if needed)
- Repeat first two steps for remaining three sections
- Introduce improvisation:
  1. Establish rules: Depending on level, this will change drastically. For example, singers may only use one pitch, but come up with their own rhythm; or you may limit singers to a single rhythm, but allow them to use any note from a particular scale. A limited A flat blues scale works very well over the end of this piece so we will use that.
  2. Half the group sings the last section in a loop, other half comes up with improvisations. (“Stress that creativity is more important than sounding good at this point”.)
  3. Allow individuals to volunteer to sing over the refrain
  4. Set your improvisers, and enjoy!