

Developing A Good Performance Attitude Through Well-Structured Rehearsals

by

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*Improve a group's musical quality
through effective rehearsal techniques*

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Effective use of rehearsal time is a major factor in the improvement of any group's musical quality. Some vocal groups may rehearse one or two hours per day and others only three hours per week, yet both achieve the same musical level. Many hours of rehearsal is not the answer to higher musical quality. Optimal results may be achieved in fewer hours if the time is used efficiently. The amount and quality of learning depends upon the conductor. To help a group reach its fullest potential, you must provide goals, an organized and structured environment, and be in control of individual and group behavior. To achieve this, you must be aware of the domains which collectively determine the effectiveness of the rehearsal. These are attitude, environment, technique, and pace. If you use them with the proper preparation and control, rehearsal time will be more efficient and musically fulfilling.

Attitude

Your group will be more productive if you demonstrate confidence in them. By being enthusiastic and treating them with respect and concern, you show them that music making is a team effort. Opening yourself up to the group and showing them you are also a human being who will make mistakes and is willing to learn from them, creates a sense of honesty and trust that is the basis of any healthy organization.

A sense of physical and mental readiness for singing can be created by preparing in advance to make a rehearsal well-organized, fast moving, exciting, and enjoyable.

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Group members should be made to feel at ease with their musical experience, that their participation is valued, and that their hard work will be rewarded with the satisfaction of making good music.

Environment

Making music can be a team effort. Demand the group's full attention. Remember, it is not you against them--you are all part of a group. You are a member of this group, not its ruler. You just happen to be the one with the knowledge to guide the others to musical excellence. An effective technique is to include yourself by using the plural pronoun when addressing the group. For example, say, "Can we do this?"

The spark of inspiration comes from the conductor. You know what happens when you and your group catches fire. They never forget it. They continue to talk about it. This spark can be started or extinguished by nonverbal actions which project your expectations of student behavior. What is not said but seen, often is the catalyst which can motivate or discourage students. For example, you should come to rehearsal prepared, start on time, end on time, and treat students with trust and respect during the process.

Students must be committed to expending the time to achieve a high degree of excellence. Wise conductors know when they must be stern and insist on absolute concentration; they must also know when to relax the singers and permit more

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freedom. But to do this, you must understand the personality of your group. Each group has its own personality which is determined by:

- The organization's customs, beliefs, and values.
- The attitudes and motives of its members
- The social structure of the group.
- The cohesiveness and morale of the group.

By being aware of these dynamics within your group, you will have a better understanding as to which techniques you use and when, to motivate and inspire your group to musical excellence.

Technique

Every learning situation should aim toward a focal point, or peak experience. In such experiences, the individual is momentarily fulfilled, has a sense of accomplishment, and feels content. In situations that involve music making, peak experiences are relatively easy to attain. Appropriate challenge, persistent struggle, sufficient reinforcement, and eventual achievement bring about such experiences in rehearsal. It is largely through continual peaking that people are motivated to grow.

Fatigue, tension, and repetition are three of the causes of lack of attention during a long rehearsal. Humor is one of the best ways to relieve this tension and

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energize a group during a rehearsal. Most directors have been trained to follow a businesslike rehearsal protocol, but inexperienced singers work better when there is occasional relief from physical and mental concentration. Another method to keep their attention is to constantly change your voice pitch, volume level, and speed and by rearranging their physical position.

If you start with a difficult piece of music at the beginning of rehearsal, start at a relatively easy spot within it. This will allow the group to begin with a sense of accomplishment and a positive attitude towards the work ahead. If a work was featured near the midpoint at one rehearsal, place it near the beginning or at the end of the next rehearsal. The climactic point of a session should coincide with the rehearsal of the piece of music requiring the greatest degree of concentration. End each rehearsal by reading through one of the group's favorite selections. This leaves them cheerful, wanting more, and looking forward to the next rehearsal.

Closure is an essential ingredient in the learning experience. At the end of the rehearsal, provide immediate reinforcement or correction by letting your group know the extent of their attainment. Your statement may be positive or negative, depending upon the circumstances but, above all, it must be honest. During closure, most of what is learned is cemented into long-term memory. Good conductors plan and control their full closures. For example, if you want a positive closure, establish a goal that can be accomplished successfully. If, on the other hand, the group has grown overconfident or cocky, you can easily structure the rehearsal to lead to a more negative closure.

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Pace

To make rehearsals as efficient as possible, a no-nonsense, well-organized approach must be taken. Here are some guidelines that have proven to be useful:

- Warm-ups must be effective and fun, while loosening up the musical mechanisms, tuning the ears, and focusing the mind.
- Start with a familiar selection to continue the energy, enthusiasm, group focus, intonation, and blend just experienced and rehearsed in the warm-ups.
- Get to the meat of the rehearsal. Move quickly from rehearsal point to rehearsal point, never allowing time for distractions or for the energy level to drop.
- If the rehearsal is going badly, switch to a favorite piece of the group.
- Avoid pounding at the same problem over and over. Go on to something else, and then come back to it.
- Plan your rehearsal so that there are contrasts in mood, style, and key. The level of difficulty should increase throughout the rehearsal. To keep students interested and reduce the level of fatigue, change activity, focus, or physical position every six to seven minutes.

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- If section work is necessary, move quickly from voice part or instrument to another. Avoid allowing time for the other sections to become inactive, bored, or distracted. Require non playing/singing sections to rehearse their parts mentally, then quickly test them to keep them alert.
- Attention span is a crucial factor in planning effective sequencing. The group may not be able to absorb any more ideas concerning a piece already rehearsed for over a half-hour.
- Fire a question at the group the moment they stop singing or playing--before anyone can begin to speak.
- One of the most easily controlled stimulus variations involves the use of the podium. Movement to the podium should be brisk and purposeful, and the director should be at the podium only when holding the group at attention.

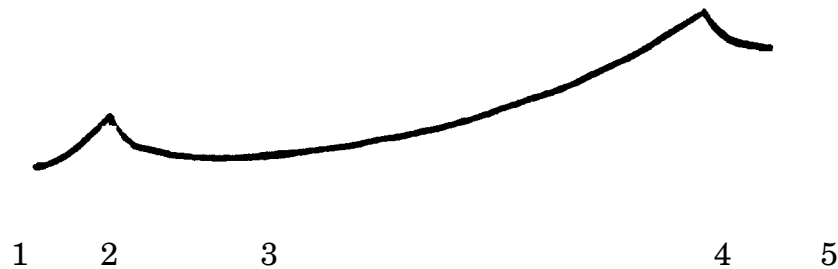
A rehearsal is like a concert. You must get the complete attention of your group, hold it, and leave them feeling good and wanting more. The following graphic illustrates the manner in which a rehearsal should be structured:

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1. Begin the concert
2. Get the audience's attention and bring back down a bit
3. Slowly build over time aiming for the peak
4. Reach the peak
5. Taper off and end the concert

Conclusion

The effectiveness of your rehearsal depends upon how prepared, motivated, and enthusiastic you are towards the task of making music. If your group is not progressing as they should, evaluate your approach and techniques first, and alter them as needed. Flexibility and the willingness to change are the keys to successful rehearsal technique.