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TECHNIQUE FOR CHOIRS

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Technique for Choirs

Experienced choir trainers know well (and some even risk saying so openly) that the best results are obtained from a group that does not include any highly trained singers. In matters of blend, tone and balance, one or two persons of the "I have had lessons" variety can wreak horrible havoc unless surrounded by improbably large numbers of less individual and forceful voices. Moreover, choirs that are dependent on good professional soloists rarely avoid the unchoir-like "Follow the Leader" effect, and things tend to fall apart when one of the kingpins is absent. A choir director who relies on Miss So-and-so to pull the sopranos through must have little pride in his craft or satisfaction in his work. Solo singing is quite a different matter, of course, but here and now we are concerned with that minimum of vocal technique which any able choirmaster should demand from even his weakest vessels, remembering that it is his job to make silk purses of sows' ears (and boars' ears too).

Many of us are facing a serious decline in choir membership. The least we can do is to extract the utmost from every available voice and to make our people sing possibly rather better than they would have believed possible. Here are a few notes and observations which may at least stimulate interest and encourage choir members and trainers to experiment in making their little go as far as possible. Singing "by the light of nature" gives pleasure to many people, but is hardly enough when so much can so easily be achieved.

First, a look at the mechanism:

Posture
Whether standing (both feet on the ground), sitting or kneeling, the back must be straight, the chin in and the head up. Head pokers must be chided, and all music must be held a least breast high. A choir should look as well as it sounds (if possible). The Rib Cage must be raised at all times, even when observing long rests in the music. Pulling the shoulders loosely back and down will raise the chest, but the looseness is very important. Everything must be quite relaxed except the "working parts", e.g. the diaphragm. Tipping the head slightly forward is helpful for high notes; "the higher the softer" is a golden rule.

Breathing
Rudolph von Laban observed that breathing out is a tension while breathing in is a relaxation – a very interesting notion contrary to the usual gymnastic instructions. If you can discover what he meant by this you will have learnt a great deal about good breathing for singing (and health). Expiration must be felt as a controlled upward pressure of the powerful diaphragm muscles, while the ribs and shoulders do not move. If the rib cage is always raised, breath will flow in as the diaphragm is allowed to relax and fall. A deliberate down-pulling of the diaphragm increases the speed of the process and completely fills the lungs at the base: the singer's deep breath. The chest remaining expanded at all times, pressure for singing must come entirely from below, a controlled squeezing up of the breath.

Always take breath in good time, sometimes as much as a full bar before an entry and never at the last moment. Conscientious preparation will see that copies are marked so that everyone takes breath on the same beat – a silent beat, more-over, since even the most copious intake of

breath need not be audible. Snatching quick, shallow breaths must be entirely avoided, but a quick intake at breaks in long phrases (e.g. at commas) may be practiced as a strong downwards kick of the diaphragm. Correct breath intake and control, like all techniques, must first be practiced consciously and with concentration until good subconscious habits are formed. Breathing exercises can be exhausting, but will pay marvelous dividends if administered in small doses; neither do they need to be separated from the study of music. When you learn a new piece, learn the breathing too!

The Voice

The diaphragm presses up the wind against the vocal cords in the larynx, which must be held down to meet this pressure, as in the position of yawning. Raising the chest assists in this, and also enlarges the base of the neck (don't wear tight collars!). The vocal cords determine pitch, and their squeaks are amplified and beautified by the various resonances obtained from throat, mouth and facial bones which, assisted by the tongue and teeth, also colour the sound and give us a palette of vowel tones.

Note the opposition of throat and mouth: as the lips close the throat tends to open and vice versa. Conscious practice helps one to keep the throat open when the lips close, developing a full, round tone (based on OO) which gives depth and resonance to all vowels. N.B. that the lips close, not the teeth, which must remain parted at least an inch at all times (more for large mouths) even when humming with the lips together. "Teeth apart" is the secret of clear, bright tone.

The TONGUE naturally lies well forward for OO, tip beneath the front teeth, and remains flat as mouth and throat open for AH (as doctors know). The tongue rises somewhat for the thinner vowels (AY, EE) but must always remain loose and never bunch up at the back of the mouth and black the voice. The tip must be highly mobile and very deliberate when exploding consonants like T and D. Don't leave things to chance! The LIPS also must be loose and able to move rapidly and accurately; they should open from top to bottom (not sideways). "Smiling" should not be encouraged for EE as it makes it unnecessarily thin and starves the tone, but flat a (as in THAT) and difficult vowels the THY and YEA are helped by a slight smile.

Tone

Except when very quiet indeed, tone should be built on the resonance of the facial bones to which the various tones may be added by changes of throat, mouth and tongue. (Practise singing "N" with no vowel: feel the vibration in the "Mask". No breath should pass through the nose: "N" tone may be sung with the nostrils pinched together). The tone and blend of a choir equals its unanimity of vowel colour. Don't ignore the value of much humming when learning new music (always with the teeth well parted). A group that can maintain the smoothness and blend of its humming tone when the words are added is beginning to operate as a choir. Rich, resonant humming with vibration in the facial bones.

Vibrato

Vibrato, so-called, is the proud emblem of the "trained" singer and much damage can it do to a small ensemble… "Wobble" is a better term for this phenomenon as most of us find it a rapid vibration in pitch usually due to inadequate tension somewhere or other (in the diaphragm, for

example). The true vibrato of the great singer or woodwind player is rhythmical vibration of wind pressure controlled by the diaphragm – good players can turn it off and on at will, and so can good singers. True vibrato is a splendid thing (and is the foundation for vocal agility in runs, etc.) but is not easy to learn without individual tuition. Most choir trainers will wisely seek a perfectly steady tone throughout the choir, especially for Church music. Wobblers must be re-taught or weeded out; their instability is quite ruinous to blend and tone. Remember that individuals may not be aware of the extent of their wobble; tread delicately, but be firm!

So much (or so little when so much is left unsaid) about the actual mechanism. An occasional half hour of study and experiment with elementals will always be rewarding, but the able choir trainer will not relax his vigilance at any time, for most of what is needed can be unobtrusively conveyed in the course of a normal choir practice. The learning of new music provides a perfect opportunity for drawing attention to technical points; good habits are then cemented in the material.

Now we must see how a conscious application of technical method can improve performance, and how detailed care in the preparation of performance can at the same time continue to improve technique.

Two points must be stressed.

1) Only attention to the most minute details will ever show big results: "general principles" are a dangerous illusion
2) Church music exists solely to convey and glorify the sacred text, whether it be liturgical or poetic. Therefore church choirs must make the clear pronunciation and projection of the words their first and last aim (How many of us invariably select anthems for the suitability of their text? How many of us habitually sing trashy words because we like the music that adorns them? How much better we would serve our churches if we never sang trashy words, however good the music!)

Any choir with a reasonable balance of parts, by concentration on the clear articulation and pronunciation of the words (that is, by applying technique) will automatically develop its musical potential to the full, remembering that the music exists only and entirely to support the words. Word and music cannot be separated; good singing of words equals good singing of the music.

Perhaps not all of us have closely examined this apparently obvious statement, that the parts of words which are sung are the vowels. It is possible to sing, after a fashion, without using any consonants at all (some choirs sing like this all the time). It must be made clear that consonants have a separate existence from vowels in singing – they live a life of their own – and that they need infinitely more emphasis and care in placing than they ever get in ordinary speech. I expect that most choirmasters will agree with me that it is quite impossible to persuade the average choir member how much deliberate exaggeration is needed before consonants can be clearly heard from a distance of more than a few feet. Actors act to the back of the gallery; singers should sing to the back of the church. Attempts to stiffen up the pronunciation of consonants often give choirs the giggles and are forgotten ten minutes later; but smacking the consonants will not make words audible unless a choir has also worked systematically on vowel tones. Sludge with a few sharp rocks in it is still sludge.

Vowels
First, we must isolate the vowels, realizing how few there are and what they are, then learn them as TONE; using phonetic spelling from time to time to be thorough about it.

There are three categories: long short and compound.
Long are OO (too), AW (for) AH (tar) ER (sir) AY (play) and EE (see)
Short are oo (wood) o (hot) u (thus) a (hat) e (then) and i (in)
Compound are the sounds formed by a combination of the above simple vowels (see below)

Long vowels are easily perfected, and (when the composer plays fair) are normally sung on long notes and runs. The short vowels are more difficult to shape and keep pure, and when given to sustained notes tend to resolve into their neighbouring long vowel. The classic example is that of the word HOLY, which should be sung HOH-li (spelt phonetically) and not HOH-LEE (I will forbear to repeat the joke about the Chinaman). The simple vowels, long and short, form a sequence which progressively alters the shape of the resonators (throat, mouth and tongue) as you sing them in order:
OO oo OH AW u ER a e AY i EE. Starting with throat open, tongue forward and lips pursed (OO) you will notice how the lips part until the central AH sound is reached (try to keep the throat open too) and then how the tongue begins to rise to shape the flatter and thinner vowels. (N.B. The teeth must be parted all the time, from OO to EE. Charles Cleall suggests the following sentence to show the succession of simple vowels and I am much indebted to him for this and for many other valuable points on voice production.

YOU SHOULD GO FOR TOP MARKS, SON; PER-HAPS THEN THEY'D INCREASE
(OO oo OH AW u ER a e AY i EE)

Choirs should isolate these sounds, keeping them pure and taking care that all members are shaping them alike. Individual accents (dialect) must be subordinated to the pure tones of the choir. Some people say EE-YER for HERE; some say DENS, some say DANS, some say DAHNS – is all depends where you come from. A Canadian choir trainer might insist on everyone DANSING, while an Englishman would want to DAHNCE. Further example of varied pronunciation will occur to everybody. In choral work pronunciation must be uniform.

Take a verse of a hymn; write it out phonetically:
THER S-u-n of G-o-d g-OH-s f-aw-th t-oo W-AW, ER king-li Cr-AW(oo)-n t-oo g-AY-n. (Already we have met a compound vowel in CROWN). Had you previously noticed that FORTH and WAR have the same vowel? Or that KINGLY ends in –li not –lee?

Vowels must be matched throughout the choir; they must also be maintained without slurring for the full duration of long notes or passages. In ordinary speech one does not normally hold a mouth position for more than a split second, but in singing one must practice to hold a vowel for possibly several seconds, and most especially on the long notes which often end a piece. It is very easy to anticipate the next sound, perhaps a consonant calling for considerable mouth-tongue movement, and so the vowel is smeared. (So we see that the exact placing of consonants affects vowel colour).

Many choirmasters, especially with boys, do much vocal exercising on OO. We have seen that this sound, the first in the series of simple vowels, opens the throat, flattens the tongue and purses the lips. It is a valuable stock (in the cooking sense) for flavouring other vowels and preventing them from sounding under-nourished. However, AH is a better exercise vowel in most cases; it's the centre of the tonal spectrum. With widely parted lips, flat tongue and open throat, AH is the sound that radiates most light.

Compound Vowels

Compound Vowels tend to be smudgy unless a choir has had a good look at their nature and found out how to cope with them. They consist of a main vowel and a "colouring" vowel. Mostly the main vowel comes first, and this must be sung unadulterated as long as possible. Thus THOU, NOW, CROWN, etc. must be sung as AH, shading into short oo at the last moment. (Careful choirmasters will instruct their people to the very thirty-second note where such sounds change, and such discipline is the only way to avoid that unmusical smear which Shaw pilloried so amusingly in *Pygmalion*.)

Smeared vowels are the pride of the Cockney, who will produce four or five sounds from the single syllable OY. This particular vowel, as in BOY, is AW closed by short i; the AW must be sung pure. THY is a word often in the mouths of church choirs, whence it emerges as THOY as often as not. It is one of the words most deserving of care and correction. The main sound is AH, closing into short –i, but the AH sound should be slightly thinned by smiling lips or it will sound plummy. Its rhymes HIGH, FLY, NIGH, FRIGHT etc. need the same treatment.

An initial "closed vowel" (W or Y, see below) will turn a simple vowel into a compound sound, and a final closed vowel has the same effect. Both may be seen in the word WAY: (oo)W(oo)-AY-i.

Our language is such that spelling will not help you. Consider WOOD and FOOD; oo and OO. Also notice the reversed compound vowel when the short sound comes first, as in YOU, FEW and many others. Here the first sound must be quickly disposed of (but <u>not</u> ignored) and the second sound is sung at length. How would you teach your choir to sing, "YOU CHOOSE NEW SUIT, DUKE?"
Cleall points out that many people sing vowels ending in R as two sounds, whereas they should be simple vowels. Examples: FEAR, AIR, and POOR, which should be Fi'r, as in it; e-r as in ERGG and Pu-r, as in PUT. N.B. All <u>short</u> vowels closing into R. The fact that R is a vocal consonant mustn't allow it to affect the vowel that precedes it. The characteristic Canadian burr afforded to internal R's (in such words as EARTH, WORD and above, LORD) marks a closed throat and raised tongue-tip. This may be a national trait but it is a poor way to sing!

The clear, true conveyance of the words is the first and last aim of the church choir – yes, but this does not mean that you must sing as you speak! I do not wish to seem to labour the point, but choirs should be encourages to aim at a very high standard of vowel perfection <u>as a choir</u>. This is sure to mean that individuals will find themselves obliged to modify their natural dialect. People who speak with a nasal tone must pinch their nostrils often while singing (at rehearsals only, of

course!) to check that their singing tone is not coming through the nose; if it is, pinching the nose will alter the tone. Plummy speakers must learn to drop the jaw and focus the tone well forward.

Many things that are easily heard in the intimacy of conversation must be tremendously exaggerated if they are to be perceptible when sung, even from quite a short distance. The careful shaping of vowels and their maintenance through-out long notes is one such exaggeration – one wouldn't dream of doing it in conversation. But exaggeration does not mean distortion; the true proportions of speech must be minutely observed, and especially in the relationship between long and short vowels. Do you sing UND, OND, AHND or AND? Is your “the” before a consonant THER or TH-u (as in THUS)? Do you say AY-GAY-N or u-gen? Which should you sing? "And u-gen AH-I s-AY(i) ri-JAW-i-ce". Phonetic spelling looks ghastly but it does teach you a lot about what you thought you knew already! Whatever your choir agrees is the correct spoken vowel must always be deliberately sung, blown up to singing size. Guard against the many words ending in a short vowel which, when spoken, cause the jaw to close (MOVEMENT, LEISURE, CAPTAIN). In singing, the jaw must not close, for the teeth must remain parted – practically the only time the jaws need to close is to articulate the consonants J and CH(ARLES). Affected? In speech, yes; in singing, no. Singing is an art, requiring technique. If the acquisition of technique seems to induce affectation it does so only in relation to speech which is a different art.

Consonants

I hope I have already made the point that the exaggeration of consonants alone will not necessarily improve the diction and musicianship of a choir. Most choirmasters who become concerned about diction work on consonants first – they are easy to hear and to deal with. But poor vowel shape is just as often, perhaps more often, the cause of unclear singing, since it muddies the tone, ruins the blend and wearies the ear. When the sludge is filtered and our vowel tones are pure, clear water it becomes possible to see and distinguish between the rocks, the sand banks and (maybe) the weeds which give interest to our vocal stream.

A choir may well enjoy an amusing half hour finding out where and how it makes its consonants. The experience is rather like that of trying to ride a bicycle or swim consciously. It will be discovered that some consonants "pair up" for example, t and D, or F with V, and that their difference is largely a matter of attack. The lip consonant B is a soft, gentle explosion. Increase the speed with which the lips are parted and back up the operation with a simultaneous and forceful expulsion of breath – and your B has become a P. The same thing happens with G and K, Z and S, and J and CH. Put your tongue between your teeth to say TH(THUS); blow hard and suddenly (a kick from the diaphragm!) and you have the TH of THOUGHT. So we classify the second of each pair as a "breath" consonant and the first, softer and more gentle sound, as "voiced". Say a J (J-ER, not J-AY) and you will discover a deep vowel sound in your throat. If you eliminate the vowel, an explosion of breath (producing CH) is needed to produce anything at all.

EXPLODENTS are B and P, D and T, J and CH, G and K.
SIBILANTS are V and F, TH(US) and TH(OUGHT), Z and S, ZH and SH
VOCALS (obviously, all voiced) are L,M,N,NG and R
ASPIRATE is H and there are two "stopped" vowels, W(stopped OO) and Y (stopped EE)

Technically, we should make sure that the breath consonants are in fact adequately reinforced by that puff of air. The explodents, particularly P, T, CH and K, should blow out the birthday candles. (I mean this quite literally; there should be an expulsion of air that may be felt several inches in front of the mouth. People are so lazy about this!) As you build up good habits in this respect you will notice a movement of lips for P, of tongue-tip for T, of jaw for CH (for once the teeth must close in preparation for opening again) and of the base of the tongue and throat for k. It is not necessary to move the jaw for k, though most people naturally do.

Voiced consonants need rather less speed BUT (and this is perhaps one of the most important things about consonants) the movements must never be so slow that the "after-vowel" becomes mixed in with the true vowel so that the true vowel starts late, after the beat, making the rhythm flaccid.
("MER-AH-I SER-OH-L DER-uth MER-agnify the Lord, etc!")
Work on the attack of voiced consonants is far more valuable than merely flogging the Ts and Ps. While on the matter of speed, the articulation of the stopped vowels W and Y deserves attention. Lazy lips make any word with initial W painful to hear. The lips (in the case of Y, the jaw) must open like lightning, from top to bottom and before the beat, so that the clear vowel can shine forth. Laziness can ruin one of the loveliest phrases in Church Music ("O where shall wisdom be found?") and ruins the music. Please note, not just the "diction". Diction IS music.

Sibilants carry well, S in particular needs under-emphasis if anything, but see that the lips are pursed for it when it is a final consonant. Long notes on syllables ending in S are proving-grounds for the beat-counting and the accurate placing of unsung sounds! Be sure that F and TH are not neglected, however. (Not "Var away would I vly").

The above remarks about W and Y apply most earnestly to the vocals; lips must be RAPIDLY parted for M; tongue and jaw RAPIDLY dropped for N. Both these sounds and final –NG are nasals, that is, some of their tone must pass through the nose.

Not only the Cockneys drop their aitches – most choirs regularly worship the Trinity without them. H is the breath consonant par excellence, of course; it consists of nothing else. Once again it is a matter of speed. The breath must be shot out of the mouth, forcibly propelled by a smart kick of the diaphragm. Hs vanish when people try to sing them, i.e. associate them too closely with the following vowel. If you open your mouth and force air out by pressing your abdomen sharply just above the belt with both hands, what do you get? Repeat the process rhythmically and you are panting. "As pants the hhh-art". This is the singer's H, and if it seems to roughen up the vowel that follows, so be it. We must accept that roughness if we wish our H to be audible. H takes up some time when done properly, which means that we must start it well before the beat on which the following vowel should be sung.

Then matter of anticipation of consonants before the beat is a fine art, requiring much judgment and rehearsal. It is possible though not easy, to overdo it. If the SH of SURELY is placed on the beat it is already late and the vowel will be late too. Many cheat their way out of the problem by understating all initial consonants, especially H and the other breath consonants. Moderation in all things, of course – too enthusiastic an attack on the initial explosion can unsettle the following vowel. But we cannot sing consonants, therefore they must be placed early if we are to

sing on the beat. Explodents, if really hard and short, take up so little time that they may be placed on the beat (some will not agree). The softer sounds TH(US) and SH and CH(ANT) take up much time and must be anticipated carefully and precisely.

Final Consonants

The harder they are, the bigger they fall. The tittering effect of a poorly trained choir ending a long note on a word like HEART is in inverse proportion to the number of singers who solve their personal problems by omitting the T altogether. A choirmaster must see that everyone is certain of two things: the exact moment in time when the final consonant is to be placed, and the exact nature of that consonant. It is not an affectation to voice final consonants when they are the voiced variety and are followed either by silence or by another consonant. In fact, they are not being properly articulated unless they are voiced. Example: A bar of a whole note, common time, on the word LAND should end with NDER (a sound through nose and mouth) on the down beat of the next bar if it is a rest, or on the second half of the fourth beat if the next beat is to a word with an initial consonant. (In very slow tempo the NDER may be placed on the last 16^{th}, even 32^{nd} of the bar). It would take much space to talk out all the possibilities and combinations involved in the correct placement of consonants: I must ask readers to conduct their own experiments. Leave nothing to chance!

Final breath consonants must have their puff of air – from everybody. A week or two of this sort of thing "GL-AW-ri BEE TOO thu FF-AH-ther, (easy), an-DER TOO thu S-u-nn(er), (harder) and-DER TOO thu HH-OH-li GH-OH-S-T, (quite difficult)" may startle the congregation, but only at the unwonted vitality of the choir's work.

Double Consonants

Double consonants between adjacent words must be firmly articulated. (Clearly this does not apply to repeated consonants in the same word, which are only one sound, e.g. LITTLE is li-tul, not lit-tul and also NOT liddle!). The classic example is in the Gloria or Agnus Dei: "That takest away the sins of the world". Each member of the choir must listen for the fractional silence between THAT and TAKES. The explosion of the final T in THAT releases a rush of air as the tongue is smartly detached from the hard palate. The initial T of TAKEST must return the tongue to the palate and repeat the explosion; this takes a movements of silent time, very short but very important. It assists matters to give the second T rather more emphasis than the first, but "tha' takest away" will not do. Adjacent voiced consonants (e.g. AND DIE) need just as much care, but in this case the silence is replaced by the tiny after-vowel. "AND (ER) DIE". Be assured that you will not adequately articulate both Ds without it, so do it on purpose!

Beats in the Voice

Choirmasters know that long notes must be counted and that tied notes rarely keep the amount of tone that initiated the longer note to which they are tied. "Thinking a crescendo" is helpful with long sustained notes, but is not the only way to encourage good habits. Except in very quiet, contemplative music, singers should make the beats with the voice, and especially the beat of a tied note. Mark the beat, that is, with a slight increase of intensity controlled by the breath; the vowel shape must not change. The effect to the listener is one of greatly increased vitality, beyond the belief of those who have not heard this before. Since the pulses come on the beats,

where stress may be expected, they are not heard as such, but the long note remains alive and full of tone. Rhythm also is noticeable improved.

Practise singing every note as a semi-staccato in runs and scale passages (unless the tempo is very slow). This induces rhythmic vitality and avoids smear. This articulation of runs is traditional in the instrumental style of Bach and Handel but should be applied to all choral work (even to two or three consecutive silent notes on the same vowel) by choirs of more than ten or twelve voices.

Final Vowels

Final vowels are to be sung to their full written length, must end with a planned silence (not just a vague absence of sound) on the first beat of the following rest. If the next phrase follows closely and breath is needed, slightly shorten the preceding vowel. The rhythmical attack of the next phrase is more important than pedantry about note lengths. The closing of a compound vowel should be on the rest, for this ensures that the pure vowel is sung as long as is required.

Articulation within words and phrases will be accurate if it is understood that consonants associate with the vowel that follows them if they are initial or internal. Final consonants are coloured (somewhat) by the vowel that precedes them. (Whisper TEA, TWO, TAR, TONE; then try TEATWOTARTONE as one word, making sure that it is TEE-TOO-TAH-TOHN(OH), and not TEET-OO-AHT-OH(NER). Then try it the wrong way to feel the difference.

Voiced consonants also take the pitch of the vowels with which they are associated. If you sing the four syllables COME UNTO ME to the notes C, D(below), E and F, the first M must be voiced on C, the N on D and the Second M on F, if you are to avoid singing Cu mu ntoom EE (careless people do sing like this!) Adjacent voiced consonants need care: COME, MEET must not sound like COME, EAT. On the first two notes of our tune (C and D below) M of COME would be voiced on the C, the initial M of MEET would be voiced on the D. But a gentle portamento on the first M to bind up this falling interval would be quite in order. Rising portamenti should be shunned at all times, but a falling portamento does not have to be a "scoop" and can be highly expressive.

I want to close with a word about consonants in general, indeed about good singing in general. Care taken with vowel shape imparts good tone and blend to a choir; consonants, properly paced and given full value, impart life and excitement to the music. (Both, needless to say, are needed for good diction). Singing need not be brilliant, but must not be dull. Over-reverent performances of church music, particularly of the 16th century, do not aid worship if the result is dull and sloppy. The Artistic features of religion – architecture, painting, music – have suffered for more than a hundred years from an excess of misplaced zeal. We may have to live with the raw, red brick Gothic of our forefathers and to see by the light of their mawkish stained glass, but we do not have to sing as they sang, nor do we have to worship with faint praise and lifeless voices, So I have left until the last, one (shall I say) recommendation that my friends well know me for – the treatment of initial Rs. Possibly no other characteristic can give such vigour and "grip" to choral work for so little trouble. Nothing gives such an exalted and thrilling delivery as the placing of properly rolled Rs before words that require them. If the R is preceded by an explodent, so much the better.

"Praise Him in the sound of the trumpet:
Praise Him upon the lute and harp
Praise Him in the cymbals and dances:
Praise Him upon the strings and pipe".

All the rapture of the Cherubic Choir is in those well-rolled p-r-r-aises – provided that both P and R come BEFORE the beat, of course. It hardly needs remarking that, just as all similar vowels will not be sung in the same way expressively, neither will the initial Rs be all rolled alike. We should not expect the same sound from CREAM as from SSCCREAM, and GRACE will need less of the snare-drum than PRAISE or CRUCIFY. But the rolled R, in the right place, is a lively companion.

Always remember, singers and slave-drivers both, that the greater part of singing as of all musical activity has to do with ear training. No-one will get anywhere who has not learnt to listen, to himself as well as to others. Close attention to technical details will train the ear with the voice; success and new found strength will increase confidence and bring joy; as the voice gains radiance the heart will lift. So shall we sing with the spirit and with the understanding also.

September, 1960.