Rehearsal Guidelines

The building of a great choral instrument takes place in rehearsal. It depends upon understanding the rehearsal process, specifically the individual singer's responsibilities in participating to the fullest extent. Great singing in a fine chorus demands sensitivity – to the group sound, to the conductor, to the individual's sound, and most important, to the music itself. Here, in brief, are a few of the cornerstones of choral practice, which will establish the primary disciplines necessary for a first-rate performance.

Practices Techniques:

- **Listen!** The most important function of any musician is the function of listening. If a phrase comes to you from another section, careful listening will inform you of the shape, tone color and articulation you should be using to answer their phrase. You must be aware as well of "duets" and "trios" in the texture of the music. I mean that you need to be aware of who is singing with you at all times: is this an Alto- Tenor kind of duet? Then listen to the other part and try to get your part to be compatible. All of the attributes of great choral singing, intonation, homogeneity of sound (the "sleeve of sound") phrasing, dynamics, all depend upon how well you listen and how quickly you react.

- **Watch!** Your conductor is there to help you. Only by watching can you be helped to achieve that unanimity which is the hallmark of all great choruses.

- **Count!** The count-singing exercises we do are precisely about getting the music organized in your brain according to metric pulse. The worst kinds of choruses are invariably the ones who can't keep it together rhythmically. On the other hand, indifferent choruses, from a vocal point of view, can sound wonderful if they are rigorously together- that is, if everyone is counting the beats.

- **Nourish the small notes!** Care must be taken with the smallest note values, especially the second of two eighths, the second and fourth of four sixteenths, and the small note after a dotted note. Remember that God is in the details! Counting and paying attention to the littlest of notes are essential to great choral singing.

- **Good singing!** Get inside the music. Always make a musical sonority appropriate to the score. The vowels must be in line, attacks sung not spoken, which makes mental and physical preparation for an entrance of prime importance and must become habit. In particular, your mental visualization of the kind of sound, the pitch, the vowel, the dynamic and the articulation must be vibrantly present before you make a sound. The need is for the vocal care of the best solo singing and the musical intelligence of a fine ensemble singer.
Good diction! The use of words is the main factor that distinguishes a chorus from any other ensemble of wind instruments. Unless the consonants are hard, clean and rhythmic, we have no articulation. Spongy singing results. Unless the vowels are well-formed, deep-set, well-focused and maintain their shape throughout the entire dynamic range we have no real sonority, no glory in the sound.

Phrasing! A musical phrase is a group of two or more notes, which taken together, form a musical thought (rhythmic, or melodic or both). Beside rhythmic togetherness and beautiful consistent diction, great music making demands sensitive and logical phrasing. Without phrasing, that is, without a sense of the musical logic (the context of the score) at the smallest scale, we are not singing music, just notes. Concentrating on the individual note is useless. Notes only have meaning and can only be found and understood in the context of a phrase.

Know the music! Become as familiar as possible with it. Memorization is not required, but by performance you should be glancing only occasionally at the page, not reading it. The ideal is to spend 95% of the time watching the conductor, and only 5% glancing at the music.

Work on your own! No instrumental musician would think of coming to rehearsal and expecting that everything would be given there. The members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra practice their parts a lot outside of rehearsals. There simply is not time in rehearsal to get everything done that needs to be done in order to get the score off the page and into you head. The excellent choral singer takes the music home, studies the marks made, practices the difficult parts and becomes acquainted with the score on his or her own.

Mark your music! A pencil is a must at all rehearsals. The shorthand you use can be an individual matter. Whatever method you use, make sure that it is dark enough and big enough that you can see it on the fly. An unmarked score is useless to any musician. Singers are expected to mark their music with the cues, instructions, dynamics, changes, and other pertinent information given by the Music Director.

Watch - surprise entrance, tempo changes etc.

Tempo control! Any criticism as to dragging, rushing or other time related factors.
Forced release. crescendo release cutting short immediately, on direction after a crescendo.

Piano Release.

Cut off on, for example, on 4th beat.

Poco détaché. Separate the notes used frequently when the notes repeated on the same pitch.

Won't do

The perpendicular line indicates a glottal stroke before the next syllable or word.
Arrow indicates early consonant

No accent, occurs for instance, on the down-beat or at the top of an ascending scale where, for musical reason, an accent is not made.

Circle any note where pitch error has been made. Also circle note in another part to help pitch.

Listen! Arrow to another part indicating imitation, main theme, duet, etc.

Follow dynamics. Circle or underline them.

Hold Note & sustain intensity to whatever the release is. Draw vertical line at the release point.
Placing a final consonant. Write the final consonant under the rest at the cut-off [or bar line].

Staccato.

Portato or slurred staccato.

Accented and sustained, marcato or agogic accent.

Accented and not sustained.
Crescendo [mark through entire staff so that you cannot miss.]

Diminuendo

Super accent.

Messa di Voce, Crescendo and diminuendo over one note.

Hold or fermata. [Watch conductor for release.]

Breathing marks.