

# FORWARD MOTION

A Sweet Adelines International Newsletter for Members of The Directors Certification Program and Front-Line Directors

## Music selection questions asked of Top Directors from the 2006 International Contest:

*How do you pick music for your chorus? What do you look for? What do you need to know about your chorus before even looking for a song?*

*Do you pick contest songs with different criteria than other songs? If so, why and how?*

## Responses

When I look for music, I usually look for something that is recognizable to the general audience. I find when they can relate to a song, they seem to enjoy it more. In my case, I like songs that gear towards a theme ... it seems to narrow the selection down a little. Usually, after a few weeks, the chorus lets me know if they like it or not. If they don't, there is no point in continuing with it. Choosing a theme sometimes is harder when looking for contest songs. This time, Erin and I wrote one to fit our package because we couldn't find one that had already been written.

**June Dale**  
Director of North Metro Chorus



I pick music that interests me. I look for music that will challenge my chorus, appeal to all ages and the lyrical message is comfortable to me as well as our singers. Our chorus has a specific style and identity and I try to select music that fits within this framework. Contest music is really no different, however, I have always tried to select music that will show off our vocal and performing strengths, not weaknesses. I also have a couple of arrangers that I consult for ideas and input.

**Vickie Maybury**  
Director of Skyline Chorus



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SWEET ADELINES  
INTERNATIONAL

Music selection is probably the most challenging thing I do! But it's worth being picky and fussy and doing lots of research. Here are the things I try to keep in mind: How will my leads sound singing it? Of course, I care how EVERYBODY is going to sound, but like the phrase "When Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy," I feel it's true that "When the leads ain't sounding good, ain't nobody sounding good!"

**Karen Breidert**  
Director of the Spirit of the Gulf Chorus



The next step, of course, is to examine all four parts – see if the music suits our ideal ranges and matches our level of vocal skill. I also consider carefully whether the piece fits our personality, our image – whether the lyrics are meaningful, and how will it touch our audiences.

Do I use different criteria to select contest music? Well, most of the criteria are the same. But then, the kind of song that may score well may not be quite the audience-pleaser for a performance outside of Sweet Adelines. So, yes, for contest I want a song that will score well in all four categories.

## Listening Skills For A Sense of Ensemble - Part 2

(Acknowledgement to Liz Garnett) from the LABBS Web site

**Note:** Last month we introduced the concepts of Responsive, Conceptual and Diagnostic Listening Skills. This month we are following up with exercises for each listening skill.

### RESPONSIVE LISTENING

1 With eyes closed, focus your listening first on sounds within the room, then outside of it, and then within your own body. This is a preliminary exercise to initialize aural awareness and can be used for any size of group to de-habituate from the surroundings, enabling focus on ensemble without distraction.

2 Stand in a circle, with eyes closed and hum any note you wish. You may change notes, volume or sound quality at any time in response to what you hear around you. The coach/director should walk around the circle, humming notes to which the singers can respond.

After a while, the chorus can settle onto a chord to finish understanding that they have been on a journey from self to ensemble.

3 "Virtual-ear" listening (from Jean Sutton) for a quartet, chorus or section. Sing a unison note to a neutral vowel ("Ma" is a good place to start and listen to the imaginary ear which you place some distance in front of and above [or in middle and above if standing in a circle]). Repeat until the sound from the vantage point of the virtual ear starts to ring/lock in as one voice – this indicates that tuning/vowels & vocal quality are all matched. When a single note is right, move on up the scale, listening for the ring/lock from the vantage point of the virtual ear. When the pure vowels are working, it is useful to use tricky words, which crop up in songs ("love" is a good one!).

The beauty of this exercise is that instead of trying to fix vowels, tuning, balance

and vocal quality in order to achieve just intonation and create harmonics, it lets singers lead with their ears and use the ring to gauge when they have everything right. The brain will adjust the rest of the body automatically leaving the singer with one focus only. It is useful to take a mental snap-shot at the point of ring of your singing apparatus so that the brain has a future reference point and can adjust the body at greater speed to creating a sense of ensemble.

4 "Projective listening" (after Heinrich Neuhaus). For any size group. Take a single phrase, blow pitch, and then think through the phrase before singing it. When you have then sung it, re-run the performance in your memory. You will find that the short-term memory is incredibly detailed. Then, without stopping to discuss it, repeat the exercise once or twice more. You will find that all sorts of small performance problems fix themselves in a very short space of time.

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This exercise not only develops aural awareness, but also is excellent for concentration. It is very tiring and therefore unrealistic to treat more than two or three phrases this way in a session.

**5** Re-stacking (primarily for chorus work). This is a fairly standard device to stimulate singers' aural awareness by changing the sounds around them in formation (on the risers). To gain maximum benefit from this exercise, ask each singer to use their own voice to meld together with the two that are coming past them from immediately behind or to think of the "virtual ear" listening again.

### CONCEPTUAL LISTENING

**1** Build up a tune, one note at a time; director/coach sings, group repeats (can also be done in quartet as 1+3). This develops the aural memory of all concerned – a collective aural memory – important as individuals learning from the music by themselves will develop

individual characteristics – their own just intonation scale, etc., rather than that of the ensemble.

**2** Numbers games. Sing up and down the scale to numbers (1 = do, etc.). The director/coach calls out numbers for the group to sing back. As confidence increases, use a well-known tune and see how long it takes for the group to recognize it. This can work the other way around with the director/coach singing scale degree for the group to identify.

**3** Advanced version of the above for use in pairs work or for any smart-alecs who find the numbers games too easy. One sings a note, names it, and then gives another note name for the next person to sing...and so on, until the brain starts to emit steam.

**4** Sight-singing exercise. Develops the link between what the eye sees on the page and the "inner ear" of the ensemble. (As conceptual listening

is the standard type used for musical training, there is a lot of commercial material available to develop it.)

### DIAGNOSTIC LISTENING

**1** Listen to a recorded performance with the sheet music and mark down notes that differ between score and recording, tempo and dynamic changes, and any problem areas for tuning, vocal quality, synchronization, vowel matching or balance. Listen more than once!

**2** Try tune drawing exercises. Identify strength/theme of song – identify three strengths of performers and three areas where they could improve. Don't identify any if you haven't the means to fix it or know someone who can!

**3** Become a trainee judge!

### CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

If you are reading this right now, you might be wondering if there could be more to this newsletter — more meat, more innovation, more new ideas, more, more, more! I'm guilty — I am limited in my imagination and **I NEED YOUR HELP!** Your submissions are so welcome and invited!

Please tell me:

- what you like about the newsletter,
- what you don't like and would like changed (give me some ideas on that),
- what ah-ha moments you have had that might help others,
- what oh-no moments you have had that might help others,
- who has influenced you and how,
- new articles you have read that would inspire others too,
- you name it...if you think it's interesting and related to directing or vocal production...we'll run with it.

I hope to hear from you very soon!

Alice Linskey  
Director of Education  
alice@sweetadelineintl.org

# Vocalizing Through Menopause: Regaining Lost Vocal Function

By David L. Jones ([www.voiceteacher.com](http://www.voiceteacher.com))

It can be challenging to find published information regarding the female voice and how to deal with the effects of menopause. There are several questions to ask when considering this subject. What symptoms often arise that can create vocal difficulties? How does a singer deal with these vocal changes that can trigger low self-esteem? What might seem strange to some is how few professional singers want to breach the subject of menopause and how they have had to deal with it. Perhaps it is time for this subject to be discussed. This could help younger female singers facing these difficulties in the future.

## The Age Factor: Determining the Early Stages of Menopause

Symptoms of menopause can occur as early as the late 40s or as late as the mid 50s. Believe it or not, it is not over at 50, 60 or 70. Having worked with singers in their 80s who were still singing well, it is important to note **correct vocalization** is the most critical factor in recovery and in keeping the voice young. Correct vocalization can minimize the negative effects of menopause just as exercise of any other part of the body can help an individual stay in shape during the aging process. The emotional frustration can be overwhelming. Working with singers during this process can be psychologically challenging for them. The instructor is working against the clock in trying to help the voice heal before the singer psychologically gives up. Not only do these singers need a lot of psychological support, but also solid vocal tools that assist in recovering from the vocal confusion caused by hormonal changes.

The following list outlines some of the vocal symptoms due to the menopausal process. Some singers may suffer from all of the following, while others may only have one or two. This list is to help a singer verbally identify specific vocal difficulties brought on by this transition.

### Vocal Symptoms Of Menopause:

1. Voice becomes dry with less flexibility
2. High range suffers because the upper passaggio becomes difficult to negotiate. (This is due to incorrect vocalization of the middle register.)
3. Break between the lower head voice and the chest register becomes larger and more difficult to negotiate.
4. Low head voice loses color and can become weak.
5. Voice becomes pushed due to registration imbalance.
6. Larynx assumes a higher position in the middle voice, sometimes accompanied by a large hole in the voice where the cords have become bowed. This lack of proper adduction of the folds creates insecurity in this range.
7. Chest voice becomes overly dark due to tongue pressure and the use of the thicker vocal cord mass rather than the thin edges.
8. General hardness of tone. Rigidity due to laryngeal muscle tension, often accompanied by a vocal wobble. The singer might also report a general feeling of thickness in the voice.

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## Directors of Note

### Advanced to Certified Director

As of February 15, 2007

**Brad Charles**, Crosstown Harmony Chorus, #22

**Jennifer Johnson**, Yahara River Chorus, #22

**Annette Gary**, Prairie Winds Chorus, #25

**Vyneta Ryan**, Note-ably North Texas Chorus, #25

**Judi Stygar**, Summer Springs Chorus, #9

**Laura Gaither**, San Francisco Sound WAVE/Blossom Valley Choruses, #12

**David Sangster**, Forth Valley Chorus, #31

**Jacalyn Compton**, Champaign-Urbana Chorus, #5

**Andrew Howson**, Harmony In Paradise Chorus, #34

**Lorraine Hornaman**, Flagship City Show Chorus, #17

**Carol Smolenski**, Merrimack Valley Chorus, #1

## **Critical Exercises for the Menopausal or Post-Menopausal Singer**

1. 1..2..3..2..1..2..3..2..1.. (breath) 8..7..6..5..4..3..2..1  
ae..... u.....

(Tongue out over the lower lip for the 'ae' as in 'apple' in the beginning three-tone scale. This is a chest voice scale. Then, within the descending scale, use the small 'u' with jaw slightly down and back to insure proper adduction of the folds.)

2. 5....5....5....5....5....5....5....5....5....4....3....2....1....  
Lu Lu Lu Lu Lu Lu Lu Lu Lu Lu Lu Lu Lu Lu

(Start sequence with two sets of 16th notes, then descending five-tone scale on 8th notes. Use this exercise in the middle register.)

3. 1..1..1..1..1..1..1..1..1..2..3..4..5..4..3..2..1..  
i...i...i...i...i...i...i...o...i...o...i...o...i...

(Staccato 'i' on the repeated beginning notes, then legato on the ascending five-tone scale. This exercise is designed to get to the thin edges of the vocal folds. The singer must imagine simply touching the finest point of the folds on the staccato section.)

4. 1.....8.....1  
ngah.....u.....ah

(One-octave yodel allowing the voice to crack across the register break between chest and head registers. This exercise must be immediately followed by exercise #5 in order to strengthen the middle register.)

5. 5...3...1  
i.....

(Rounded 'i' vowel bringing head register as low as possible. Start in the upper middle register. This exercise should immediately follow exercise #4.)

These exercises have been listed because they have proven to be extremely helpful in reducing the effects of menopause. While they have proven over the years to be helpful, it is important to remember that every exercise does not work for every singer. Anyone trying these exercises needs to be careful to approach them with great concentration. Remember that the jaw needs to be slightly down and back. The back position of the jaw allows for a lower larynx position, a critical factor in the re-strengthening of the middle register. The vocal cords will not approximate correctly if the larynx is too high in the middle register.

# My Experience with the Director Mentor Program

By Peggy DiSunno

Director, Long Island Sound Chorus, Region 15

What a wonderful experience I had this past year when I participated in the Director Mentor Program sponsored by International. A master director is chosen for you from another region and you must work with them at one rehearsal and it is suggested that you invite them back for another coaching session. You are introduced to this mentor at International Education Symposium (IES), prior to your visit. The purpose of the Director Mentor Program is to provide one-on-one, personal, hands-on director training.

The mentor chosen for me was Master Director Elaine Gain, the director of the Greater Kingston Chorus in Ontario, Canada. She was unable to attend IES last year so the first time I met her was at the airport an hour before her coaching session. It was an instant bond.

Elaine is such a positive, energetic person who transfers that energy to anyone around her! She brought so many tools for success with her. Our first night of coaching was three hours of non-stop singing and coaching of my directing skills. The next morning she gave personal voice instruction (PVI) in her hotel room before she left for the airport at noon, at no expense to the girls. What a wonderful experience. As a new director, I was an observer at all of the PVIs. She gave me the tools I needed to feel more confident in giving PVIs myself.

We had Elaine back for a weekend six weeks before our contest, last February. It felt like this huge energy field came through the door when she arrived. She fine tuned our package and gave us a plan to use to ensure we had the energy and stamina for the contest stage. She also gave me her year-long plan that she used for her chorus and a plan that she uses to teach new music. We have instituted both of these ideas and have never felt so prepared for all that we are doing. When the chorus got off the bus from our Regional contest, I handed them my plan for the next six months, including a list of all of our new music and our taping schedule. They now have a schedule that includes every rehearsal through December and what will be taught at each rehearsal. I have a plan ready to give out in December that will show the girls what skill will be taught at every rehearsal from

January until contest. Elaine made us believers that we were a different chorus.

This past year at contest, we improved 99 points and I know having Elaine Gain as a mentor helped to have us move up a level. I would also like to add that coaching is such an important part of improving your singing. We are very fortunate to now have three fabulous coaches working with the Long Island Sound Chorus.

**This past year at contest, we improved 99 points and I know having Elaine Gain as a mentor helped to have us move up a level.**

## Master Directors take note!

**Coming soon:**

Be on the lookout for the  
"Call for participation"  
in the

International Director Mentor Program

***We need you to help make a difference!***