

# FORWARD MOTION

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



## Co-Directing Two Heads Are Better Than One

By Molly Huffman, Capital City Chorus, Region 4

### Front line directors:

**D**o you need someone who can share the workload of the chorus with you? Do you need someone to help you make decisions for your chorus? Do you need someone to help you in the planning and visioning process for your chorus? Are you looking for someone with whom you can share the joys, successes and even setbacks that a director experiences? If you answered yes to any of the above questions, you may want to consider a co-directorship for your chorus.

The front-line directors in this organization have a full time job as leaders of our choruses. They are the role models, the counselors, the teachers, the conductors, the disciplinarians, the referees, the coaches, the motivators and the mothers of their singers. The front-line directors work tirelessly to plan rehearsals, choose music, schedule coaching, attend meetings, train music staffs, teach songs and create an ambiance of positive learning. Had many directors known the job description of a front-line director before they began their journey, they might not have been so eager to step into the position!

Co-directing can be a wonderful opportunity to pursue. The front-line director must be willing to step aside and share the load, not an easy decision for many to make. Each director must have an established sense of self-worth as well as a complete trust in the other director. The two must share common goals, their communication skills must be highly developed, they must honor confidentiality and they both need a sense of humor!

Establishing a co-directorship can offer the chorus many new and exciting opportunities:

- There is a built-in coach every week
- There is the potential for complementary strengths and teaching styles to reach more learners
- The decision-making is more objective
- Creativity is enhanced
- The shared responsibilities allow more freedom to serve in other areas of Sweet Adelines International
- Performance and competition cycles may be less stressful because of the built-in support system
- Teamwork, conflict resolution, leadership and support are modeled on a weekly basis in front of the chorus

- The forward motion of each rehearsal is enhanced
- When success is not achieved, the responsibility is shared
- Each person can be both a singer and a director!

Establishing a co-directorship can offer the chorus some challenges:

- The director expenses are doubled
- Decision-making requires much more time and effort
- Planning requires much more time and effort
- Conflict between the directors can cause uneasiness among the chorus members
- Allegiances might be divisive
- Member confusion could result from difference of styles or too much information

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SWEET ADELINES  
INTERNATIONAL

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- Sharing the limelight may be challenging
- Co-directors may not be as decisive or authoritarian as a single director, which may make problems harder to solve.

Co-directing can bring an exciting new dimension to the leadership of our choruses. We know that good, front-line directors are difficult to find and keep, so having a team at the helm can lessen the load and hopefully prevent director burn-out. We know that there are both advantages and disadvantages to every situation, but we truly know that co-directing has enabled each of us to mature, to learn, to team and to become better friends. Good luck!

## **Decisions! Decisions!**

*By Michael McGuire*

Directors are quite certainly the most underappreciated people on the face of the earth. Their job goes far beyond the educational music level. It involves not only deep concentration and discipline, but also the ability to make good decisions. Being a choir director entails making many important decisions and if a person cannot do this well, then s/he should find another career. From the tiniest detail to the largest question, the director answers them all. Many people are unaware of what a demanding job directors have.

When was the last time you went to see a choir performance? Did you ever stop

to wonder how many decisions went into what you watched? The area where the concert was held was decided by the director, as well as the repertoire, the soloists, the musicians, and often the choir members themselves. How does a director make all these decisions? S/he treats each decision with equal importance. Just to give an idea of how much preparation a concert takes, I will go through the director's process before a concert.

Let's start at the beginning, when a director must decide if s/he wants the members of his/her choir to be auditioned. An upside to auditioned members is that the director has a general idea about each member of the choir and the extent of their musical abilities. The downside to auditioning members is that it may upset people by turning singers away who want to be in the choir. Because of this, public school choral directors and other community directors do not hold auditions.

After a choir obtains all of its members, the director next has to choose the proper musician(s) to accompany the singers. Every choir needs an accompanist of some kind, and the director must be careful in hiring that musician for the choir. An accompanist and a director have a very special relationship, because they have to be able to give each other constructive criticism. Also, a lot of the communication between the director and the accompanist is done non-verbally. They develop a special bond and even seem to develop a knack for reading each other's minds. So, picking an accompanist is a very important decision for a director and is never taken lightly.

After a choir and its accompanist are set, it is time for the director to start picking the repertoire that the choir will sing. This is a complicated process and it is done in many different ways. Public school teachers, having no tuition fees and very little funding, usually end up buying some music and using recycled music for the

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## **ADVANCEMENTS**

### **ADVANCED TO MASTER DIRECTOR**

LaDonna Cheatham, Sound of the Heartland Chorus, Region 7  
Jerilee Inghram, City Voices Chorus, Region 5  
Brent Graham, City of Lakes Chorus, Region 6  
Bonnie McKibben, Greater Harmony Chorus, Region 17  
Roger Tarp, Greater Richmond Chorus, Region 14

### **ADVANCED TO CERTIFIED DIRECTOR**

Tracey Bailey, Champagne Cornwall Chorus, Region 31  
Bonnie Fedyski, Western Lights Chorus, Region 3  
Kathryn Filipiak, Vermillion Valley Show Chorus, Region 5  
Suzanne Frank, Song of the Bluegrass Chorus, Region 4  
Lucy Heinkel, Rolling Hills Chorus, Region 13  
Robyn Hely, Endeavour Harmony Chorus, Region 34  
Barb Hodge, Circle of Harmony Chorus, Region 16  
Vicki Mauck, Na Leo Lani Chorus, Region 12  
Barbara VanderPutten, Harmony Crossroads Chorus, Region 12

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rest of the musical set. Other community choirs, where tuition is paid, usually have no restraints other than the limit of the choir's musical capabilities. This makes the director's decision easier, because there is a broader variety of music to choose from.

Once the music is paid for and carefully distributed, the several steps involved in teaching can begin. The director will first go over the music alone, deciding how the music should be taught to the choir. Some directors prefer to make CDs for their choir members with the music recorded on them so that the singers can learn it at home. Other directors like to have the accompanist during the rehearsals play each part of the song with the choir until they can handle the written piano accompaniment. Still, others like to have their choirs learn the music individually, and then a few weeks before the concert put everything together. There are many different ways to teach the actual notes, but that is only the first step in teaching a piece of music to a choir. After the basic notes are learned the choir director then moves on to tone, style, dynamics and all the other details that make a song

unique. The bulk of a director's decisions are made during this process. They get to decide what they want the feel of the music to be, and how that feeling is to be conveyed to the audience. They get to decide if solos should be performed, and how to go about choosing them. It gives the director the ability to turn a boring medieval song into a stunning knight's tale. It is the real difference between a mediocre choir director and a superior choir director. If a director can connect with the choir members and communicate to them how the piece should be sung, then he or she is a superior teacher. If the connection is missing, then the choir director is not doing his/her job of teaching well. This, for most directors, is the longest and hardest part of working with a choir, but it is the most rewarding. It is where the choir starts to come together and all the hard work and decision-making pays off.

After the music has been taught, the director must decide on the finishing touches. This is the point at which the director will add choreography, arrange a specific standing order on stage, and polish out any mistakes. This is also the point before the concert where the

director will get the choir used to the concert hall in which they will be singing. This is very important, because when learning the music, a choir is usually not in the same space in which they will perform, and the feel of the sound is different. This allows a choir to become acquainted to the acoustics of the new setting. After all of the hard work put in to perfecting the music, the day of the choral concert finally arrives.

When the sound of a trained choir hits a listener's ears, one must wonder what they are thinking. To me, I think of the hard work that was put into that sound, to make it perfect. I reflect on the many things that it has taken to get to that point. Most of all I think of the many decisions made by the director that led the choir to where it is. Decisions are the hardest part of life, and without them there would be no originality. A choir director's job consists of making decisions. Some of them are very hard, and some of them are easy, but all of them are important.

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## BOOK REVIEW: "The Perfect Rehearsal" Author Dr. Timothy Seelig

If you have been fortunate enough to have already read Dr. Seelig's first book, *The Perfect Blend*, you are already aware of his writing style. It is full of humor, at times a short story or two, and lots and lots of good, down-to-earth pointers to help you in your journey. This book is no different in those aspects.

Dr. Seelig has a great way of covering the topic. He's never too technical. His book is very easy to read and because of the humor and the information, you don't really want to put it down. This book is a great tool for any conductor/director. Whether just beginning or a seasoned director you will get useful pointers. Maybe what you are doing will be affirmed by reading his book, but it's great to know you're on the right track and doing what works for others too. As a beginner, there are many great ideas here that you can incorporate into your rehearsals from planning to saying "Thank you" after the performance.

I highly recommend this book for any director's library but don't just put it away and let it gather dust — use it!

# Put Your Best Voice Forward: Warm Up Your Voice

For World Voice Day (April 16) and everyday, it is important that you put your best voice forward. Remember that your voice is part of your appearance. Effective verbal communication depends not only on what you say, but also on how you sound.

When you speak, you make sound in your larynx (voice box) with your vocal folds. Your vocal folds are soft tissue folds that consist of muscle, ligament and mucous membrane.

Certainly, when you exercise, run, or play sports, a healthy warm-up is a good way to prepare, improve your performance, and prevent injury to yourself. The same holds true when you use your voice. A short vocal warm-up improves the quality of the sounds you make and helps prevent vocal injury, keeping you in good voice and making your voice production feel better. Many people use warm-ups everyday. You should use vocal warm-ups before vocally intensive activities like public speaking or singing, classroom teaching, or exuberant social events.

There are many ways to warm-up your voice, and listed below are several examples to get you started. (Note – on the Web site, after most of the exercises there is a link to a video clip to show an example.)

## WARM UP #1

**Breath Relaxation:** Releases tension often associated in the breathing mechanism that can interfere with effective voice production. Ordinarily, if there is tension when breathing, that tension radiates to the voice box muscles. Take a normal breath and then exhale. Make sure your shoulders and chest are low and relaxed. Repeat many times making sure that your breaths are focused low in the abdomen and that

there is not associated chest, neck, or shoulder tension while breathing. You can place one hand on your abdomen to remind you to keep the focus low and away from the chest and shoulders. Hold an “s” sound like in hiss when you exhale.

## WARM UP #2

**Jaw Release:** Reduces tension in the mouth and jaw area during speaking and singing. Place the heels of each hand directly below the cheekbone. Pushing in and down from the cheeks to the jaw, massage the facial muscles. Allow your jaw to passively open as you move the hands down the face. Repeat several times.

## WARM UP #3

**Lip Trills:** Releases lip tension and connects breathing and speaking. Releases tension in the vocal folds. Place your lips loosely together; release the air in a steady stream to create a trill or raspberry sound. First try it on an “h” sound. Then repeat on a “b” sound. Hold the sound steady and keep the air moving past the lips. Next try to repeat the b-trill gliding gently up and down the scales. Don’t push beyond what is comfortable at the top or bottom of the scale.

## WARM UP #4

**Tongue Trill:** Relaxes the tongue and engages breathing and voice. Place your tongue behind your upper teeth. Exhale and trill your tongue with an “r” sound. Hold the sound steady and keep the breath connected. Now try to vary the pitch up and down the scale while trilling. Again, don’t push beyond what is comfortable at the top or bottom of your scale.

## WARM UP #5

**Two Octave Scales:** Provides maximum stretch on the vocal folds.

Start in a low pitch and gently glide up the scale on a “me” sound. Don’t push the top or bottom of your range but do try to increase the range gently each time you do the scales. Now reverse and glide down the scale from the top to the bottom on an “e” sound. You can try this on the “oo” sound also.

## WARM UP #6

**Sirens/Kazoo Buzz:** Improves the resonant focus of the sound and continues work with maximal stretch on the vocal folds. The mouth postures are easily made by pretending you are sucking in spaghetti with an inhalation. On exhalation, make the “woo” sound. It will be a buzz-like sound. Hold the sound steady for 2-3 attempts. Now use the woo sound to go up and down the scales.

## WARM UP #7

**Humming:** Highlights anterior frontal vibrations in your lips, teeth and facial bones. Begin with lips gently closed with jaw released. Take an easy breath in and exhale while saying “hum.” Begin with the nasal sound “m” and gently glide from a high to a low pitch as if you were sighing. Don’t forget your vocal cool down after extensive vocal use. Gently humming, feeling the focus of the sound on the lips, is an excellent way to cool down the voice. You should hum gentle glides on the sound “m” feeling a tickling vibration in the lip/nose area.

## WARM UP #8

**Cool Down:** Don’t forget your vocal cool down after extensive vocal use. Gently humming, feeling the focus of the sound on the lips, is an excellent way to cool down the voice. You should hum gentle glides on the sound “m” feeling a tickling vibration in the lip/nose area.

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# Coaching As Easy As



1



2



3

*By Sandie Nason, Canadian Showtime Chorus, Region 16*

If you have set in a performance and thought how much better a quartet or chorus would be if only the baritones would tune just a little higher, or if the lead could keep the sound more resonant on the top, or if the basses would only fill the chords with more authority and freedom ... then somewhere a singing ensemble needs YOU! Coaches provide the invaluable objectivity and knowledge that it is so hard to generate from within the group itself, no matter how experienced and capable the singers.

Preparing yourself to offer this unique and much needed service is less daunting than you may think. It is, in fact, as easy as 1...2...and the ever popular, 3.

Here are some ideas for you to consider:

1. Assess and improve your own understanding of performance;
2. Assess and improve the chorus or quartet skills; and
3. Assess and improve your teaching and motivational skills.

Let's look at what each of these steps may include:



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## **It's All About You!**

Before you offer assistance to another group, make sure your own knowledge and skills are ever expanding and being put to the test. As you assess your own skills, it can provide you with a way to evaluate the performance of others....but that comes in #2! Here are some areas you will want to explore:

### **A. Music Theory**

- Can you read music enough to know when the correct notes are being sung..or NOT?
- Are you working towards understanding chord structure enough to identify which voice part is singing which note in the chord.....invaluable information for balancing chords.
- Of course, you are enrolled in the DCP program which will lead you towards competency in this area!

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## B. Vocal Skills

- Do you have a working knowledge of the basics of good singing? Your ability to recognize and demonstrate resonance, breathing, articulation, posture, and phonation will increase your value as a coach and your own performance.
- The DCP program will give you the language. The Judging Category Description Booklet (JCDB) will give you the requirements of barbershop singing, and a voice teacher or vocal coach will give you the confidence and skill to demonstrate what you are looking for in the ensembles you coach.

## C. Barbershop Style

- Do you have a solid understanding of the components of unit sound? The ensemble benefits hugely from the coach's ability to recognize synchronization errors, differences in vocal production, vowel matching or NOT, and issues with harmony accuracy.
- Thankfully, we have a wealth of high quality barbershop CDs to improve our ears and our understanding of barbershop singing, on many levels.
- Have I already mentioned the DCP program as a terrific source of building an understanding of barbershop? The more ragged and used your JCDB ... the more knowledgeable the coach!

Is there more you could be learning? Well of course! The important part is to start somewhere in your own journey to become a lifelong student of the art form. It is also important to know you cannot be perfect in any of this and well-respected coaches that impact positive change in choruses and quartets are learning right along with their "coaches."



### It's All About Them!

One of the most daunting tasks for the new coach is to assess the strengths, diagnose the weaknesses and provide some solutions to ensembles who come for our assistance. It can be overwhelming to listen to a group perform and instantly figure out what needs to be done and which issue to tackle first. This list of priorities may help lessen the anxiety and give you a routine to follow while you get your feet wet:

### A. First Impressions

Have the group sing two or three songs while you relax and become familiar with the overall performance of the ensemble. While listening, consider the following questions:

1. What are they doing best?
2. Is it entertaining or does the "cringe factor" make it tough to enjoy the overall performance?
3. Are the performers relaxed and confident or stressed and apologetic?

4. Do they appear to be struggling with the music itself?
5. Are there any big and obvious issues that pop out? For example, difficulty starting and stopping together.
6. Do they appear to be enjoying singing or do they just look worried?

### B. Check Note Accuracy

Have each voice part sing one page with their music in their hands and self-evaluate their note accuracy. Comment on any "creative notes" you are hearing and, if you are able, demonstrate the correct choice, play it on the piano or have an accurate singer demonstrate. If the notes are wrong, nothing else is going to work!

### C. Evaluate The Unit Sound

#### 1. Synchronization

Identify any synchronization issues in each section and clearly reach agreement on the interpretive plan. If they are not singing together, it still isn't going to work!

#### 2. Ensemble Versus Solo Singing

Listen for voices that obviously stick out of the sound and encourage the singers to enhance their ensemble skills by being very aware of the voices around them and staying with the group. It's not about listening more than you sing, it's about being very aware of the ensemble around you and adding your voice to the group sound. This will also become an issue in balancing chords that will impact on the tuning.

#### 3. Common Approach To Vocal Skills

Assess the differences or similarities in vocal production of the members of the group. Have each person sing a few lines of the piece and evaluate their skills in the areas of support, resonance, placement and use of vibrato. Also address any vocal oddities that might become obvious. (i.e. scooping, glottal attack)

### D. Consider Barbershop Style

#### 1. Balance

Assess the ensemble's understanding and execution of barbershop balance. Are the basses providing a solid, consistent foundation to the sound? Are the baritones singing full and round and with a more bass feel when they are below the lead? Are the baritones aware of how to cone when they are above the lead? Does the lead sing with consistency and authority while still remaining aware of the harmony parts? Does the tenor understand how to reinforce the overtone without over-powering the group sound?

#### 2. Embellishments

Help the group identify the swipes provided by the arranger and the skills necessary to maintain balance and tuning while executing these embellishments.

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It is also important to note that, depending on the level of expertise of the group and your own comfort level, you may not cover all of these steps in one coaching session. As a group improves you may move quickly through some steps and spend more energy on others.



### **It's All About You Reaching Them!**

You may have wonderful ears and years of experience and knowledge in our art form but if you can't connect with the singers who come to you, it will all stay inside you.

Developing strong teaching skills is a powerful part of becoming an effective coach. A few ideas you might consider:

#### **Establish A Safe And Positive Learning Environment**

Commit to being respectful of all the life experience and general knowledge the adult learners carry with them.

Monitor your use of language to evaluate and teach in a positive way. Rather than: "your quartet never matches the vowels," you might say, "focusing on matching vowels will have a major, positive impact on your sound."

Be respectful of confidentiality and do not discuss one group with another in any way other than pointing out positive traits.

Make it safe to ask "stupid" questions by acknowledging we all have different levels of expertise and even the "experts" have gaps in their education.

#### **Build Your Teaching Tool Kit**

Read everything you can about the different styles of learning and the particular challenges of the adult learner. Visit your local library.

Gather many different ways of saying the same thing. Never miss an opportunity to watch someone else teach or coach and don't be afraid to STEAL, STEAL, STEAL! HOWEVER, use your best manners and ethics and give credit to the person you stole from! Sweet Adelines are, by and large, wonderfully open about sharing our tools and methods and, as such, deserve respect and acknowledgment from our peers.

#### **Understand The Principles Of Human Motivation**

If humans are asked to do something that is too far above their current skill level, anxiety is created.

If humans are asked to do something that is too far below their current skill level, boredom is created. The trick then is to provide a goal that is moderately above the current skill level of the group.

Be very mindful of the goals of the group you are coaching and adjust your approach to those goals. For example, if the quartet has no interest in competing, then help them identify goals that allow them to be the best performers they can be. Encourage, support and be enthusiastic about musical progress in all its many forms.

If you expect groups to be perfect, they will always fail. If you encourage them to focus on progress, they can always succeed.

This article has just scratched the surface of the skills required to be a coach. The good news is that we can be of help to individuals, quartets and choruses while we travel our own road to increased knowledge and understanding of this art form.



**Sandie Nason**

Sandie has been a member of the organization since the late 1970s. She is a member of the International Faculty and the Master Director of the 100-voice Canadian Showtime Chorus. Sandie has been coaching choruses and quartets since the late 1980s and working as an individual vocal coach since 1993. She has a masters degree in counseling with a specialty in couple counseling and is currently in private practice. Sandie lives in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, with her fish, Bob.



## **THANK YOU**

to June Berg and Debbi Bustamante  
for giving us *Up on the Risers Song*  
free of charge for any director to  
use with his/her chorus!



# Up on the Risers Song

Words and Music by Debbi Bustamante  
and June Berg, CMA - for Spring Valley,  
Region #3, Sweet Adelines, Int.

Begin in about Ab minor and proceed  $\frac{2}{2}$  up by half steps.

Tenor Lead

Bari Bass

3 come on a - long,  
Ev - - - - - bod - - - - - v's  
Come on up and sing a long, we'll

All are wel come, all are wel come all are wel come

4 we'll sing a song, 5 it's such a great 6 night.  
wel - - - - - come, got lots to do to - night.  
sing a wel come song Come on up and sing a long to night.

all are wel come lots to do to night.

7 come on a - long 8 come on a - long 9 just sing a - long  
Step up on the ris - - - - - ers, and let's get start - ed  
come on up and sing a long, we'll sing a wel come song, come a long, get start ed

All are wel come all are wel come let's get start ed

10 right now!  
right now!  
11 12 13  
right now! Etc. right now!

right now! All are wel come, all are wel come, Final Time, Baritone  
resolves to major chord,  
then swipe to finish.

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