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PLANNING FOR REHEARSALS

- *Plan vs. guide*
- Necessary elements for the written plan:
 - Where? (Which piece, which section?)
 - Who? (Which voices are problematic? Why?)
 - What? (What are the specific issues?)
 - Aural?
 - Vocal-technical?
 - Conceptual/cognitive/mental?
 - Emotional or vision issue?
 - **How? — especially important!** (What strategies and techniques will you use to address the issues?)
- **The additional crucial question: When?**
 - Is it appropriate (logical, linear, and sequential) to address this issue—the *what*—at this point in the learning process?

REMEMBER THE SEQUENCE

André Thomas's Rehearsal Hierarchy

1. Correct rhythms and pitches
2. Intonation and tone quality
3. Articulation and diction
4. Precision
5. Phrasing and expression
6. Dynamic contrast
7. Balance and blend

My Rehearsal Hierarchy

Adapted from Thomas and from McGill & Volk (2007),
Beyond Singing: Blueprint for the Exceptional Choral Program

Level 1: The Core Level

1. Rhythm
2. Pitch

Level 2: Expectations No Builder Would Miss

3. Tone
4. Intonation
5. Diction

Level 3: Common Comforts We Expect

6. Breathing
7. Phrasing
8. Dynamics
9. Balance & blend
10. Style (e.g., syllabic stress, articulations, tempo)
11. Memorization

Level 4: The Dream Home

12. Communication
13. Stage presence
14. Physical involvement
15. Artistic fulfillment

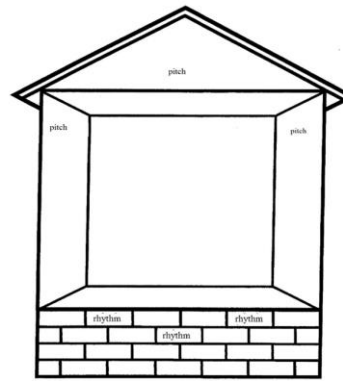
Level 5: The Castle in the Clouds

16. Artistic expression
17. Heightened meaning
18. Memories

TOOLS FOR EACH LEVEL

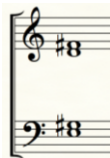
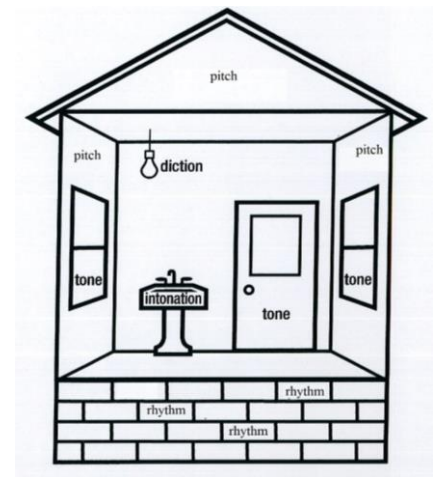
Level 1: The Core Level

1. Rhythm
 - Count-speaking: Takadimi or Gordon rhythm syllables
 - Count-singing: 1-e-&-a 2-e-&-a or Tometics
 - Use of conductor-singer repetition/call-and-response
2. Pitch
 - Tonal music: movable-Do solfège (AKA “solfa”)
 - Non-tonal music: fixed-Do solfège



Level 2: Expectations No Builder Would Miss

3. Tone
 - Neutral syllables
 - Attention to vowel formation
 - “2-step audiation” concentrating on both (1) **pitch** (Kodály-Curwen-Glover solfège hand signs) and (2) **vowel** (vowel hand signals)
 - **Rule of the Diphthong**: Sustain the primary vowel; the second vowel sounds just before the next consonant or syllable
 - Vocalices & exercises that address technical issues
 - **Rule of Chiaroscuro**: The higher you sing, the more *oscu*ro you must think (open/space); the lower you sing, the more *chiaro* you must think (focus/place)
 - **Rule of Crossing the Passaggio**: As you ascend, create more space but don’t think louder unless it’s indicated
4. Intonation
 - Under-dynamic singing
 - Staccato [dut]
 - [bim]
 - One chord at a time
 - Technical solution
5. Diction
 - “Oratoric” echo-chanting
 - Rhythmic echo chanting
 - Shaw chord
 - Attention to consonant formation
 - Principle: Singing is *exaggerated* speech, an *extension* of speech, but to sing like we speak is the “domain of amateurs” (James Jordan).
 - **Rule of the Consonant Onset**: Consonants are articulated before the beat, vowels are articulated on the beat (heel-to-floor exercise)
 - **Rule of the Consonant Release**: Sound the consonant release on the next beat
 - **Rule of the Shadow Vowel**: If the final consonant before a breath/rest is voiced, add a shadow vowel after it
 - **Rule of “The”**: If followed by a vowel, pronounce [ði] (“thee” earth); if followed by a consonant, pronounce [ðʌ] (“thuh” world)
 - **Rule of the Glottal Stroke**: In English, if the word begins with a vowel and is lyrically important, initiate it with a gentle glottal onset



Session Notes

Level 3: Common Comforts We Expect

6. Breathing

- **Rule of the Breath:** Breathe in the shape of the first/next vowel you sing
- Show with conducting (stop/"freeze" gesture)
- Students write in ✓s during 2nd/3rd reads (eyes up!)
- **Rule of Punctuation:** *Usually* add a beat-division rest wherever there is a mark of punctuation in the text to define phrasing; *always* look at the conductor for sustain or release gestures to make sure!

7. Phrasing

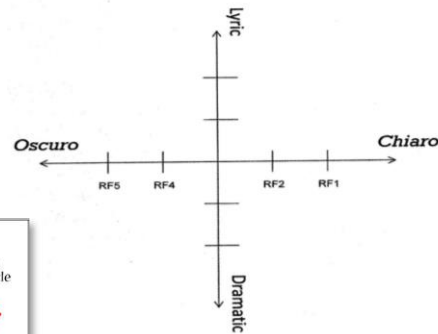
- Show with conducting
- Importance of singing *note-through-note* instead of "note-to-note" (singing on vowels only exercise with a steady column of air)
- **Rule of Phrase Shape:** Most phrases begin softer within the dynamic, then crescendo before a decrescendo at the end of the phrase
- **Rule of Melodic Contour:** When the melody ascends, crescendo; when it descends, decrescendo
- **Rule of the Final Syllable:** In no way accent, "clip," or "slap" the final syllable of a phrase
- **Rule of the Steady Beat:** Note values longer than the steady beat crescendo or decrescendo (*watch!*)
- **Rule of the Dot:** A rhythmic dot almost always indicates a momentary "swell"
- **Rule of Word Stress:** Underline the most important words/syllables—emphasize the same syllables in singing as you would in speech
- **Rule of the Slur:** Implied tenuto on the first note of any two-note phrase ("sing, shut up!")
- **Rule of Dissonances:** Lean into the dissonant notes (tension) and lift off of resolutions (release)

8. Dynamics

- Show with conducting
- Dynamic exercise (1 = *ppp*, 2 = *pp*, 3 = *p*, 4 = *mp*, 5 = *mf*, 6 = *f*, 7 = *ff*, 8 = *fff*)
- **Rule of Dynamic Contrast:** When going from a softer dynamic to a louder one, think even louder than the dynamic written; when going from a louder dynamic to a softer one, think even softer than the dynamic written

9. Balance & blend

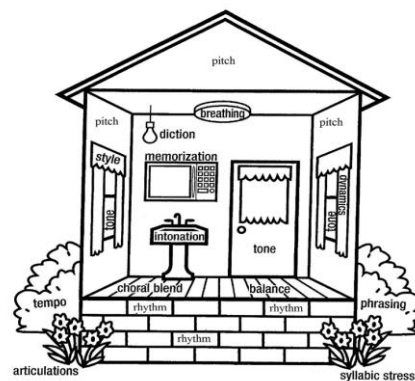
- 2 key questions: What is the *ideal* choral balance? What is "blend" and the best way to achieve it?
- Focus on vowel unification
 - Use of IPA
 - Use of vowel hand signals
 - Vowel modification through & above *passaggio*
- Building chords from root up
- Use of "model" voices
- Create sectional unity before attempting ensemble "blend"



10. Style (e.g., syllabic stress, articulations, tempo)

- **Rule of Word Stress:** Underline the most important words/syllables—emphasize the same syllables within words (micro) and words within phrases (macro) while singing as you would in speech
- **Rule of Voicing:** In polyphonic music, "mic" the important motives and "shush" everything else

11. Memorization



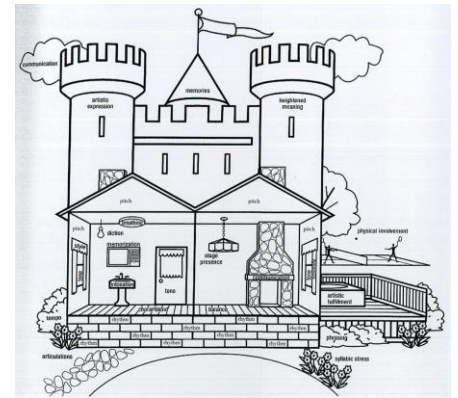
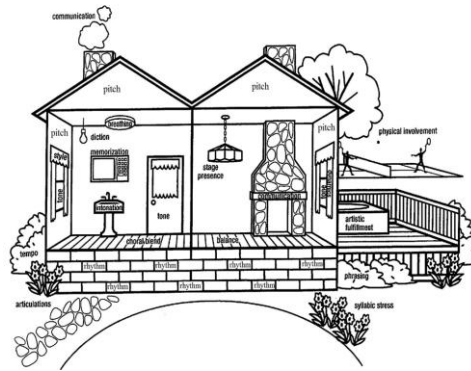
Session Notes

Level 4: The Dream Home

- 12. Communication
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Level 5: The Castle in the Clouds

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STRUCTURING AN EFFECTIVE & EFFICIENT REHEARSAL

- Pacing
 - The golden mean
 - Instructions of 7 words or fewer
 - Always singing
- Setting the tone
 - Teacher feedback
 - Use of humor
 - Avoidance of sarcasm & insults
- Working together
 - Foster a culture of safety, respect, and camaraderie every day
 - Student ownership
- Inspiration and imagination

