

EVERY VOICE COUNTS

Repertoire and Motivation for Community Choirs

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Music is vital to our lives: for its educational, health, social, spiritual benefits. The most natural way to make music together is in song. How do we develop a real sense of commitment in all members of our choirs? Some are brilliantly committed but there always seem to be those on the edges who do the minimum. Often this is because those members don't understand what they are doing. Their knowledge of how music works and their vocal ability are limited. One of the joys of being in a community choir is that you don't have to be a great musician to be there, nor do you have to have a wonderful voice. BUT if we enable people to improve their skills then we will see greater commitment from them and better sound from our choir.

Every Voice Counts is a multi-stranded programme that will take your choir members where they are and help them to grow. Our job as conductors and administrators of choirs is to enable everyone to do their best. This is **Professional Development** for choirs. *Those two magic words just might help with funding applications.* None of this will work without the conductor's enthusiasm.

- **PASTORAL CARE:** We all need to be appreciated and feel cared for. Set up a structure where that is demonstrated. Make it so that there is no way anyone would want to miss rehearsal.
- **DREAMS AND DIRECTIONS:** Have a dream and a direction for the choir. Once a year, with the committee, present a plan for the direction you would like the choir to be heading in. Find a way to measure how you got on.
- **THEORY KNOWLEDGE:** An amazing number of choir singers have no idea about how music works. Help them with basic music theory instruction.
- **UNDERSTANDING HISTORY:** Our singing will be so much better informed if we know something about the pieces we are singing. When were they composed? Who for? What sort of occasion were they performed at? Information will make a difference.
- **PERFORMANCE PRACTICE:** Mike Brewer's "Fine Tune your Choir" (Faber) has a good chapter on Performance Practice. Singing in a style appropriate to the period can bring a performance to life.
- **VOCAL TRAINING:** Nothing will do more to improve the sound of your choir than to work consistently on their vocal training. Model good singing or if you can't, find someone who can. Find the choir a Vocal Coach.
- **WARM-UPS:** Many choirs are conscientious about warm-ups and that's to be commended. But do they really know why they are doing them? If not choir members

won't be motivated to use them in their private practice. So use exercises that have an obvious purpose. There are plenty of books to help you here.

- **SIGHTREADING:** “Oh but I can't sight-read” is the most common reaction of many singers. Of course they can sight-read. They just may not be very good at it yet. But you can help them. (Try reverse sight-singing. Whenever a melody comes into your head try to see every note of it on the page – in C major, then in another key.)
- **REPERTOIRE:** Singing the right repertoire for your choir is absolutely crucial. **SOUNZ – the Centre for New Zealand Music** – is a great place to start, since NZ has so many wonderful choral composers. Use www.sounz.org.nz you can easily explore a wide range of music by category, availability, difficulty, duration, etc.

Some publishers have fantastic free resources available. Eg. Oxford University Press – join their mailing list

For more resources go to Peter's website www.wattsandwatts.co.nz and follow the link to “Tips and Articles”