



American Academy of
Teachers of Singing

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The *Journal of Singing* continues to publish selected pronouncements issued by the American Academy of Teachers of Singing. For a brief history of the organization and its unique relationship to NATS, the reader is referred to the *Journal of Singing* 61, no. 3 (January/February 2005). Since 1922, the year of its founding, the American Academy of Teachers of Singing has been actively writing and disseminating papers on all subjects pertaining to the teaching of singing. This Statement, "Choral Singing: Responsibilities in the Relationship Between the Conductor, Voice Teacher, and Singer," is a recently approved revision of an earlier document, "Choral Singing and the Responsibility of the Choral Director," that appeared in 1964. The present paper is significantly altered and expanded so as to constitute an essentially new document. Because Statements arise out of the Academy as a whole rather than reflect the thinking of an individual or small group, it is important to list the organization's membership at the time of the drafting of a particular Statement. The appearance of

the Statements in the *Journal of Singing*, however, does not imply NATS endorsement, nor does their content necessarily reflect the philosophy of NATS or the *Journal of Singing*. Readers are invited to visit the AATS website [www.americanacademyofteachersofsinging.org].

CHORAL SINGING: RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CONDUCTOR, VOICE TEACHER, AND SINGER

Singing in a fine choir can be of great benefit to a singer. It is often in a choir that young singers first learn of their love of singing and their vocal gifts. Furthermore, the choral conductor is often the first musical model encountered by a young singer. Choral conductors and voice teachers have much to learn from each other as they work for the musical and vocal growth of their students.

Choral singing is one of the most effective early means of musicianship training. Ear training, especially sight singing and listening skills, can be taught effectively in a choral situation. A fine choral conductor can give choristers a life-long basis in musical style and performance practice, phrasing, tonal color, articulation, and even

foreign language diction. Young singers usually can perform music of much more sophistication in a choral group than they could as soloists and thereby can begin to learn the elements of a style that otherwise might not be available to them. Performing a large choral work is often a young singer's first experience singing with an orchestra.

The personal benefits of singing with others are also significant. Singing in a choir fosters a spirit of cooperation and helps diminish the unhealthy competition that sometimes accompanies solo study, especially in a music school environment. The so-called "peak experiences" that may be possible in an outstanding choral performance are a source of motivation as well as joy for young choristers.

There are, of course, issues that can have a negative impact on a singer in a choral situation. Singers have a limited number of hours in the day in which they may healthily sing. It is important that choral singing not take a proportionally large amount of those hours. Conductors who ask the singer to sing in a tessitura, dynamic range, or vocal color that is excessively taxing can cause damage to an inexperienced singer. Singing repertoire that

is too difficult or for which the singer is not adequately prepared can be both discouraging and harmful.

It is therefore essential that choral conductors, voice teachers, and singers communicate with each other and be aware of the responsibilities each has for the success of singers and the choral ensembles in which they sing. For this reason, we have outlined the roles of each player in this important triangle.

Choral Conductor

Choral conductors are first of all committed to the musical and vocal success of their choral ensembles, but must acknowledge their power and importance in the musical and vocal development of the individual singers in it. If possible, choral conductors should have studied voice themselves. They must, in any case, have a thorough and efficacious understanding of the vocal mechanism and its development as well as the singing process. They should be aware of the physical maturation of the singing mechanism, especially as it relates to the age of their choristers. They should understand the importance and skill required for preparing (“warming up”) a choir to sing. Rehearsal pacing and duration as well as their gestures and words should promote good vocal hygiene and concentration skills. Conductors should choose repertoire of the finest quality, but also be mindful that the repertoire suits the age and ability of the singers. They should be particularly careful in their teaching of music requiring extremes of range, dynamics, and unusual vocal timbre. Conductors should be open to voice teachers’ suggestions for their students’ voice placements. Singers must not be required to sing when they are ill, nor should a single singer be made to feel indispensable.

Conductors should consult the student’s voice teacher about technical problems. Under no circumstance should a conductor single out a singer for criticism or ridicule.

Voice Teacher

It is, of course, the primary job of voice teachers to develop the solo voices of their students. They should, however, be supportive of their students’ choral experience, reminding them of the musical and personal benefits of their participation in a fine choir. Voice teachers should become familiar with the vocal styles and performance practices of choral music. They should help their students solve vocal problems they may be having in their choral singing. They should teach strategies for getting through rehearsal situations that are particularly challenging, either musically or vocally. Voice teachers should be open and respectful of the musical and tonal requests of choral conductors. If they feel there are significant problems in a student’s choral experience, they should consult with the conductor about the issue of concern.

Singers

It is the responsibility of singers in a choir to bring to the choral rehearsals and performances all of the technical and musical accomplishments that they have learned in voice study. They should come to rehearsals vocally and musically prepared. They should bring vocal and musical problems in their choral singing to their voice lessons. They should feel free to speak with their conductor, in private if possible, if there are vocal problems in rehearsal. Students should gauge their vocal endurance and be responsible for maintaining their vocal health by marking when necessary or not singing if they are vocally

fatigued. On the other hand, they should take their responsibilities as important members of the choir seriously and avoid putting themselves in situations that require curtailing their participation.

Conclusion

It is essential for the well being of all concerned that choral conductors, voice teachers, and singers work together in a spirit of openness and mutual cooperation. Conductors are in a position to refer choristers to appropriate voice teachers. Some conductors are voice teachers themselves. They should develop relationships with voice teachers, seek their advice, and be open to their insights about the vocal health or development of their students. Voice teachers should establish a dialog with choral conductors with whom their students sing or might sing. Attending performances or rehearsals can be very helpful in fostering a good working relationship. The highest professional behavior and respect must accompany each of these relationships. For the sake of all, especially the students involved, any power plays or demeaning of authority must be avoided at all costs.

In all voices there is a direct correspondence between registration and resonance balancing. A uniformly resonant timbre is not possible unless breath energy (breath management, best accomplished by appoggio) is adjusted to match voice registration requirements.

Richard Miller,
Training Soprano Voices, 120.