

# Survival Tips For Choral Singers

Aside from singing in the shower, choral groups offer abundant performance opportunities for the amateur vocalist. Whether one participates in a church choir, more competitive community chorus, or in the company of a local musical theater production, the following guidelines should help to get the most out of the experience:

**WARM UP, ENERGIZE** - Most choral singers arrive at evening rehearsals exhausted after a long day's work, so it's important to begin with an overall physical warm up. Stretching, "loosening" exercises and calisthenics "wake up" the body, while "yawning" and relaxed humming gradually get the voice going before more extensive vocalizing. Warming up should begin in the careing route to the rehearsal.

**THINK POSTURE** - A "collapsed" posture limits breathing capacity and puts stress on laryngeal muscles. Most choral singers rehearse sitting down, with music in hand a position that often becomes inefficient, through "slumping" back in the chair, crossing the legs, etc. "Sitting up" may seem to require effort, but in fact, an erect, well balanced sitting posture is less tiring in the long run. A good concept is to imagine the head "floating" directly above the pelvis, and the rib cage expanded. The music should be raised to eye level, however the shoulders must remain relaxed. Both feet should be "flat on the floor". When standing during a performance, be careful not to "lock" the legs. Always wear comfortable shoes, no high heels. A rigid stance, combined with nervous tension and inadequate ventilation can cause choir members to feel faint, and occasionally lose consciousness!

**BREATHE** - This may seem obvious, but many choral singers

simply do not allow themselves an adequate breath, and instead, "gasp" for air in order to stay with the conductor's beat.

Admittedly, breath management can be challenging in group singing. Good choral directors are aware of this, and endeavor to indicate breathing with their conduction gestures. Ultimately, however, it is the singer's own responsibility to maintain efficient breath support.

**SING THE RIGHT PART** - Singers may be incorrectly classified in order to accommodate the needs of the choral group. Tenors are often scarce, so baritones may be induced to sing the tenor part, which can strain the voice. It is possible to use certain vocal techniques, such as singing falsetto in the upper register, to render the voice more versatile. If you are uncomfortable singing in the required range, and suspect that you are "misplaced", request a change of part or help with vocal technique. It is hoped that choral conductors will guide singers in the best possible use of their voice.

**DON'T OVER-SING** - Singing loudly in order to hear oneself over other singers usually stresses the voice. "Showing off" one's voice is inappropriate in group singing -- it doesn't contribute well to a choral "blend," and it is usually resented by fellow singers! If you need to check the accuracy of your pitch, simply put a finger in one ear. Even when fortissimo singing is required, it is wise not to push the voice -- always sing on the "interest," not the "principal"!

**ARTICULATE WISELY** - Discomfort in singing is often caused by tension in the articulation of consonants and vowels. Choral singers are generally encouraged to enunciate clearly, but care should be taken that the jaw, tongue, and lips remain as relaxed as possible. Furthermore, it is necessary to modify pronunciation for efficiency and ease of vocal production; for example, sopranos need to "open" vowels on high notes.

**PREPARE YOUR MUSIC** - Whenever possible, try to learn your part before coming to the rehearsal. If you are insecure about

pitch, it is unlikely that you will sing well. Hesitation impedes good vocal technique!

**AVOID TALKING** - Not only is chatting disruptive to others (especially the conductor!), but it tires the voice.

**TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF** - Being a choir member is the same as being a member of an athletic team, and you have a responsibility to safeguard your health. Avoid smoke and alcohol, partying should be postponed until after the final performance. Get plenty of sleep and aerobic exercise. "Hydrate", drink plenty of fluids in order to reduce irritating phlegm. Use common sense when you're sick, if possible, miss a rehearsal rather than sing over a cold or flu, and avoid exposing other choir members to your germs.

**TAKE VOICE LESSONS** - If you really want to maximize your enjoyment of choral singing, a few voice lessons can provide valuable insight. Ideally, your teacher should understand and appreciate both choral and solo singing techniques.