

Harmony HANDBOOK

Repertoire and Resources for Developing Treble Choirs

With Correlated Exercises and Instruction by Katie O'Connor-Ballantyne
Music by Sally K. Albrecht, Andy Beck, Greg Gilpin, Donald Moore,
and Dave & Jean Perry

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CHAPTER 1

Unison Singing

Unison singing is the first step a choir takes on the harmonious path. It's where a choir first discovers their sound as a group, as opposed to as individuals. Unison singing requires careful listening, focused attention, and a team mentality.

Here are some of the foundational skills choirs develop through unison singing:

- **Posture:** It may seem fussy to focus on how your choir stands and sits while singing, but good posture makes a tremendous difference in vocal sound. The body must be aligned in a way that air can be inhaled and exhaled efficiently. Whether standing or seated, the rib cage should be lifted, the shoulders relaxed and back, and the head balanced on top of the neck, neither pulled back nor hanging forward. When standing, the weight should be balanced evenly between both feet. Some may feel more stable when one foot is placed slightly ahead of the other.
- **Breath:** The choir that breathes together sings together. A relaxed inhalation sets the body up for making a free sound. The air must be used wisely in controlled exhalation to support the tone. For young students, lots of modeling (by the teacher) and practice (by the singers) will be necessary. Incorporate breathing exercises into your warm-ups to help reinforce good habits.
- **Tone:** A healthy, well-supported tone is the product of the correct use of breath. Some young singers struggle with breathiness, while others tend to shout. Model what you want frequently so that young singers learn to gravitate toward that core sound.
- **Vowels:** Purity of vowels and the correct handling of diphthongs (double vowels) are essential to developing a beautiful choral sound. Having students look at each other to match mouth shapes is one way to begin unifying vowels.
- **Diction:** Beginning singers often need to be reminded that we pronounce consonants differently in singing than we do in talking. Not only do we have to exaggerate the sounds, especially at the beginnings and endings of words, but we also have to make sure we do it precisely together.
- **Dynamics:** How loud is your group's *forte*? How soft is their *piano*? Dynamics present challenges of support and intonation that need to be practiced to be mastered. A good *crescendo* (or *decrescendo*) is even and in tune, and grows louder (or fades softer) without forcing the sound. Don't restrict practicing dynamics to repertoire rehearsal; make that part of your regular warm-up routine.
- **Watching the conductor:** Learning to rely on the visual cues of the conductor is a skill that should be cultivated early in a singer's journey. Begin with insisting on eye contact and teaching singers to respond to your visual cues. Turning this into a game is one fun way to encourage singers to watch.

1. Sing Your Song

Words and Music by
GREG GILPIN (ASCAP)

Quietly with rubato (♩ = ca. 88)

UNISON VOICES

PIANO

p

No

5

mat - ter what the mel - o - dy, sing your song.

9

High or low, in har - mo - ny, sing your song.



Objectives

1. Sing the scalar melody in tune, both in unison and in canon.
2. Sing the Hebrew text with pure vowels.
3. Sustain long notes at the ends of phrases with support and beauty.

Warm-up:
Minor Scale

Warm-up:
Ah-Eh-Ee-Oh-Oo in Minor

Hashivenu

Sing the scalar melody in tune.

One of the challenges of this particular melody is the frequent use of stepwise ascending and descending passages. At first glance they make the melody easy to read and sing, but if the tone is under-supported or singers aren't mindful, they may slowly go flat. This becomes especially problematic once the canon begins. From the very first stages of learning the melody, encourage a buoyant, well-supported sound.

1. Warm-up: Minor Scale. Write an E_b major key signature on the board, and an E_b major scale on solfège. Sing from low *do* to high *do*. Add two notes below low *do*, and demonstrate that you can make a new, different sounding scale with many of the same notes if you start and end on *la* instead. Sing from *la* to *la*, and identify it as the C natural minor scale. Add a B natural instead of the B_b , and label it *si* instead of *sol*, explaining that this variation is the C harmonic minor scale. Point out where the half steps occur in the scale (*ti-do*, *mi-fa*, and *si-la*). Sing the ascending and descending scale as a warm-up each time you rehearse the song, checking pitch at the top and bottom of the scale, and calling attention to the half steps. If you find the pitch sags, especially while descending, try lifting a hand upward as you sing downward.
2. After singing the C harmonic minor scale on the board, it's easy to transfer to reading the melody in measures 5–28. Working in eight-bar sections (measures 5–12, 13–20, and 21–28), read the pitches from the score on solfège, either in or out of rhythm. Point out where the half steps occur, and use a lifted hand to encourage pitch buoyancy.
3. To work on listening for intonation, split the choir into two groups, and have one group sustain a middle C hum while the other group sings the melody. Check unison and octave Cs for intonation: is the group singing the melody coming back to the same C they started on, or has the pitch shifted? Trade parts and sing it again.
4. To check intonation during the canon, make a “pause button” sign, and attach it to a ruler. When you reach a point you'd like to check, hold up the “pause button,” signalling singers to hold that pitch and listen across the group. In most cases, it will be useful to pause on beat one of any given measure.

Sing the Hebrew text with pure vowels.

The Hebrew text of this song makes beautiful use of the five basic vowels, and it has only one diphthong. Good vowel shape and vowel matching across the ensemble will help create a beautiful sound.

1. Warm-up: Ah-Eh-Ee-Oh-Oo in Minor. Sing through the five basic vowels on a single sustained pitch, and then descend on a five-note minor scale on the syllable “oo.” Place the backs of the hands on the cheeks to promote tall vowels.

5. Hashivenu

Words from
Lamentations 5:21

Israeli Folk Song
Arranged, with English Text, by
SALLY K. ALBRECHT

With feeling (♩ = ca. 108)

PIANO *mp*

5 ALL VOICES (*unison*) *mp*

Ha - shi - ve - nu, ha - shi - ve - nu A - do -

10 13 *grad. cresc.*

nai e - le - cha. Ve - na -

grad. cresc.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE AND TRANSLATION:

Hah-shee-veh-noo Ah-doh-nahee eh-leh-chah. Veh-nah-shoo-vah. Chah-dehsh yah-meh-noo keh-keh-dehm.

NOTE: pronounce *ch* as in Bach

Return us, O Lord, to you. And we shall return. Renew our days as of old.