

WORKSHOP II
TONAL BLEND THROUGH SECTIONAL VOICING
Voicing the Choir: A Perspective on Singer Placement

I. Philosophy of Choral Tone

Perhaps no other aspect of choral tone has received more attention than the subject of blend. And yet one's attitude toward blend is perhaps the most critical factor in establishing a philosophy of choral tone. What is your philosophy of choral tone?

Two Principles of Blend:

1. A single tonal model is established. All voices are asked to subjugate individual vocal timbre and characteristics for the purpose of matching the model. This philosophy of blend establishes a single choral tone that is superimposed over all literature.
2. The development of the individual singer is encouraged, creating blend out of the collective timbres of all singers.

II. Thesis

The consequence of constructing one's choral tone from the collective blend of individual timbres with emphasis on the development of the singer, is a critical need for voicing each section of the choir so as to position every singer for maximum contribution and effective blend. The term "voicing," when applied to choral singers, refers to the placement of each singer in the best possible acoustical environment in relationship to other singers.

Weston Noble – "You simply have to hear people together; you can't accurately predict placement. My goal is to have every single person comfortable with the person on each side of him. In essence I don't ask the singers to conform to one model voice; I am after uniformity but not conformity."

III. Voicing Procedures with a Demonstration Choir

- A. Voicing by Section
 - use of unison, *My Country 'tis of Thee*
- B. Voicing from "fundamental voice" to "color voice"
 - Blend vs. Color
- C. Methods of Listening
 - voice cancellations
 - identification of category timbres
 - pairing of "like" voices
 - insertion of dissimilar voices
 - vibrato
 - intonation

- D. Choral Formations
 - Sectional Arrangements
 - Quartet or Scrambled Arrangements
 - Arrangement by height, leadership, or musicianship
- E. Integration of sectional rehearsals while voicing sections
- F. Vocal Acoustical Science and Hypotheses

IV. Need for Voicing

A. Benefits

- blend is not at the expense of the singer
- each singer contributes more and develops individual responsibility
- better listening and consequently more intelligent vocal adjustments
- stronger sectional identity and sound
- clearer understanding of each singer's role and contribution to the sectional sound
- flexible choral instrument whose color is capable of greater nuance and change from composition to composition
- richer, more vibrant tone
- more intimate knowledge of each voice by the conductor

B. Inherent problems without voicing

- "false blend" -- James Jordan's term when singers forfeit their individual production for the "blended vowel."
- tendency for the singer to over-sing or to force the perceived tone color
- less individual responsibility
- choir is forced to achieved blend as a collective whole rather than by section – thus unanimity of vowel, rhythm and other techniques must become the "cure all" without the aide of sectional voicing.