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The Conductor's Voice: Flow and the Choral Experience

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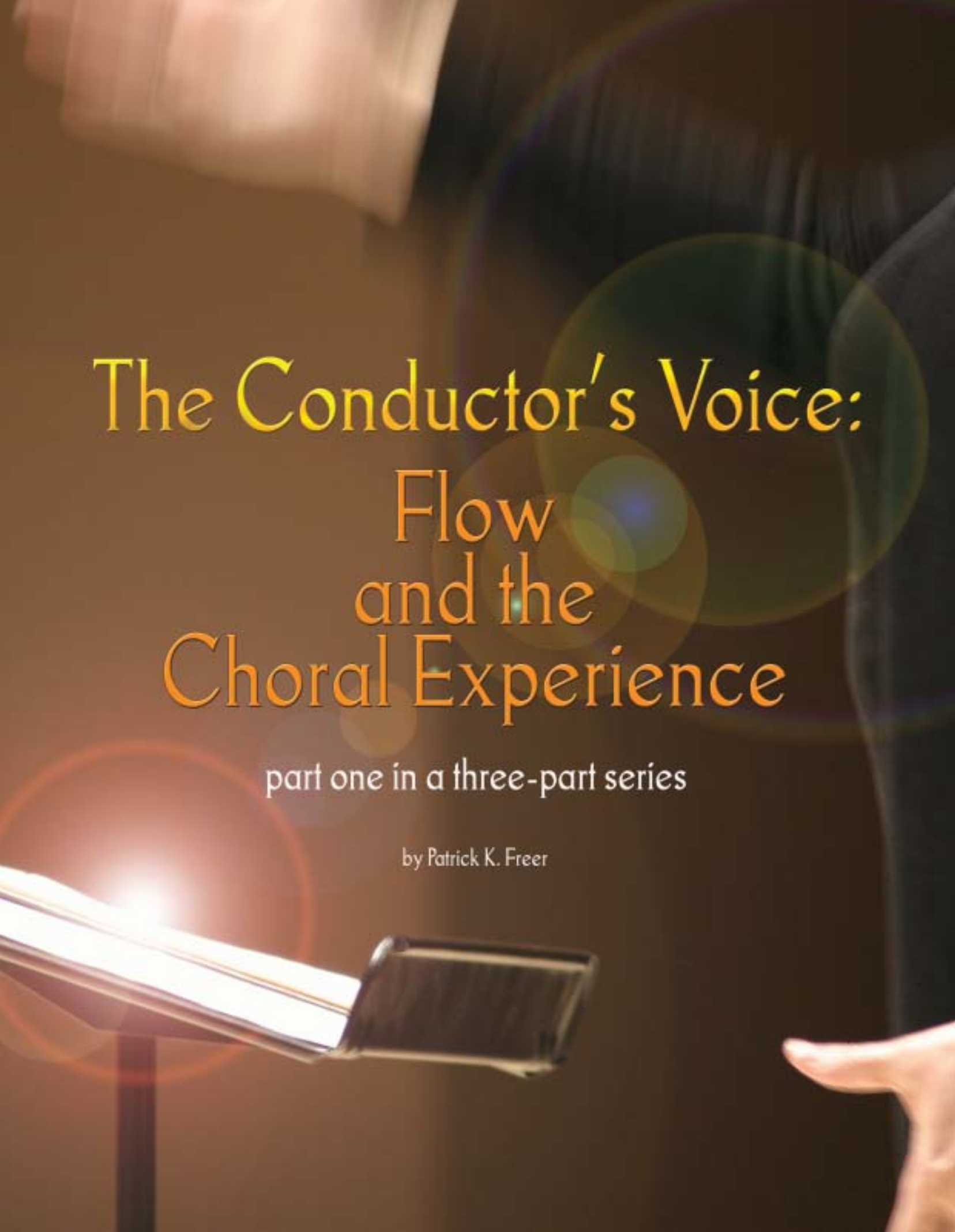


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The Conductor's Voice:
Flow
and the
Choral Experience

part one in a three-part series

by Patrick K. Freer

In a "Research Report" column for the August 2005 issue of the *Choral Journal*, David DeVenney listed a large number of interviews with American choral conductors.¹ DeVenney compiled this list "in the hope that the thoughts expressed by these prominent American choral conductors might assist all of us in the shared pursuit of choral excellence."² Just weeks earlier, a colleague and I had presented a session for a conference of choral conductors in which we examined the research base concerning "flow experience" and choral music, using the terms defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced Me-high Check-sent-me-high) and others. At that conference, an ensuing discussion resulted in the questions, "Have choral conductors described these flow experiences using discipline-specific terms?" and "How do choral conductors describe flow experience for themselves and for their choristers?"

DeVenney's list, extended to include volume 46 of the *Choral Journal*, served as a vehicle for examining potential answers to these questions. A total of 141 interviews were coded and analyzed using HyperRESEARCH qualitative analysis software. Included in the analysis were interviews with individual conductors, articles containing interviews with multiple conductors, and two books containing interviews with many conductors. Articles appeared in the *Choral Journal*, *American Choral Review*, *American Organist*, and a *Journal of the Conductor's Guild*.

This article is the first in a three-part series of articles organized around quotations excerpted from these interviews. Because the excerpts only provide brief glimpses into the thoughts of these conductors, readers are highly encouraged to seek the original, full-length interviews. This first article outlines how these conductors spoke of components of the choral experience that result in enjoyment, intrinsic motivation, and artistic satisfaction for themselves and their choristers. The second article contains two sections: quotations describing the conductors' personal experience during rehearsal and performance; and quotations describing their perceptions of the singer's experience and how those perceptions can influence decisions concerning pedagogy and rehearsal technique. Finally, the third article centers on how these conductors have described their work, including issues of excellence, craft, career, leadership, pedagogy, and wishes for the profession.

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Overview of Flow Theory

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has worked for several decades to define components of optimal experiences, and the resulting theory has come to be known as flow theory.³ In 1994, Csikszentmihalyi outlined the relationship between choral music and flow theory in an address to a convention of the American Choral Directors Association.⁴ Subsequent research in both music education and choral music supports the application of flow theory to the choral experience.⁵

The attitudes, behaviors, musical values, and educational philosophies of conductors can greatly influence the experiences of singers in their ensembles.⁶ Choral singers report that their choral music experiences provide valuable opportunities to develop their musical skills, heighten spiritual expression, communicate with an audience, collaborate with others, and achieve artistic growth.⁷ On occasion, singers sense that their moment-to-moment involvement moves beyond the mundane and becomes an optimal experience—an experience where everything seems to be "in flow." These experiences are characterized by high levels of perceived challenge and perceived skill, a clarity of goals, deep personal involvement and concentration, self-directedness, self-awareness, the receiving of immediate feedback, and a lack of awareness concerning time constraints. When in these situations, people experience a state of flow while the loss of these conditions disrupts the flow experience. The remainder of this article explores how conductors have variously described these components as they occur within the rehearsal and performance of choral music. Conductors are identified within the text or in parentheses following the quotations.

Sense of Control and Autonomy

Voices cannot be violated, individual spirits cannot be crushed, and the composer cannot get lost. Communication from the composer and the score through the conductor to the musicians and then from the musicians outward is the ultimate standard.

—Ann Howard Jones⁸

Conductors in these interviews repeatedly stressed the importance of ensuring that individual singers were equipped with the skills and capabilities necessary for successful rehearsal and performance experiences. In the quote above, Jones reflects the complex web of relationships that conductors need to negotiate, with none more important than the relationship between singers and the music. Harold

Decker said that when they leave, singers

Should be more sensitive to all music than they were when they came to me. They should develop a willingness and an ability to express themselves, and they should improve vocally as well. They should feel that they are able to express their own individuality as well as that of the group. Individuals should learn to appreciate each other, and they should improve as people through their association with the choir.⁹

It is:

the sharing, the cooperative venture in great art [that] helps to make the singers more alive, more sensitive, and more perceptive as human beings with an awareness of something beyond themselves.

—Kenneth Jennings¹⁰

The relationship of the individual singer to the collective art form results in “our responsibility to help develop the human being while we are helping to develop the vocal and musical abilities of the individual” (Lloyd Pfautsch).¹¹

At the same time, conductors need to sense that they, too, are fully capable of satisfying the demands of rehearsals, repertoire, and performances. This growth process never stops, beginning with “humility, an ability to be objective about yourself, a capacity to grow, a curiosity to learn, and

a passion to teach” (Jameson Marvin).¹² The awareness of one’s own strengths and weaknesses “is imperative if one ultimately is going to succeed. The conductor has to find out who he or she is, accept himself or herself, and then not try to be anyone else” (Daniel Moe).¹³ For

When people ... come to grips with those qualities which identify them as being uniquely theirs and overcome the fears and traumas of showing them, those persons are well on the road to being successful conductors.

—Robert Page¹⁴

This becomes a central focus of many conductors because “to sense the depth of our inner person is vital to our ability to sense the unique ‘special world’ of a composition” (Weston Noble).¹⁵

Several conductors commented about their growth toward musical independence in terms of age.

I think the most important element that impacts a conductor is the conductor’s age. As the conductor’s age changes, there are different ways of thinking about the music. I see that more and more. I also become impatient with works that at one time I thought might have been fine works but on my tenth or twelfth time through them, I am beginning to wonder about their value. I begin to make my own value

judgments. And yet, there are works that I might be working on for the fortieth or fiftieth time, and I still see new illuminations in them.

—Michael Dean Lamkin¹⁶

Said another way, “the older you get, the more you learn it is the creativity and the ability to trust yourself that lead your students along the way” (John Cooksey).¹⁷ In the end,

Every conductor’s choir is a symbol of what that conductor is as a human being. It’s a mirror. And I suppose that for me, also a composer, a kind of exuberance, a kind of quietly aggressive rhythmic definition is a very important aspect of my musical personality. So this tends to be the thing that my choir does best.

—Daniel Moe¹⁸

Lois Wells commented that her choirs were not equally comfortable with every style of music “because they are limited by me, the conductor. Generally, most choirs suffer that limitation today, even many of our finer choirs.”¹⁹

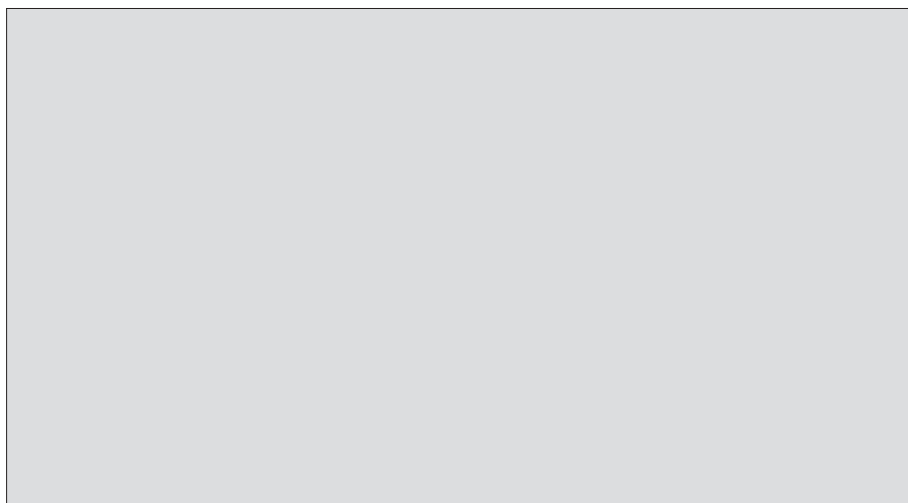
Conductors must recognize that the

Words and body language that [they] use to communicate ... during rehearsals and performances will ultimately affect the sound. A subtle example might be asking for a full rather than loud sound. If I ask for a loud dynamic, it might result in a harsh sound that would not be desirable. Gestures that I use with the choir must always be musical and not mechanical.

—Dale Warland²⁰

The relationship between conductor behaviors and singer autonomy became powerfully evident to Howard Swan when he found himself unable to sing:

What was I to do? I couldn’t use my own voice to illustrate. I had to find words to describe desired results. This led to me watching responses—the students’ response to what I was saying—particularly shown by their



eyes. When those eyes began to glaze, I knew I was not understood. This approach became extended to speech—how did others talk? Did they speak too rapidly or too slowly? Everything they would do physically—their walk, stance, smile, frown—were these a part of their personality? Gradually I began to understand that observing in this way and then going forward with such knowledge became a great tool for my own teaching, and I could set up rehearsals to match the mood or change things for all who took part in the rehearsal. As I learned to make these observations my teaching and conducting improved greatly.

—Howard Swan²¹

Ultimately, the goal is that singers become responsible for their own musicality and the proper use of the voice in ensemble or solo work. They must understand how unique their voices are. They have to decide individually which areas they need to improve ... People have a much higher success rate with anything if they realize their own progress and growth.

—Nancy Telfer²²

To promote a sense of autonomy for individual singers within the ensemble, Robert Page made a point of having every singer sing an octave at each rehearsal, stating, "this refreshes the students' minds that they are not anonymous in the group. When he knows he is needed and he counts in the group, he sings better."²³ Weston Noble similarly places his singers into a "quartet formation," then asks

If each singer is comfortable with the horizontal arrangement as well ... The comfort, then, not only helps the choir but also the individuals in their own personal solo/vocal development. Each singer practices feeling right about what he or she is doing.

—Weston Noble²⁴

Deep Concentration

Intensity is the intertwined focus of every singer and the conductor working together. Their joint concentration is so intense, solidified, and directed that they are only thinking one thing: sing what they are singing the very best that it can be sung, second after second, minute after minute, hour after hour until the rehearsal or concert is over—every note, syllable, word, and phrase.

—Donald Neuen²⁵

The focus and concentration necessary for sustained choral work can be promoted from the first encounter with a work.

Whatever the technical approach we choose to introduce a work, I always try to make music because this is

what ultimately engages the singers and brings a deeper concentration that inevitably facilitates the learning process.

—Joseph Flummerfelt²⁶

The teaching of technical skills promotes concentration as "it is only after techniques have been mastered that the singer can be free to become totally involved in the primary goal of communicating through music-making" (Lara Hoggard).²⁷ Robert Shaw's legendary attention to rhythm came from a belief that concentration could facilitate a sense of ensemble in his choirs. He explained several assumptions that grounded this belief, the first being:

If one wanted to 'communicate,' one had to establish a 'community' in the performing group. Others came from the understanding that music was uniquely a time-art distinct from the space-arts of sculpture

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and painting. Therefore, one of the principal disciplines had to be the organization of the elements of time. It also became obvious to me as I began to work with professional and nonprofessional choruses that almost all of the problems of enunciation were cured by an attention to metric precision, and most intonation problems were vastly improved by having people arrive at the same moment of music simultaneously.²⁸

Yet, several conductors voiced concern with concentrating too intently on technical precision. Joseph Flummerfelt stated,

I am also concerned that there's a kind of going for perfection at the expense of spontaneity. We've overemphasized the cognitive and disconnected from the intuitive.²⁹

He added that for conductors:

Everything begins with completely internalizing the score. We also continually talk about finding a deep connection to the composer's voice. This starts with breath as an opening, a total awareness, and vulnerability that allows one to

listen deeply. You conduct with your ears. It's all about listening; the total awareness of sound, line, and the whole range of color that comes from understanding how the text symbolizes the music.³⁰

These moments of deep concentration and connection with the composer's voice result in "a concentrated energy, a drive beautifully disciplined and with enormous balance of heart and mind" (Roger Wagner).³¹

Goal Clarity

I have learned so much from my students. When you have to teach someone else, it is a constant give and take. In the attempt to say instructive things, I had to clarify them. You have to be very specific. In this manner, it keeps you fresh in the quest for the right answers. The best teachers are the performers who are constantly learning.

—Abraham Kaplan³²

During choral rehearsals, the primary

goal of musical performance is omnipresent, yet that goal is only achievable when conductors provide an appropriate sequence of increasingly complex learning goals and opportunities. Sometimes goals arise spontaneously:

All of a sudden, right on the podium, I find something that teaches, that makes the light come on in the minds of the chorus. And I'm always looking for that. If you have that basic thing, that knowledge of how something works and how to teach, you can always improvise on it. I don't try to be different for the sake of being different. I try to be different for the sake of growth; to figure out, 'How can it be more beautiful?'

—Margaret Hillis³³

For goals to be clear in the minds of singers, conductors often need to verbalize their thoughts for the entire group to hear. Sally Herman commented "it's so crucial for the teacher to narrow his or her concepts, to simplify directives and drill them over and over. You have to continually remind the students of what you want before they understand and apply it regularly."³⁴ Helen Kemp related the clarity of goals to the interest level of young singers:

The way a song is presented is in exact proportion to the children's interest and enthusiasm. If you believe in the music—if you have studied it and know what you want to do with it—if you have a plan that considers where the children are in terms of their background and culture, and attempt to reach them in terms they can understand and relate to—if you are excited yourself about what you are doing—and if you make your presentation seem fresh and spontaneous, you will get the attention of the children.³⁵

Robert Shaw added:

It seems sort of silly to say, 'Blend, you rascals,' because nothing will ever result from that. I think the conductor has to be able to find out



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what's wrong. Perhaps the color is wrong, perhaps the vowel is wrong, perhaps the pitch is wrong. He or she should be able to say to the singer specifically, 'Your problem is in intonation;' 'Your problem is in color;' 'Your problem is in vowel;' 'Your problem is too much vibrato or not enough;' or 'Your problem is one of these things;' rather than to just shout, 'Blend!' So, blend is a result, not a thing of itself. It's a result of the right pitch at the right time on the right dynamic level with the right vowel.³⁶

Receiving of Immediate Feedback

When I work with young people, it is not easy for me to conceal the fact that I love them. They soon know how I feel and whether or not they are meeting my expectations

—Lois Wells³⁷

Another characteristic of flow experiences is that feedback is immediate. Conductors in flow-conducive rehearsals frequently invite singers to provide feedback to themselves and to others. When the conductor provides verbal reinforcement, the feedback needs to be specific and related to the goal.

Singers of all ages have difficulty knowing when they sound good, because it sounds so different inside the head. So, they need someone to tell them when their tone improves. Then they memorize the sound and the physical sensation ... Each week the singers fill in a self-assessment chart, so they are always aware of their progress.

—Nancy Telfer³⁸

The specificity of a conductor's feedback becomes especially important on such occasions as:

When you have one voice in a section with an intensive vibrato and six others with reasonable vibrato, you cannot look at that section and say to them, 'straighten the tone,'

because you will be saying the wrong thing to the people with the even sound.

—Richard Westenberg³⁹

To facilitate the feedback singers receive during ensemble music-making experiences, some directors place:

Confident, experienced singers next to at least one other confident singer [to help] more advanced students challenge one another, feel less isolated when projecting their voices, and build friendships with like-minded singers. Seating in this manner is one simple strategy that keeps advanced students motivated and inspired, which in turn aids retention in choir from year to year.

—Julia Shaw⁴⁰

No matter the situation, however, "effective teaching incorporates incidents which arise" (Jean Ashworth Bartle)⁴¹ into the rehearsal, and conductors need to be ready to provide the feedback necessary for singers to learn from those moments.

Matched Challenge and Skill

Paramount to our success as conductors is assessing the level of the singers we are standing in front of and choosing the literature wisely. Success is based upon how well the conductors have not only prepared the ensemble, but also how well they have chosen and programmed the repertoire for the ensemble.

—Jo-Michael Scheibe⁴²

Repertoire selection is one of the central tasks for choral directors, and conductors in these interviews frequently spoke about matching the requirements of the repertoire to the needs of the choral ensemble. This match between challenge and skill is a hallmark of flow experience. Over time, however, challenges cease to be challenging, and conductors need to introduce new levels of challenge to match

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the heightened skill levels of their singers. According to Csikszentmihalyi's research, the relationship between the challenge of a situation and an individual's skills in meeting that challenge has four primary designations: flow—both challenge and skill levels are high, apathy—challenge levels are low, but so are the skill levels, anxiety—level of challenge exceeds the skill level, and boredom—skill levels are higher than the challenge being presented.⁴³

A principal objective for most choral directors "would be to provide the opportunity for interested students to sing and to grow above their present level ... It's important to strive for excellence with a sense of challenge, accomplishment, pride, and a good feeling about the effort and the result" (Douglas McEwen).⁴⁴ When choosing repertoire to provide these opportunities, "I try to find just the right kind of music that will challenge them, will be practical to learn, and also will be attractive to their audiences" (Theodore Morrison).⁴⁵ This process necessitates that conductors be responsive to their choirs, with the implication that concert programs cannot be determined before the choir has been formed. Lloyd Pfausch commented:

I am not a conductor who chooses a program before the school year starts and then forces that program upon whatever personnel happens to be in the choir...Even though I have some repertoire already planned for the next year, I will make whatever adjustments are necessary

on the basis of the choir personnel after I audition.⁴⁶

Hugh Sanders agreed, saying, "first of all, I quickly evaluate the personnel for which I am going to choose, and I think of music which will stretch the singers musically and vocally and yet not be out of reach."⁴⁷ When asked how to describe the repertoire he chose for specific choruses, Erich Leinsdorf stated "They should be exactly right for them."⁴⁸

A conductor's sensitivities need to incorporate the adage that "musical skills don't seem to go by age. You can't say that just because someone is six years old and in first grade he or she should be able to do a certain thing in singing. It's as if each child has his or her own schedule of development"(Helen Kemp).⁴⁹ When working with college-age singers, conductors must remain mindful that not all repertoire suits the still-maturing voices of young adults. For instance:

Brahms and Haydn wrote certain compositions for large groups of mature adult singers. This makes it difficult for younger singers to produce the same quality of sound needed to fulfill the tonal demands of a particular composition, e.g., *The Creation*. One can try to imitate an adult tone, but usually to the detriment of the vocal development of the young singer.

—John Haberman⁵⁰

In all cases, "you must understand the tech-

nical demands of the music you choose, whether there is a fit between what they can do vocally and what they can do in terms of their range and register adjustments. [Also] consider whether they can relate to this music emotionally" (John Cooksey).⁵¹ Rodney Eichenberger addressed the need to carefully yet continuously raise the level of challenge when he said, "I believe it is important to select a fair amount of literature that requires some stretching beyond the present level of performance in order to give it a proper reading. I think they call that 'education.'"⁵²

"Repertoire involves assessments of vocal capabilities of the choir, desired musical development, past experience with repertoire (new challenges are important), and the potential of selections for the 'shaping' of aesthetically satisfying concerts and rehearsals" (Colleen Kirk).⁵³ Matching the challenge level to the skill level of the choir requires that the conductor be comfortable with a varied array of rehearsal techniques. When introducing a piece, for instance, "I think it is important to read through a work in order that the singers get a sense of the whole. I will do this only if mistakes can, by and large, be avoided. Often this may mean reading at a much reduced tempo or checking some trouble spots before beginning" (Joseph Flummerfelt).⁵⁴ Margaret Hillis related:

When I'm doing something in French or in Russian, I always schedule extra rehearsal time because there are so many sounds in both those languages that we just simply don't have in English. The sequences of vowels and consonants are very different, and you have to work them into the tongue in such a way that they become almost automatic. Once that's done, the words come out with ease, and the color of the language gives the sound the right color.⁵⁵

Ultimately, the match between challenge and skill means, "you have to be willing to start some place and encourage singers. You can't blame them for what they don't know If I can't get it across to them, it is my fault, not theirs" (Harold Decker).⁵⁶



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Loss of Sense of Time

Music has the capacity to inspire, which allows the performer and listener alike to momentarily join together in a mutual communion of spirit that transcends everyday life experiences.

—Jameson Marvin.⁵⁷

One of the most frequently cited characteristics of flow experiences is the sense that time stands still. Many musicians absorbed in the process of intense rehearsal or performance can recall instances when large blocks of time seemed to disappear without notice. Though this is a fairly frequent occurrence for musicians, the analysis of these interviews with conductors did not result in many quotations addressing this phenomenon. This may be because conductors are forced to focus on the clock, particularly during rehearsals. Howard Swan stated that the musical tasks of

a conductor directly relate to “one’s ability to organize one’s time and that of the singers. Otherwise, one will never accomplish all that one wants to do. Eventually, people will not respect a person who consistently wastes their time.”⁵⁸

From the point of view of rehearsing, I think the hardest thing for [conducting students] to do is making the most of time. I say to them, ‘What’s the most important instrument in the room?’ After they name all their favorite instruments, I point to the clock. That determines everything. Just the sense of keeping one eye on the clock while still doing thorough work—that’s the hardest thing.

—Brock McElheran⁵⁹

Even when working within a schedule, McElheran added,

A conductor should be sure that every note he or she conducts, every phrase, every bar, is the most exciting moment of music in the history of the world. I hear pieces being performed, and they sound quite well. It’s all very pleasant, but they don’t really attain great heights. Why do them? There are so few minutes in life when we are performing music. Let’s do the best music there is!⁶⁰

Action and Awareness Merge

It’s not about us; it’s about helping singers to have the courage to be fully in the moment of the sound.

—Joseph Flummerfelt⁶¹

Flow experience requires that individuals simultaneously process information—awareness—and respond to that infor-



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mation—action—. For example, conductors in flow-producing rehearsals are able to address the needs of individual singers while leading the full ensemble. Similarly, choristers must cognitively interact with large amounts of incoming information in the same moment that they physically produce sounds responsive to that information. Especially with inexperienced choirs, this process needs to be taught as singers are expected to “change their mind set. When they come into choir, suddenly they have a dual role to play: they must be independent as singers, yet, they must also focus their mind on the conductor and the rest of the ensemble” (Nancy Telfer).⁶² Weston Noble stated:

The best way to build involvement, I've found, is to ask questions—to bring the singers into an awareness of what's going on in the music...I believe that questions—and the sense of imagination they excite or involve—are essential in the

achieving of emotion in the tone of a choral ensemble. They also help us to discover the spirit of the composition—the key to the creation and communication of the essence of that particular piece of music.⁶³

Alice Parker commented about the listening skills that must be employed in the midst of all the other cognitive and vocal skills occurring simultaneously:

The question of everyone in the group listening for a unison sound is of the utmost importance. If people are asked to sing very loudly either while they are learning or after they've learned something—well, it is very difficult to listen to anybody else or be tuned to anybody else while you are producing a loud sound yourself.⁶⁴

The complex relationship between ac-

tion and awareness begins as:

The singer must first relate to and react to the poetry, then examine how the composer reacts to the poetry, and then taste and test the result of these combinations. Adapting all of this information and these decisions to the form of the music, to the voice itself, and then to the ensemble is a monumental task for the singer—and there is no avenue that can be taken to bypass these crucial steps of preparation and execution.

—Robert Page⁶⁵

When it happens, though:

The feeling of singing and expressing one's own inmost thoughts through the words and music of two great artists, the poet and the composer, is a great thrill. Then when it is done

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with other people, one becomes a part of a group so that what is produced is literally greater than the sum of all the individual efforts. It's a rather great thing. You can't define it very well for other people; they have to experience it to know what it is.

—Howard Swan⁶⁶

Disappearance of Self-Consciousness

Transparency is vulnerability. It is the capacity to be open within ourselves in order that the music can flow through us—that we can be an open conduit, a free vessel. If we are not vulnerable as conductors, if we don't have the freedom to allow ourselves to be as we are, we can't take the experiences offered to us by our singers and incorporate them with our own

—Weston Noble⁶⁷

When action and awareness merge, the result is a reflective process that instantly informs behavior. When self-consciousness interferes, however, the merger of action and awareness is interrupted, the reflective process is slowed or halted, and the potential for flow experience is negated. The conductors in these interviews spoke frequently of a choral ensemble's power to enlarge the musical experience of both conductor and singer. Allen Lannom spoke of this ephemeral, corporate nature of choral music:

Somehow a group of people comes together, learns the technique—and more important—learns to care. Then something happens. We can't always make it happen, though. The applause, the perfection of the technique, and the tears that are shed on the way out may be an indication of how much it means to some of these people.⁶⁸

Choral music is experienced both individually and collectively:

One of the great things that

happens in choral groups is that people of all kinds and stations and abilities can get a very real sense of togetherness, and common concern, and accomplishment. In a choral context this might go beyond what they might be likely to do otherwise From that standpoint, it's more important that people make music than that they listen to it.

—Richard Cox⁶⁹

Conductors must balance the needs of the ensemble versus the needs of the individual since "you are working with the body of sound but the individuals within that body of sound are still people. They are wonderful, producing people, and they like to be referred to by name. I think this is terribly important" (Robert Page).⁷⁰ Doreen Rao added the group process of choral music "is about relationship making and peace keeping. It is a way of being mindful, it is a way of listening to others, and it is a way of being and interbeing."⁷¹ Some singers are drawn to choral music as an activity "where access to the most profound artistic works can be made possible and satisfying for the participant who has limited skills as an individual but whose capacity is enlarged by the group" (Ann

Howard Jones).⁷²

Many of the interviewed conductors spoke about the enlargement of their own artistic capabilities as a result of choral music's collaborative nature. Weston Noble noted, "were I to tell the choir all about the music, the singers would have limited involvement. However, if the choir members discover insights about the music, the act of singing then has much greater meaning. In addition, the singers can give the conductor new insights never thought of in score study."⁷³ Others related they were personally drawn to the reciprocal process of ensemble music as though they "couldn't do anything else. I feel that I am the most complete when I am making music with a choir, and I wish I could do it all the time" (Larry Wyatt).⁷⁴ Paul Salamunovich similarly recalled,

music became the tool through which I, very introverted as a youth, was able to share with others. . . . These experiences were sometimes so moving that my voice could not even function. Whenever I stand in front of a choir, I try to recreate those kinds of experiences for the singers—to take them where I have been.⁷⁵

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The First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tennessee is searching to fill the full-time position of Minister of Music/Worship. Candidates must demonstrate that he/she is classically trained in choral music but stays current with modern worship and musical styles. One must promote a comprehensive program of traditional and contemporary worship and lead in both venues. Candidates must demonstrate that he/she can lead in developing worship and music experiences for a congregation of all ages: be a team player and a leader among staff and congregants. Candidates must demonstrate the personality traits of leadership, high energy, contagious enthusiasm, vision and versatility. He/she must be capable of conducting both vocal and orchestral performance and have received training from a seminary or equivalent. A graduate degree in music from a recognized seminary is optional. Applicants should send a resume with a cover letter to:

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Howard Swan spoke powerfully about an individual's self-awareness as a condition for total immersion in the communal experience of choral music. He said:

Music, as an art, requires of those who would serve it, a complete absence of self, of consciousness of self. The music is the thing; the text is the thing. If we have to make the composer's and the poet's thoughts our own thoughts, there is no place for self-consciousness. It seems that when most people sing in a good chorus where this is emphasized, and where the direction comes from one who has learned that he or she cannot be self-conscious in the presence of music, the singers also learn to act with assurance. This is important, for them both as musicians and for what this does for them as persons.⁷⁶


Conclusion

As seen through these quotations, the qualities of optimal experiences defined by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi are implicit in the conversations that choral conductors have about choral music and the process of making that music come alive for themselves, choral singers, and audience members. Part II of this article series will explore in greater depth how these conductors describe the personal experience of choral music and its relationship to repertoire and rehearsals.

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