

## *Q. - What's the Most Basic Rehearsal Technique? A. - Rehearse!*

*by Robert King*

Among the most popular categories for music education workshops are those dealing with rehearsal techniques. I was recently asked to make a presentation for our regional vocal association on this very topic. Why are these among the most sought after sessions? Because we realize that the real work of ensemble building happens in that regular rehearsal time. Frankly I enjoy rehearsals more than the performances. It's just the music and the musicians. When it's good, we know it. When it's not good, there is no audience to flatter us anyway.

So if we agree that rehearsals are really important, then why don't more directors take fuller advantage of this precious time? Why would we start late or end early, or even decide not to rehearse at all today? Yes, I realize that there will always be circumstances beyond our control that may interrupt our schedule. But through the years I have observed frequent examples of decisions to not take advantage of every rehearsal opportunity. What message does it send our singers, administrators, parents, and colleagues in other fields, etc. when we do not respect the sanctity of our rehearsal time? Many times I have communicated with other teachers who kept my singers from coming to rehearsal that my class is important too. However, if I decide to just take a day off, can they really take me seriously? If we blow off a rehearsal because we don't feel like directing that day, what about the individual ensemble members? Can we afford having them each make the same decision? (And you can count on those other teachers quickly learning through the students that *yours* is a class that can be missed.) With some groups, if a qualified substitute director is not available when you are absent, letting the ensemble run their own rehearsal can communicate a sense of trust you have for them, and responsibility on their part.

The relationship between director and ensemble is just that – a relationship. Ask any marriage counselor, and they'll tell you that relationship building takes time. Yes, it must be quality time. But try convincing that significant other that the absence of significant time investment is not a sign of lack of commitment.

What could you do with another 10 hours of rehearsal? What about 15, or 70? Five minutes a rehearsal for a group that meets 12 times a semester adds up to 10 hours a year. My high school classes meet about 170 times a year. That's 70+ hours of rehearsal that I can either lose or gain. Our class periods run for 50 minutes. We start warm-ups about 1 or 2 minutes before the bell rings, and usually sing a few seconds past the bell.

In my experience, the last 5 minutes are usually the most productive. If we start 5 minutes late, we miss those most productive minutes. When the routine fire alarm drill hits our class time, we circle up outside and keep working. It's just one more opportunity to send the message that our time together is precious, and it also effects how they approach that time.

Consider one last reason to maximize rehearsal time. I have learned more about directing and teaching vocal technique in the process of rehearsing than any formal education could ever have given me. Certainly, if we do not work at our craft and hone our skills outside of rehearsal, then more rehearsal may only result in more time with a bad director. But if I lost 5 minutes each rehearsal in my career (24 years X 70 hours - an average of 3 rehearsal a day) then I would have lost 1,680 hours, or **2,016 fifty minute rehearsals!** There is no question that I am a better choral director today as a result of my experiences (and many mistakes) teaching on a daily basis. My advice is, if you want a better choir (and to be a better choir director,) **REHEARSE!**

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