

- Remember that rehearsing music is a process. Relax, stay focused, and let the music unfold.
- Smile often at others.
- Leave rehearsals in good spirits!

Changing the Expressionless Faces that Sing in Your Choirs

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It was 2003, and the Vocal Majority Chorus was once again favored to win the International Barbershop Competition in Montreal, Canada. As an internationally renowned chorus with, at the time, nine gold medal championships to its record, word spread among the convention delegates as to where the chorus would be holding its first rehearsal.

As the choir assembled for its much-anticipated rehearsal, the ballroom quickly filled to standing room only. The impromptu audience, anticipating a preview of an award-winning performance, instead witnessed a much different type of rehearsal. For the first twenty minutes, the chorus director rehearsed the group without singing a single note. Instead the rehearsal was focused on perfecting facial expression and choreography. The lyrics were virtually inaudible to the spectators. What would prompt a director to use such valuable rehearsal time to rehearse visual expressiveness on the eve of an international singing competition?

From the early 1970s to mid-1980s, a fascination with choral body movement became a popular topic in music circles. Since then, particularly in the past three decades, the use of movement by choirs has become underutilized. The choral tradition continues to emphasize improvement of tone quality, often neglecting visual expressiveness.

Unquestionably, the quality of auditory elements is the most important feature in a musical performance; however, the significance of visual expression by a choir should not be underestimated.

Most choral directors recognize the importance of movement in vocal development and incorporate movement exercises into their rehearsals; however, these exercises are not transferred or intended to be included in performance. While show choirs, musical casts, and performances of popular music frequently contain extravagant displays of visual expression, choral directors too often resist allowing any form of visual expression in the formal concert setting. Students are frequently instructed to stand motionless, as if turned to stone by Medusa. Consequently, choral performances throughout America are greatly fulfilling to hear, but often uninspiring to watch.

Recent research has validated the importance of visual expressiveness in musical performance but has not been effectively assimilated into American musical culture. In 2008, Juchniewicz evaluated the effect of physical movement in solo piano performance. The results demonstrated that heightened levels of facial, head, and full body movement increased a listener's perception of musical quality. In addition, "as the pianist's physical movements increased, so did the participants' ratings of phrasing, dynamics, rubato and overall musical performance."¹

As a choral director and ensemble member who has performed both with no expression and with highly expressive movement, I wondered what effect, if any, visual expressiveness of singers would have on a listener's perception of musical quality. To test this question, an experiment was designed to determine how listeners' perceived musical quality at varying levels of visual expressiveness.

A university women's choir was video-taped lip-synching a pre-recorded audio track at three varying levels of visual expressiveness (no expression, moderate expression, and high expression). Although the audio was identical for each video, audience observers (N = 164) perceived the quality of music differently at each level of visual expressiveness. Table 1 depicts the average scores for all audience observers' evaluations of musical quality and visual expressiveness.

As the choir's level of visual expressiveness increased from no expression to high expression, the observers perceived a 20.12% improvement in the musical quality of the performance. Observer rating of musical quality increased from an average of 6.51 to 7.82, a difference of 1.31 on a ten-point scale. It cannot be determined by this research if visual expression is enhancing the audience's evaluation of musical quality or if a lack of visual expression is decreasing their evaluation score. Nevertheless, these results support the importance of visual expressiveness in enhancing the perception of musi-

cal quality by an audience. We as choral directors would be remiss not to tap the full potential of our student performers by promoting visual expression in performances.

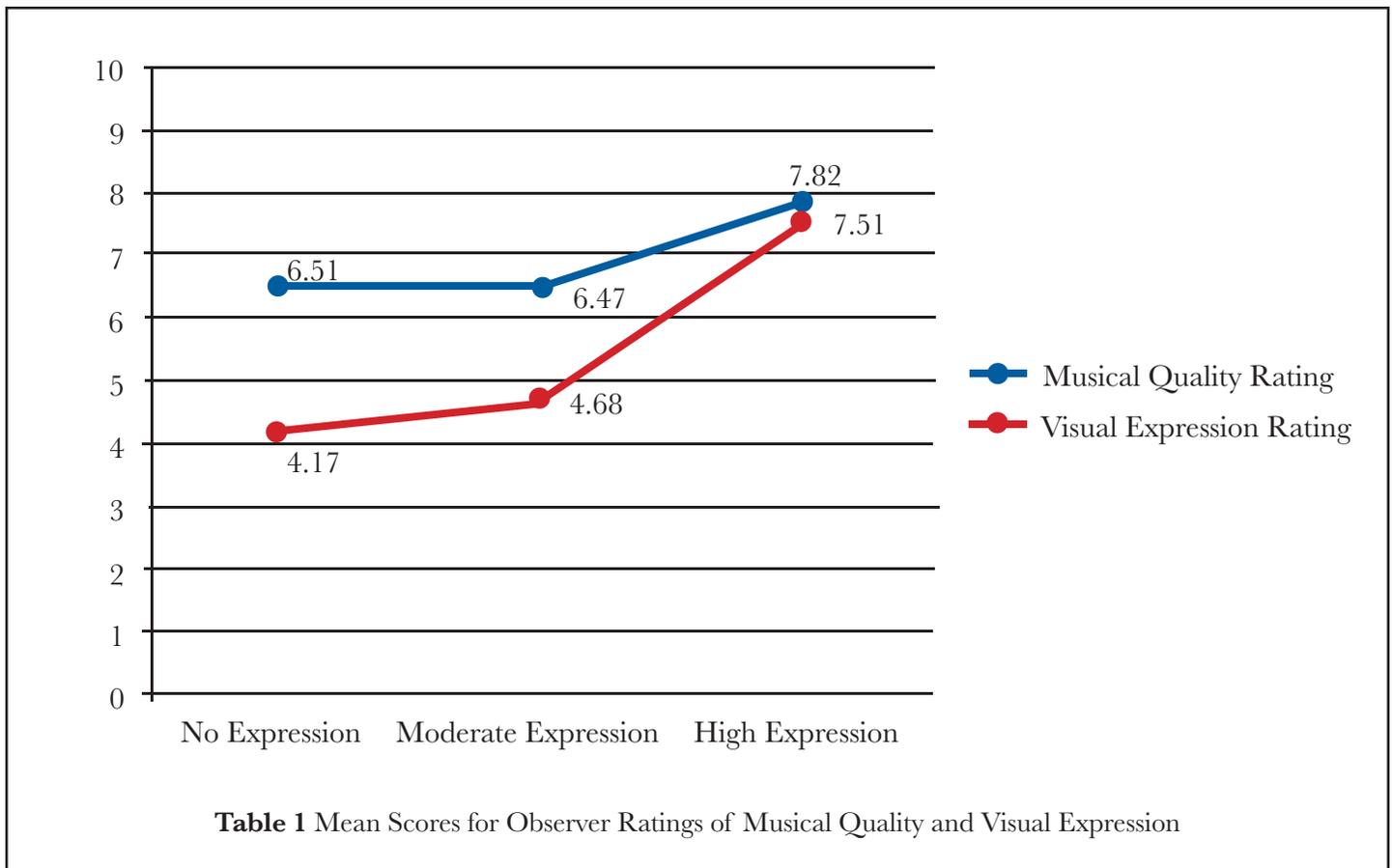
Rehearsal and Performance Applications

Full body, highly expressive movement is not intended to be choreographed movement by a group. Instead, with this type of full body movement, each individual singer should be allowed the freedom to interpret the work using not only his or her face but his/her entire body in the same fashion as any opera or musical theater performer.

For singers to appropriately display this level of expression, the director should establish expectations for posture to facilitate body movement. Performers should stand with their feet firmly planted; from the ankles up, however, the choir should be free to move with the emotional context of the song, which is often dictated by the text. To avoid undesired or distracting movement, performers' hands should remain relaxed at their sides, and singers should stand motionless at the beginning, end, and between songs.

Understandably, some choirs are not ready to perform with a heightened level of expressive movement. Middle school boys often wiggle constantly as if someone had just lit fireworks in their pants. In addition, at times the junior varsity choirs must first master correct tone and dynamics before concerning themselves with body movement. Regardless of the maturity of the choir, visual expressive training should be incorporated throughout a singer's development.

To successfully implement a heightened level of visual expressiveness in performers, choral directors should incorporate visually expressive exercises into their daily rehearsals. It is unwise and irresponsible to expect chorus members to perform with a high level of visual expression without any prior training. The following are a few examples of movement exercises that can be implemented throughout a choral rehearsal. It is important to note that these exercises do not require much additional rehearsal time and can be implemented in conjunction with a director's personal rehearsal philosophy.



Movement Exercises for Vocal Warm-Ups

- **Vocal/Visual Expression:** Students sing vocal exercises with different visual and vocal expressions. For example, on a five-note descending pattern on the text, “I love to sing,” instruct students to sing using the following expressions: anger, joy, sadness, etc.

- **Body Stretch:** This exercise, common among directors, allows students to explore the limits of their body movement. For example:

1. While bending at the waist, ask students to make the largest circle possible with only their upper body.
2. Without moving their feet, ask students to lean as far forward/backward as possible.
3. Swaying to the music—Have students plant their feet but move forward, backward, or side-to-side with the director’s hand movements. This exercise allows students to experience the entire area of movement available to them.
4. For a variation on this exercise, using this same method, move with pre-recorded music.

- **Imaginary Glass:** Instruct students to imagine that they are holding a piece of glass. Press it firmly against their face. Move the imaginary glass around in all directions, with their “pressed” face moving with it.

- **Inhalation Movement:** While inhaling one long breath, have students lean slightly forward from the ankles and not the hips. This movement can accompany any vocal exercise. It helps train singers to prepare a vowel, breathe low and silently, and initiate sound with movement. This exercise should be the initial movement for every phrase in an ensemble’s repertoire to encourage full body movement throughout the remainder of the phrase.

- **Kinesthetic Vocal Exercises:** Include kinesthetic body movement throughout the vocal warm-up. This is the first step in having students feel the freedom of motion available to them while performing. Allow students to improvise hand or body movement. The following are examples of kinesthetic hand movement.

1. Sweep the arm slowly in any direction. This includes vertical, horizontal, circular, and arched movement. This is useful in legato singing.

2. Pull the hand upwards, starting at the waist going up to the shoulders. This is helpful for pitch accuracy in descending passages.

3. With arms crossed at the waist, drop the arms to the side as you inhale. This movement promotes a low singer’s breath.

For an additional resource, see materials by Sabine Horstmann,² Frauke Haasemann, and James Jordan.³

Movement Exercises for the Rehearsal

- **Silent Singer:** Perform without singing, without sound, but incorporate body and facial expression.

- **The Italian Chef:** Sabine Horstmann asks students to stand and sing like a Russian soldier (stiff and rigid), then like an Italian chef with over-exaggerated hand and body movements.⁴ Encourage students to sing like a gospel singer or a pop star.

- **Singing Gestures:** Ask students to use their hands to show the dynamics of a work. Next, have students use their bodies to visually display dynamics.

- **Lifted Cheeks and Eyebrows:** Instruct singers to lift their eyebrows and cheeks. The result is an energized face. In addition, this technique promotes a forward tone placement and is beneficial for students with a dark or heavy tone.

- **Facial Copy:** Conduct the ensemble with facial expressions only, giving cues with a lift of your chin. Have students mimic your facial expressions.

- **Performance Venue Variation:** Experiment with your performance venue. Break down the barrier of distance between performer and audience. Have your ensemble process in, encircle the audience, or sing from the balcony.

- **About-Face:** Charlene Archibeque⁵ encourages movement by having students face and sing to each other—the front row faces the back row, second row faces third row, etc. Archibeque

places the most animated singers toward the middle of the choir where they are more visible to the audience.⁶

- **Imagery:** The use of imagery or visualization is a powerful tool in the choral rehearsal. This technique is most effective when connecting the music and movement to the emotional context of the song. Also, student discussion of texts of songs can evoke vastly-improved, committed singing.

Conclusion

The initial incorporation of movement exercises may be met with resistance from students. It is important to explain to students the effect movement can have on an audience. This will encourage both the enthusiastic and reluctant singer. Keep in mind the suppression of a performer's visual expressiveness opposes the body's natural reaction to music. From infancy, children naturally respond to music with movement. Their bodies are compelled to move with the beat.⁷ A student might appear reluctant, but she or he may be simply shy or insecure.

The effect movement has on an audience is profound, but at the heart of the matter is a question of passion. As choir directors, are we encouraging students to openly express the music through movement or suppress it through strict posture guidelines? If we expect music to move our audiences emotionally, the performers must convey the passion of the music and the meaning of texts through nonverbal expression.

NOTES

¹ Jay Juchniewicz, "The Influence of Physical Movement on the Perception of Musical Performance," *Psychology of Music* 36, no. 4 (2008): 417–27.

² Sabine Horstmann, *Choral Vocal Technique* (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2013).

³ Frauke Haasemann and James Jordan, *Group Vocal Technique* (Chapel Hill, NC: Hinshaw Music, 1991).

⁴ Sabine Horstmann, "Group Vocal Technique" (lecture, Westminster Conducting Institute, Princeton, NJ, June, 2016).

⁵ Archibeque, Charlene. "Quick Fixes for Common Choral Ailments." Lecture at the Texas Music Educators Association, San Antonio, TX, February 10, 2017.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Patricia Campbell and Carol Scott-Kassner, *Music in Childhood: From Preschool through the Elementary Grades* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Schirmer, 2006), 121.

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Moving Toward More Progressive Choral Music Teacher Education Programs

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Over the years, teacher education programs (TEPs) at institutions of higher learning have sought to create undergraduate curricula to prepare pre-service teachers for their work in the field. As the landscape of education changes frequently due to new educational initiatives, increasingly diverse student populations, lack of funding for music programs, it is paramount that TEPs adapt to the changing times. Choral music education programs are no different.

Given the peculiarities of the profession of choral music, the additional skills necessary to teach music and the duties