

# **Singing it THEIR Way: The Challenges and Rewards of Approximating Diverse Vocal Practices with Children's Choirs**

**Mary Goetze Clinician**

## **1) Ways of Approaching Diverse Vocal Practices**

- a) **Adaptation:** Adapt it to the familiar vocal timbre, style and range.
- b) **Approximation:** Listen and reproduce to the best of your ability the sounds that you perceive
- c) **Acquisition:** Study with specialists of the style for an extended period until you master the vocal technique as well as aspects of the style and culture

## **2) Is it possible and appropriate to approximate a range of vocal styles?**

- a) We can because
  - i) It is possible to approximate the sound without negative consequences.
  - ii) It can be broadening vocally and educationally.
- b) We should because
  - i) It demonstrates our respect for their music and of other ways of singing.
  - ii) It contributes to our understanding of their culture.
  - iii) We would not change the timbre of our music.

## **3) What is needed to match vocal timbre?**

- a) Information about How Vocal Styles Differ
- b) How to Match Unfamiliar Vocal Qualities
- c) Assurance That It Won't Hurt Singers
- d) Models of Multiple Vocal Techniques

## **4) How do styles of singing differ from *bel canto*?**

- a) Registration/Range: More use of the chest register, and thus a lower tessitura.
- b) Glottal Position: *Bel canto* training stresses lowered glottis to achieve maximum resonance in the laryngo- position, while others make use of a high glottal position.
- c) Pharyngeal Shape: *Bel canto* calls for verticality while for other styles, the pharynx is narrower and more horizontal.
- d) Placement: Some styles are "placed" further back or for a high degree of nasality.
- e) Special Techniques: These include ornamentation, bleating, yodeling, pulsations, overtone singing or throat singing, phonating on inhalation.
- f) Congruence of singing with speaking: *Bel canto* calls for a sustained and enlarged position of the pharynx in order to attain maximum resonance and pure vowels while other styles intone text so that the pharynx is in the same position as in speech.

## **5) Won't it hurt your voice or disturb your western vocal technique to sing in these ways?**

- a) Follow the recommendations for healthy vocal use
- b) Explore and imitate a variety of vocal sounds
- c) Teach and practice basic fundamentals of vocal production, i.e. posture, breathing
  - Teach students to recognize their vocal strengths and limitations.
  - Teach preventive practices (Adapted from Leon Thurman)
  - Maintain your body's optimum water level.
  - Warm up the voice gradually.
  - Balance voice use time with voice recovery time (silence).

- Rest at first signs of fatigue (hoarseness, phlegm, unable to maintain good posture, breath support)
  - Do not sing when throat is inflamed.
  - Avoid things that dehydrate the body (caffeine, antihistamines, antidepressants, alcohol, smoking.)
- d) Be careful not to over-practice, especially in the early phase of learning
- e) Don't overdo in the early phase of learning.

#### 6) How to Approximate Vocal Techniques

- a) Let your ear (and courage) guide your voice so that you invoke your natural imitative response while coincidentally forgetting everything you learned about your western training. (Children are better at this than adults.)
- b) Attend to and match the vowel color exactly (because the vowel shapes the pharynx and that define vowel color and thus timbre.)
- c) Explore as you prepare, listening to yourself and the model.
- d) Teach by oral transmission—notation is culture bound: It assumes *bel canto* singing and disregards vocal timbre.
- e) Listen often to the model (live or recording).
- f) Record the choir as they approximate timbres, then compare to the model.

#### 7) Other Recommendations

- a) Consonant Production: Listen to and articulate the consonants with care, attending to the position of the tongue in relation to the palate, the plosives, the use of parts of the articulators that may be used in clicks or other unfamiliar consonants.
- b) Style is dependent upon attack, duration and release of sounds: Be sensitive to the way in which vowels, pitch and quality are approached, sustained and ended.
- c) Whenever possible, learn from natives of the cultures.

*To learn THEIR music and sing it THEIR way can build bridges to unfamiliar cultures by*

- *showing respect for them and their practices;*
- *sensing the essence of that which the music expresses—the feelings embodied in it;*
- *empathizing with the makers of the music;*
- *understanding the culture in ways that learning facts cannot.*

Contact Info: goetze@indiana.edu