

Between Order and Chaos:

An Exploration of Power Dynamics and Democratic Rehearsal Techniques in

School Choirs

by

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Introduction

Chorus was my least favorite class at Portland High School in Portland, Maine. It met at 8:00 in the morning, and we were taught music that was too difficult for most singers in the choir, who had little choral experience due to poor middle school chorus programs. The director would teach each section their parts at the piano while the other sections sat idly and silently. I remember one piece by Palestrina, a composer whose music I learned to love and appreciate after having understood its context in college courses. In high school, however, Palestrina seemed boring and was made more boring by the conductor's lack of enthusiasm. With no understanding of the text setting or historical background, the music was irrelevant.

Not only was the chorus full of people who loved singing, but a handful of the singers had years of choral singing experience, piano lessons, and other musical skills. Yet our potential for leadership was never realized. It never occurred to us that other rehearsal formats existed. Therefore, we begrudgingly answered to our director, who conducted with no passion and frequently lost his temper.

I was lucky enough to sing in the Boy Singers of Maine, a choir independent of the school system. Had such an organization not existed, or if my family hadn't had the means to have me participate in it, the school music in the Portland Public School system would have been the only outlet for my desire to sing. And if that had been the case, I don't know if I would love singing and making music as much as I currently do.

The authoritarian rehearsal model described above is unfortunately all too common in this country. When I recently mentioned to a family friend, an eighth grader named Grace from New Orleans, that I wanted to be a choral conductor, she immediately responded by saying, “Please don’t be strict.” Her plea illustrates a culture in which singers wish to have their voices heard in their choral rehearsals, regarding what and how they rehearse. With no room for dialogue or dissent, authoritarian rehearsals promote docility and complacency among singers.¹

On the complete opposite end of this spectrum of singing organizations is the model of the collegiate a cappella group. In many a cappella groups, there is no one musical director, no one person making decisions about repertoire or musical interpretation. Instead, decisions are made by consensus, by voting, or by other democratic means. While a cappella rehearsals are not always efficient, having fun is just as much a goal as creating music. A cappella groups are becoming increasingly popular on college campuses and even in high schools, and this phenomenon is no accident or coincidence. In many cases, singers participate in a cappella groups because they are fun; whether they would listen to their group’s music in their own time is secondary to the enjoyment they get from singing and engaging in a democratic music-making.

The context in which these groups rehearse is noteworthy. The groups hold auditions together rather than one director, so there is collective responsibility for accepting new members. Rehearsals are usually social by nature, since members of

¹ O’Toole, P. “I sing in a choir but ‘I have no voice!’”. *Visions of Research in Music Education*, 6 (2005). Retrieved from <http://www-usr.rider.edu/~vrme/>, 3.

the groups often become close friends through their participation in the a cappella group.

More fluid, less hierarchical rehearsals like those held by a cappella groups may sound unproductive to musicians whose primary goal is polish and perfection. One of the primary challenges of any group of musicians of any size is to create a unified vision for the music being performed. The most efficient way to assure a unified performance is to select one person whose vision is steadfast and non-negotiable, and then follow his or her will. However, such a model has the potential to repel just as many singers as it attracts, given the conductor's demeanor and the music chosen. As expressed by Regelski (2007), "Teachers of all subjects would do well to worry more about how formal schooling gets in the way of, or extinguishes, the natural love of learning that students first bring to school with them."² This concept of getting out of the way so that students can learn has implications far beyond the classroom, such as the symphonic orchestra.

Dissatisfied with experiences in orchestras led by dictatorial conductors, cellist Julian Fifer and a small group of other musicians formed the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra in 1972. Orpheus has no conductor and instead relies on the leadership and passion of all its members. I will examine the rehearsal practices of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra in addition to collegiate a cappella groups to show how a professional ensemble handles democracy.

² Regelski, Thomas A. "Amateurism in Music and Its Rivals." *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 6.3 (2007). <<http://act.maydaygroup.org>> 4.

I believe that making music is inherently enjoyable. Nobody would make music if it weren't a positive experience in some way. Choral directors in the school setting are responsible for nurturing the natural love of singing that leads students to join the chorus in the first place. By exploring the rehearsal techniques employed by democratic musical ensembles, I hope to gain some insight into what makes rehearsals both effective and enjoyable, and how more egalitarian rehearsal models can be used in a school setting.

Critical pedagogy

One lens that can be used to illuminate the problematic power dynamics in choral rehearsals is critical pedagogy, a philosophy of education rooted in the works of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire's pedagogy, developed to teach literacy to poor workers in rural Brazil, centers on themes of liberation, transformation, and dialogue. Critical pedagogues reject the "banking" concept of education, in which "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing."³ Instead, critical educators seek to liberate students from hegemonic practices in the classroom and the world by examining power structures and engaging students in dialogue, reflection, and problem-posing.⁴ A critical pedagogy is one that honors the student's world and works to expand that world by making connections through dialogue.⁵

³ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1970, 72

⁴ Ibid., 66-67, 79-80.

⁵ Abrahams, Frank. "The Application of Critical Pedagogy to Music Teaching and Learning." *Visions of Research in Music Education* 6 (2005). <<http://www-usr.rider.edu/~vrme/>>.

Over the past twenty or so years, the institution of music education has been criticized from within by educators and theorists. In 1997, an international organization of music educators called the MayDay Group published an article entitled “Action for Change in Music Education,” enumerating seven action ideals for which all music education should strive. These action ideals challenge the “taken-for-granted patterns of professional activity, polemical approaches to method, and social, musical and educational philosophies, educational politics and public pressures that have threatened effective practice and stifled critical and open communication among music educators.”⁶ The purpose of these action ideals is not to be dogmatic, but rather to guide music educators through the process of reflecting upon and improving their pedagogy. Since the publication of “Action for Change,” there has been an outpouring of criticism regarding the state of music education in this country from teachers and thinkers in many disciplines. In 2002, the MayDay Group published the first issue of the journal “Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education” (ACT), promoting active criticism, research, and discussion about music education between educators and scholars in a variety of fields from all over the world. At the core of this movement to reform music education is critical pedagogy’s goal to liberate students from hegemonic practices in the classroom and in society.

⁶ "Action for Change in Music Education." *MayDay Group*. Feb. 1997. Web. 25 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.maydaygroup.org/>>.

The typical high school choir rehearsal

Every choir is different, because every choral director and every group of singers is different. However, the basic format of most choir rehearsals is the same or similar throughout the country, according to both scholarly and anecdotal accounts. Depending on the size of the group, the singers typically sit in rows or possibly in an arc, facing the conductor and perhaps an accompanist.⁷ In most rehearsals, talking is discouraged since it wastes valuable time that must be used to create a cohesive sound for the whole group. Notes are often learned by rote or with sheet music. If discussions of musical choices and text setting ever occur, they are often monologues by the conductor rather than true dialogue between all members of the chorus. In short, singers learn to sing the music correctly, but they never learn to think critically about the music.⁸

Rehearsals like the one described above fail to engage the majority of students with the music and with each other. Perhaps the few singers with more musical experience are more successful at singing correctly, but accuracy and engagement are not the same. Active engagement means that singers participate in the transmitting of the meaning of the text. It means that the interaction between the musical lines is understood. It means that choices having to do with expression, phrasing, dynamics, and timing are agreed upon thoughtfully, not simply accepted.

⁷ O'Toole (2005), 13.

⁸ Vodicka, Jason. "The Impact of Critical Pedagogy on a High School Choir." Thesis. Westminster Choir College of Rider University, Princeton, NJ, 2009, 3-4.

The conventional choral rehearsal is more concerned with the product it creates than with the experience of the singers.⁹ This concern with product is congruent with the nation's fixation on standardized test scores rather than the education and well-being of students. Music ensembles often act as promotional groups for schools, so it is understandable that having a choir with a beautiful, polished sound may be important for a school's image. However, if choral directors subscribe to a strictly authoritarian rehearsal style based on the "banking" concept of education, it is less likely that students will be changed by their singing experience. In fact, Freire maintains that such a teaching style is oppressive because it turns students into "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teacher.¹⁰ Music educators' use of more interactive, democratic rehearsal models would better serve their students.

Many teachers are frightened by chaos, so they do everything in their power to create order. However, in the words of O'Toole, "There are many degrees of control between chaos and order that might offer possibilities for rethinking choral pedagogy."¹¹ What follows is an exploration of those rehearsal models that fall somewhere between order and chaos, including rehearsals held by collegiate a cappella groups, my student forum, and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra.

Collegiate a cappella groups

If authoritarian school choirs are at one end of the spectrum of vocal ensembles, collegiate a cappella groups fall more toward the opposite end of that spectrum,

⁹ O'Toole (2005), 3.

¹⁰ Freire (1970), 72.

¹¹ O'Toole (2005), 38.

where democracy trumps all. There is great variety in the ways college a cappella groups rehearse, perform, and organize themselves.

This discussion of a cappella groups focuses on groups at Wesleyan University. There are eleven a cappella groups at Wesleyan, an unusually high number for a university of less than 3,000 students. There are currently two all-male groups, two all-female groups, three co-ed pop groups, two co-ed “comedy a cappella” groups, one choral group, and one group that sings folk songs from Eastern Europe. Each of these groups holds auditions at the beginning of the academic year, and there are generally more people who want to sing than available spots. Every so often, a new group will form composed of singers who were not accepted into any groups. Some groups prefer that their singers don’t sing in other groups, depending on the genre. For example, it would be more acceptable for someone to sing in one pop a cappella group and the choral group than to sing in two pop a cappella groups. Tension sometimes arises when multiple groups accept the same singers.

In the spirit of full disclosure, it is important that I explain my relationship to these a cappella organizations. I am one of only two people on campus who sings in three a cappella groups. The first is the Wesleyan Spirits, the oldest all-male a cappella group on campus, whose repertoire includes pop songs, old college glee club songs, and choral pieces. Along with one or two other members with years of musical experience, I play an active role in teaching music and maintaining focus in rehearsals. I also sing in the Mixolydians, a co-ed chamber choir that sings choral music. As the musical director for the Mixolydians, I lead warmups, conduct music,

and facilitate rehearsals in which everyone participates. Finally, there is Slavei, the Eastern European and Georgian a cappella group. I joined Slavei in the second semester of my junior year and am fairly new to the repertoire. My role in Slavei is therefore purely one of singing.

To learn more about power dynamics within a cappella organizations on campus, I sent a survey to members of each group. I asked three questions:

1. How does your group learn new music?
2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?
3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that make it efficient? If not, what would you change?

The responses I received were fascinating. From the process of choosing music and soloists to arranging and teaching music, there is a wide variety of practices from group to group. I will consider each question individually, summarizing the responses and analyzing power dynamics.

Question 1: How does your group learn new music?

Some groups initially sight-read the song together, and, if the parts are complicated, they then break into sectionals to solidify their parts. The group then

reconvenes to see how the song sounds after people have had a chance to work on the music in sections (ten respondents).

In one group, a few members create an outline of their arrangement in a Microsoft Word document and teach each part orally. This group almost never uses sheet music, “which makes it nearly impossible for those who didn’t arrange it to follow along or learn on their own” (respondent 6).

A few groups use a piano to teach and learn their arrangements (respondents 8, 21, and 28). The respondents didn’t specify how the piano is used, but I imagine that one member plays parts on the piano and the other members learn by ear. Many a cappella organizations arrange music with the Apple software GarageBand. The arrangers record each part and then play the recording to the rest of the group, who learn the arrangement by ear (respondents 16, 19, 21, 22, 23, and 26).

The many strategies that a cappella groups use to learn music illustrate a creative rehearsal environment in which power is spread evenly among group members. Singers discover how best to rehearse their songs through active dialogue and consensus. Leadership positions rotate, since often many members arrange songs and are expected to teach them. I would suggest that singers in any collegiate a cappella organization, formal school choir, or any musical group for that matter, be wary of using rehearsal habits that exist merely because they have worked in the past or because they are “good enough.”¹² Each new piece that presents new challenges is an opportunity to be creative and try novel rehearsal techniques.

¹² Regelski, Thomas A. “Critical Theory as the Foundation for Critical Thinking in Music Education. *Visions of Research in Music Education* 6 (2005). <<http://www-usr.rider.edu/~vrme/>>, p.20

Question 2: Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

Only a few a cappella organizations at Wesleyan have musical directors. In each of these groups, it seems that the musical director acts as someone who facilitates rather than someone who dictates musical decisions alone. “We technically have three co-heads, one of which is the musical director.... However, other members are welcome to suggest musical changes/decisions, but the musical director must approve (unless there is a majority vote, which then overrides the musical director)” (respondent 1). In another group, the musical director is responsible for conducting pieces and running rehearsal but actively leads discussions regarding musical decisions (respondents 3, 5, and 31). One group started with a musical director, but then “switched over to a system where whoever knows the piece best (often the arranger) teaches it” (respondent 4).

Five respondents said that their a cappella groups have a few members who possess advanced musical skills that allow them to guide the rehearsal process. Eleven respondents mentioned that the arranger of a particular song is responsible for teaching it. Nine respondents made no specific mention of any one person having more power than others.

Whether or not one person or many people have power to make musical decisions, each response shows that a cappella organizations at Wesleyan are fundamentally devoted to creating some sort of consensus and hearing everyone’s

opinions. Those skilled singers who step up to direct the music in a cappella groups need to listen to feedback from other singers, whose different perspectives can shed light on other aspects of music-making, such as the text and the historical background of the song.

Question 3: Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

This question yielded the most interesting results. Most respondents had clear suggestions for how their group might run better. Respondent 4 wishes that one particular group member would allow others more of a chance to speak; respondents 18 and 28 would prefer that more members of their groups would participate or be more assertive in group discussions. Respondents 12, 16, and 22 would like their groups to have a definitive music director just to keep rehearsals moving rather than debating every single issue. Respondent 3 wants to try rehearsing with a piano. Respondent 24 thinks her group could improve at choosing the right repertoire for their sound. Respondents 6, 21 (who doesn't read music), and 27 want their groups to learn from sheet music rather than by ear.

However, there is one detail that almost every respondent liked about their group's rehearsal method: everyone has a chance to voice their opinions. Many respondents went into vivid detail about the benefits they've found in having an open, democratic rehearsal process. "The most rewarding thing is, in fact, the same thing

that makes it unproductive from time to time: without a formal power structure, it relies on everyone's constant effort and input" (Respondent 11). Some respondents made mention of the mutual respect that singers must have for each other in order to have a successful rehearsal. Respondent 7 stated elegantly: "The key factor in our group's success in rehearsing is a mutual respect for all the singers in the group, and an understanding that everyone is working towards the same goal—making excellent quality a cappella music with as little stress as possible in the process. It's this understanding that bolsters the group's success and efficiency" (Respondent 7).

Many respondents are even willing to sacrifice efficiency for the sake of democracy. Respondent 2 went as far as saying that his/her group "isn't that interested in being incredibly efficient." Respondent 15 emphasized that rotation of leadership is important and that efficiency in rehearsals depends on who's leading. Sometimes, according to respondent 18, singers "tiptoe around being decisive and/or assertive," but s/he still thinks the group's democratic decision-making process is "great and innovative." Respondent 20 summarizes how most groups feel about their rehearsal process:

I am very satisfied with the way my group learns music and makes decisions, because I think it is important to make sure the power is shared between all members of the group. That being said, it is definitely not the most 'efficient' way to make decisions, but again I do not think efficiency is always the most important. I do think that certain individuals rise as leaders naturally in the group, but I think it is important to make sure everyone's voices are heard.

The fact that group members are willing to sacrifice efficiency for democracy is astounding when I think about my history in formal singing groups, which took efficiency most seriously. Yet the more I think about these answers, the more they

make sense. Equality among group members means that everyone has ownership of the music. Further, it is clear from these responses that singers care deeply about their a cappella groups.

Repertoire

In hindsight, I should have included a question about how music is selected. Luckily, some people included such information in their responses. In some groups, the decisions about repertoire are formal and intense discussions. “Song selection is a disaster in my group (it usually takes seven-or-so hours, during which everyone gets to bring in a song or two for the group to vote on, which will be learned the following semester),” says Respondent 6, “but it allows us to choose songs that we are all interested in performing and that we think will fit our group’s current sound nicely.”

The Wesleyan Spirits often begin the discussion of repertoire with one of the seniors asking if anyone has any songs in mind that they would like to sing. There are only a few people in the group in any given year who arrange music, so soloists generally work with the arrangers to decide on the right song, both for the group and the soloist. Usually, the upperclassmen facilitate the discussion of repertoire and soloists because they know the tradition that soloist priority goes to seniors and to those who haven’t had (many) solos in the past. In the Mixolydians, on the other hand, singers often casually bring in new pieces to sing. After sight-reading the piece, we’ll decide whether or not we want to sing it based on consensus.

How a group deals with choosing soloists is another point of difference between groups. Some groups arrange their pieces with particular soloists in mind. In this scenario, the arranger and the soloist work together throughout the arranging process.

Many groups hold auditions for solos. One group in particular takes their democratic soloist selection process quite seriously. Everyone in the group sings a section of the song, whether they want the solo or not, and the singing is followed by a round of anonymous voting on pieces of paper. The top three most-voted-for members then leave the room, and the rest of the group discusses each of those singers' merits as well as issues, such as how many solos the singers have had in the past. Every respondent from this group finds this process fair, though at least one finds that it can sometimes lead to hurt feelings (respondent 24).

Repertoire and soloist choices have the potential to cause conflicts between singers, especially if multiple people set their hearts on singing a particular solo. Each group has found their own way to navigate this potential for disaster, some more systematically than others. It is important that a cappella groups consistently reflect on their methods for choosing music and soloists, especially as their personnel change from year to year.

Student forum

In September of 2011, I organized a group of twenty-two singers and created a program of challenging unaccompanied choral repertoire to be performed as part of my honors thesis. I chose singers who I knew were adept sight-readers, almost all of

whom sing in a cappella groups at Wesleyan. After months of rehearsing twice a week, we performed on February 18, 2012, in the Memorial Chapel at Wesleyan University.

In addition to my experiences singing in choirs growing up and holding leadership positions in a cappella groups, my rehearsal methods were strongly influenced by a workshop I attended at Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey about the application of critical pedagogy to choral rehearsals. Led by Jason Vodicka, the workshop introduced me to concepts of group learning that felt strangely familiar. I soon realized that many a cappella groups naturally tend to rehearse in ways that Vodicka advocated, and I wanted to see how his methods would translate to a peer-led choir.

I led rehearsals with the singers standing in sections in one large semicircle. Before singing through a new piece of music, I would ask the singers to scan the music and discuss sections that looked tricky with the people standing next to them. After first reading through a new piece of music, I would tell the singers to find a space with their sections to work on their notes. Some sectionals were longer than others, normally ranging from five to ten minutes. When the singers knew the notes better, we worked more on dynamics and phrasing together, though I would occasionally ask them to work on that kind of interpretive work in sectionals. Sometimes after running through a song, I would ask the singers to take a few minutes to go over their mistakes with the people next to them, and surely enough, they often sang their parts correctly the next time. The group learned the music

quickly and sounded fantastic. Throughout the rehearsal process, I made sure to ask the singers questions about how they thought we sounded, or people had suggestions for solving particular problems. Inviting them to share their opinions established a rehearsal environment that was open to dialogue.

Sometimes the rehearsals were too loosely structured, and certain singers would keep talking or otherwise be distracting. When the concert date became closer, some singers stepped up and asked others to quiet down. Many singers told me after the concert that I could have been more strict with those who took advantage of my loosely structured rehearsals, making me wish that I had asked for that kind of feedback earlier in the process.

The concert was held on February 18, 2012, in Wesleyan's Memorial Chapel, and the singers, the audience, and I were elated by the experience. We closed the concert with Rheinberger's "Abendlied," and I have never heard a choir produce such an expressive, powerful sound. Listening to the recording of the show a few weeks later, I was struck by how wonderful the choir sounded, although I did notice some spots that could have been more polished. A few songs went flat, some songs rushed, and some songs didn't convey all the expression we had worked on in rehearsals. However, I was proud, as were all the singers in the group. Being able to contribute to the rehearsal process led to a sense of ownership of the music and camaraderie among the singers. Many of the singers in the group tell me that singing in my thesis choir was one of their greatest musical experiences at Wesleyan, and I am convinced that, in addition to the gorgeous repertoire and the caliber of everyone's musical

abilities, the collaborative rehearsal process played a crucial role in enhancing the overall experience.

Orpheus Chamber Orchestra

At the professional level, musical organizations that follow democratic practices can be incredibly successful when power is shared evenly and realistically. The Orpheus Chamber Orchestra is a world renowned orchestra with twenty-seven instrumentalists and no conductor. Instead of one person interpreting the score and making musical decisions, the orchestra discusses the score together as an ensemble. For each piece, the members of the chamber orchestra elect a concertmaster and the principle musicians, who together make up the “core.” Before rehearsing any piece with the full orchestra, the core meets together and creates a collaborative interpretation of the score. At the orchestra rehearsal, the core presents their interpretation, and the rest of the group channels their input toward the core member representing their section.¹³

The concertmaster’s and the core’s primary role is “to guide the orchestra through a collaborative process, bringing focus and shape to the musical interpretation, while encouraging others to contribute ideas to the discussion.”¹⁴ Orpheus members support the concertmaster and core because they recognize that their structure needs an effective leader in order to function successfully. Leaders must be open to suggestions, synthesize those suggestions with their own

¹³ Seifter, Harvey, and Peter Economy. *Leadership Ensemble: Lessons in Collaborative Management from the World's Only Conductorless Orchestra*. New York: Times, 2001. 69-71.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

interpretation, and be decisive when time is limited.¹⁵ Since it is understood that the members of the core have decision-making powers, there are no illusions of pure democracy.

What keeps Orpheus democratic is that the members share leadership roles. In a phone interview, cellist and co-artistic director, Jonathan Spitz, said “the core system works for us because core members continually rotate.”¹⁶ Therefore, no one person has a disproportionate amount of responsibility, and everyone gets a chance to lead. Members of Orpheus have come to realize that their lack of a conductor allows for and inspires more leadership, not less.¹⁷ Moreover, the chamber orchestra runs smoothly because each role has clearly defined responsibilities.

The members of Orpheus are well aware that their product is valued as a commodity and that it must be of high quality in order to compete with other orchestras. However, the orchestra members care just as much about their experience as the product. In the words of former executive director of Orpheus, Harvey Seifter, “Empowerment gives us the ability to maximize the talents of highly skilled individuals throughout our organization, and it improves our performance across the full spectrum of activities.”¹⁸ The experience of being empowered in rehearsals leads to a spectacular product.

Through the Orpheus Institute, members of Orpheus teach their system of leadership and communication to proficient high school musicians. Orpheus

¹⁵ Ibid., 91.

¹⁶ Spitz, Jonathan. "Conversation with Jonathan Spitz of Orpheus Chamber Orchestra." Telephone interview. 7 Mar. 2012.

¹⁷ Seifter, (2001), xi

¹⁸ Ibid., 22.

members also work with conductorless orchestras at the Manhattan School of Music, the Julliard School of Music, the University of Connecticut, and the University of Maryland. They often run workshops with businesses looking to change their work environments, and they have been the subject of numerous studies on group dynamics and power structures in academic and business journals.

Despite the fact that the Orpheus Process was designed for an ensemble of accomplished, professional musicians, its power structure can be applied amateur groups, including choral groups in which the singers' levels of skill and experience vary. Spitz suggested that the choir could "designate the core for each piece in the concert."¹⁹ Depending on the balance of core members, each core group could meet simultaneously during a rehearsal, or they could meet outside of rehearsal to prepare their interpretation. If the implementation of the core system were to include a concertmaster as well, the teacher could include a few short lessons in conducting during rehearsal, or s/he could meet with all the concertmasters separately. The core groups would then lead each piece in rehearsal. This model would require a fluid and dynamic rehearsal setup, which could sometimes end up being rather chaotic. However, giving everyone the chance to lead provides a unique learning experience that is worth the potential chaos.

¹⁹ Spitz, phone interview, 2012.

Discussion

By examining collegiate a cappella groups, my student forum, and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, I hoped to explore new possibilities for democratic rehearsals in school choral ensembles. Included in the discussion are ideas regarding sectionals, prompting, dialogue, and repertoire, all strategies and subjects I've found can create a balance of power in rehearsals.

Before considering more possible approaches, music educators must understand that resistance to new rehearsal techniques is to be expected from students and sometimes even parents and administrators. Students are often "comforted by their chains,"²⁰ and accustomed to complacency. Perhaps authoritarian rehearsal models have provided students with rewards, such as praise for singing correctly and obediently, that they don't want to give up.²¹ Music educators might also find it difficult to take a step back and allow more input from students. Rodriguez (2009) found that during student teaching apprenticeships, some music education students were resentful of letting their students teach each other and felt that their privileged, professional knowledge was devalued.²² However, the lasting effects of an empowering education can far outweigh the difficulty of getting past the initial resistance to critical and inclusive approaches to education.

²⁰ Regelski (2005), 2.

²¹ O'Toole, Patricia. "Threatening Behaviors: Transgressive Acts in Music Education." *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 10.1 (2002), 7.

²² Rodriguez, Carlos. "Informal learning in music: Emerging roles of teachers and students." *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 8.2 (2009). <<http://act.maydaygroup.org>>

Sectionals

Many choirs around the world require that each section meets once a week to work on their part together. While this model can work wonders, students often have busy schedules that don't allow for sectionals to be held. Therefore, short sectionals in the middle of rehearsals can end up saving time. Additionally, holding sectionals during a rehearsal gives each section an opportunity to collaborate and discover how they work best together. Natural leaders get the chance to use their talents, and shy members get the chance to voice their opinions in a smaller setting rather than the full choir's rehearsal.

These short sectionals need not be utilized solely for learning notes. A sectional can begin with the director asking each of the sections to experiment with different ways of shaping a certain phrase or section of music and to choose their favorite to sing with the group. Posing the question of phrasing to singers can lead to active engagement with the music, instead of simply doing as they are told by the conductor. And especially in highly polyphonic music, leaving such a discussion for sectionals can save the time it would take for the conductor to work with each part individually. Rather than just obediently following the conductor's directions about how to sing a phrase, singers collaborating in short sectionals participate in music-making and discussion that is mindful of musical results, a key component of effective music education.²³

²³ "Action for Change." *MayDay Group*, 1997.

Many a cappella organizations break into sectionals when learning music. Since the groups are completely peer-organized, the decision to hold sectionals comes naturally. There is no conductor to stop singers if they feel the need to work on their part's notes in isolation before singing in the full group. The Wesleyan Spirits and the Mixolydians use this method, and the decision to work in sectionals is often made by consensus. The singers in both groups always recognize when sectional work can be useful; often, it takes only ten minutes to fix problems that drastically improve an entire piece of music. Considering that the singers in these groups are busy and often have hours of reading and long papers to write, they see rehearsal time as valuable time. So if, for example, the altos need extra work on a particular passage, the sopranos, tenors, and basses will gather elsewhere and solidify their own parts in the meantime. To singers with time constraints who are invested in their group and music, short sectionals are common sense. Rather than having sectionals built into our rehearsals like some choirs, these sectionals happen when they are needed.

The small sectionals that happened frequently in my thesis choir were incredibly successful. While they learned, I visited each group to see who needed some help. The basses and sopranos both had some music majors in their sections, and usually didn't need much help from me. The tenors and altos, on the other hand, usually learned their parts a little slower, but I soon came to realize that their issue was mainly one of confidence, not competence.

In ten minutes, we would split up, learn notes, come back together, and sound wonderful, after which more detail-oriented rehearsing could take place. I was

consistently impressed with the level of focus that each of the sections demonstrated in these sectionals. Additionally, the singers would often use the end of their sectionals as a time to go to the restroom or fill their water bottles, which helped people focus when we reconvened.

Prompting

Another strategy for fostering growth and empowerment in a rehearsal is to prompt the singers with questions they can discuss with people around them or to consider in silence for a few moments. Prompting and asking questions can save the time that it would take to fix careless mistakes, and it also recognizes the students' previous experiences with singing and gives them the responsibility to identify and preempt problems. The first time encountering a piece is a good opportunity to ask the singers to look through the piece for a minute and perhaps suggest that they confer with each other and predict challenges. After an initial run-through, discussing those predictions as well as any challenges that the singers hadn't predicted can inform the rest of the rehearsal process.

Too often, choirs and a cappella groups will run through a piece they have practiced many times and make the same mistakes they made when they first started learning the piece. These surprise mistakes could be avoided by simply talking about or looking over the music before the first run through. "What did we work on last rehearsal?" "What makes this piece difficult?" "What did we do to fix the mistakes we made last time?" These questions can make singers aware of things they might

otherwise forget in a run-through, such as notes or dynamics noted previously in their music. Prompting critical thinking and conversation acknowledges the singers' musical knowledge and encourages independent musicianship by empowering them to take action rather than waiting to be corrected by a conductor.

Dialogue

Dialogue is the cornerstone of critical pedagogy and plays a vital role in creating an open and engaging educational environment. In a cappella groups, dialogue is present in all aspects of decision-making.

In his study of critical pedagogy in a high school choral program, Jason Vodicka discovered that engaging students in dialogue strongly effected their music-making, critical thinking, and attitudes. When working on a particular series of passages without dynamic markings in Schubert's Mass in G, students discussed the passage and came up with multiple options for how to sing the phrases. Through consensus, they decided on a mix of all three options.²⁴ The result was "stunningly beautiful," and the singers never had to be reminded of dynamics in that movement.

Dialogue regarding the text setting can serve multiple purposes. First, it can create an emotional connection between the singers and the music. It is not enough for the director to simply tell the ensemble that the text is joyful or tragic. By discussing the text together, singers can voice their interpretations and learn how the text speaks to their peers. Second, this emotional connection can inform musical

²⁴ Vodicka (2009), 98-99.

decisions regarding phrasing, timing, and dynamics. In my first year of directing the Mixolydians, we performed William Byrd's madrigal "Is Love a Boy?" It was one of the most challenging and exhausting pieces we sang that semester, and the group rarely had fun singing it. After trying to assign dynamics to passages based solely on their musical characteristics and failing to implement them, we decided to discuss the meaning of the text. From there, we were more accurately able to correlate dynamics with words, and the changes we made in that discussion effected our performance of the madrigal for the rest of the semester. Rather than starting with the "what" and "how" of our phrasing, we let the "why" inform what and how we sang.

Repertoire

Students should be more involved in choosing the repertoire they perform in school choral ensembles. Involving students in programming repertoire encourages independent musicianship, a crucial goal toward which music education should strive.²⁵ Teachers can guide their students, showing them what resources are available for discovering pieces of choral music. I use a process that anyone could certainly use to discover music: I go to Wikipedia and search "List of compositions by Johannes Brahms" or whichever composer about whom I'm curious. His compositions are organized by genre, and I click "choral." Then I look up particular pieces on Youtube to see if I like the way they sound. Since Brahms's music is old enough to be in the public domain, I then search for scores on public domain

²⁵ Regelski (2007), 34.

websites, such as the International Music Score Library Project (www.imslp.org) or the Choral Public Domain Library (www.cpdl.org). These websites are easy to use, and they make centuries of high quality music available to anyone who seeks it out. Once a student knows how to use these websites to find, evaluate, and choose music to perform, they can utilize the websites for the rest of their lives.

Depending on musical tastes, involving students in repertoire decisions could mean the inclusion of popular songs. Music educators need to stop assuming that their duty is to bring high music culture down to the level of their students and acknowledge the music of their students as worthwhile.²⁶ Another option is to organize multiple singing groups that sing different genres - choral, gospel, pop, folk, etc. That way, the director wouldn't impose choral repertoire on anyone who isn't interested in singing music they find irrelevant. Of course, lack of resources could limit this possibility. Under such limitations, directors might have to take a more hands-off approach, setting ground rules for behavior and observing as students take leadership into their own hands.²⁷

Including popular song in a vocal music program would also give students the opportunity to arrange music. Students could use traditional methods of arranging—writing a score—or they could use other creative ways to keep a record of their arrangements, including the use of software like GarageBand in the same way as some college a cappella groups. Composing and arranging gives students an entirely new perspective on the music they perform.

²⁶ Ibid., 25.

²⁷ Green, Lucy. *Music, Informal Learning and the School: A New Classroom Pedagogy*. Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008. 24.

Having multiple ensembles might mean that each of these ensembles is smaller, which I believe is a step in the right direction. Since students often have busy schedules, a smaller number of singers means that there are less people who need to find times in their schedules to rehearse and even perform.²⁸ It also means that students are better able to communicate with each other and create collaborative, cohesive interpretations through dialogue.

Programming involves more than just choosing pieces that the conductor or the ensemble likes, especially in the setting of a public school. Concerts often have themes that unite the selected pieces. Sensitive political issues in the community, state, or country might inform programming decisions, as well as the school's previous history with concerts. Rather than shying away from discussing such issues with students, these situations can provide wonderful opportunities to engage students in interactive learning environments that acknowledge music's effect on culture and society.²⁹ One of critical pedagogy's defining principles is that "education is political," and what better way to contextualize music's political role in society than by including students in the process of creating a concert program?³⁰ By exploring music's potential to make important statements, students have an opportunity to see how music fits into society and the world rather than engaging with music in isolation.

²⁸ Regelski (2007) 36.

²⁹ "Action for Change." *MayDay Group*, 1997.

³⁰ Abrahams, (2005), 4.

Architectural changes

The location of the singers and the conductor can have a strong effect on the rehearsal. O'Toole maintains that the architecture of a typical choral rehearsal, in which singers sit or stand in rows and face the conductor, perpetuates docility.³¹ She also says that having everyone stand in a large circle makes singers more aware of the gaze of both the director and the rest of the singers.³² These architectural structures are hard to avoid in choral rehearsals since they're effective and since most rehearsal spaces are conducive to these kinds of formations. One formation that I experienced at a critical pedagogy workshop at Westminster Choir College placed the four voice parts in their own circles around the room with the conductor in the center. Not everyone faced the conductor, but everyone listened and worked on making their voice part sound cohesive. The more adjustable the space, the more options there are. I recommend trying out new formations every once in a while and perhaps inviting students to think of new formations as well.

Conclusion

In a rehearsal environment that promotes dialogue and flexibility, the role of the choral conductor becomes that of a facilitator. When students actively participate in running a rehearsal, the facilitator's job is to keep them on track and to help channel their energy toward their goals. When students get lost or confused, conductors may

³¹ O'Toole (2005), 13.

³² Ibid., 14.

ask questions to guide them, or use their knowledge of music to correct students' mistakes and set them on the right path again.

Every music ensemble is different and the conditions of any given rehearsal are bound to change. Therefore, choral directors must constantly reevaluate their approaches to facilitating rehearsals. Singers might need more freedom on some days, while structure and order might be more conducive to learning on other days. In an environment where open dialogue is the norm, such decisions about how to rehearse can hopefully be made together.

Through my experiences singing in and leading cappella groups and my student forum, I have come to value democracy in musical ensembles more than I would have ever thought. I have never felt more empowered or fulfilled than when I have collaborated with other musicians to create a work of art that is larger than any individual contributor. Authoritarian choral directors in schools must become a thing of the past. While they may hold strongly to their opinion that efficiency creates the best musical product, they are teaching for the wrong reasons if product is all that concerns them. Students of music deserve no less than an education founded on active participation and dialogue.

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Appendix A: Senior Thesis Recital

In partial fulfillment of my honors thesis at Wesleyan University, I conducted a choir of twenty-two singers in a concert of thirteen unaccompanied choral works. We started rehearsing twice a week in September of 2011, and we performed the concert on Saturday, February 18, 2012 in Wesleyan's Memorial Chapel. The works we performed were:

Psalm 96 by Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621)

Lasciatemi Morire by Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

The Shower, Op. 71, No. 1 by Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Chansons Françaises by Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

1. Margoton Va T'a L'iau

2. La Belle Se Sied

Versa est in luctum by Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548-1611)

The Colorless Morning by Aaron Peisner (b. 1989)

Fünf Gesänge, Op. 104 by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

No. 2, Nachtwache II

No. 3, Letztes Glück

No. 4, Verlorene Jugend

Kristallen Den Fina by Gammal Mariavisa, arr. Gunnar Eriksson (b. 1921)

Lakodalmas by György Ligeti (1923-2006)

Abendlied, Op. 69, No. 3 by Josef Rheinberger (1839-1901)

I chose each of these pieces because I find them beautifully composed and satisfying to sing, with no boring melodic lines and many subtle nuances regarding the relationship between the text and music. Each piece is challenging in its own way, and there are few opportunities at Wesleyan to sing such challenging choral repertoire by major composers. The pieces also represent a wide range of periods, spanning over four hundred years. I didn't choose any pieces from the 18th century because most pieces from that period are accompanied by harpsichord, organ, or full orchestra, and I wanted my concert to be completely unaccompanied.

Some might say I was audacious to include one of my own compositions in a program featuring works by composers such as Brahms, Poulenc, and Monteverdi. I certainly felt that way. Since I wrote "The Colorless Morning" in January of 2012, I didn't think the entire choir had time to learn it, so I asked five singers to learn the piece with me. The piece, written in six parts, is set to a poem by Richard Aldington (1892-1962), whose poetry reflects his time fighting for England in World War I. All of the composers in the program influenced this compositions, as well as the composer John Hollenbeck of the Claudia Quintet.

I feel incredibly lucky to have had the opportunity to perform this program and to work with such skillful and intelligent singers. The singers, the audience members, and I all thought the concert was a great success. I can only hope that I'll ever get to work under such conditions again.

Appendix B: A Cappella Survey Responses

Respondent 1

Response Started: Sunday, March 4, 2012 7:35:05 PM

Response Completed: Sunday, March 4, 2012 7:54:53 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

Group A: Typically we have sheet music, and because everyone is really good at sight reading, we can usually sight read through the piece (or break down into parts if/when needed). For some other songs, we learn through oral tradition (older members teach the younger ones the music by singing it). To memorize, once the majority feels ready to go off-book, we have one person in a part hold the sheet music, while the other is off-book, then they trade. Group B: In this group we always have sheet music arranged by one of the members. We break down into parts, and then come back together to piece it together. As of right now, we have part sectionals once a week to solidify individual parts.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

Group A: The seniors in this group are the "heads" of the group, one could say. Although we typically do have one to two people who give pitches/direct/make critiques and give comments after the song. But this is, from what I've seen, because they have the most experience and have grounds to do this. Also, all other members make comments and help each other out. Everyone plays a big part in the group. It's the best. Group B: In this group, we technically have 3 co-heads, one of which is the musical director. This director makes the final calls on the large musical decisions and tends to direct dynamics/tempo/etc. However, other members are welcome to suggest musical changes/decisions, but the musical director must approve (unless there is a majority vote, which then overrides the musical director).

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

Group A: Yes yes yes yes yes. The high level of musicality, the focus, the logical process, and tradition simply makes the most sense for learning music and making musical decisions. Group B: As for learning music, I am satisfied. But, I believe the musical decision making process could be a little more democratic, rather than limited to one person. This allows for a larger range of opinions, which ultimately will be more appealing to the audience.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 2

Response Started: Sunday, March 4, 2012 7:55:46 PM

Response Completed: Sunday, March 4, 2012 7:59:13 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

the arranger of the song assigns parts and we learn through repetition/ piecing together.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

no music director. we reach decisions by voting. also arrangers or seniors usually get a little bit more say.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

learning music has gotten better as the semester goes on, but it depends on the arranger. it could go more smoothly if the arranger identified parts ahead of time. but we are not that interested in being incredibly efficient. the way we make music decisions is great. i'm glad it's done through consensus. we all have an idea of what kind of music suits our group, but there's also an active effort to branch out. so because we're all on the same page, we tend to agree on what needs to be done.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 3

Response Started: Sunday, March 4, 2012 8:16:54 PM

Response Completed: Sunday, March 4, 2012 8:18:36 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

By ear/sight-reading without a piano. Our musical director teaches people parts when they have problems

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

The musical director makes most of the decisions and conducts, but takes a lot of input.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I think that some of our voice parts could benefit a lot from using a piano.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 4

Response Started: Sunday, March 4, 2012 8:41:01 PM

Response Completed: Sunday, March 4, 2012 8:56:20 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

There is some debate over this. Some of the more classically trained members of our group think that music should always be learned as a whole, so people can hear how all the parts fit together. However, I personally feel that this is inefficient and it is better to split into sectionals to learn music, until each section has a good grasp on their part. Then the group should bring it together and listen to the whole sound.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

We started out with a musical director, but then we switched over to a system where whoever knows the piece best (often the arranger) teaches it. The person in charge teaches the music to the group and plays parts on the piano if necessary. They also often have control over dynamics, etc. However, if there is a soloist, he/she has input and often sets the tempo.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

There is one individual in the group, whose is too opinionated and controlling and discourages others from speaking up. However, as a whole, our group is able to discuss important decisions as a whole rather effectively. I think this is primarily because we are so close personally and understand each other.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

Without a set leader in the group who controls everything, there is of course a loss in efficiency, but it is worth it. This way everyone has a voice. Because of the constant discussion, "rules" of the group are always in flux.

Respondent 5

Response Started: Sunday, March 4, 2012 8:57:29 PM

Response Completed: Sunday, March 4, 2012 9:00:47 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

We sightread each piece.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

I would say that you, Aaron, are our musical director. Usually our director directs us as we learn, but we all play a role in making musical decisions.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I am satisfied, although I'm a little concerned about how our group will run next year when we lose so many seniors.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 6

Response Started: Sunday, March 4, 2012 8:37:18 PM

Response Completed: Sunday, March 4, 2012 9:01:38 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

Two or three group members get together for a total of five or six hours and arrange the new song by ear. The arrangement has historically been done on Microsoft Word, which makes it nearly impossible for those who didn't arrange it to follow along or learn on their own - although last week we used sheet music for the first time.

Following the arranging process, we all meet at our schedule meeting times and gather around a piano to learn the song. One of the arrangers teaches each group member his or her part, phrase by phrase, until everyone can sing a certain section of the song together. We go on learning that way until we've put the whole song together and then audition that song at the beginning of the following rehearsal (that is to say that those who are interested in soloing on that song all get a chance to sing it with the background parts and those who didn't audition deliberate and vote on the eventual soloist).

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

We do not have a musical director. Normally all the musical decisions are left up to the arrangers of the song that we are currently learning. Occasionally someone will suggest something to the arranger that works really well and that suggestion will usually be accepted by the arranger and incorporated into the song, on the fly. A recent example of this was when group member "A" (not an arranger) suggested to the group that we sing a triplet rather than the standard rhythm that had pervaded in the song. We all worked together to figure out how this change would affect the rest of the song and then incorporated it into our performance.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I am largely satisfied with our process, although I would rather have sheets of the arrangements that we put together. The difficulty with that is that we often choose to create very complex arrangements - some which require all thirteen group members

to be on individual parts at certain moments - which makes notating our arrangements more difficult than traditional transcription. While I would appreciate sheet music so that I would have the opportunity to learn outside of rehearsal, I think our group has a really unique learning style that aids our total sound and overall dynamic. By learning songs by ear, together, we create a blend that is unmistakably our own, and have the opportunity to fix sections that we don't like immediately. In short, as we learn together, we automatically find the right blend for the song and that we we don't have to "unteach" or "reteach" at the end.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

People bring too much drama to a cappella. Groups should not be considered "rivals" and group members should not get so upset with other group members for minor mistakes, be they musical or logistical. Having said that, I'd also say that joining an a cappella group is a choice that is made with fun in mind, but that should be taken seriously, and honored as any primary commitment would. As far as learning music is concerned, I think everyone recognizes that something an arranger brings in is a representation of his or her musical creativity and ingenuity, and I appreciate the way in which my group respects that fact. Song selection is a disaster in my group (it usually takes seven-or-so hours, during which everyone gets to bring in a song or two for the group to vote on, which will be learned the following semester), but it allows us to choose songs that we are all interested in performing and that we think will fit our group's current sound nicely. Having song selection every semester also allows us to keep our repertoire fresh and well-balanced - or so we hope.

Respondent 7

Response Started: Sunday, March 4, 2012 9:01:08 PM

Response Completed: Sunday, March 4, 2012 9:08:58 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

We usually go through an initial sight-reading of the music, then break off into sectionals to learn in parts. After the sectionals, we reconvene and go over rough spots. Although there is no official "director," the better sight-readers help others out with their parts.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

Our group does not have a music director, but there are certainly people who take more active roles in teaching music and troubleshooting at rehearsals. Everyone shares their input when learning songs, and the group benefits from this active participation.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I am very satisfied with the way my group learns music and makes decisions. Everyone is committed and there is little drama. However, I don't believe that our group's method is what makes it efficient. On the contrary, the same method failed in numerous ways last year. The key factor in our group's success in rehearsing is a mutual respect for all the singers in the group, and an understanding that everyone is working towards the same goal--making excellent quality a cappella music with as little stress as possible in the process. It's this understanding that bolsters the group's success and efficiency.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 8

Response Started: Sunday, March 4, 2012 10:52:10 PM

Response Completed: Sunday, March 4, 2012 10:54:09 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

We teach each other with piano

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

No we spread the work our evenly

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I like it. I think it comes from te respect we have for one another and the fact that everyone does that part by arranging and teaching makes it an equal playing field

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 9

Response Started: Monday, March 5, 2012 8:20:13 AM

Response Completed: Monday, March 5, 2012 8:31:57 AM

1. How does your group learn new music?

We learn by ear. A couple of group members collaborate in arranging the songs we want to sing, roughly notate it in a Word document, and teach the rest of the group from the document by picking out each person's part on the piano. We've only used sheet music once, which helped somewhat, but not everyone in the group can or enjoys reading music so I'm not sure if that will continue.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

Nope! It's entirely democratic, for better or for worse. We decide by consensus (usually hours of argument and debate) on which songs we want to learn, set lists for concerts, etc. Songs are usually not picked with a soloist in mind, and we have open auditions for each song, and then decide as a group who gets the solo. For the background/body of each particular song, the arrangers generally decide who sings which part, based upon knowledge of everyone's vocal ranges.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

Overall, yes, I'm satisfied with it. Having a democratic decision-making process can be frustrating at times, but I think it's the best way to ensure that each member of the group has a voice and that each song we sing is truly the product of collaborative effort. This adds to the overall positive dynamic of the group; we're all very dedicated to one another not only as singers but as people, and I think that care shows in our performance. The only thing that hinders us is that without a designated director we sometimes get in our own way with talking, goofing off, etc. No one really has the "power" to easily quiet and bring focus to the group, so we often end up shouting over each other for quiet.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 10

Response Started: Monday, March 5, 2012 11:28:11 AM

Response Completed: Monday, March 5, 2012 11:32:44 AM

1. How does your group learn new music?

We usually give it a run-through if it's not too complicated, or begin with sectionals if it's quite scary.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

Sort of - musical direction is shared across the groups but concentrated within the most musically literate members of the senior class. These individuals help to isolate and address problematic sections of music, or improve pieces as wholes.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

Yes! Collaboration is central to the group sound, and the focus members bring to rehearsal is crucial to our success in this area.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

I very much enjoy the balance between collective and solitary leadership: the group trusts itself to learn and develop new meanings, and individuals can step in and out of leadership positions as need be,

Respondent 11

Response Started: Monday, March 5, 2012 11:51:50 AM

Response Completed: Monday, March 5, 2012 11:57:07 AM

1. How does your group learn new music?

In most cases, we use written music, though occasionally, we learn pieces by ear. We often break off into short sectionals, though mostly we learn music as a group.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

Our group does not have an official music director, though there are often a few upper classmen who act as de facto music directors. Though everyone has a say in musical decisionmaking, I would say that the de facto leaders push our rehearsal process along.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

Overall, I would say that I am satisfied with my group's music learning and decisionmaking style. The most rewarding thing is, in fact, the same thing that makes it unproductive from time to time: without a formal power structure, it relies on everyone's constant effort and input. From year to year, this varies. This year, however, it has been quite excellent.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 12

Response Started: Monday, March 5, 2012 11:59:36 AM

Response Completed: Monday, March 5, 2012 12:03:36 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

We break up into sectionals and go over sheet music with a piano, following along and working through trouble spots.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

No. Generally, though, the arranger teaches his or her piece. Then once in sections it's pretty even. Though the arranger leads the learning of his or her piece, everyone in the group also brings their opinion and often we change parts.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

Yes, I think it's helpful to have multiple people's musical ideas being used. However, there are times when having one clear leader could make things more efficient.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 13

Response Started: Monday, March 5, 2012 4:49:39 PM

Response Completed: Monday, March 5, 2012 4:54:46 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

Usually groups comprised of 2-3 people arrange a song. Then, the whole group meets in the music studios and is taught the song. Occasionally we break up into sectionals

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

We do not have a musical director. However, there are certain members of the group who have stronger musicianship background who take leadership roles in terms of arranging and coming up with parts. Different people take charge of different songs depending on their amount of free time and dedication to the specific piece

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I am very satisfied, sometimes the first few rehearsals of learning a song is difficult because for half the time you are listening and waiting for others to learn their parts. Our group gets along very well socially and therefore we all respect each other and forgive people when they get cranky or sassy. I think this patience is key in our success.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 14

Response Started: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 4:43:17 PM

Response Completed: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 4:51:14 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

Group A (Ono): by ear and/or with music. Group B (Slavei): primarily with music

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

Group A: no. democratic group! there are a few girls who step up to leadership roles often, but everyone is always really vocal about how we run rehearsals/make decisions/etc. Group B: no formal music director, but tend to have several people who step up to leadership roles (more, for example, than my "Group A")

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

Group A: yes. I like that it's democratic. Group B: I think it could be more democratic. But I think a lot of that has to do with the "leaders" we've had for the past three years -- that could change a lot in upcoming years.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

Group A: Audition process for solos: We audition every solo we have. Everyone stands up in a circle, and sings through (in unison) a selected portion of the solo, until everyone is comfortable. We then go around one at a time, and everyone sings the section (even if she doesn't want the solo). After everyone has finished, only the people who want the solo leave the room, and the rest of the group discusses who to give it to. Group B Solo process: Totally random. I feel uncomfortable with the fact that, for example, I feel like I get a lot of solos just by chance. I would prefer if we auditioned them, and I "earned" them. As it is now, I feel like I might be just taking solos away from other people!

Respondent 15

Response Started: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 5:00:42 PM

Response Completed: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 5:04:45 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

Depending on who has arranged the music, we will either learn by rote or learn with sheet music. Depending on how many parts there are/how complicated the music is, we will either all be present to learn our parts or we will break off into sections and teach ourselves. Usually we all stay together.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

We are a democratically run group, so usually the person who arranged the piece will teach the rest of the group and have final say over musical decisions, but we all contribute to the decision-making process

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I am, in general, satisfied with the musical organization of my group. The learning process goes different levels of smoothly depending on who is teaching, but it gives each person (if she arranges) the opportunity to lead a rehearsal. As someone who does not arrange music, that means I have less of a leadership role in terms of music making, but I don't think we could function any other way.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 16

Response Started: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 5:04:41 PM

Response Completed: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 5:07:09 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

Alternating between sheet music and garageband (learning by ear)

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

No, whoever arranges a song teaches the song. We are democratically run, so everyone has input with making decisions.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I am satisfied although there are times when I wish we had a distinct leader or director for the times when we cannot come to conclusive decisions.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

n/a

Respondent 17

Response Started: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 5:11:28 PM

Response Completed: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 5:13:22 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

Sometimes by listening and repetition, sometimes by reading music and listening to the piano

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

No. The group decides semi-democratically

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

Yes. I think it works better this year because there are more people contributing new songs.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 18

Response Started: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 5:20:55 PM

Response Completed: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 5:23:57 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

Different ways (sheet music, by rote, etc.) depending on who arranged the music and how.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

Nope, we are very consciously democratic. Everything is put to group discussion and an effort is made to make sure every voice is heard and everyone feels good about decisions made.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

The democratic decision-making process is very time consuming and sometimes feels inefficient (especially if people are tiptoeing around being decisive and/or assertive), but generally I think it is great and innovative.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 19

Response Started: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 5:51:59 PM

Response Completed: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 5:57:41 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

Multiple ways: by sheet music, with garageband (by ear), with someone teaching it vocally (by ear)

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

No. Everyone may suggest songs and arrange songs. We vote/come to a consensus on songs that we want to arrange, the arranger arranges them, and people give the arranger constructive criticism/suggestions.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

Yes. It keeps everyone happy and does not put pressure on any one person. If people don't want to arrange, they don't have to, and if people want to arrange many songs, they can. Also, since everyone has a say, it keeps our repertoire balanced and diverse.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 20

Response Started: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 6:43:56 PM

Response Completed: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 6:48:14 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

The arranger generally teaches their song. We usually learn by ear using a piano, though if the arranger writes music we also learn by reading music.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

We do not have a music director, as we are entirely democratically run. Anybody can arrange, teach, direct, or give comments/feedback. We make musical decisions as a group. For auditions, everyone in the group sings a part of the song and then those who want the solo leave the room and the remaining members decide.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I am very satisfied with the way my group learns music and makes decisions, because I think it is important to make sure the power is shared between all members of the group. That being said, it is definitely not the most "efficient" way to make decisions, but again I do not think efficiency is always the most important. I do think that certain individuals rise as leaders naturally in the group, but I think it is important to make sure everyone's voices are heard.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 21

Response Started: Wednesday, March 7, 2012 10:46:53 AM

Response Completed: Wednesday, March 7, 2012 11:00:49 AM

1. How does your group learn new music?

We learn by ear. One person or a couple people work together to make the arrangement on GarageBand and then that person (or people) teach the song to the group members by assigning them different parts within the arrangement. We learn by singing and repeating, or from repeating what we hear from the arrangement.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

We do not have a music director. At the beginning of the semester we get together to discuss and play for each other partial arrangements or the original version of the song that we would like to sing- what we actually perform really depends on who actually arranges a song. In terms of who sings a solo, we decide by having everyone audition for the solo and then vote on slips of paper for our top two. Those two leave the room and we discuss the pros and cons of each person singing the solo.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

In theory our group makes musical decisions by consensus, but in practice it is more often the few louder voices that ultimately end up swaying decisions within the group. I do like that we learn our songs by ear because as someone that cannot read music, I am able to be included in the music learning process, whereas if we were reading music it would be a lot more difficult for me. On the other hand, using sheet music would mean more efficient learning from year to year. As it is now, we teach the new members our old songs by singing through them and having them listen to a particular part, which can be a tedious and long process, and means that if there are multiple people who graduate who were the only ones singing on a part, it might make it more difficult to keep that song in our repertoire because those parts might be lost when that person graduates. Often we have recordings to work from, but using sheet music might remedy a lot of these issues.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

It is a fun, unique, and stressful experience- yes, all three of those.

Respondent 22

Response Started: Wednesday, March 7, 2012 11:13:39 AM

Response Completed: Wednesday, March 7, 2012 11:17:50 AM

1. How does your group learn new music?

By rote, using garageband arrangements

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

no we don't have any set leader, we decide things by discussion and majority vote. whoever arranged a given song teaches it.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

we should have a musical director, a set note-taker, a business/admin director who books rehearsal space/does schedules etc. but i do like the fact that the person who arranges the song has authority with it.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

an all female group creates a lot of drama

Respondent 23

Response Started: Wednesday, March 7, 2012 1:19:22 PM

Response Completed: Wednesday, March 7, 2012 1:22:26 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

One person teaches from an arrangement done in GarageBand

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

No-we discuss everything as a group, though the person who arranges the song generally has most say in the decisions for that particular song.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

yes! I think it is effective for everyone to take on as much responsibility as they see fit —if one person arranges, that person takes on more responsibility and vice versa.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

Without sheet music, it is sometimes hard for people to remember their parts week to week. We have people generally record themselves singing their own parts on some sort of recording device before they leave rehearsal so they can always go back to it.

Respondent 24

Response Started: Wednesday, March 7, 2012 1:24:14 PM

Response Completed: Wednesday, March 7, 2012 1:45:53 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

The person who has arranged the song records all the different parts on garageband, and then teaches each part to the other members by ear. People either get it in their head or record their own parts on their phone for reference.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

No, it's a pretty democratic system. The arranger of the song teaches the music and everyone follows the arranger's wishes in terms of dynamic and tone. If people have suggestions for how certain phrases should be sung, they bring it up and people may or may not accept it. The final say goes to the arranger, though. In terms of deciding which songs to sing, we have a rehearsal at the beginning of every semester where we all bring 2 songs we'd like to have the group sing. Then we just go through them and pick a realistic number to learn by that semester based on popular vote. We have discussions about the songs too, of course, and generally we try to keep in mind that we should have a variety of genres in our repertoire. Sometimes though people will also arrange songs throughout the semester just for kicks and play the arrangement for the group members during a rehearsal, and if we like what we hear and the other songs we were supposed to sing haven't been arranged yet, sometimes we'll pick up that song instead. It's a very fluid process.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I think we should be a little more discriminating about which songs would have arrangements that would suit our group's talents and general sound- sometimes we just jump on songs because we think they're hot. Which is not a big deal- I'm not really bothered by it because it's fun to sing a sexy song. I think if we were to be more discriminating though, we would end up with higher quality performances. Also the way we choose soloists produces kind of a strange dynamic- each member is obliged to audition a part of the solo chosen by the arranger and then we have an anonymous voting process on pieces of paper. The top three most-voted for members leave and then the rest of the group discusses the relative strengths of each candidate's audition and how well suited we think each person's voice is for the song. It think this decision process gets messy because it's not always about who sang the best audition- there are factors to consider like each singer's past history of singing solos (is the singer never loud enough?), how many solos does the person have, etc. During this deliberative process I feel like we objectify our singer's voices too much, (which is not an intentionally bad thing, but is just what happens) and it kind of sucks because they're our fellow members and we love them. We discussed it a couple of times though and

have decided that this is the best way to be fair about auditioning solos, so I guess I can't think of an alternate strategy. Choosing solos isn't always a big deal, but sometimes people's feelings do get hurt, and I wish there was a way we could avoid that.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 25

Response Started: Wednesday, March 7, 2012 1:55:40 PM

Response Completed: Thursday, March 8, 2012 11:05:12 AM

1. How does your group learn new music?

Someone listens to a song and changes the instrumental parts to voice parts and then teaches each part to the rest of the group.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

We are pretty democratic, many different people arrange songs and typically whoever arranged the song is in charge of the decisions for that particular one.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I think that having everyone have the opportunity to arrange and direct songs keeps the task from being solely on one person and helps us to learn a lot of songs in a short amount of time.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

none.

Respondent 26

Response Started: Thursday, March 8, 2012 10:23:16 PM

Response Completed: Thursday, March 8, 2012 10:25:07 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

one person arranges on garageband and then teaches the parts

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

no musical director - we vote on which arrangements we want to do and which people we want to have the solo

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

everyone is very opinionated in my group, so sometimes it is difficult to make decisions that everyone is happy with. if anyone is vehemently opposed to a decision, we don't do it.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

i love it!

Respondent 27

Response Started: Saturday, March 10, 2012 11:35:47 AM

Response Completed: Saturday, March 10, 2012 11:37:49 AM

1. How does your group learn new music?

By ear

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

No, we go through a democratic process and listen to everyone's opinions before making a decision

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I wish we could learn from sheet music because it would be quicker and more precise that way, but I understand that not everyone reads music and that learning by ear can lead to some cool input and different improvisation that wouldn't have been there otherwise.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

No Response

Respondent 28

Response Started: Sunday, March 11, 2012 12:02:44 PM

Response Completed: Sunday, March 11, 2012 12:10:33 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

All sorts of ways... by ear, by piano, with sheet music. Depends on who arranged it.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

I guess so! We have an elder stateswoman of sorts who is really good at music and arranging and teaching things. Everyone gets input of course, especially if they arranged a song.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

Yeah! It gets messy sometimes, because we're all really busy and so not enough music gets arranged. But everyone ends up pretty happy. I certainly wouldn't call us efficient but it works well enough! More group input would be better, I think, because then everyone would have ownership of the group. On the other hand, then sometimes people get crabby when they don't trust other people's input. I'd say I'm generally pro-more-involvement though.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

We have to balance having a lot of fun with staying focused, which can be a challenge since our version of "focused" is supposed to be fun. Since the music we do isn't that hard and sounding good isn't always the point, we have to gauge what we want to do at each practice. Would we rather just tell jokes and sing some songs twice or so? Then we do that! Do we want to work hard and learn a new song all the way through? Then we do that! It's not a group filled with music majors and whatnot, so everyone has something slightly different they want to get out of being in the group. It can be hard to find a balance, but we talk it out and get better at it.

Respondent 29

Response Started: Thursday, March 22, 2012 2:01:52 PM

Response Completed: Thursday, March 22, 2012 2:11:30 PM

1. How does your group learn new music?

The Vineyard Sound generally learns music through group rehearsals led by a designated musical director. Sectionals are often used to foster learning of individual parts. While group members are free to offer their opinions, musical decisions are generally finalized by the director.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

Yes. Members are expected to be competent sight singers, if problems arise the music director is in charge of enforcing dynamics, syllables and the like, as well as keeping an ear out for mistakes in sight reading, precision, intonation and blending.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

For the most part, yes. Assuming a competent music director is in charge, this system works rather well. However, I would note that some directors are better at taking group members' musical concerns and opinions into account. Furthermore, some directors have a better understanding of how to vary voice parts, and how to get the best from their members voices. Having a musical director in general allows for a more efficient rehearsal because that position of leadership allows a certain amount of relief from other group members in terms of maintaining musicality. That is to say, there is generally not a lot of time arguing of musical minutia since that is exclusively on member's job.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

Unlike other collegiate a cappella groups, part memorization is expected outside of rehearsal. This demand is fostered in a professional performance aspect in ways that it is not in campus groups.

Respondent 30

Response Started: Saturday, March 24, 2012 9:24:46 AM

Response Completed: Saturday, March 24, 2012 9:36:53 AM

1. How does your group learn new music?

Our group is able to read music and we often times break up into sectionals to work on parts. Learning by ear is also a crucial technique.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

The group does not have a music director. Musical decisions are typically made as a whole group, though there are select members of the group who have arranging capabilities that make more decisions than others for they are able to impliment them into the notation. Our group has about two people that teaches or guides and helps us learn music.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I am satisfied with the way my group leans music and makes decisions. The group is incredibly fair in making decisions and people voicing opinions if they chose to.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

One method that has worked incredibly well in my group involves memorizing music. Essentially, if there are two or three people on any one SATB part, one person has music infront of them while the other person does not look at the music. In this way, the person with music supports the one attempting to memorize it, and the

person without music is able to see where he or she is singing incorrectly. This method has single-handedly transformed a cappella group and should be used by any musical group for best results. ©

Respondent 31

Response Started: Tuesday, March 27, 2012 6:21:46 AM

Response Completed: Tuesday, March 27, 2012 6:33:38 AM

1. How does your group learn new music?

My group first attempts to sight read a new piece. Generally, we'll then split off into sections to solidify the notes. After each part has learned the notes, we come back together as a group and work on turning the new piece into music, i.e. manipulating dynamics, phrasing, etc. My old group in high school would learn music by imitating the music director on the piano. He would play each part on the piano to make sure we got the correct notes. Although we might have learned music faster this way, I prefer my current groups method.

2. Does your group have a music director? If so, what is his/her role in teaching/ learning new music and making musical decisions? If not, how does the group deal with making musical decisions?

My group does have a music director. He is integral to the group's work with new music. Although all the members of the group contribute their ideas, the music director buffers all comments and has the final word about decisions.

3. Are you satisfied with the way your group learns music and makes musical decisions? If so, do you think there are particular strengths in your group's method that makes it efficient? If not, what would you change?

I am satisfied by our group's balance of group participation and leadership. We have two primary leaders of the group, one who runs rehearsals and the other coordinates the group's logistics. I think it is very important to have leaders within the group who have authority but do not silence the voices of the other members. I think there's space for every member of the group to shape a piece of music, and rehearsals run smoothly and efficiently with two leaders.

4. Additional comments about learning music in your a cappella group:

I think when music really comes to life within my group is when all of the members are invested in the group and the piece. Everyone is accountable.