

THE CHURCH CHOIR

BASIC MUSIC SURVIVAL GUIDE

By Hector Bourg Jr.

A musical primer for the amateur church musician who hasn't a clue to what's going on at least half the time (but doesn't want to admit it), and who desperately wants to avoid those piercing, steely-eyed glances from an exasperated choir director.

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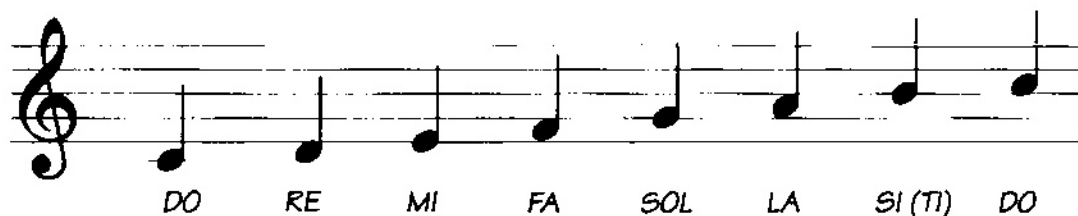
The typical church choir member is a non-professional volunteer who enjoys singing, indeed takes great JOY in singing, but typically has little or no formal musical training. Even many long-time choir members harbor misunderstandings about various musical concepts or possess only a sketchy knowledge of necessary music fundamentals. This often leads to frustration for both choir director and choir member. While there are many formal music theory texts available for serious music students, there are few if any texts around that address the limited needs of the once-a-week, volunteer church choir member.

This handy "Basic Music Survival Guide" is meant to fill that void. Music fundamentals are presented in a manner that is non-threatening, frequently humorous and always easy to read. The author has attempted to present to the reader the necessary basic musical concepts without offering him "more than he wants or needs to know!"

Every choir member could benefit by having his or her own personal copy to refer to, or mark up, or study. Both director and choir members are likely to find this little guide both rewarding and useful.

THE CHURCH CHOIR

BASIC
MUSIC
SURVIVAL
GUIDE



DID YOU KNOW...

...that a very ancient hymn which commemorated St. John the Baptist is the source of Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, ... ? The hymn contained six lines of words. Each line was chanted on an ascending scale. The initial syllable of each line eventually came to be associated with the ascending scale.

**UT QUEANT LAXIS
RESONARE FIBRIS,
MIRA GESTORUM
FAMULI TUORUM,
SOLVE POLLUTI
LABII REATUM,
SANCTE IOHANNES.**

That thy servants may
Freely sing forth
The wonders of thy deeds,
Remove all stain of guilt
From their
Unclean lips,
O holy John.

Musicians in later years added "Si", from the initials of St. John in the last line, (there being no letter "J" in Latin, the letter "I" was used to spell Iohannes), and changed "Ut" to "Do!" So, every time you warm up using these syllables, you add your own voice to the continuing celebration of the life of St. John the Baptist!
...and it's a worthy motto for any choir as well!

The FOR-WHAT-IT'S -WORTH-DEPARTMENT

There are a few things that should be kept in mind by every choir member. The following comments are based on personal observation and experience over the span of nearly 40 years in or around music. While they are admittedly my PERSONAL opinions, I believe that they accurately reflect opinions held by the conductors/directors of most musical organizations.

1. There is ONE PERSON and ONLY ONE PERSON in charge: YOUR DIRECTOR. He or she was selected as a result of experience, ability, and education. To insure a coherent, cohesive and coordinated performance it is ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL that your director has your confidence, forbearance, and understanding. Your worship performance is HIS or HER RESPONSIBILITY. Many times there are factors of which you may not be aware that cause the director to make decisions about certain selections, soloists, accompaniment or other performance details. It is NOT PRACTICAL to expect the director to consult with EACH CHOIR MEMBER regarding every necessary decision. It is also counterproductive and inconsiderate to grumble and grouse and say bad things about the director's momma! TRUST your director to make the right performance decisions. After all, the director WILL TAKE THE HEAT for wrong decisions... even for mistakes made by YOU! Remember: All too often, the choir gets the CREDIT, but the director TAKES THE BLAME!

2. Your director simply MUST HAVE YOUR COMPLETE ATTENTION! This cannot be overemphasized. If you are not focused on the task at hand, the end result will never be as good as the capabilities of your choir could warrant. Also, there is nothing quite as frustrating to a director (and choir members who are paying attention), as to hear, just as the baton drops, "Where ARE we?" or "What did she say?" It is simply a WASTE of EVERYONE'S time. Save the jokes and gossip until break-time or out in the parking lot after practice!

3. A choir is a SINGLE ENTITY, a single MUSICAL ORGANISM if you like. Most choirs are dressed in identical choir robes... A UNIFORM. Once more for emphasis: "UNI-FORM!" That is, ONE-form." This means that our liturgical garb is designed to de-emphasize our INDIVIDUAL identities, and shift the emphasis to our mutual identity as a SINGLE, human MUSICAL INSTRUMENT. THAT'S WHY WE WEAR THEM! The things we do as a group MUST be done AS ONE. We must SIT together as one, STAND together as one (the choir area should not be

used to perform some sort of "liturgical wave" ...save it for the ball park!), and most important...SING TOGETHER as one.

4. Arrive ON TIME to rehearsals and performances or services. It is inconsiderate to the entire group to arrive late. EVERY voice is important to the overall quality of your choir's musical product.

5. PLEASE, do NOT wear colognes and perfumes. Fifty or more different aromas, when combined, do not hit the nostrils pleasantly. It can be most overbearing and unpleasant when everyone is grabbing for deep breaths.

6. Don't wear DISTRACTING PERSONAL ITEMS such as bows in your hair or large, dangling earrings. Gentlemen...please wear socks and comfortable dress shoes, at least while performing. You can wear loafers without socks, or grungy athletic shoes after the service. The choir area is no place to make a fashion statement! In short... don't wear anything that draws ATTENTION to yourself. That defeats the purpose of the UNIFORM appearance caused by the wearing of identical choir robes, or other identical apparel.

7. Closely related to number six above, is the following: When a mistake happens (someone comes in at the wrong time, an accompanist misses an entrance, whatever) don't draw attention to the error by making exaggerated facial expressions. Most choirs are facing their congregations and are plainly visible to all and sundry. Chances are, if you ignore an error (even a major one), no one may notice it anyway! Don't make the error worse by pointing to it!

8. If you have a beef with a fellow choir member or with your director, try to resolve it face-to-face, before or after rehearsals. Don't bring emotional baggage to the rehearsals, grouching and grumping, and generally making life miserable for everyone. Exercise a little of the Christian LOVE that we're always singing about. If you're really serious about WHY you are in church, this should not be a difficult task. ("LORD, make me an instrument of thy peace.")

9. As members of a CHURCH choir, it is important to remember our ultimate purpose. We are charged with enhancing the worship experience of all present. When we do it right it is indeed an enhancement. It will truly serve the ONE who brings us all together. As was said by St. Augustine, "He who sings, prays twice!" (TWO FOR ONE! ...such a deal!) Surely that's a generous reward for the gift of our time, talent, perseverance, attention, forbearance and restraint.

Our Librarian's own cryptic code...
your guess is as good as mine!

Indicates Four-Part Vocal Arrangement
(Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass)

Key Signature
(Key of "C")

Notice that there
are NO sharps or
flats indicated,
ergo: The Key of
"C." PLEASE don't
be misled by the
large "C" symbol
which is the
symbol for
"COMMON TIME"
which is, as you
already know, 4/4.

Fortissimo
(Very Loud)

Whole Rest

Moderately
Loud

Slur

Accidentals

Tempo

Repeat Sign
(This section
of the
arrangement
will be
repeated.
First time:
Verse One.
Second time:
Verse Two.

Pianissimo
(Softly)

Phrase
Mark
(Sing as one
phrase, with
no breaks).

Quarter
Rest

312 10398 THE HEAVENS ARE TELLING (SATB, accomp.)

Theodore Presser Company

The Heavens are Telling

L. van BEETHOVEN

Moderato (♩ = 96)

ORGAN

1. The heav'ns are tell - ing the Lord's end - less
power and splen - dor, and wis - dom and

2. The heav'ns are tell - ing the Lord's end - less
power and splen - dor, and wis - dom and

glo - ry, Thro' all the earth His praise is found. The seas re -
or - der, in Na - ture's might - y plan un - roll'd! Thro' space and

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or - der, in Na - ture's might - y plan un - roll'd! Thro' space and

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This is an example of an "open score". You will notice that all four parts are written on SEPARATE staves. This is done to avoid confusion in compositions that tend to have more complex vocal parts.

Note the TIME SIGNATURE... it indicates that there will be four beats (or pulses) per measure, with the quarter note "receiving" the pulse. Then it changes (at "B") to 2/4 time, with TWO pulses per measure with the quarter note "receiving" the pulse.

PIANISSIMO (very, very, soft)

REHEARSAL LETTERS
Your director will use these letters to direct you to a specific location in the piece. Often publishers will use numbers instead of letters for this same purpose.

FORTISSIMO (very strong)

PPP

B

B

B

B

"DOTTED" Half Note (Three Counts)

TRIPLETS
These 3 notes must be sung in the time normally allotted to TWO. It is more FELT than counted.

TIE

ACCIDENTAL

DECRESCENDO (gradually softer)

Note Key Change from Key of "G" to Key of "A-Flat"

CRESCENDO (gradually louder)

JUST WHAT IS NECESSARY TO MAKE MUSIC ?



It almost goes without saying that the most basic ingredient is the ability to "CARRY A TUNE"... in a bucket or otherwise! (This little book does not address vocal ability and cannot help you if the good Lord has not seen fit to bless you with the ability to recognize and reproduce CORRECT PITCH. Your current choir membership, however, would seem to attest to the fact that your vocal abilities have been deemed acceptable! So, sing out with a full heart!!)



Understand that choir singing is a COLLABORATIVE effort. We must work together as a group... as a SINGLE, multi-colored, complicated voice, we cannot each sing as if we were ALONE in the shower.



In order for our working together to be successful we must each have the SAME UNDERSTANDING and APPRECIATION of the FUNDAMENTALS of music notation, time, tempo and so on.
(That is what this little book is meant to address)



Assuming we each have: The ABILITY to sing, realize the GROUP NATURE of choir singing and understand the basic FUNDAMENTALS of music... what else is necessary? Someone to pull it all together... that someone is YOUR DIRECTOR!

The director is the engineer of our musical train. He (or SHE, calm down everyone, no gender-based bias is either implied or intended now or in later references to gender! WHEW! One must be aware these days.) leads us on our journey through a piece of music... reads the road signs... tells us when we can go fast or slow... helps us avoid the bumpy track in our path... and helps us all arrive at our destination together, without being sidetracked. (AH, YES! The prize for literary hyperbole can't be far... that was bee-you-tee-ful).