



Church Music Help Sheets

“CD” Series – for Choir Directors
Choir Practice: Next steps **CD4**

This sheet is the second of two intended for directors of church choirs to help them manage practices effectively.

CD3 examines three possible ways of beginning choir practice: prayer, warm-ups and hymn practice. What then?

Music for next Sunday. Rehearsing the music for next Sunday is obviously the most urgent, but if that music has been on your practice list for six weeks or so, it may be in very good condition. Check it out first. If it needs no more than tidying up, do this and set it aside for the time being (see “Da capo” below). If it needs more work, perhaps because of the absence of one or more members during the practice weeks, you have to judge whether a good standard is attainable within the time available or whether it would be better to relegate this music to a later performance date and do something easier next Sunday - or not to sing.

If you decide to continue with the music originally planned, resist the temptation to keep on working at it without a break until it is absolutely right. Boredom and fatigue set in very quickly and paralyse the learning process. It is better to leave this music alone while you practise something else and then come back to it - several times if necessary.

The rest of the practice list. Some choir directors choose their choir's music for a whole year at a time. If you direct a small choir, this is probably a waste of time, since you do not know what resources will be available in the choir so far ahead, e.g. you may acquire or lose a soloist, a high-flying soprano or enough tenors and basses to make the difference between SATB and SAMen (see CD 2).

Choosing music for 6-8 weeks ahead may be enough, depending on the length of your rehearsal and the number of times you have to do an emergency operation on the music for the coming Sunday. If, in any practice, you work your way through most of the music for the next 6-8 weeks, you will keep the level of interest high and you will create a situation in which most of the members have attended most of the rehearsals of a particular piece, i.e. emergency operations will not often be necessary.

The last item but one (see “Da capo” below) will of course be the least familiar, being either new material or something not performed for some time. Use this moment to check whether the difficulties you expected when you chose it, if any, are real and whether they are the only ones. Then you should be planning ways of overcoming the problems and the amount of time you may need in forthcoming practices to do this.

Da capo. Leave time before the end of the practice for a final run through the music for Sunday, in performance conditions, as it were. Up to this point the choir has been working its way through music at increasing levels of unfamiliarity or difficulty. Singing the music for Sunday brings them back to the familiar and sends them home with a feeling of competence and achievement. This is also the music which will be uppermost in their minds over the next few days and may even “mature” to some degree in that time.

Copies of any of these Help Sheets may be obtained from the Secretary of RSCM Australia, ACT Branch:
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