

**Kyle Madison, Jackson High School
Chamber Choir
8:00-9:30**

We visited this school during our choir tour over spring break. When we first arrived I was very impressed with the layout of the room. There was a set of permanent risers in the back of the room which chairs were set on. Opposite those, there were some movable risers. It seems that Mr. Madison used the permanent risers with the chairs for regular rehearsals and then brought out the other risers for performance mode rehearsals. I think this is a great idea because choral students usually behave and perform much better when in performance mode rather than rehearsal mode. Mr. Madison also had many different inspirational quotes on the wall, which I really enjoyed reading. I thought they brought an uplifting and comfortable atmosphere into the room. Along with these posters, he also had solfege charts and Kodaly hand sign charts.

When we all had gotten into the room, Mr. Madison started to warm us all up. He did several general warm-ups and then did several that I had never heard before. Many of these incorporated ear-training into the warm-up.

- He had them sing a chord and then moved each part up or down in half or whole steps to form a new chord. Many teachers do this, but he then asked the students to identify the chord. What a great way to get the students to listen to not only their part, but what others are singing as well. I think this would help students to be much more aware of intonation while singing songs.
- While singing chords, he would ask certain parts to drop out until there were only two parts singing. He would then ask the students what the interval between them was. This is another fabulous way to train singers' ears while actually singing.
- Mr. Madison played a steady beat with one note on the piano. He would say "clap on 4" and then tell them when "1" started. He went through many different numbers to clap on and ended with "clap on 3, clap on 2, clap on 1" This was fun and a little challenging for those of us who hadn't done it before. And I think another great way to get kids to audiate and really listen to others around them.

After warming up we traded off singing songs for each other. After each song we performed, Mr. Madison asked the students to share what they were hearing. I was extremely impressed with the quality of their comments. They discussed different tone qualities, blending, expression, form, etc. I could tell that these were trained musicians, not just kids that showed up and sang.

Their choir sang one piece for us that they were still learning. During the song many students were raising their hands randomly. After the song, Mr. Madison explained that he asks them to "own their mistakes" by raising their hands when they mess up. At first I thought this was a little mean, but as I thought about it I decided that it is another great way to train the ear and get kids to audiate during their performance. I've seen teachers do this where they have students keep track of places that they need to fix and write it in their journal. You have to be paying attention

to what you are singing and know what it is supposed to sound like in order to know when you make a mistake.

Overall, I was extremely impressed with Mr. Madison's teaching as exhibited in this choir. There were many different warm-ups and techniques that I plan to incorporate into my own teaching.

Tiffanie Woolworth, Tarkington High School Ladies Chorus 1:00-2:30

Another high school we visited on our choir tour was Tarkington High School. This choir was a ladies chorus of about 50 singers. The school had just won the region football tournament (an we were there), so many of the students were very excited. It took a minute after the bell rang to get them settled down and then Mrs. Woolworth started right into warm-ups. She did several general warm-ups. I was impressed at the unified, solid tone she got from these girls. She also took them very high with minimal screeching. She did some warm-ups using solfege syllables. **One good thing about these warm-ups was that they were very melody and she insisted that the girls sing them musically.** I thought these were good and they were fun to sing, but after being so impressed with Jackson High's warm-ups these warm-ups came in second place.

Tarkington High School has a paid accompanist. She wasn't there on this particular day, so Mrs. Woolworth played the piano as well as directed. **She kept apologizing for her "bad piano skills" which kind of bothered me. She wasn't bad at the piano, but did just fine. No need to make the situation worse. Sort of like a performer apologizing verbally or nonverbally after he or she performs.** She actually looked very comfortable sitting there and directing with one hand randomly or her head. It made me think that she probably does that quite often. I used to think that was an efficient thing for a teacher to be able to do, but I now think that directors should direct. Otherwise students don't learn to watch and follow.

As they started their first song, the nice tone that we heard in the warm-ups disappeared. Mrs. Woolworth let them get through a few phrases and then stopped them. "Where are my ladies?" she asked. She then asked them to sing like they knew how to sing and the good tone reappeared.

There were some good things going on with this choir. Their tone was probably the best thing about them. It was consistently very round and focused. One thing I didn't like was the atmosphere of the class. It was a more laid back, semi-serious atmosphere. Mrs. Woolworth made a lot of jokes and teased the kids a little bit. Much time was spent laughing and then getting the kids' attention again. I much preferred the education, active learning atmosphere at Jackson High.

Richard Larson, Nederland High School Chamber Choir 7:00-7:55

This choir class meets at 7 a.m. in the morning. I arrived there at 6:50 and there were students waiting to get in, but no teacher. Mr. Larson arrived at 5 minutes to 7:00. As he opened the door

and let the students in they all chatted comfortably about what lied ahead during the day. Class started promptly at 7. I was impressed that most of the students were on time and quite awake. As Mr. Larson was getting ready for class, he asked who wanted to take roll. One girl volunteered and went up to the piano to take roll. Mr. Larson then began to discuss with the students a performance they had the night before. There were a couple of boys that apologized profusely for forgetting about the performance. Mr. Larson didn't really acknowledge their apologies or that they had forgotten. **That made me wonder about his policy on missing performances. I think they probably all know the consequences [not good] and would prefer not to discuss it in front of the class.** He reminded a couple of students about state solo and ensemble on Saturday. He wanted to hear all of the students with their accompanists before then. I think it is great that he is so involved with the students in their solo voices as well as the choral ensemble.

Warm-ups

1. uh (1) oo (5-1) relaxed on the uh, lift on the oo. Mr. Larson described the lifting as opening the tent in your mouth. I really liked that description. He also talked about waking up your face and made some pretty funny demonstrations.
2. oo-ee (5432) oo (1) as the students were singing up the scale, Mr. Larson asked the students to throw their arm up on the top note. This helped them get on top of the pitch.
3. ha (1) hae (2) hee (3) ho (4) ha (5) hae (4) hee (3) ho (2) ha (1)
4. (12345) blow feather and ha, Mr. Larson called out a different scale degree each time for the students to blow on instead of ha-ing. This is a warm-up that Dr. Henderson does and it usually takes the college choir multiple times to figure out the pattern. I was impressed with this choir's ability to sing this warm-up correctly. It shows that they are focused and audiate well.
5. fla (1) fla (3) knee (54321)
6. ha (135) hoo (853) ha (1)
7. wa (1234) ee (5654321) This exercise is used going down the scale. I was a little concerned that he went to low with it because it sounded like some of the students were pressing to go lower rather than dropping out. However, I was impressed that he incorporated a talk about vocal fry and its use to explore the lower range with the students. He also pointed out that it shouldn't be done too much or for long periods of time.
8. Row, row, row your boat (translated into large academic words) They sang it all unison first and then in a round with four groups. I really liked this warm-up. It was fun and musical. What a great way to end warm-ups.

This is a good way of documenting the warm-ups in an efficient way.

O Sifuni Mundo

As they started rehearsing this piece, two girls on the front row were chatting and goofing off. After a minute of ignoring it Mr. Larson pointed at them and said "turn it off please". This comment was made in the midst of several other comments to the whole group about what was happening in the song. I thought this was good because it addressed the problem, but it didn't give them unduly attention or interrupt what was happening with the rehearsal. It also fixed the problem. Both girls stopped talking and started singing.

Mr. Larson used a student accompanist for this piece. I think I've already shared my feelings about that. I think it is a great thing!

Nederland High School Song

Mr. Larson started to teach the choir the school song. I got the impression that none of them knew it very well. The same student accompanist was used to play parts. First everyone sang the melody. Then they broke into parts. After going through it once with the piano, he asked them to try it without the piano. At one point he stopped and worked with the altos on one part. After completing that run through, he asked them to sing it again without the piano. On the other times he had been singing the tenor part, but this time he mostly listened and sang on some tricky parts.

Non Nobis Dominum

After the school song the students were getting a little chatty. Mr. Larson was trying to have them start rehearsing Non Nobis Dominum, but there was a lot of talking during his instructions. He stopped talking mid-sentence and said "Let's focus, please". He then waited until there was no talking. I was very glad that he did this because I was getting annoyed at all the talking. The class settled down and they went on with the rehearsal.

This time Mr. Larson sat at the piano and played as the students sang. The song began with a unison theme that was repeated. He played with them the first time and then let them sing a capella on the repeat. I think this is a great way to develop the student's ears. Mr. Larson started playing again when they broke into parts. At the end of the song the opening theme returns in a new key as this approached Mr. Larson said "now with refreshed vigor". This made me laugh, but I was impressed with his enthusiasm (especially at 7 am) which was exhibited in this comment and many others he made throughout the class period.

After running through the song once, he had the students get into a mixed circle at the front of the room. He stood in the middle and gave comments as they were singing. He asked them to emphasize the correct words or syllables like they would if they were speaking it. He asked them to connect the phrases. And he asked them to have darker/taller vowels. I could tell that he had discussed these things with the choir before because they understood his directions and were able to respond very well.

I really appreciate the clarity of your writing.
50 points for this assignment.