

Chapter 1 : Choral technique and interpretation: blog.quintoapp.com: Henry Coward: Books

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Two fine illustrations of this are afforded in "Since by man," and "As in Adam" Messiah see page , and "Open the heavens," and "Then hear from heaven" Elijah see pages , , which emphasise the dual points of securing something nearly symmetrical and the avoidance of repetition of mathematical regularity. The fourth and fifth rules laid down in the preceding pages say that we must always go from somewhere to somewhere else. That is, we must have as an objective a climax of some sort, and we must proceed to this by the "line of beauty. They ignore the fact that the larger the design the nobler the effect. Restraint is what is often needed. The conductor should fix his mind on what is to be the grand climax, and work steadily up to that, though not in a hurried manner. But the question arises, How is the interest in a piece to be sustained until the climax is reached? The answer is, Follow the "line of beauty. This working for and achieving well-planned crises is of immense importance to a conductor. It is part of that "thinking in continents" spoken of in a previous chapter. Handel owes a great part of his popularity to this feature. The crises follow each other in ascending ratio until the final effort carries the conviction that the end has really been reached. Sir Charles Santley, of all the singers I know, is the one who owes most to this great gift of arranging crises. If the thousands who have heard him will look back and analyse the impression of his singing, they will find that he seemed all the time to be rising to something, -- that figuratively he was always coming towards you with increasing power, and that his arrangement of the crises of his song or aria was always artistically correct. THE SWELL - - This arranging of crises must be carefully planned by the conductor, and he might, for private use, do this graphically by means of curves, to see that he gets variety as well as interest in each phrase. For instance, he may wish to arrive at a climax at the end of, say, one hundred bars. He will have to study the words and the form of the music, discover which points can be emphasised in the unfolding of the scheme of expression, and then sketch it out as follows: This explains why Joachim seldom played a solo twice in the same manner. There was always the same ebb and flow of sound, always the same sense of appropriate variety of treatment, but never a cast-iron interpretation. Similarly, Madame Clara Butt says she never professes to sing a song twice exactly alike. She is swayed by the feeling of the moment; but if she sings rather more loudly here, and softer there, than she did at a previous rendering, the audience are quite satisfied, because the charm of the artistic variety and good taste are evident. Most singers, as well as the general public, who knew Sims Reeves, place him as the most consummate artist in phrasing ever before the public; and yet he varied his renderings according to his mood. This opens another question, namely, the correctness of one artist singing a phrase loudly, and another artist singing the same phrase softly. Both the artists may be correct, because many phrases are open to two interpretations. For example, take the words: Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" THE SWELL - - The first example may be treated in a reflective manner, in which case it would be sung piano; or it may be sung in a confident, defiant way, when it would be declaimed fortissimo; and b could be sung as full of awe, or as an expression of joyful assurance. A striking example of this contrasted treatment of the same words and music was afforded at two performances of Gerontius, both conducted by the composer, at which I was present. The phrase -- was sung by an eminent artist fortissimo, as marked, while at the second performance a still greater artist sang it pianissimo. With this fact in mind it will be seen that there is little need to have two phrases sung alike. A phrase which might have been sung softly may, through being preceded by a soft phrase, be sung loudly without injuring the sense. This apparent contradiction is explained by the fact that it is viewed from a different standpoint by different artists. Again, in many phrases it does not matter whether they begin softly and end loudly, or vice versa, as long as they dovetail artistically. This power of varying the form of expression, while keeping strictly within the line of artistic propriety, is in my judgment one of the attributes of an artist. If the interpretation is prompted by brain, and carried through with mastery, whatever else the conductor may make he will not make a failure. Nevertheless, with all the latitude of choice which a conductor has, it must not be taken for granted that it is

hardly possible to go wrong. If he thinks that, he is sure to make a mistake. And it is conductors endowed with temperament, and those who have a feeling for expression, who are most likely to go wrong unless their natural impulse is trained and kept under control by a course of severe discipline. These temperamental people feel that monotony is unendurable, and they try to introduce variety without knowing the true principles of artistry. Of many instances of this kind I will mention only two. The chorus commences with the rhythm: Then we realised that to give emphasis to the word "us," they had changed the rhythm entirely, making it duple time, as though written -- which, it will be seen, produces quite a lopsided effect. The next example was at a concert which I attended, to oblige a friend, on purpose to hear a singer full of musical feeling. The moral of all this is, Study well the principles of expression before attempting any new departures. Stress has been laid upon reaching the climax by well-ordered and consistent steps; but as the climax itself is the great thing, we must give adequate importance to it when it is reached. As a rule it should be treated with breadth, dignity, and power. Care must be taken to approach its culmination soon enough to enable it to be held sufficiently long to be impressive, and when it has been reached it must not degenerate into an anti-climax by weakness of voice, insufficiency of breath, or failure to bear the strain. Here comes in the value of arranging the breathing places so as to have plenty of breath for the last bar, b breath pressure sufficient to enable the choir to put on extra power for the supreme effort, and c emphasising the words as a final stimulus to the feelings of the audience. Remember that a fine peroration will cover a multitude of weak places in the preceding parts. It should be noted that the effects of climax depend very largely upon their surroundings. If, by the antecedent phrases being too loudly played or sung, the sense of cumulative effort has been destroyed, the climax fortissimo distresses the rather jaded nerves instead of rousing them. Table Mountain is not very high, but on account of its surroundings it is very impressive. Thus conductors must be mindful of the context, and take care not to fire off all their ammunition too soon. It is this which gives the thrill. A further illustration may be found in: Under the heading of "Voice" we rather exhaustively considered the question of "How to obtain soft singing with maintenance of pitch"; but there are several disturbing elements not touched upon, which demand serious attention. I do not say the audiences were dissatisfied. They were usually charmed at the measure of success attained, on the principle of "What the eye never sees the heart never grieves about"; but to me, who had heard them reach the ideal, it was heart-rending to note the fall from an ethereal seventh-heaven pianissimo to one of an ordinary type. Considering that most of the choir are as anxious to achieve success as the conductor, the question arises, How is it that these lapses occur? In my opinion the causes are three: To these lazy ones constant attention must be given, for, like the poor, they are ever with us. To sing pianissimo the voices must be poised so forward, with nasal resonance, that the singers are often unconscious of singing at all. I ask them to sing by faith, and be content with a sound which is so nebulous as to be almost, if not altogether, too contemptible to be called singing. Under my personal influence in rehearsals this is done, but at concerts in a large hall their lack of physical sensation in the throat gives them the idea that the sound will not carry a yard; therefore to do their duty they imagine they must sing louder. The lesson of all this to a conductor is to train choristers, by constant iteration, to differentiate between the very slight physical sensation they fancy they ought to feel at a concert. Urge them to sing by faith, assuring them that if the sound is only a kind of hum produced somewhere near the nasal cavities it will be heard, although they may feel doubtful about its carrying power. Respecting the third drawback, the "law of sympathy," I would observe that in many cases it is of immense use in choral singing, because by its almost unconscious influence choirs move by common impulse to a rousing fortissimo, or catch the inflection of the dramatic spirit, or realise the subtle atmosphere which pervades a piece. In a choir no one lives or sings to himself. Therefore, when a person sings a shade too loudly, his neighbour -- not hearing himself as well as he thinks he ought to do, sings rather louder also, and this singing a shade too loudly spreads through the choir. The worst of this is that the singers having unconsciously fixed a standard, it is impossible to get them to the bewitching softness they have often attained in rehearsal. The remedy for this is to specialize for pianissimo at the last rehearsal, asking everyone to be responsible for himself or herself at the performance, even to cease singing -- as some self-denying members of my choir do -- when they hear other people singing too loudly. There are certain phrases in pieces where it is practically impossible for a full choir to sing so softly as the ideal demands. In these cases I usually ask half

the choir to sing, and balance matters by asking the other half to sing a similar phrase later. For instance, I have the quartets "Since by man," and "For as in Adam" Messiah, sung as unaccompanied choruses, commencing very softly, and, after a gradual crescendo to forte, finishing equally softly. To achieve an ideal rendering I ask the first voices of each part to commence the first bar alone, the seconds come in at the second bar, and the whole choir sing till the - - first note of the last bar, when the second voices finish very pianissimo: I therefore ask those whose voices are not of the light soprano type to deny themselves the pleasure of singing for two bars. This selecting of legitimate means to an end I call artistic discrimination. Note that the doing of this always gives the conductor more trouble than the usual plan of letting all sing; but the result justifies the task of finding out the phrases to be treated exceptionally, and the worry of soothing the ruffled feelings of singers who are asked not to sing for a few bars. To sing an unadulterated mezzo, piano, or pianissimo would produce a weak, unsatisfactory effect. There may be a few cases where a dull, lifeless sort of expression is required, but they are very few. It may seem strange to introduce a mezzo-p, or even louder, into a passage marked piano, but singing it softly throughout -- if it be of any length -- would induce that monotony which must be avoided at all costs. Again, by the decrescendo from the louder tone the hearers have a standard of comparison, and as the voices get softer and softer the sense of real pianissimo is grasped by the mind of the listeners as the passage reaches its close, because the effect of the whole is almost entirely governed by the impression of the last few bars. In addition to what has been said, the attention of the choir must be directed to getting anti-throaty, vibrant tone, which bears the same relation to a shouting backward tone as a well-trained athlete does to a lumbering navvy. The occasions when a real fortissimo can be used with the proper artistic effect are comparatively few; therefore when they do occur urge the singers to "knock sixes. In the main this is so, but very frequently an episodic phrase is interpolated which quite breaks the formal continuity of the ebb and flow to the climax. Sudden transitions from ff to pp or vice versa, abrupt changes of tempi, and unexpected changes in sentiment are cases in point. These erratic contrasts are welcome changes, as they take us from the commonplace and introduce the romantic element. Music is not always a series of well-ordered lawns set out with Dutch precision. Then, at times, the climax seems to be so far away that there appears to be no connection between what you are doing and the end in view. Another disturbing element is the obscure, nondescript, neutral passages which are parenthetically introduced without apparent reason. These things may be perplexing and annoying to those who want things to move on in symmetrical sequence, but they are the elements which give life and vigour to expression. The mind revels in contrasts. The mountain peaks and deep gorges of sound tend to picturesque effects. If expression were always in unbroken curves, however varied, we should get tired of the monotony, however beautiful. The obscurity of the other places just satisfies that speculative bias which many people have, and which finds expression in their depreciating things that are understandable. These little "affairs of outposts" must be dealt with sectionally, each being made as interesting as possible, and treated as a relief to the grand forward movement to the brilliant finish which will come by-and-by. The tendency is to keep in the last mood too long through lack of mental alertness. As a means to stimulate this I always ask the singers to mark these places with large ff and pp in blue pencil, which they can see long before they reach the place. These signs serve as helpful mnemonics, and usually produce the desired result. It is worthy of remark that in the Requiem the same words are sung both ff and pp.

Chapter 2 : Henry Coward - Wikipedia

Choral Technique and Interpretation by Henry Coward Webpage by composer William blog.quintoapp.com to some choral music. Though perhaps archaic and imperial, this book contains nearly everything a choral conductor must remember to rehearse, train and develop singers.

In this ideal there should be faultless technique and artistic expression -- the former to give intellectual satisfaction, the latter to stir the emotions, -- the whole to transport the hearer to that exaltation of spirit, free from baser passions, which it is the glory of music to produce. While this end should always be kept in mind, we must never lose sight of the means to the end. Hence the importance of giving attention to the supreme factor in musical achievement -- the rehearsal. There is a hoary fiction that a final bad rehearsal ensures a good performance. It may be granted that a poor final effort may have its value by making the performers careful at the concert, but it is a mistake to think that a poor or bad rehearsal is anything but a calamity to a society of amateurs. Artistic ideality soon droops in the chilly atmosphere of incompetent dulness; shrivels up in the air of strenuous misdirection of effort; withers and expires in the sultry blasts of querulous irritability. In the main there are three methods of taking rehearsals. The Conventional Generalizing; 2nd. The Critical or hypercritical -- Particularizing; and 3rd. These methods may be used at both full and sectional rehearsals. Generally all three varieties are used consciously or unconsciously by all conductors, but as "Method is the secret of success," if conductors are able to realise the distinctive features and differences of the three plans of conducting rehearsals, and also know the best stage at which to use each style-- whether singly or in combination -- rehearsals will be made much more effective and enjoyable. The enjoyment aspect is to my mind of such importance that it swallows up every other consideration, for pleasurable choral rehearsals mean profitable social reunions. I will now consider this trinity of plans, with a view of obtaining unity of effects, namely, getting as much good work done as possible in the limited time for rehearsal. The Conventional Generalizing Method is the one to be followed chiefly as the foundation of all rehearsals. Theoretically this is quite correct, and, as such, this useful and necessary process is followed by the great majority of conductors. Most of them, however, fail to achieve success, or at least distinction, because of the limitations of the method. It needs that element of ideality which the Particularizing and Specializing Methods presuppose. At a recent Three Choirs Festival an enthusiastic gentleman amateur asked a very well-known composer -- who is generally regarded as a great genius in composition--What is genius? He replied, "Two per cent. Those who follow the Generalizing Method exclusively, just miss this two per cent. Let us follow, in a matter-of-fact way, the common usage of a conductor who adopts this method. Full of zeal, with a lofty ideal, and familiar with the score, he begins the rehearsal with high hopes and a firm determination to achieve something good. In the first few bars he hears some wrong notes. Instead of allowing these to pass and "blundering through" somehow, he stops the choir to try over, say, the bass and contralto parts separately. He starts again, and finds the sopranos and tenors are wrong, therefore he stops again to put them right. A harsh voice and a mispronounced word call for stoppage and reproof; and by the end of the rehearsal one chorus, perhaps, has been got through. The choir meanwhile are invariably annoyed and "fretted" at being stopped so often -- like a spirited horse that is being constantly "pulled" by a tactless driver-- and sore at having to sit, for a seemingly long part of the evening, listening to the other "parts" correcting their mistakes. The feeling running through it all is "much cry and little wool. This is not a fancy picture, as I know societies which have undergone this treatment from well-meaning, clever men for season after season, until a rebellion of the long-suffering members has led to a change of conductors. This mistake is to expect artistic results too soon. They forget the old saw "Rome was not built in a day. In this matter of note-perfection, after pointing out errors or very difficult phrases, it is good policy to leave it to the members and "wait and see. Equally wasteful and unsatisfactory is it to try to get a body of players or singers to render a phrase with expression before the phrase itself and the words have become familiar, or rather burnt into the mind. Every artistic effect must have its antecedent of preparatory work. The little known and little practised Compartmental Specializing Method consists in taking some special point or topic, and concentrating all attention on it, and, for the time being,

ignoring everything else. For instance, if note-perfection of a difficult phrase be the object sought, all faults of time- quality, words, breathing, or expression are passed over. The same rule is observed if the topic of study be the development of a fugal subject, or obtaining fluency in runs, divisions, or roulades, as in "His yoke is easy," or "For unto us. The above list is not exhaustive, as each composition presents its own problems. This specializing method may be described as the Napoleonic "Divide and Conquer" policy: Maskelyne and other famous jugglers and plate-spinners, who get one plate spinning before they attempt to set going the next. Of course care must be taken not to give too large doses of this method at one time, or it would become as wearisome as the Particularizing Method. Fortunately experience has shown that it takes only a seemingly short time to enforce one or two points during an evening, because when the object aimed at is explained to the singers they generally enter into the spirit of the quest, and when they become interested the time is pleasantly and profitably spent. First in order comes the General Conventional Method. This should be used almost exclusively for the first two or three rehearsals, and, combined with the other methods, should continue to the final rehearsal. When the music and the words have been roughly but firmly outlined, and the "hang" of the piece fairly grasped, then Specializing or Particularizing treatment should supplement the general coaching. The specializing should be introduced at the very earliest moment, but in the early stages should be applied in homeopathic doses. It gives the smart conductor the chance of putting right a particularly knotty point, and, while relieving for five minutes the decorous general method, it also gives the conductor credit for alertness. For instance, a good method of specializing is to take one or two difficult intervals or phrases in a piece, and, before the music is sung over, to pattern the phrase by voice or pianoforte, showing how it should be sung. By this means pitfalls are made comparatively easy to circumvent, and much time is saved. Similarly the sopranos must be prepared for the high G natural, bar 14, in F minor, which comes abruptly after G flat in the bass and contralto parts in bar It will not be necessary to multiply examples to which this principle can be applied, because almost every modern piece contains one or more phrases in which it is necessary. This specializing should not be undertaken without previous preparation on the part of the conductor. He should know what he wants and how to go about getting it. During the early general rehearsals he should notice any errors of notes, time, rhythm, attack, release, phrasing and what not, marking in blue pencil the places that want special attention. It is well known that in nearly every piece there are certain parts which require much more rehearsal than, say, the other nine-tenths, but owing to the inconvenience of stopping a choir in full swing, the difficulties are allowed to pass unnoticed. By applying this method the desirable extra rehearsal is met with conspicuous success and usually in a pleasant form. A feature of this specializing is to keep all the choir engaged. It is said that the great artist Turner, the day before the Royal Academy was open to the public, used to touch up his pictures by means of a brush at the end of a long stick. This was done to accommodate the picture to the distance from the spectator and the surroundings. This plan of "final touching up" I strongly approve, and it should be carried out whenever it happens that the work is practically finished by the time of the penultimate rehearsal. There is no doubt that this last effort produces maximum results. When, with great saving of time and temper, the choir has been prepared, by the Conventional and Compartmental Methods, for the consummation of the rehearsals, then the Critical Particularizing Method can be introduced with advantage both to the conductor and the conducted. It is easy to see how it can now be successfully applied, because each section -- voice, music, words, expression -- having been dealt with separately, all that is needed is to combine the various constituents in a well- balanced whole. It is as though an artist had made finished sketches of each object, figure and background, and then had merely to harmonize them on a single canvas into an artistic whole -- the picture. The conductor will find that the worry to himself and the fretting to the choir have now disappeared, because the singers, being in a state of preparedness, can give full attention and practical effect to any new demand of interpretation. As to the conductor, he will go home delighted, and refreshed in spirit though perhaps tired in body. For has he not had the joy of seeing -- or rather hearing -- his ideals of beauty materialise? Like another Aladdin, he has only had to call, and lo! In conclusion of this topic, I would strongly urge highly-strung, anxious-souled conductors not to "put the cart before the horse" --i. If they do, they will find, as I have found, that it is a case of more haste less speed. I have small faith in the "make-perfect- as you go along" plan, but prefer the system of arriving at perfection concurrently with the grasping of the

atmosphere of the composition as a whole. Like the man who said he knew honesty was the best policy because he had tried both, I say I have tried every method of conducting, and the plans I recommend above are the best-- best for the music, best for the choir, and best for the conductor. I may say that now I never go away disappointed from a rehearsal, because I always get from the choir as much as I expected. The first rehearsal gives satisfaction, the next more satisfaction, and at each following rehearsal there is generally a crescendo of pleasurable feeling till, after a final hypercritical Particularizing rehearsal, I feel jubilant at the splendid responsiveness of the choir, and look forward with confidence to the thrills which will be experienced at the concert by the conductor, the performers, and the audience.

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technique & interpretation given above, is exceptional, and only occasionally occurs. For instance, in the whole of The Messiah I only adopt this interchange or borrowing of voices in three choruses -- in "And the Glory" for ten bars, in "O Thou that tellest" for one bar, and in "Worthy is the Lamb" for four bars.

Chapter 4 : Choral Technique and Interpretation

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Chapter 5 : - Choral Technique and Interpretation by Coward Henry

Book Choral Technique and Interpretation download PDF link Conducting is the art of directing a musical performance, such as an orchestral or choral blog.quintoapp.com has been defined as "the art of directing the simultaneous performance of several players or singers by the use of gesture."

Chapter 6 : Choral technique and interpretation, (Book,) [blog.quintoapp.com]

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Chapter 9 : Full text of "Choral technique and interpretation"

Vocal and Choral Techniques The Components of Choral Technique 1. choral tone 2. blend 3. balance 4. diction 5. intonation 6. rhythmic accuracy 7. interpretation.