

Effective Choir Rehearsals 101

By Jermaine Manor

Have you ever had a choir rehearsal that didn't go well? You had your music prepared and the musicians were ready, but the people didn't connect with you.

Well, this is not uncommon. It's not easy leading a group of people with different personalities, attitudes, and sometimes varying church experiences. To avoid your being constantly frustrated, I want to walk you through a few steps that can greatly increase the likelihood that your choir rehearsals will be effective.

1. Know Your Choir

It is very important that you know the people you lead. Not only are you building relationships, but you are also learning the skill level of your choir. Take the time to meet with each choir member to cast your vision for the music department. These meetings do not have to be long or formal, but you should be prepared when you decide to meet with a choir member. It is helpful to have at least a sheet of paper or card that states your vision for the choir. A personal touch can go a long way. Also be prepared to listen to each choir member's wishes or concerns relative to the choir. "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

2. Prepare Yourself

Make sure that you are prepared musically. Having a good ear is great but taking the study time to learn the songs thoroughly that you want a choir to sing is priceless. There is nothing more frustrating than sitting in rehearsal while the director fumbles through parts either by rote or sheet music. If you give out CDs or sheet music to your choir, you need to sit and learn the music as a choir member first. Why? Because there may be A LOT of questions during rehearsal concerning the music versus what you are teaching. Ultimately the choir will follow your lead, but they will do so with ease if you present yourself as an authority on the music that they will sing.

3. Make Proper Song Selections

Every new song or song most played on the radio isn't for your choir. Choosing the correct music is very important. You should always select music with the following in mind:

- Is it scripturally valid?
- Does it go against any teachings of the pastor?
- Does it draw attention to God or to the choir?
- Do you and the choir have the skill level to do the song?
- Is this song diverse enough, meaning does it have the components to be a good song (verse, chorus, bridge, vamp, pre chorus, etc.)? Make sure that it's not redundant with no celebratory ending.

There are other things to consider as you select songs but these five are very important.

If you have a mixture of older and younger members, you should always incorporate a song that speaks to each generation. You don't have to use a hymn and anthem every week as your special selection. However, you **MUST** have them in your repertoire. Challenge your younger members to learn sacred music. Challenge your older members to learn new styles of music.

Sometimes I open my rehearsal with a hymn or anthem. I also use that opening time of worship to teach hymn singing. Challenging the choir to "make parts" (meaning sing a harmonizing part against the melody, or said simply, it is to make 3- to 4-part harmony). It's common for singers to find a matching part if the melody is too high. Encourage that. During the actual song, you can tweak the parts. This method gets your choir going. You will be surprised at the ear level you have in your choir.

4. Always Affirm

There is nothing wrong with fussing a little in rehearsal. Sometimes it's needed. On the flip side, affirming your choir will prepare them to handle those times when you need to correct improper behavior. It's very important to have a solid relationship with your choir before you begin giving them correction. Use phrases such as: "sounding good," "come on tenors get on that note, you can do it," "you guys are singing tonight," etc. These are great ways to encourage your group. You can also approach rehearsal with a sense of humor yet maintain a serious environment.

Have fun. Encourage your choir with the word of God too; know the word and quote it sometimes as appropriate. It's also always good to remind the choir of their purpose. Remember this: Where purpose is not known, abuse is inevitable. Never lose sight of why you do what you do.

5. Rehearse Outside Sometimes

This may be a little out the box but it will pay off. This can only be done during daylight savings time, of course (unless you rehearse on Saturday mornings/afternoons). If the weather is nice and there is enough daylight, take your rehearsal outside. Encourage your choir to bring lawn chairs or you can provide chairs. This will help your choir relax and allow them to get fresh air. This will also serve as an evangelism tool. Once the community hears the voices of your choir ringing out, they will come and listen. You will not have the luxury of a band or live instrumentation unless you prepare for it. However, I used a pitch pipe on some songs. I even had our guitarist play an acoustic guitar at times to keep us in pitch.

Once you conclude the rehearsal, you can serve fruit or other healthy light refreshments. Your choir will appreciate it.