

## Warm ups in principle and in practice—Faye Dumont

### Familiar scenes

- In a short school lunchtime rehearsal when there are pieces to learn we can't afford time to warm up.
- Warm up starts the church choir rehearsal, but as a matter of form BJ, SL and PM always come fifteen minutes late, to arrive just in time to learn the service music and anthem.
- On tour there is only a short time available for a sound check so we will skip warm up and do pieces.

All the above suggest that warming up is not a valuable use of time and can be dispensed with—it is a luxury, not a necessity.

### The why warm up?

If one has a contrary view, then there should be good reasons for a vocal warm up. Here are a set:

- 1) Because singing is using the body, with sets of muscles that literally need to be warmed up for activity. The blood supply needs to be brought to the places used in singing for safe, energetic athletic activity.
- 2) As many singers in choirs have no other voice teacher than the conductor, basics of healthy voice use and refinement of skills can be honed at the start of rehearsal (and sometimes within when the need arises) and referred to as principles of singing.
- 3) Techniques needed in the music for rehearsal can be anticipated in warm ups, whether they be for breathing, dexterity, tone, vowel or consonant awareness or other skills ahead, for satisfying music making.
- 4) Warm ups direct the singers towards music making. If they have rushed from being in the lunch line, from getting tea for the family or have come direct from a hassled day at work, singers need to set earlier activities behind them and focus on singing and giving their best to music making.
- 5) For the conductor warm ups set the essentials for safe singing, for skills and concepts and for drawing the focus to their leadership.

### Warm up principles

I divide my warm ups into five units, and I select exercises to address each at each rehearsal. There may be more in the categories, especially related to music in repertoire of the time.

Physical readiness	Breathing techniques	Vocal warm ups and skills	Voice extension	Other skills and needs
Easing and freeing the body. Focussing energy. Standing well.	Breathing out/in. Breathing open throat, silently . Breathing for varying purposes – long / short phrase, high, low, dynamics.	MM NN NG. Vowel placement and choir vowel unity. Mouth shape. Jaw ease. Legato, staccato. Scales and arpeggios.	Range, and needs for current music. Range extension up and down. Passaggio management.	Principles of diphthongs. Dynamic shading. Phrase shape. Pronunciation of languages.

### How long for warm ups?

I plan 15 minutes at a usual rehearsal, and 20 minutes if there has been a break, or it an imminent event requires high energy and focus.