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### Choral Cantabile on YouTube

Many of the exercises used in this book are demonstrated on YouTube at the Pavane Publishing Channel.

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Pavane Publishing Cat. No. P5027 ISBN: 978-1-934596-09-8 Hal Leonard Cat. No. 00145651

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

There are 13 emphases outlined. (See page xii) The first four are identified as **Choral Essentials**:

- I. Release of Tension and Aligning the Instrument
- II. Opening the Vocal Tract
- III. Breathing for Singing - Inhalation
- IV. Breathing for Singing - *Appoggio* and Breath Management

These are aspects of choral singing that must be mastered by every choral group in order to be competent and expressive as you pursue the choral art. All the other aspects of choral singing are dependent on your choir having some mastery of these concepts. Every rehearsal must provide some training in these Essentials. We are training muscles, and without prompting, reminding and repetitions, these skills erode over time (especially if your singers are not studying singing elsewhere).

The next nine emphases are identified as Choral Pillars. Figuratively and literally, the Choral Pillars stand on the pedestal of the Choral Essentials. The Choral Pillars will help you solve specific problems in your rehearsals, and you can pick and choose when to introduce them to your choir. For example, you have identified that some of your singers are using inappropriate glottals that are breaking the melodic line and interrupting the legato style that you want. When your choir knows something about the Choral Essentials (because you have provided that training and they are singing with an Open Vocal Tract and good Breath Management) then you can introduce the material in Choral Pillar #2, Onsets and Releases. With your provided training, they will be able to sing a more effective legato line that will be more expressive, because they now have a stronger technique (an open throat and reliable breath support) and will be able to extinguish the glottals in the melodic line.

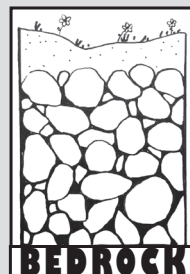
It is suggested that you spend the first several 12-to-15 minute voice-building sessions exclusively on the Choral Essentials. The first five sessions provided here model that for you. When you move on to the Choral Pillars, the text will remind you to keep reinforcing the Essentials as you work on the new ideas outlined in the Pillars sessions. The icons provided and outlined on the next page will help you plan your rehearsals to include both the Essentials and the Pillars.

# CHORAL ESSENTIALS & PILLARS INDEX

## Teaching Emphases

### CHORAL ESSENTIALS

(To be trained and cultivated at every rehearsal)



- I. Release of Tension and Aligning the Instrument
- II. Opening the Vocal Tract
- III. Breathing for Singing - Inhalation
- IV. Breathing for Singing - *Appoggio* and Breath Management

### CHORAL PILLARS

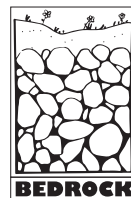
(Built upon the Essentials and necessary  
for beautiful choral singing)



1. Unifying Vowels
2. Onsets and Releases
3. Resonance
4. Intonation and Choral Blend
5. Diphthongs
6. Articulation
7. Blending Vocal Registers
8. Forward Focus of the Tone
9. Performing with Emotional Empathy

"Music expresses that which cannot be put into words  
and that which cannot remain silent." - Victor Hugo

# CHORAL ESSENTIAL I



## Release of Tension and Aligning the Instrument

### TRAINING EMPHASIS SESSION ONE

Introducing "Voice-Building" to Your Choir

Preparing the body to sing:

1. Release of tension
2. Positioning or aligning the instrument

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR THE CHORAL CONDUCTOR

- Tension is the main enemy of beautiful singing. Your first task is to help your singers to begin the rehearsal without tension in their instruments. Every other aspect of singing flows from a freely aligned body and the correct position of their instrument.
- Proper alignment, or a singing posture, is dependent on muscles large and small that are tension-free and "ready to act" (in a state of tonus).
- An excellent alignment mantra for your choir is "feet apart; knees released; hips, shoulders and ears aligned; sternum moderately high and flexible."



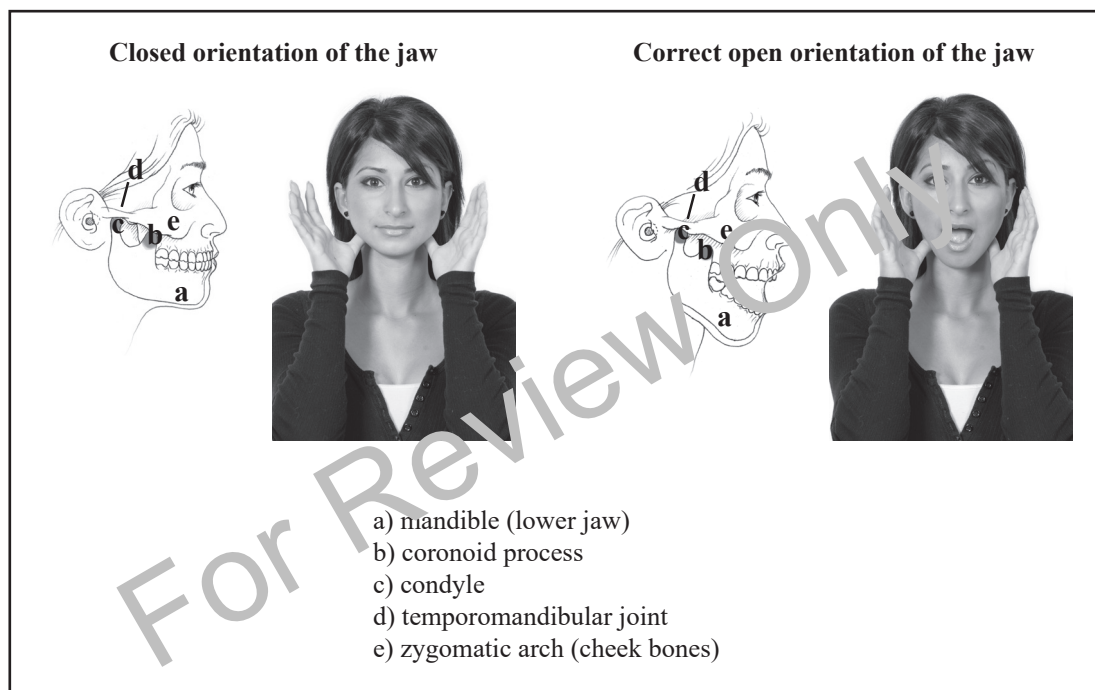
### PROCEDURE

- Begin by inviting your singers to stand and spread out a bit so they don't feel crowded. Then invite them to do the following with you:
  - Reach toward the ceiling with one hand and then the other, as if you are "placing stars in the sky." Then use both hands as if you are "raising the roof."
  - With hands clasped over head, stretch side to side from the waist.
  - Bring elbows down to shoulder level and twist to one side and then the other.
  - With their feet apart, roll shoulders forward and then back, making large circles.
  - Shake everything out.



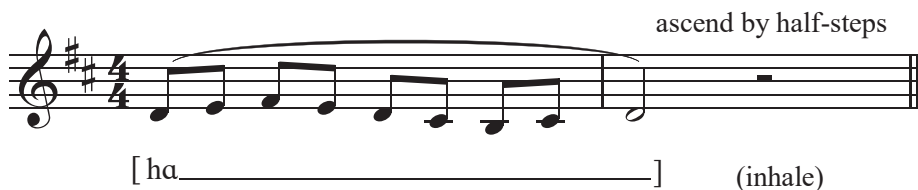
*(Give the following instructions to your singers while you are demonstrating.)*

- Now that you have released any tension in your instrument, we will align it so you can sing at your very best: your feet are apart about hip width; your hips, shoulders and ears are lined up; and your sternum is in a moderately tall and flexible position. Stand like you are important! (Because you are, and you are doing something important!) Do you feel buoyant and flexible?
- Release your jaw, rotating it down and back. Do this five or six times. Then waggle it side to side. Does your jaw feel loose and flexible?

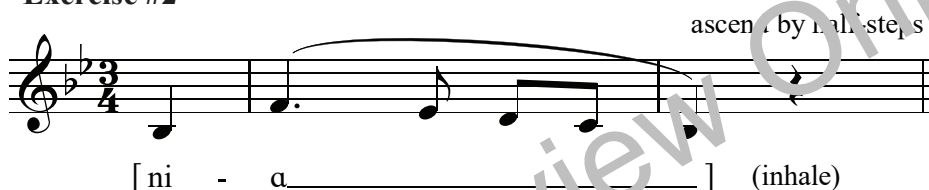


- Exhale completely through your mouth and then yawn into a big stretch. Do you feel a strong “stretch” in your throat that is too open for singing? Now in contrast, inhale through only a “gesture of a yawn” or the beginning of a yawn. It should feel easy at the throat. Do that two or three times. Make sure your jaw feels tall and flexible.
- Now here is the hard part. Inhale through that gesture of a yawn and then immediately exhale through the same space. Don’t change the position of your jaw or the open feeling in the back of your throat. Do it again and exhale on the palm of your hand like you are fogging a mirror. Your throat should feel open and the air should feel warm on your hand. Do that two or three times.

- Now remembering that warming gesture feeling, sing exercise #1 on “ha” through that open space/warming gesture. Ascending by half steps, sing five or six repetitions. (Starting at D major and ascending by halfsteps). Make sure it always feels easy at your throat.

**Exercise #1**

- Be seated and practice sitting in your “important” position with your hips, shoulders and ears aligned and your sternum moderately tall. Sing exercise #2 (beginning in Bb major and ascending by half steps) and notice that a “tall” [ɑ] keeps the feeling easy and open in the back of your throat.

**Exercise #2**

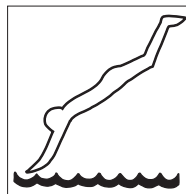
- Putting everything together, sing exercise #3. Be sure your body is aligned and that you are inhaling through a “gesture of a yawn.” The [wa] [ɑ] syllables will help you keep your jaw and tongue flexible.

**Exercise #3**

- Throughout our rehearsal, I will be reminding you to align your instrument and to shake out any tension. But you don't need to wait for me to remind you. Just do it!

**MORE TRAINING IDEAS**

If this is the first time you have done voice training with your choir, there may be some resistance. Just be matter-of-fact and positive. If someone asks why you are doing this, tell them you believe that voice training will help all of them sing more confidently. (It will.) Your commitment



to the process will help them understand that this is not unusual and that all singers train their voices.

Have everyone put their finger on their chin when practicing the jaw exercises. Tell them that they want their finger to move down and back when the jaw opens for singing. If their finger is not moving (very much), they should allow the jaw to move more freely. Releasing the jaw is a very important concept that every singer in your choir must be committed to and understand. Without this basic singing technique, your singers will not be able to breathe efficiently or sing unified vowels. Insist!

Be sure you are watching and listening to your singers, don't just "run through the exercises." It is usually better to do the vocalises *a cappella* so the piano doesn't interfere with the singing. The pianist can pitch each exercise and then give new pitches for each repetition. If the singers are having trouble, give them another chance or two. Keep things moving but don't rush. You are training muscles and they need repetitions to get it right.

Always remain positive. If you are not getting the results you want, change your approach ("slice the loaf thinner" for them).

We primarily learn to sing by "how it feels." "How it sounds" is not a reliable gauge for choral singers. Be sure to frequently prompt them about how singing should feel when it is right. It should feel "easy" in their throat and "bummy or forward" in the front of their face.

Here is a list of other training ideas to use at any rehearsal to encourage your choir to release tension and keep their instruments aligned.

- Shake your whole body and then slump over. Then straighten and align your whole instrument.
- Let your head fall forward gently, and then gently roll your head 360 degrees to the right and then to the left.
- Pretend that a really small (and annoying) dog is pulling at your pant leg and you are trying to shake him off. Now shake the other leg.
- Release your jaw down and back three times and then waggle it side to side several times.
- While standing, shake out any tension in your body.



Start with one leg and then the other. Then shake one arm, the other arm and then both arms together. Rotate your head from side to side and then twist your whole trunk (body core) from side to side. Slump over like a rag doll and then shake yourself into your singer's position. (Remember the mantra: feet apart; hips, shoulders, etc.)

- Standing in your singer's position, close your eyes and imagine how you feel in the following scenes:
  - A diver, just the second before launching.
  - An archer, the second before the arrow is released.
  - A strange sound has awakened you in the night.
  - A choral conductor a second before the down beat.
  - An Olympic runner, the second before the start signal.

Keep that feeling and inhale on the gesture of a yawn. **RIGHT NOW** you are ready to sing.

- Stand with your feet apart and then pretend to lift tall, heavy suitcases, one in each hand. Do you feel how tall and stable your sternum is? Keep that alignment as we start to sing.
- Shake out your whole body and then, beginning with your feet, think up, scanning your whole body and release tension as you go.

## RESULTS FOR YOUR CHOIR

Choirs that sing tension-free and with their instruments aligned have a vitality of spirit. As the singers' muscles come to a state of readiness (tonus), their brains become more alert also. They will focus as a group with a common purpose that will contribute to a more vibrant tone.





# CHORAL PILLAR #1



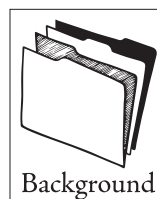
## Unifying Vowels

### TRAINING EMPHASIS SESSION SIX

#### Unifying Vowels [a o u]

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR THE CHORAL CONDUCTOR

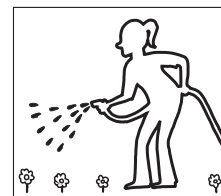
- Training your choir to sing with unified vowels is one of your most important tasks. Vowels are shapes that we make with our vocal track, and there are legitimately many variations. In order for your choir to sing in tune and blend, they all need to understand that every vowel has a basic shape or nature. The nature of [a] (like father) is “tall.” In order to unify [a] in your choir, everyone must sing it with a released jaw and a tall feeling in the back of their throats. If you have outliers, singing with a smiling, spread shape, their sound will distort and inhibit the overall blend of your group.
- Moreover, you are the final arbiter of what your choir’s [a] is ultimately going to sound like. If you take a vote, you will get 30 (or 50 or 80) different ideas. Deciding, creating, training and maintaining your ideal choral sound with your group is your prime task.
- Watch your singers carefully and encourage **everyone** to be engaged, even the ones who believe “they don’t need it.” Have the sections demonstrate for each other their vowel shapes, especially when they do it right. (“Everyone watch the sopranos sing their tall vowels.”) They all need plenty of repetition, even the very experienced singers. This is what singers do; we train and practice.



Hint: See suggested specific words to use in explaining the vowel sound you want in the IPA chart on page x.

#### PROCEDURE

*(After you have begun your voice-building session with some aspect of the Four Essentials, give the following instructions to your singers while you are demonstrating.)*



- Put your fingers on your larynx as you are humming and feel the vibration. Stop humming and swallow. Do you feel how your larynx lifts and your throat closes? Swallow again and feel how at the end of the swallow your larynx slightly lowers and the back of your throat feels “easy” or released. This is the feeling we want to maintain when we are singing.
- Now maintaining that “easy” throat feeling, sing exercise #22. As you are gliding through the pitches, first be attentive to your open vocal tract. Then make sure that you are widening your ribs on inhalation and then engaging your abdominal muscles when you are singing. Do two ascending repetitions on an [m] hum, and then do four or five repetitions on a tall [ma].

### Exercise #22

ascend by half-steps

[ m \_\_\_\_\_ ] (inhale)

[ ma \_\_\_\_\_ ]

- Inhale and exhale through a tall [a] sound, then through a round [o] and then through a forward and rounded [u]. Do you feel how you can keep your throat open even when you are changing your lip position?

Sing exercise #23, first with just a tall [a] and then with [a o u] as shown. Be sure to observe the crescendo/decrescendo dynamics; they help you train and connect to your *appoggio* breathing. Then pay attention to how you are shaping your [a o u] vowels. Does your vocal tract stay open when you move your lips? Does your lip shape match your neighbor's? It is important that we all be matching vowel shapes so we collectively sing with a unified sound.

### Exercise #23

[ a \_\_\_\_\_ ]

[ a \_\_\_\_\_ ]

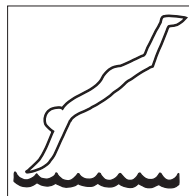
o \_\_\_\_\_ u \_\_\_\_\_ ] (inhale)

o \_\_\_\_\_ u \_\_\_\_\_ ]

descend by half-steps

## MORE TRAINING IDEAS

Make sure that your singers understand that in order for the choir sound to be unified, everyone needs to be singing with the same vocal technique concept. Obviously, there are individual differences in singers. But point out that if everyone in the group is singing with a controlled rounded [o] vowel, except for one tenor, who is singing with a brassy unrounded tense sound, our attention is drawn (both visually and aurally) to that one tenor. Instead of the audience paying attention to our beautiful storytelling, they are looking at the tenor and wondering why he (she) is singing so loudly. (Sorry to pick on tenors, of course it could be coming from any section.) The outlier singers may not be aware of their overly individual singing. That is why they have you to provide training and point out when they “miss the target” in their performance.



Exercise #24 will help your choir to unify tongue vowels [i e] and then open to the tall vowel [a]. With tongue vowels, every singer needs to move their tongue forward appropriately for the vowel without using any lip movement.

### Exercise #24

ascend by half-steps



## RESULTS FOR YOUR CHOIR

Singing in a choir requires many complex skills. The very nature of the activity is being a part of a group and this requires every singer to have an understanding of their function within the larger choral context. Choirs that are trained to understand their purpose within this choral architecture are expert listeners. Good listeners sing in tune, they match their neighbors in vowel shape, color and dynamics and understand when they are important and when they are not. These are the attributes that enable your choir to blend perfectly and sing artistically. You provide the initial listening and training for them and guide them in “hitting the target” in both practice and performance.



WARM-UP PREPARATION CHART

If you want to train and cultivate:	Emphasize these vocal techniques:
Unified vowels	Open vocal tract Resonance Diphthongs
Sustained, legato singing	Breath management Intercostal inhalation <i>Appoggio</i> singing regulation
Engaged, intentional singing	Aligning the instrument
Authenticity	Open vocal tract Tonus Emotional empathy
Clear, rhythmic and meaningful diction	Free and independent articulation that is coordinated and controlled by the breath
Individual intonation and singing in tune with others	Breath regulation, register blending, alignment, listening three ways
Rhythmic precision	Breath regulation Coordinated onset and release of the tone
Vibrant, exciting tone	Tonus Forward focus of the tone Breath management
Tension-free tone; not strident	Open vocal tract Breath management Vowel modification
Dynamic range: <i>pp</i> to <i>ff</i> in every voice in every range	Release of tension Open vocal track Breath management Vowel modification

## COMPENDIUM OF VOCAL EXERCISES

Use this compendium to design your own voice-building sessions. For example, "In this session I want to train sustained legato singing so I will choose:

One from Opening the Vocal Tract, two from Breathing, one from Registers, etc."

Start most exercises in a range that is comfortable for everyone. For narrow-range exercises, usually D major works well to start. For wider-range exercises, Bb major is usually comfortable for everyone. In each exercise, encourage singers to try one key higher (or lower) than they think they can sing. Almost always they can do it!

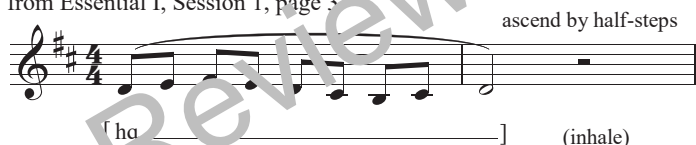
### Choral Cantabile on YouTube

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#### OPEN VOCAL TRACK

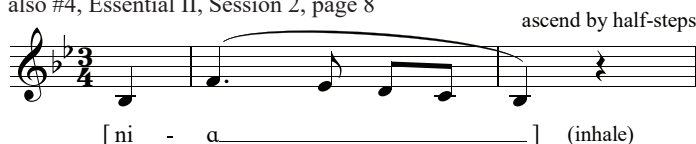
1

Exercise #1  
from Essential I, Session 1, page 3



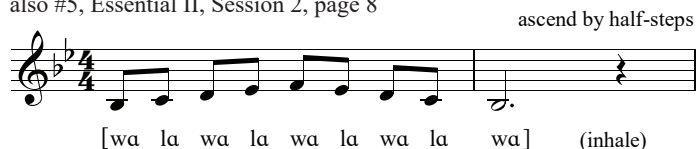
2

Exercise #2  
from Essential I, Session 1, page 3  
also #4, Essential II, Session 2, page 8



3

Exercise #3  
from Essential I, Session 1, page 3  
also #5, Essential II, Session 2, page 8



4

Exercise #6  
from Essential II, Session 2, page 8

