

Leading young singers: the teacher as musical leader.

What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Thomas Leech

Director of the Schools Singing Programme, Diocese of Leeds

Consultant, National Schools Singing Programme

Musical Director, Bradford Festival Choral Society

tom@thomasleech.com

www.dioceseofleedsmusic.org.uk

www.nssp.org.uk

www.bradfordfestivalchoralsociety.org.uk

www.thomasleech.com



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Dynamics



pp



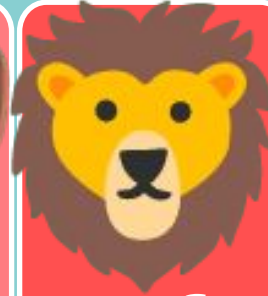
p



mp



mf



f



ff

crescendo



Dynamics



Leading young singers: the teacher as musical leader.

What was going on there?

Call and response.

Listening

Breaking the ice

Lots of listening and staying in the moment

No verbal instructions, just musical

visuals

Dynamice

Unifying your singers



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What was going on there?

Music warmups
disguised as fun things

Physical warm up

Energetic warm up

Range of voice

Fun

Little talking

Linking movement and
sound

Quick



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Leading young singers: the teacher as musical leader.

What was going on there?

having fun

Working as a group

Engaging warm ups
which move on quickly

Engaged learning and
warming up. There's no time
for singers to be distracted
as they will miss the next
exercise.

No discussion.

Solfaige

Physical and vocal
warmup

Clear instructions ,
modelling



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Session structure:

- Some singing!
- Who this session is for...
- Preparation
- Time and fluency
- Praise and progress
- Assessing
- Singing in parts
- Does conducting matter?
- Repertoire
- Curriculum



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

This session:

- For anyone working with young choirs (or indeed any choirs - the older I get, the more my choral society rehearsal shares with a Y1/2 session!).
- Contributions from the floor very welcome!
- Experiential - also my approach in general, doing, listening, working out what worked and what didn't.
- It could equally be titled the musical leader as teacher...



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The Lighthouse

Composer: Lin Marsh

Structure: Verses and Chorus

Tempo: Moderato

Tonality: Major

Time signature: $\frac{2}{4}$ (2 beats in a bar)





mf On the cliff a lighthouse stands, straight and tall,
Flashing out across the sea, warning all.

f *Shine out through the darkness,
Shine out clear and bright,
Shine out with your message,*

mp *Guiding the ships, bringing them home,
Safe when they see your light.*





mf

On the cliff a lighthouse stands, white and red,
Flashing out across the sea: "Rocks ahead!"

f *Shine out through the darkness,
Shine out clear and bright,
Shine out with your message,*

mp *Guiding the ships, bringing them home,
Safe when they see your light.*





mf

From the top a beacon glows, night and day,
Flashing out across the sea: “Keep away!”

f *Shine out through the darkness,
Shine out clear and bright,
Shine out with your message,*

mp *Guiding the ships, bringing them home,
Safe when they see your light.*



Leading young singers: the teacher as musical leader.

How did that work?

Simple melody

They tell you what they need to do better, after your demonstration

introduction of dynamics in an easy to understand manner for young children

Visuals

Handing over leadership and teaching to the singers so they can internalise what they need to do.

Thumbs up response works well

Asking the choir questions to engage them with the music

modelled & right is right



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6



11



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How did that work?

Dynamics as beginning of line

Repetition and call and response

Demonstration ...children as leaders

Makes the children feel important - getting them to give advice!

A mix of verbal and visual cues

Didn't get the rest on the 1 in the forte part

They demonstrate, so do you. Do again until better

links between warm ups and text in songs



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6



11



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How did that work?

Empowering the kids to give their advice and opinion - was it loud enough and how to get it better



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Preparation:

- It ALWAYS starts with the plan...
- Big picture down to sessional detail
- Repertoire led



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

First ideas...

School repertoire planning ideas 25-26

Singing the Mass

BCWCAT Mass KGSA

DJ Alleluia

OT psalm

Motets - communion and Marian

Adoro te devote - St A

O Mary of Promise - St A

Something from Lourdes - Gaude Maria / Magnificat / Totus tuus - use as transitions

Christmas

3 carols - Tell out the news / Go tell it on the mountain / Angels Carol

Hymns and descants (start after half-term)

Secular

Fast car / Mad moon

RRB Aviary - The Lark

In parts - Rollerghoster

St N KS2 - Cumbanchero / Rollerghoster / Lighthouse

Circle song

Believe - spring 2026

Power in me - spring 2026

Change up warm-ups etc

- More fun!
- Revive 1&2 / 1, 121 / Boom said the cat / Itsy bitsy / 12345-big fat fly



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Sessional planning...

Date	Warm-up	1 st Piece	Notation	2 nd piece	Transition	3 rd Piece	Singing Stars
9/9	Itsy bitsy Do re mi so East to west S-s-s-s ssss Pow! Laser ooo Ezetale	Fast car	Notation recap	BCWCAT Kyrie	Brand new sound	Adoro te devote / Mango	
Seating plans / Expectations (link to respect / courtesy) Musicianship - notation recap (Do re mi / Ta tete tikitika) Dynamics - recap Faith - Singing the Mass / Adoration							
16/9	Ezetale Do re mi so Iron bar Consonants Siren I don't care Boom said the cat	BCWCAT Agnus Dei	Session 6	Adoro te devote	Itsy bitsy	Fast car	
Musicianship - Stick notation - Introduce ta and te-te Include Dynamics recap throughout (embedded in words) Faith - Singing the Mass / Adoration							



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Cathedral Girls Choir mega plan...

25/9	30/9	2/10	5/10	7/10	9/10	13/10	16/10	19/10	21/10	23/10	HALF TERM	3/11
Th Mass	Vespers Wk 2	Th Mass	S Mass - Latin	Vespers Wk 3	Rehearsal only	Our Lady of Fatima Mass - Full	Th Mass	S Mass	Vespers Wk 1	Th Mass		All Souls - Full
tense / relax chew gum long body 20 and in pow	Bevan vowels cold drink left / right ssss to empty v/jz/z 12321 etc 5432111 down (ya / ma)	Psalm vowels rag doll ballerina hh / ff / sh pow / w / ny / y	Gloria face massage / scream / chew alien head s-s-s-s ssss Psalm sov	Vespers Hymn shoulders round left right turns ssss 8, 12 Psalm sov	Laudamus ooo tense / relax chew gum hoo pow	Gloria Pendulum East to west ng oo aaa 5 / 9 Br 132435421	Banuwa face massage / scream / chew Ceiling pencil ss/ff/th/ft sirens (y / ny / w)	Face rub / chew arm raise tummy muscles hah / ss / ff SM sov	Antiphons tai chi breath shoulder clocks ssss 7/1 sirens	Vivaldi ooo Teeth clean Iron bar Whhhoo (wheezy) Shepherd sov		tense / relax chew gum long body 20 and in pow
mm/n/n/ng 151 gentle bounce (121, 232...) 1, 123, 345 etc Jubilato Deo Praetorius	vowels 13217218 semis - 8786 oh	volume (121, 232) vowels 58531	scoopy ee-oo breath and go	ah stac (12312342) 13587898etc	yah down (85351) breathe / go	ee-ah gesture scale	ah - oh (18531) mimema.../n/g	ah 10th ee-ah	ya (8531) Zee vah	ooo 151 ngo-ooo-aaa		mm/n/n/ng 151 gentle bounce (121, 232...) 1, 123, 345 etc
Missa XVI, Gregorian	Magnificat a8, Bevan	March together Missa in simplicitate, Langlais	Spitzenmesse, Mozart	Magnificat quarti toni, Guerrero		Magic pattern Missa brevis in C "Spitzenmesse", Mozart	Leeds Mass, Duggan	1 and 2 and 3 Missa Vidi spesiosam, Victoria	Magnificat octavi toni, Morales	Missa XVI		Faure Requiem
O nata lux, Tallis		Hymne à la Vierge, Vilette	In te Domine speravi, Charpentier			Gaude, Maria Virgo, Victoria	Exultate Deo, Palestrina	Exultate Deo, Palestrina		Domine Deus, Rex coelestis, Vivaldi		
O mysterium ineffabile, Lalouette		Ave verum corpus, Fauré	Dona nobis pacem, Bach			Hymne à la Vierge, Vilette	O sacrum convivium, Tallis	O sacrum convivium, Tallis		In manus tuas, Shepherd		
Missa XVI, Gregorian	Vespers	Missa in simplicitate, Langlais	Hymn	Vespers	Ave Maria, Saint-Saëns		Leeds Mass, Duggan	Hymn	Magnificat octavi toni, Morales	Missa XVI		



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Choral Society termly sessions...

Bradford Festival Choral Society Rehearsal Schedule Autumn 2025

September

3 [s] And the glory p11 And he shall purify p35 O thou that tellest p46
Hallelujah! p171 Worthy - Amen p217 Choral Classics repertoire
Sing through For unto us p55, His yoke is easy p86, All we like sheep p106, Let us break their bonds p161

10 [s]

Open Rehearsal - invite friends, family and colleagues to come along
And the glory p11 Worthy - Amen p217 O thou that tellest p46
Hallelujah! p171 Choral Classics repertoire

13

Saltaire Festival - Choral Classics in the Park

17 [s]

And he shall purify p35 For unto us p55 Glory to God p68
His yoke is easy p86 Worthy - Amen p217

24 [s]

For unto us p55 Glory to God p68 His yoke is easy p86
And he shall purify p35

October

1 [s]

Coaching - tenors and basses with Alex Kyle
For unto us p55 His yoke is easy p86 Behold p91
Surely p98 And he shall purify p35

8 [s]

Coaching - sopranos and altos with Hannah Mason
Behold p91 Surely p98 And with his stripes p102
All we like sheep p106 Sing through p106



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Preparation:

- It ALWAYS starts with the plan...
- Big picture down to sessional detail
- Repertoire led
- Then adding curriculum / musicianship details
- Plan all starters / warm-ups / transitions (cycling them through sessions)
- Having this all ready at the start of term saves SO much stress and drives progress too
- What's missing?



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- Plan all starters / warm-ups / transitions (cycling them through sessions)
- Having this all ready at the start of term saves SO much stress and drives progress too
- LEARN THE MUSIC!!
- Prep all materials (ie slides) in advance!



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Just before you start a session:

Remind yourself that it is your job to **motivate** the singers to want to make progress, whatever their starting point. They won't often arrive at a session determined to do their best - they need to be **inspired** and **encouraged** by you.

Have a couple of things other than learning the repertoire that you will focus on.

You are a teacher AND a musician.



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**Sing along,
Just follow me.
It's as easy
As can be.**



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Time and fluency:

- In a 30 minute session, far too easy to talk nonsense for at least 10% of **their** time.
- Feeling brave? Get someone to time how long you talk for.
- Get them singing as they come in, or in the transition to singing.
- Own the space, and start and finish on time, every time.
- A visible outline of the session can be really helpful.
- Use my turn, your turn without any explanation.
- Standing up / sitting down while singing the last bit of the previous song or transition.
- Experiential - explaining is generally unnecessary.
- Have everything set up on one presentation, in order!
- Owning the space includes a definite end to the session (sung or spoken thank you Y4 / thank you Mr Leech)



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Use their names!

- Essential!
- Places plan is non-negotiable for our colleagues (groups <45ish).
- Make the teacher / TA do it at the start of the first session (I always bring pen / paper!).
- Write unfamiliar or ambiguous names phonetically.
- Also teacher and TA names.
- I will even do this for a one-off session when covering etc.



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The Diocese of Leeds Schools Singing Programme



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Seating plan OK

1 Adebanjo	2 Ethan	3 Sara	4 Eldana	5 Solyana	6 Vania	7 Naod	8 Evan	9 Faith	10 Elisei
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1 Noah	2 Natan	3 Lucas	4 Neariah	5 Evana	6 Leigh-Anna	7 Hebron	8 Aliza	9 Shakelah
-----------	------------	------------	--------------	------------	-----------------	-------------	------------	---------------

1 Josef	2 Szymon	3 Billy	4 Zane	5 Peace	6 Annabel	7 Esrom	8 Eyoram	9 Adonay	10 Denzel
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Piano

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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Praise and progress:

- Use **precise** and **named** praise.
- Focus on progress and positive behaviour to generate engagement.
- Eliminate pointless comments / empty praise (brilliant / great / very good)



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Adoro te devote

Composer: Daniel Justin

Structure: Verses, with a contrasting middle section

Tempo: Gently flowing (Andante)

Tonality: Major

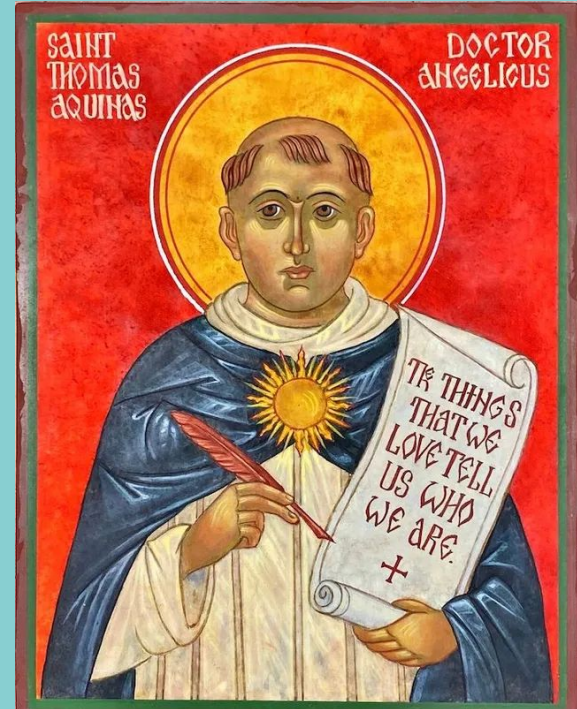
Time signature: $\frac{4}{4}$ (4 beats in a bar)





Adoro te devote

The words of this hymn are by **St Thomas Aquinas** (born about 1270) and is used as a prayer of thanksgiving at the end of Mass, or during Eucharistic Adoration.





d r m m r m l s m d

mezzo piano

**A-doro te devote, latens Deitas,
quae sub his figuris vere latitas:**

mezzo forte

tibi se cor meum totum, totum meum subicit,

mp

quia te contemplans totum, totum deficit.

*Godhead here in hiding whom I do adore
Masked by these bare shadows, shape and nothing more.
See, Lord, at thy service low lies here a heart
Lost, all lost in wonder at the God thou art.*

Leading young singers: the teacher as musical leader.

What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Praise and progress:

- Use **precise** and **named** praise.
- Focus on progress and positive behaviour to generate engagement and avoid low-level disruption and conflict.
- Eliminate pointless comments / empty praise (brilliant / great / very good).
- Appeal to team spirit.
- Soliana's ready and listening brilliantly *instead of Stop talking!*
- Excellent posture from Fred and Victoria *instead of Sit up straight!*
- Praise as they're singing - yes that's great, great mouth shape Dhruv
- Pawlos, that was so good because of your excellent breath
- Which row is the most ready?



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Praise and progress:

Remind them that this is **practising** and is about **progress**. It won't sound great straight away, there will be mistakes (which is fine - you're practising), it might be frustrating, and it will get better and better.

This is no different from maths - I think I ask in every session several times, how do we get better at singing (but also spag / number facts / football, swimming)?



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Assessing:

- A constant in any sort of rehearsal.
- **USE YOUR EARS!**
- If (when!) it sounds great, stop them in the moment - be really enthusiastic and let them know. Get them to do it again so they reinforce what it feels like.
- Never be horrible, shout, or demean their efforts.
- Remember, precise and positive - 'The earlier breath meant the phrase started really confidently'
- 'If we all stood as beautifully as Mina we would sound even better'
- Demonstrate rather than explain.
- Try very hard not to do impressions of what went wrong.
- Get the choir to assess themselves.
- Be careful with complicated metaphor / simile.
- Avoid jargon or strangely meaningless phrases.
- You'll be amazed at the power of sticker.



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Assessing - some questioning ideas

- In short sessions, the efficiency and design of questions is crucial; they should be clear, concise and have definite purpose.
- I'm going to ask about what we changed after we sing this again, put your hands up to answer.
- *OR* Don't put your hands up, I'm going to pick three people to tell me what they think.
- Try to use whole class techniques (everyone show me).
 - Thumbs up or thumbs down for an either/or question, such as 'major or minor?'
 - Show me a number on your fingers... e.g. 'which note was highest? 1, 2, or 3?'
 - 'which beat had a rest on?' 'how many beats long is this note?'
- Wide arms/narrow arms to answer questions about loud or soft, fast or slow questions
- Everyone saying an answer together for closed questions.
- Wrong answers - that's not quite right, but it was a great musical word
- No answer - let's see what Sadie thinks
- Right answers - remember to praise and reinforce.



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Getting into parts:

- Echo songs
- Call and response
- Waiting 'canons'
- Partner songs
- Adding drones / ostinati
- Spoken rounds
- THEN rounds



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Does conducting matter?

- Discuss!



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

What about repertoire?

- Clear melody, structure, definite...
- Vivid (and appropriate) text
- Avoid slush
- Make it yours!
- Consider vocal range
- Don't worry about it not being cool
- I fall back on - Junior Voiceworks / Jonathan Dove (Seasons and Charms) / Lin Marsh anthologies / Sing for Pleasure / Sacred - Come and Praise / Lourdes anthologies



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Curriculum:

- Easy to embed concepts experientially, then label consistently
- Dynamics / Tempo - can rapidly give the children real expressive agency
- Beat / Rhythm - easy to explore
- Low / Middle / High pitch
- Incremental and scaffolded
- NYCoS Go for...bronze / silver / gold



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Observation:

- Go and watch other conductors / coaches.
- Make notes and record how they make progress, are they specific in their feedback and praise, do they manage behaviour positively, what really engages the choir?
- Have a look at our online lockdown Schools Singing Programme sessions (www.schoolssingingprogramme.org.uk)



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

Children love achieving something, and progress (and recognition of it) is a very powerful motivator. This will drive engagement, in turn creating more progress!



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What do you need to lead singing successfully in the classroom?

YouTube channels (and like / subscribe!):

Diocese of Leeds - www.youtube.com/@dioceseofleedsmusic

LOADS of singing sessions, with pdf summaries of content and timestamps.

BFCS - www.youtube.com/@BradfordFestivalChoralSociety

Some useful warm-up sessions and lots of wild virtual choir projects!

Websites

www.dioceseofleedsmusic.org.uk

www.nssp.org.uk

www.bradfordfestivalchoralsociety.org.uk

www.thomasleech.com



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