ABCD Reading
Harmony Signing workshop

Harmony Signing is a means of developing collective improvisation in group singing, employing gestures partly derived from Kodály and Curwen, partly from conventional conducting, in a systematic manual language that is easy to learn. Participants respond to one another and improvise or compose by taking on the role of leader. Developed initially with a children's choir in the UK, Harmony Signing is the subject of two books, and has been trialled in Canada, Germany, the USA, Brazil, and China as well as in the author's 15 years at the University of Western Australia. It has proved highly effective as a mean of engaging in social music making even where participants do not share a common spoken language, and of accelerating fluency in aural development. It also provides warm-up materials for choirs that can contribute to musicianship, blend and tuning.

Workshop Content

The purpose of Harmony Signing is to release the capacity for original musical thought, instinctive response and self-expression within a social context that should be seen as a universal attribute of human beings. Initial interaction in vocal warm-ups builds confidence in group singing and interpersonal sensitivity through both unison and free improvisatory responses. Harmony Signing itself was developed as a means of achieving collective creativity that permits real-time composition and improvisation led by participants. Everyone present sings (later, instruments can also be introduced), in as blended a manner as possible, responding to the intention of acquiring confidence in 3-and-4-part improvised polyphony. Initially, a set of simple gestures is acquired in order to provide harmonic backing to which melody may be added. Texts can be incorporated as the basis for composition as participants become more confident with the potential of the system.

The foundations of HS that will be explored in this workshop will be those most appropriate to working with school and adult choirs (for whom and with whom these procedures were first developed) include:

- Singing harmonics and building chords from them;
- Voice-leading relationships between Tonic, Subdominant and Dominant;
- Progressions based on chords I, IV and V (the Primary Triads);
- Signing melody;
- Combining signed melody with accompaniment.

At each stage, participants will be invited to lead activities.

Participants are invited to visit the Harmony Signing website, which provides a full explanation of further activities as well as 75 videos of students engaged in exploring its potential.

Published sources that present and elaborate *Harmony Signing*

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Bannan, N. (2020). Evolutionary psychology and the necessity for music education for all. *Australian Journal of Music Education*, *53*(2), 13-18.
https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1272336.pdf

Bannan, N. (2017). A role for action research projects in developing new pedagogical approaches to aural and musicianship education. In *The Music Practitioner* (pp. 295-308). Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315085807-22/role-action-research-projects-developing-new-pedagogical-approaches-aural-musicianship-education-nicholas-bannan

Bannan, N. (2017). Darwin, Fux, and Schenker in the Primary Classroom. In *2015 WA Chapter MSA Symposium on Music Performance and Analysis* (pp. 95-104). Musicological Society of Australia.
https://www.nicholasbannan.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Bannan-Proceedings-Music-Performance-and-Analysie-Version-3.pdf

Bannan, N. (1999). A gestural language for the representation and communication of vocal harmony. *The Phenomenon of Singing*, *2*, 16-23.
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