…from average to excellent…!

Dr. Amy Bebbington

Sunday 18th October, 2026, 9.30-10.30am

This session aims to share a variety of approaches to polish and refine your amateur choir's sound, accuracy and ensemble ready for memorable performances

1. Kala kalla – Eric Whitacre (No. 2 from 5 Hebrew Love Songs)

Intervals – apply fricatives (vv, jj, zz, or th) to encourage connecting breath to sound, and maintaining vibrancy, colour, confidence and vocal support across the range. Exercise: portamento

S/A: Count singing – pulse every quaver lightly: "1 an 2 an ti an 4 an". Helps to illuminate vertical harmonies, reinforce rhythmic precision and allows the brain to assimilate musical detail

T clap regular accents & B stamp tenuto accents. Also, clap "on the dot" (bt 2) to resist rushing.




34
SOPR.
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
ALTO
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
38
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
42
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
46
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la

2. O Radiant Dawn, James MacMillan

Early consonants - and **pitched** where possible - should spring open to vibrant vowels here

Consider rhythmically resonating on consonants like ‘nn’ and ‘mm’ (“daw**n**” & “sple**n**dour”)

Modify vowels so “light” is an ‘ah’ vowel with a clearly rounded diphthong to finish

Avoid elisions such as “splendou **rof** eternal light”

Exercises:
diaphragm echoes
descending 5-note scale alternating on “mm, ah” or “nn, ah” or “ll, ah” (add diphthong “ee y t” to finish to create “might, night, light”)



3. Come my way, Becky McGlade

Beautifully measured, long phrasing. Apply first a fricative sound and then an open vowel for a visceral connection of sound to breath. Demand this at every rehearsal and in performance!

Consider how to make longer notes "live" – i.e. spin the breath, warm the tone, allow natural vibrato

Try a kinaesthetic gesture to enhance velocity of breath through long phrases. Or apply the "bowl of warm air" exercise: arms slowly travel out as breath is used, and come back in to mirror recoil breath

The support apparatus can be released collectively at the ends of long phrases making for a more homogenous physical connection **across** the choir, **with** the conductor and **for** the audience



4. Pastime with good company, attr. Henry VIII

After count singing, try staccato singing on the text to lighten tone and improve rhythmic accuracy

Encourage choir to apply kinaesthetic movements – tapping hand on palm for buoyant, decayed notes, or expressive arm movements/walking/knee bends for smoother lines



5. Crux Fidelis, Sarah MacDonald

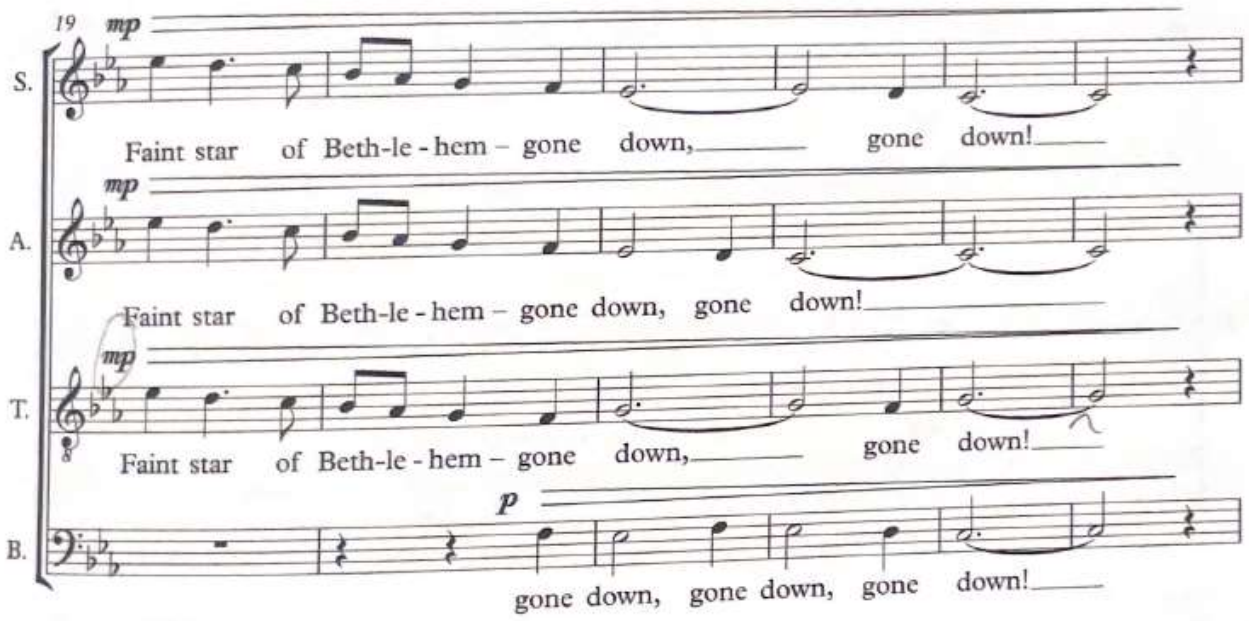
Bounce singing (pulsing quavers) for accuracy of tempo, consonant alignment and rhythmic release/breath

Intonation – ‘do’ to ‘la’ 10 note descending scale. Remember to **rhythmically pitch consonants**

Text, intention behind the meaning and use of suspensions to create meaningful communication

Pacing of decresendo – slightly less on each quaver pulse, sops can modify vowels/omit consonants







6. Sure on this shining night, Samuel Barber

Tone, vocal quality, intonation and musical integrity are everything! This text needs 'ah' quality throughout!

Avoid elision between "sure" & "on". "This shining": 's' should be indiscernible and merge with 'sh'

"O**f** shadows" – pitch the 'v' every time! Amateur singers find this hard to do consistently.

"round" – open + 'posh' + diphthong ('ah' quality again)

"I weep for wonder wand'ring" – early "oo-ee" every time, convince singers they can never do too much! Exercise: "ah-oo-ee" in a descending scale



Additional elements to consider…

Tone quality – be encouraged to apply analogies and emotional descriptions as well as - or perhaps instead of for community choirs - technical terms. Instead of 'forte' consider 'bold', 'forceful' or 'deeply warm'. Instead of 'pianissimo', consider 'tender', 'delicate', 'intimate' or 'effervescent'. Aim to serve the meaning of the music, the singers in front of you and audience engagement.

Kinaesthetic gestures are my go-to top tip for ALL choirs. These are not for conductors to employ alone, but for the whole choir to feel collectively (even those who are reluctant!). Appropriate movements that reinforce the sound can enhance every musical element you can think of.

Reinforcing voice parts in solos or semi-chorus sections can optimise blend, balance and confidence

Music that is confidently sung from **memory** means you have more versatility for 'staging' or voicing.

Favourite phrases: "smile across the collar bone/chest" and "sing through your eyes"

Since we are fast approaching the season of goodwill, please consider "i**n**ce**n**se" and "Chris**t**mas"!