

Preface

The idea for this book originated at a Youth and Student Activities Committee roundtable breakfast meeting during the 1991 National Convention of the American Choral Directors Association in Phoenix, Arizona. The subject that early March morning was "Training Our Future Choral Directors," and several of us on the committee felt it could form the basis for a journal article or monograph. Sr. Sharon Breden, Chair of the ACDA Repertoire and Standards Committee, was of invaluable help in her encouragement, as was Ray Robinson, who suggested that the subject might well become the basis for a book.

While many fine volumes have already been written on the subject, it soon became evident that singing in a college choir, taking one or two courses in conducting and a choral techniques class is all too frequently the extent of a choral conductor's training. Also, the path to conducting a choir is often approached from different areas of expertise — from one's keyboard skills or instrumental background, leaving many conductors without a concept of diction or choral tone. So much is involved in the learning process to become an effective choral director. A publication which would articulate basic concepts would be an invaluable research tool in the training of choral musicians.

The learning process is the sum total of many things — courses taken, books read, conventions attended, and, most importantly, **on-the-job training**. Though this book is written for the student, it is written for every choral director who is still striving to grow in the profession. It is not limited to those who have yet to find their first choral position.

I wish to thank the chapter authors who so promptly and graciously agreed to participate in this project. Their succinct views on their respective topics were requested, in a manner that would speak directly to choral students. They have each brought considerable uniqueness to the approach of their subject. The reader may find within these twelve chapters some repetition of the various aspects of rehearsal techniques, score study, resource materials, etc. Yet such duplication, if viewed from different perspectives, can be illuminating. If through reading these pages the reader gains some new concepts, a desire to grow, to look anew at what is involved as a choral musician — to listen, search, and perhaps even question old habits or ways of doing things — this book will have served its purpose.

— Guy B. Webb

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The Challenge of Choral Leadership in the Twenty-First Century

Ray Robinson

In a world of political, economic, and personal disintegration, music is not a luxury but a necessity, not simply because it is therapeutic nor because it is the "universal language," but because it is the persistent focus of man's intelligence, aspiration and good will.¹

We live in an extraordinary time in world history, but it is a period that is not without its difficulties for choral musicians: support for the choral art is waning in the schools; entire segments of the church across denominational lines have declared choral programs and choral literature irrelevant as a meaningful vehicle of congregational worship; college and university curricula no longer consider the arts an integral core requirement for all students; and a difficult economy has reduced public and private financial support for professional and community choruses to the extent that many are actually struggling for survival. As we begin to write the final chapter on the twentieth century, it is painfully clear that the next generation of choral conductors will have a much more difficult time than did its predecessors.

Yet when we really stop and think about it, choral musicians have always existed in a state of tension. We only need to read the letters of Johann Sebastian Bach to the Leipzig Town Council² or conduct some research on Felix Mendelssohn's frustrations with the religious establishment at the *Berliner Dom* during his years as Kapellmeister³ to realize that little has changed in the last two hundred years for those choral musicians who wish to produce a high quality choral experience for their singers and the audiences they reach.

In the millennium that is about to dawn, a new generation of choral artists will emerge to face many of the same problems that frustrated Bach and Mendelssohn, as they accept the challenge of choral leadership in a new century. Those who are the primary audience of this volume represent the vanguard of this new wave. However theirs will not be the pioneer role of the great choral conductors of the twentieth century—F. Melius Christiansen, Wilhelm Ehmann, Eric Ericson, Helmuth Rilling, Robert Shaw, John Smallman, Roger Wagner,

¹ Robert Shaw, quoted in: Robinson, Ray and Allen Winold, *The Choral Experience*. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1992, (re-issue of Harper-Collins, 1976) p. xvii.

² David, Hans T. and Arthur Mendel, *The Bach Reader*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1966.

³ Werner, Eric, *Mendelssohn: A New Image of the Composer and His Age*. Translated by Dika Newlin. New York: Free Press, 1963. His appointment as Kapellmeister in 1842 at the Berlin Cathedral by King Friedrich Wilhelm IV proved to be the only church music post that Mendelssohn ever held, and it was a very unhappy experience for him.

Figure 2

Now, raise the hand *without changing the curved, relaxed position of the fingers*, and place the baton in it, gripping it at the point where the thumb and index finger were previously placed. Slide back easily to the point at which the handle meets the shaft of the baton. This is "the point of the grip." Allow the middle finger to *gently rest* (not grip) on the handle behind the index finger — not pressing tightly against it, but still allowing "breathing" room.

**Figure 3**

Drop the hand and baton. The hand should be as relaxed and free as before, without the baton — fingers curved, relaxed, and "breathing." The baton will now be slightly pointing to the left, as the hand itself previously did. It is important to point out that if the hand and baton were to aim *straight forward* the wrist would have to turn or twist in an *un-natural, slightly forced* position. Remember: the baton and arm must be as natural a collaboration as possible. The physical act of "conducting" must be *natural*.

