

**Developing musicianship through performance in schola: Gregorian  
chant as the blueprint for musicality**

by

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## Abstract

This report identifies the regular practice of Gregorian chant as a key factor in developing singers' musicianship, particularly through energized breathing, ensemble awareness of vowel uniformity, and a collective sense of forward motion in the phrasing. In my work with choral ensembles, I often encountered frustration when students produced a weak tone and demonstrated inconsistent intonation – issues I initially attributed to a lack of note accuracy. The typical response involved repetitively plunking out individual parts, yet this yielded little improvement in overall musicality. Upon further reflection, I hypothesized that if students developed a deeper understanding of ensemble singing – specifically in tone production, blend, and intonation – their pitch and rhythmic accuracy would also improve. Teaching in a Catholic school provided a unique opportunity: each music class began with prayer, typically one of the seasonal Marian antiphons. I observed that my choir often sounded its best while chanting these prayers, even before formal warm-ups. The consistent use of monophonic melodies and free rhythms simplified the singing experience for less-trained voices, eliminating the challenges of dense harmonic textures and complex rhythmic notation. This allowed singers to redirect their focus toward healthy vocal technique and ensemble unity, fostering improved expression, phrasing, and overall musicality.

Completing graduate studies in music at Kansas State University has been a transformative experience. The practical courses, most notably *Advanced Choral Rehearsal Techniques*, provided rich opportunities for collaboration and experimentation with colleagues and professors as we explored innovative approaches to teaching music through performance in choir. Implementing creative warm-ups, musically responsive gestures, and pedagogical insights has transformed my choral rehearsals into dynamic, engaging music-making experiences. It has

been deeply fulfilling to synthesize my passion for sacred music, particularly Gregorian chant, with these practical innovations to meet the unique needs of my students and school community. The most rewarding aspect of the program has certainly been the didactic courses, especially *History and Philosophy of Music Education* and *Theories of Music Teaching*, which challenged me to reflect on my core values as an educator. Each course inspired a renewed commitment to professional development, a deepened engagement with current literature in music education, and a stronger drive to offer the highest quality instruction to my students. Ultimately, this journey has empowered me to more intentionally use Gregorian chant not only as a meaningful expression of faith, but also as a powerful, research-informed tool for cultivating ensemble skills and musical excellence.

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## **Dedication**

For my wife, Elizabeth, whose constant support and sacrificial love have made this endeavor possible.

## Preface

In Chapter 1 of this report, I articulate the role of music education in the formation of the whole person, particularly within Catholic classical schools, which are uniquely positioned to draw from a rich artistic and liturgical heritage. While this emphasis might suggest that my school at the time of this report exemplifies such a commitment, that is not the case. Like many music educators, I encountered significant challenges in securing adequate instructional time for my students across grade levels. My high school choir, in particular, experienced a reduction in class time this year – from three sessions per week to two 40-minute sessions. Furthermore, the course was scheduled during the final period of the school day, primarily due to students’ waning focus at that time, making it less desirable for core academic classes. This scheduling, coupled with frequent early dismissals for athletic competitions and travel, often resulted in inconsistent attendance. These early releases were approved under the assumption that students would only be missing a non-core elective. As a result, full ensemble rehearsals were infrequent, and even when they occurred, student fatigue and limited focus often hindered rehearsal effectiveness.

I share this information not as a criticism of my school but to provide a clear understanding of the situational constraints under which this project was conducted. While I had envisioned a broader scope of instructional material and more lessons to support this project, I frequently had to shift focus toward immediate performance preparation. Weekly liturgies, festival appearances, and other school events required the ensemble’s repertoire to be performance-ready, often at the expense of deeper pedagogical exploration. These circumstances are reflected in the reflections of Chapter 3 and continue to shape my approach to curriculum planning and instructional prioritization moving forward.

## Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

In an age when education is increasingly driven by data, test scores, and utilitarian goals, the role of music in forming the whole person has been largely neglected. Many schools treat music as an extracurricular activity rather than as a fundamental component of a well-rounded education. The entirety of my teaching career so far has been in a Catholic, classical liberal arts setting. Due to this unique opportunity, I have developed a teaching philosophy particular to that environment. Catholic classical schools have the opportunity – and the responsibility – to reclaim music’s rightful place in the curriculum. My teaching philosophy incorporates beliefs and practices common to Catholic musical heritage including the *schola cantorum*, Gregorian chant, and sacred polyphony. These are all powerful tools for both musical and spiritual formation, helping students develop not only technical musicianship but also a deeper understanding of their faith and humanity.

In writing his *Republic*, Plato not only gifted civilization with one of the most valuable works of philosophy but also some of the first instructions on education. The precept at the heart of this work is this: without formational education, a society has no chance of being good, just, wise, and happy (Plato & Reeve, 1992, para. 424). The best education is a liberal one, ordered towards the formation of the whole person through imitative and peripheral instruction in the classical liberal arts. These are the arts of language, as in grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics which make up the trivium, and the arts of number, as in arithmetic, music, geometry, and astrology which make up the quadrivium.

The purpose of the liberal arts tradition is to help students apply themselves to various forms of experience and knowledge. In this way, the liberal arts are intended to prepare a person for whatever they do in life (Yi, 2022, p. 254). Classical liberal arts schools structure the course

of their studies in ways that help teachers guide their students toward authentically experiencing reality. The educational experience one receives through a classical liberal arts program is comprehensive in the means and ends regarding the formation of the whole person. This formation of the whole person involves not only the formation of the intellect through natural philosophy but also the formation of virtue through moral philosophy. The purpose of education, therefore, is to form good people who have a propensity for the True, Good, and Beautiful. Most classical educators are aware of these principles. However, not every classical educator truly understands the part that music plays in the complete formation of the person.

The earliest classicists considered music to have pride of place within the classical liberal art education. The most notable were Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine of Hippo, and Boethius. The common belief of these thinkers was that music, through the elements of rhythm and harmony, imparted grace to the human soul. Aristotle specifically believed that instruction in music develops one's intuition of first principles or basic assumptions that cannot be arrived at by other means (Jain et al., 2021, pp. 32–33). In other words, music has a particularly unique role in developing human sensibilities. Furthermore, the development of musical knowledge, or musicianship, over the course of one's life, can offer an infinite number of enrichments across every aspect of human experience, from the intellectual and the practical to the emotional and the moral.

When the practice of music is undertaken in the context of the Christian life, these opportunities for encountering the True, Good, and Beautiful increase exponentially. The culmination of formation in music is a lifelong benefit: the enrichment of one's relationship with God. The realization of this benefit can be grasped simply in the following substantiation. Humans were created by God as beings whose purpose is to know, love, and serve God (Catholic

Church, 2003, Article 1). The tradition of the Church has revealed that there are many ways of coming to know God. This can be achieved through the human faculties, or natural reason, by knowing God's works and using His creation for good (Catholic Church, 2003, Articles 31–35). Since music is a creation of God that reveals His truth, directing one's attention to His order as it is exhibited in the music is one way a person can understand what God is communicating to them (Yi, 2022, p. 255). I have found that the Psalmist best demonstrates this principle, as the Psalms serve as musical expressions of every various human emotion and experience. With these intellectual, practical, emotional, moral, and spiritual ends in mind, I believe the classical Christian music educator has a responsibility like no other.

Despite this great responsibility, music education is seldom granted a place of pride in schools. As a subject, music must compete with other math, science, history, and language arts courses for time and resources. As the demand for impressive test scores and standardized data takes its toll on schools everywhere, it is becoming more and more common in American education for instruction in music to be reduced to an intermittent break from the other studies just a few hours out of the typical week. If this issue was not enough, many people view music either as an art form gifted to or attainable by only a select group of people, called esoteric music, or simply as another way to be entertained, called exoteric music (Yi, 2022, p. 256). This issue is further demonstrated in our society by the perceivably clear distinctions people make between those who are “musical” and those who are “non-musical.” Often and pointlessly, this distinction is not given to an individual by another but rather is the result of one's own assessment. The solution to both issues (i.e. determining just how important music truly is in education) comes down to the nature of music and its relationship with the human person.

Music is intrinsically human, for humans are the species that “musics” (Elliott, 1991, p. 35). Moreover, the action of music is just another form of cognition. Something intrinsically human cannot be considered exclusive nor considered an esoteric gift. Music is attainable and applicable to everybody. This does not consequently leave music as an exoteric form of entertainment alone. Instead, music is experienced in different degrees depending on one’s level of musicianship.

David Elliott, a contemporary music philosopher, presents the following observation in support of this theory:

In contrast to someone who is merely able to do something, the cognitive action abilities of the person who really knows how to do something renders the latter’s perception of a given situation more acute and intense and incorporates into it meanings that give it depth...To know what to listen for in a musical composition requires what Dewey calls “readiness” on the part of the listener’s cognitive action abilities...The one who knows something about the relation of the movements of the piano-player to the production of the music from the piano will hear something the mere layman does not perceive (Elliott, 1991, p. 34).

In this context, there are listeners who mostly benefit at the surface level and ready listeners who might experience the music at a deeper level. Since there are so many different levels of musicianship that could be present in this situation, the esoteric nature of this group of ready listeners is not exclusive, especially since developing musical ability is achievable by all. Here is a logical response to this demonstration: all people should experience real music in a social context, feel confident enough to learn more about music, and re-establish their identity as musical beings (Yi, 2022, p. 261). This should be the charge of all music educators everywhere.

The sequential issue to consider next is the most effective way to engage students in music at a deeper level than entertainment. It has been made clear through different approaches that music should not only be experienced passively but acted upon in the fullest way achievable by a person. In principle, the act of musicing is taken at will and is a full, live “deployment” of the whole person (Elliott, 1991, pp. 25–26). Musicing in any case, from every echelon of performing or composing to conducting and listening at different levels of readiness, is a form of cognitive action. Elements of musical understanding from rhythm to harmony form a subconscious toolbox that becomes useful in other forms of musicing one partakes in. The musical knowledge one possesses becomes present in a measurable way over time through the action of music itself. These things are best learned by doing rather than by developing knowledge about music. Music education cannot be solely aesthetic.

The charge of Catholic classical schools therefore is to provide opportunities for students to music actively with literature that inevitably draws them closer to God in the pursuit of the True, Good, and Beautiful. Fortunately, the Catholic Church’s heritage provides the solution: the *schola cantorum*. The schola is most suited to this endeavor for two reasons: 1) the traditional repertoire of a schola is always an authentic encounter with the True, Good, and Beautiful, and 2) the pedagogical applications of Gregorian chant and plainsong are numerous.

By my observation, the vast majority of students today are passive receivers of pop culture’s latest and ever-changing hits. Much of this music is pervaded by worldliness and vice at best and profanity and debauchery at worst. This issue is not unique to this age, as Plato also warned against improper and disorderly music’s ability to corrupt the soul and lead to moral decay (Plato & Reeve, 1992, paras. 424e–425a). Frequently, schools see this reality and attempt to counteract it with dull music appreciation courses. This is not to say that the study of Mozart’s

sonatas and Haydn's symphonies is an unwise pursuit. However, as previously stated, students must actively music with material that inevitably harmonizes their being. The Church has always directed its faithful to the following: Gregorian chant, sacred polyphony, modern sacred music, and hymns (Sacred Congregation of Rites, 1958, Article 4). The extensive repertory of Gregorian chant was naturally synthesized by the Early Church and specially designed for the liturgy alone without any other purpose or profane influence. It is the most authentic encounter with that which is holy, possesses goodness of form, and is universal to all. Additionally, the various forms of polyphony of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, especially those whose melody and structure are inspired by a Gregorian chant, also provide incredibly sublime experiences for singer and listener. Many modern composers who rely heavily on the compositional styles of these masterworks of polyphony have created pieces intended for the liturgy and possessing great qualities of piety and devotion.

Within the past decade, Gregorian chant and plainsong have been rediscovered by some choir directors and music educators as invaluable sources for pedagogical application. One particular instance of this is the work of Professor James Jordan of Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey. He encourages music educators and choral directors to use chant regularly either as part of a warm-up sequence or as the main source of repertoire. Jordan's implementation of this practice provided significant growth in his ensembles' musicianship. The most beneficial improvements that are naturally achieved through the singing of chant include building intuitive musical phrasing, developing music literacy, sharpening listening skills, and honing ensemble intonation (Jordan, 2014). These components of musical achievement all contribute to the greater development of musicianship, allowing singers to engage actively with the music the study and unleash the potential of music's graces.<sup>i</sup>

## How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

My philosophy of music education is holistic in nature and spiritually informed. I view teaching as a means of contributing to the integral formation of my students, including their spiritual development – a responsibility I undertake with intentional care. Accordingly, my instruction is both methodical and passionate, grounded in a belief that Truth, Beauty, and Goodness can be encountered through technical mastery in the music classroom. The two lessons presented in Chapter 2 exemplify this integration, as they were designed to use Gregorian chant to support the liturgical performance of two sacred masterworks: *Ave Maria (Angelus Domini)* by Franz Biebl and *Ubi Caritas* by Maurice Duruflé. These pieces not only offer rigorous opportunities for developing musicianship – through divisi textures, dissonant harmonic structures, and nuanced vocal demands – but also invite reflection and reverence through their sacred texts.

Informed by my belief in the formative power of sacred music, the lessons emphasized practical techniques such as developing vowel uniformity through Gregorian chant, cultivating resonance awareness, and refining ensemble listening skills. These strategies were not simply technical exercises; they served to elevate the ensemble's ability to engage deeply with the music and its spiritual context. By guiding students toward an authentic musical experience that unites technical discipline with spiritual depth, I aim to cultivate both their skill and their capacity to offer music as a form of prayer and praise. In this way, my philosophy is not merely theoretical – it directly informs my daily teaching practice and is made tangible in the rehearsal setting.

## Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan(s)

### Lesson Plan 1 – Breath Support & Musicianship

#### Overview of Lesson 1

This lesson was designed to encourage greater student awareness of the mechanics of energized breathing and, consequently, the effect of that breath on their singing. The motivation for designing this lesson came from observing that many students were not consistently taking full breaths when opportunities arose in a piece. This poor habit frequently resulted in weak singing and, therefore, an imbalanced ensemble sound. I used this lesson to give my students a kind of “crash course” in this very important singing skill just days before they were scheduled to travel for a choral competition in Orlando.

The lesson centered on the placement of energized breaths throughout the phrasing of two familiar pieces: the Marian Antiphon *Ave Regina Caelorum* and the choral work, Franz Biebl’s *Ave Maria (Angelus Domini)*. I also provided visual aids on my i3TOUCH screen showing the location of the breaths, the stressed syllables in the Latin text, and the direction of phrasing according to the chant conducting technique of chironomy. By placing full, energized breaths in the appropriate spots, students could sing each phrase in its entirety with good tone, clear text stress, and expressive musicality.

We did not focus much on dynamics in this lesson. The reason for this was that I wanted to encourage students to sing out rather than hold back in any way. One new element I introduced was asking students to physically show either their breath support or the direction of the phrasing. I anticipated a wide variety of responses and results from this task. Especially when showing phrasing, I expected many awkward facial expressions and hand gestures. Nevertheless, I wanted students to feel comfortable and not worry about there being a “right” or “wrong” way

to do this. To that end, I often refrained from conducting – especially during the chanting – so they would not simply mimic my movements.

### **National Music Standards (2014)**

**MU:Pr5.3.E.IIa** – Develop and apply appropriate rehearsal strategies to address individual and ensemble challenges in a varied repertoire of music, and evaluate their success.

**MU:Pr4.2.E.Ia** – Demonstrate, using music reading skills where appropriate, how compositional devices employed and theoretical and structural aspects of musical works impact and inform prepared or improvised performances.

**MU:Pr6.1.E.Ia** – Demonstrate attention to technical accuracy and expressive qualities in prepared and improvised performances of a varied repertoire of music representing diverse cultures, styles, and genres.

### **Prior Knowledge/Skills**

The piece has been studied for a few months and so there are minimal issues with pitch and rhythmic accuracy that would cause the students to hesitate or hold back. Also, we spend time in every rehearsal practicing full breaths. Recent developments in this particular skill have been recognizing or sensing the ensemble breath, a skill that permeates traditional *schola cantorum* chanting.

### **Rehearsal Objective**

Students will discover through chant an awareness of energized breathing's effect on other elements of musicianship including phrasing, Latin text stress, and expression.

### **Assessment of the Rehearsal**

In my lesson plan template, I initially wrote: “Phrasing in our upcoming piece for competition will come naturally, and their sound will not die out for lack of energized breath.”

Assessment is something I have always struggled to incorporate in concrete ways. Due to the restrictions mentioned in the preface of this report, I had not previously found an appropriate time to include formal assessments in my curriculum. Despite this challenge, I discovered – while reviewing the recorded video of the lesson – that I could easily assess how well students followed my instructions. It was encouraging to see how many students used the suggested gestures, thereby demonstrating the type of singing I was aiming for.

Additionally, I was pleasantly reminded that my students remain most engaged when I am standing and teaching directly in front of them, rather than sitting at the piano. The benefits of this approach far outweigh the perceived “security” of playing the notes of the students’ parts on the keyboard.

### **Relevant Contextual Factors and Future Modifications**

I really wanted to continue the momentum of this lesson during that class period. Unfortunately, with the pressure of an adjudication three days away and a rusty final page of the performance piece, I had to shift gears and rehearse pitches and timing. In the future, I would like to incorporate more lessons where I get to focus on building better technique in my choir during less busy seasons of the year. I can also set them up for more success by programming less challenging repertoire for performances, granting more time for fundamentals in rehearsal.

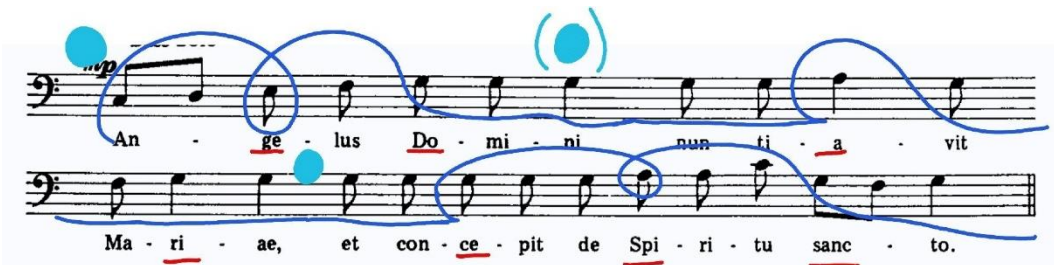
### **Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies**

- i3TOUCH screen
- Marked version of *Ave Regina Caelorum*
- Marked excerpts from *Ave Maria (Angelus Domini)*



**Figure 2.1.** Marked version of *Ave Regina Caelorum*

This is a screenshot of the marked version of the Gregorian chant *Ave Regina Caelorum*. The markings were explained to the students prior to the recording of the rehearsal video. The light blue circles represent the location of an energized breath, referred to in the lessons as a “draw” of air. At each of these spots the students were supposed to show with their arms their deep inhalation of air. The dark blue lines represent the phrasing and direction of the melodic flow. This is the way of showing phrasing using the traditional chant conducting method of chironomy. Finally, the red underlinings of syllables represent the Latin text stress. The markings were consistent in each figure used in the lesson.



**Figure 2.2.** Marked version of the *Angelus Domini* incipit of *Ave Maria* by Franz Biebl

The above figure is a screenshot of the marked incipit of Franz Biebl's *Ave Maria*. It is the traditional Psalm-toned verse of the *Angelus*, a devotional prayer to Mary the Mother of God. The light blue circles representing deep, energized breaths were followed by the students well. Traditional antiphonal singing was implemented in the performance of this incipit where the cantor soloist intones the first seven notes, joined by the remainder of the male voices at the eighth note, hence the addition of a light blue circle in parentheses. Chironomy phrasing reflects the way I wanted students to move the phrase forward, rather than give each repeating eighth-note syllable the same amount of weight and attention. Red lines indicating text stress are somewhat consistent with general practice of Latin text stress according to syllable construction.

The image shows a musical score for the opening phrase of Franz Biebl's *Ave Maria*. The score is written for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The Soprano part begins with the instruction "Quietly flowi" and a *p* (piano) dynamic marking. The Alto part begins with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic marking. The Tenor and Bass parts begin with a *pp* dynamic marking. The lyrics are: "A - ve Ma - ri - a, gra - ti - a ple - na, Do - mi - nus". The lyrics are written below the staves, with red underlinings under "ve", "ri", "ti", "ple", and "mi". Light blue circles are placed above the notes, indicating deep, energized breaths. Blue wavy lines are drawn over the notes, indicating chironomy phrasing. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat).

**Figure 2.3.** Marked version of the *Ave Maria* by Franz Biebl opening phrase

The final figure from Lesson 1 is the beginning of Franz Biebl's *Ave Maria* featuring my markings. As a reminder, these screenshots were displayed on my i3TOUCH smart board at the front of the room. The reason for providing this visual aid was so that students could have their arms and hands free from binders in order to demonstrate the gestures I asked for. The light blue and dark blue markings are consistent with the previous figures. The red underlinings are somewhat consistent with typical Latin text stress, though I am aware that the word *Ave*, a two-

syllable word, is actually stressed *A-ve* according to typical syllabification (Treacy, 2007, p. 51). I believe I subconsciously marked the red line at the incorrect syllable due to the less-strong third beat of the common time meter.

## Rehearsal Plan

2014 Music National Standards:  
MU:Pr5.3.E.IIIa, MU:Pr4.2.E.5a, MU:Pr6.1.E.5a

Teacher/Conductor's Name: Trenton Phillips O'Neil

Rehearsal 1 ☒ 2 ☐

**Prior Knowledge/Skills** (*What do they already know and what can they do?*):

Taking full, energized breaths; understanding the ascent and descent of the phrase in question; to sense the breath of the entire ensemble

**Rehearsal Objective** (*What will your student's be able to do as a result of this rehearsal **with you**?*)

Students will discover through chant an awareness of energized breathing's effect on other elements of musicianship (i.e. phrasing, text stress, expression)

**Assessment of the Rehearsal** (*How will **you** know if your **students can do** what they need to?*)

Phrasing in our upcoming piece for competition will come naturally and their sound will not die out for lack of energized breath

**Relevant Contextual Factors:**

Pitches on last page still not totally secure...

**Modifications/Accommodations needed:**

Binders or by memory?

**Instructional materials, resources, & Technology:**

Phrasing and accented syllables written on board

**Personal Improvement Objective:**

*Don't sing along!*

**Rehearsal Plan** (A step by step plan for the rehearsal - with timing - that leads to your objective.)

| Time   | Activity                             | Purpose of Activity                                           | Sequence                                                                                                     | Assessment                                                         |
|--------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 min. | Full Breath Hiss<br>Descending So→Do | Drawing open on the breath, engaging core, FWD motion         | Draw breath, cup on 'ts', rise and fall finger motion                                                        | Ensemble's sound should not "deflate"                              |
| 3 min. | Ave Regina, connecting breath        | Practice of connecting chant phrases with breath              | Draw breath, sing phrase, "tuck-in" followed by immediate draw                                               | Have students focus on draw motion                                 |
| 3 min. | Ave Maria, (Angelus Domini chant)    | Practice of connecting Biebl opening chant phrase with breath | *no cantor* - Draw breath, animate through "nuntiavit Mariae", "tuck-in" followed by immed. draw for "et..." | Students start with draw motion, then convey shaping of the phrase |
| 5 min. | Ave Maria, (choral refrain)          | Practice of connecting choral refrain phrases with breath     | TTBB choir and SAA choir alternate draw breath and shape each phrase                                         | Students choose to either draw or convey shaping of the phrase     |
| 5 min. | Ave Maria, (Sancta Maria)            | Practice of connecting B-section phrases with breath          | *sit for easy binder use* TTBB choir and SAA choir alternate draw breath and shape each phrase               | Students all convey shaping of the phrases                         |
| 5 min. | Ave Maria, (Amen)                    | Practice of connecting Amen phrases with breath               | TTBB choir and SAA choir alternate draw breath and shape to the end                                          | Students all do draw breath motion to ensure support to the end    |

**Figure 2.4.** Lesson 1 Rehearsal Plan

## Lesson Plan 2 – Awareness of Vowel Uniformity

### Overview of Lesson 2

The purpose of this lesson was to help students build greater awareness of vowel uniformity. The lesson was designed with Gregorian chant unison singing as the starting point,

even though the overall goal was to improve vowel production in the choral piece being studied. I believe it is difficult for singers to listen objectively to their own voices. Consequently, it becomes essential to listen attentively to one's neighbors and to the ensemble as a whole, making real-time adjustments in order to blend effectively. Few less-experienced singers have developed a heightened awareness of the various contributors to good singing, including tone, resonance, and vowel shape. While I frequently discuss and practice vowel purity with my choir, I do not expect them to maintain constant awareness of it. In the future, I would like to incorporate frequent assessments of their vowel awareness during rehearsals.

To set up the students for success, I began with a vocal warm-up focused on exploring different resonance placements in the head. A simple humming exercise, modified only by where I asked students to place their hand and focus the sound, helped them notice differences in tone production (i.e. nasalized and pinched versus clear and open). Next, the choir vocalized in unison the pure Latin vowels, beginning each vowel with the consonant 'n', resulting in: *neeh...neh...nah...noh...nooh*. The choice of this consonant was intended to sustain the buzzing resonance established during the humming warm-up. The vocalise set was performed three times normally, then twice with students' hands on their cheeks to encourage tall, open vowels.

I then asked the group to reflect on their singing. Specifically, I asked if any vowels stood out as lacking uniformity. They promptly agreed that *neh* sounded out of place. Rather than immediately offering a solution, I wanted the students to discover it themselves. The only hint I provided was to avoid singing a diphthong on the syllable *neh* – the rest was up to them to experiment and correct.

Next, we practiced this vocalise on some of the chords from the piece *Ubi Caritas* by Maurice Duruflé. Once I felt the choir had sufficiently narrowed their focus on vowel uniformity

through the exercises, we moved on to applying this skill in the chant *Ubi Caritas*. However, upon reviewing the recording, I noticed that much of the previously achieved uniformity had been lost. I attribute this, in part, to the sudden shift from modern notation to the unfamiliar chant notation. To help them recover, I instructed the students to sing only the vowels. This not only restored the intended vowel production but also enhanced the forward-moving phrasing that characterizes good chanting.

Comparing the two versions of “*Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*” highlighted the benefits of narrowing the focus to vowel uniformity and its positive effects on other aspects of singing. The principles explored in the chant were then applied to the choral arrangement, yielding similar results.

### **National Music Standards (2014)**

**MU:Pr5.3.E.IIa** – Develop and apply appropriate rehearsal strategies to address individual and ensemble challenges in a varied repertoire of music, and evaluate their success.

**MU:Pr4.2.E.Ia** – Demonstrate, using music reading skills where appropriate, how compositional devices employed and theoretical and structural aspects of musical works impact and inform prepared or improvised performances.

**MU:Pr6.1.E.Ia** – Demonstrate attention to technical accuracy and expressive qualities in prepared and improvised performances of a varied repertoire of music representing diverse cultures, styles, and genres.

**MU:Pr4.3.E.Ia** Demonstrate understanding of context in a varied repertoire of music through prepared and improvised performances.

## **Prior Knowledge/Skills**

Students have spent the spring semester refining their listening skills with regard to vowel uniformity and good tone production. At the time of this rehearsal, they were in the process of applying those skills in real time. This group sings almost exclusively in Latin, so they possess a strong understanding of pure Latin vowels. The primary difference in preparation between this piece and the piece from Lesson 1 is pitch security; the pitches in *Ubi Caritas* were less secure. As a result, rehearsal time had to be redirected toward addressing some of the piece's more challenging dissonant passages.

## **Rehearsal Objective**

Students will be able to apply their understanding of singing chant to improve uniform tone across the ensemble.

## **Assessment of the Rehearsal**

The intended method of assessment for this lesson was as follows: "The clarity of the choir's tone while singing Duruflé's *Ubi caritas* will be as clear as the choir's tone chanting the Gregorian version." While this seemed like a solid assessment approach on paper, it proved less effective in practice. This method may have been more successful if the choir had felt more confident with the pitches; however, the complexity of the piece hindered their ability to focus fully on vowel purity. That said, I was pleased with the choir's improvement in their performance of the Gregorian chant version of *Ubi Caritas*, which responded well to the techniques introduced in the lesson.

## **Relevant Contextual Factors and Future Modifications**

Before teaching this lesson, I was aware that we needed additional time to reinforce pitches in the middle section of the piece. However, I had not anticipated ongoing issues in the

beginning of the piece as well. As much as I had hoped to devote time to implementing and possibly extending the lesson for this report, I once again had to prioritize teaching the notes to ensure the piece was performance-ready.

One unrelated improvement I plan to incorporate more consistently is asking students to find starting pitches for sections themselves. Upon reviewing the rehearsal video, I realized that I was always providing pitches – either vocally or from the piano. In reality, my choir is quite capable of deriving starting pitches using solfège, and encouraging this independence could strengthen both their aural skills and musical confidence.

### Instructional Materials, Resources, and Technologies

- i3TOUCH screen
- Marked version of *Ubi caritas*
- Marked excerpts from *Ubi caritas* by Maurice Duruflé



Figure 2.5. Marked version of *Ubi Caritas*

The above figure is that of the Gregorian chant *Ubi Caritas*, an antiphonal hymn traditionally sung during the Triduum on Holy Thursday. This figure only includes the light blue breath marks consistent with the previous figures. Since I asked the students to chant this without the consonants, I could have also included a figure with the consonants crossed out, such as in the figure below. Figure 2.6 below demonstrates this modification which enabled students to think less about which consonant sounds to remove when asked to sing the vowels only.

The image shows a musical score for the Gregorian chant *Ubi Caritas* by Maurice Duruflé. The score is arranged for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The lyrics are: "U - bi fa - ti - fa ef á - noi, Dé - u i - fi". The score is divided into two systems, each with four staves. The first system includes the Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts. The second system includes the 2<sup>e</sup> Chœur d'Altos, 1<sup>re</sup> Chœur d'Altos, and 1<sup>re</sup> Basses parts. The lyrics are repeated in the second system. The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, time signatures, and dynamics. Handwritten annotations in red and green ink are present on the right side of the image. A red star is next to the word "Deus". A green checkmark is next to "eh ooh". A red 'X' is next to "ay ooh". A red 'X' is next to "eh yoooh".

Handwritten annotations on the right side of the image:

- \* Deus
- ✓ eh ooh
- ✗ ay ooh
- ✗ eh yoooh

**Figure 2.6.** Marked version of *Ubi Caritas* by Maurice Duruflé, removed consonants

## Rehearsal Plan

2014 Music National Standards:  
MU:Pr5.3.E.IIIa, MU:Pr4.2.E.5a, MU:Pr6.1.E.5a, MU:Pr4.3.E.8a

Teacher/Conductor's Name:

Rehearsal 1 ☐ 2 ☒

**Prior Knowledge/Skills** (*What do they already know and what can they do?*):

Latin vowel purity and text stress, energized breath, pitches mostly learned

**Rehearsal Objective** (*What will your student's be able to do as a result of this rehearsal **with you?***)

Students will be able to apply their understanding of singing chant to improve uniform tone across the ensemble

**Assessment of the Rehearsal** (*How will **you** know if your **students can do** what they need to?*)

The clarity of the choir's tone while singing Duruflé's *Ubi caritas* will be as clear as the choir's tone chanting the Gregorian version

**Relevant Contextual Factors:**

Pitches in the middle section not totally secure...

**Modifications/Accommodations needed:**

Binders necessary, notation on board to free hands for gestures

**Instructional materials, resources, & Technology:**

Marked score projected on the board

**Personal Improvement Objective:**

Do not sing along!

**Rehearsal Plan** (A step by step plan for the rehearsal - with timing - that leads to your objective.)

| Time   | Activity                | Purpose of Activity                                             | Sequence                                                                                                                                     | Assessment                                                                                                                         |
|--------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 min. | Resonance Hum           | Bringing sound into the mask                                    | Hum simple tone pattern, lightly touch face                                                                                                  | Humming shouldn't sound nasalized                                                                                                  |
| 3 min. | Vowel Chords            | Uniform vowels on chords                                        | Ni, neh, nah, noh, noo on chords from the piece                                                                                              | Vowels should be uniform and choir should sound very full                                                                          |
| 5 min. | Vowel Purity: Chant     | Use the Gregorian chant <i>Ubi caritas</i> to solidify vowels   | Begin by singing the chant for them, then they sing the chant as written, then without any of the consonants, then again with the consonants | Students should be able to recognize the same vowel sounds across the room, intonation and resonance should both be clear and full |
| 5 min. | Vowel Purity: Duruflé's | Use Duruflé's <i>Ubi caritas</i> to check vowel purity on parts | Begin by singing only the vowels, m. 1-8, repeat as necessary, then replace the consonants<br>Do the same process for m. 8-14                | Listen carefully for the vowels and the resulting tone being produced                                                              |

**Figure 2.7.** Lesson 2 Rehearsal Plan

## Chapter 3 - Reflections

I wish to begin by expressing sincere gratitude for the graduate music program at Kansas State University. Prior to enrolling, I was confident that graduate study would be a part of my near future; however, I had also discovered a strong passion for teaching. When faced with the decision to either leave my new teaching position to accept offers from graduate programs or remain in the classroom, I recognized that the outcome would significantly shape the course of my professional and personal life. The discovery of K-State's online program was a pivotal moment, as it enabled me to pursue both aspirations concurrently. This opportunity has proven to be not only a blessing but also a transformative experience. In reflecting on my growth throughout the program, I will focus on four primary areas: the development of knowledge, the refinement of skills, the evolution of my teaching, and my ongoing professional development.

To preface the section, it is important to note that my undergraduate degree was in Music Performance rather than Music Education. Although I fully applied myself during my undergraduate studies – seizing every available opportunity to perform or direct – I was aware that a key component of my professional formation was missing: formal training in how to teach music. As a result, my first year of teaching music was marked by frequent reliance on YouTube tutorials and an ongoing search for free online resources. The most essential benefit of my graduate studies at K-State has been the systematic filling of those educational gaps. While I had some success in teaching musical concepts and directing my choir, I lacked a theoretical and pedagogical framework to support my decisions. Courses such as *History and Philosophy of Music Education* and *Theories of Music Teaching* with Dr. Payne significantly enhanced my understanding of instructional methods. They provided me with the language and rationale necessary to articulate not only how to teach music effectively but also why music education

holds an essential place in the broader educational landscape. These courses helped transform my implicit beliefs into clearly stated values grounded in historical and philosophical understanding.

Another important influence on my intellectual development was Dr. Bunce's course, *History and Literature of the School Choral Program*. Before this course, I had little contextual knowledge about the historical trajectory of music education in the United States or its foundational role in shaping curricular priorities nationwide. Dr. Bunce effectively situated the story of music education within the broader narrative of American history, illustrating how the field evolved alongside the nation's changing values and needs. This perspective gave new clarity to the purpose of music education and underscored its cultural significance. In addition, I was challenged to adopt a more open-minded approach to choral literature and curriculum design. Although my own ensembles typically perform within a fairly narrow stylistic range, Dr. Bunce encouraged me to explore beyond standard repertoire to uncover lesser-known works that hold artistic and educational value. As a result, I have developed a deeper appreciation for diverse musical traditions and a growing interest in exploring cultural and historical context of repertoire from communities outside my own.

Identifying the specific skills I have acquired through my graduate studies is a complex task, as many of them are interconnected and reflect growth in multiple areas. However, for the purpose of this section, I have focused on the skills that have directly enhanced my musicianship, rather than those more explicitly related to teaching. One particularly meaningful development emerged from Dr. Rosine's course on teaching the adolescent voice. Although this course was primarily pedagogical in nature, it unexpectedly deepened my understanding of what constitutes effective and healthy singing, as well as the characteristics of suitable repertoire. I was consistently challenged to analyze melodies and accompaniments in terms of their singability –

an exercise that required me as a musician to step into the role of the student myself and evaluate each piece critically from a performer's perspective. This approach not only refined my musical judgement but also sharpened my awareness of the practical demands placed on signers.

Another area of skill refinement has been the substantial improvement of my personal aural skills. While my undergraduate training in aural skills provided a foundation, it did not adequately prepare me for the diverse and frequent applications of these skills in everyday teaching. Throughout this program, I have developed increased confidence in my ability to model vocal lines, sight read music, and identify musical elements with precision. A key contributor to this growth was Dr. Yu's instruction, particularly in solfège-based training. Although I had incorporated solfège into my teaching prior to entering the program, I did not fully grasp its pedagogical power until after my first summer at K-State. I can now reliably sight sing all vocal parts of a choral piece using solfège before introducing the piece to my students. Additionally, Dr. Yu's instruction sharpened my listening skills, enabling me to effectively assess the tonal and technical qualities of my choir's performance. As a result, my feedback has become more nuanced and constructive, moving beyond generic affirmations to specific, musically informed observations.

My growth as a teacher since beginning the graduate studies at K-State has been both significant and transformative. Most notably, I have experienced a revitalization of my rehearsal approach. Prior to my coursework, rehearsals followed a highly predictable sequence, often adhering to a rigid structure with limited variation. In contrast, I now approach each rehearsal as a dynamic opportunity for musical exploration. I have diversified my warm-ups, introduced a broader array of teaching strategies for part learning, and expanded my repertoire of physical gestures to communicate more effectively with the ensemble.

This transformation has also redefined my role as a conductor. My undergraduate training emphasized technical proficiency – keeping time and following the score – but my graduate coursework has revealed a more expansive and expressive dimension of conducting. Under Dr. Yu’s mentorship during choir clinics, I came to understand the conductor’s primary responsibility as shaping musical expression rather than merely coordinating rhythm and pitch. This shift has led me to embrace a more engaged and present role during rehearsals, including stepping away from the piano to remain physically connected with the choir. Although I continue to work on breaking the habit of singing along with the choir, I now recognize, through the program’s training, how this can unintentionally limit my effectiveness as a conductor.

In addition to these philosophical and methodological shifts, I have also developed practical leadership tools through Dr. Tracz’s course, *Organization and Administration of the Music Program*. This course enhanced my ability to lead with clarity and consistency and equipped me with resources for developing a shared vocabulary among students – a vital component of effective music instruction.

The graduate studies program at K-State has profoundly shaped my identity as a music professional. The dedication and passion demonstrated by each professor affirmed that a career in music can be a continual source of intellectual and personal enrichment. In particular, Dr. Payne rekindled my enthusiasm for reading, writing, and researching music education topics. Inspired by the program’s emphasis on lifelong learning, I began collecting recommended texts and approaching each new concept with a mindset of ongoing growth. I came to understand that the quality of my teaching would be directly proportional to the effort I invested in professional development.

Furthermore, with the guidance of Dr. Bunce and Dr. Gurgel, I cultivated a consistent and confident academic voice – an invaluable skill that has already opened doors in my professional journey. Their mentorship empowered me to pursue the publication of an article on my approach to music instruction in classical education, which marks a significant milestone in my career. Completing this Master’s Report has been one of the most fulfilling achievements of my musical life, and it stands as a testament to the transformative impact of the K-State program. I am especially grateful to now serve as an Instructor at Ave Maria University, a position that would not have been possible without the exceptional formation I received through K-State’s graduate studies in music.

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<sup>i</sup> Portions of this chapter are adapted from a blog post written concurrently as this report on my synthesis of music education into Catholic classical education. The blog post is titled “*Teaching Music Through Performance in Schola: A Catholic Classical Philosophy of Music Education*,” *Gravissimum Educationis*, March 25, 2025. <https://gravissimum.com/blog/teaching-music-through-performance-in-schola-a-catholic-classical-philosophy-of-music-education>