



Some TRG ideas about workshops

One of the reasons for us to have this festival is to present our ideas about developing a vocal group - practical advice and philosophical things that come up once you start thinking about how to improve a group's abilities and artistic expression.

Aside from doing our own workshop sessions, we look forward to exchanging ideas with the other teachers, learn from how they work, and to get input from the participants.

There are some basic rehearsal methods that we most often use in a typical TRG workshop session, even if we improvise quite a lot. Each singer also has his/her individual approach, so it is not easy to write down a "TRG workshop manual".

To choose one aspect of rehearsals and workshops, let us present the concept of having rehearsal "items".

When a workshop begins we often meet a group of nervous singers. They need to relax as much as possible, in order for us to start working on the music, instead of having shaky voices with an insecure sound.

After an initial inquiry about expectations from the group, etcetera, we ask them to sing a song from the beginning to the end. At this stage, we don't interfere while they sing. In order for the singers to have a chance to get used to the situation and the environment.

After they have sung the first song we ask the auditorium: "what do you think is good about how this group sings?".

We do this to encourage the audience to listen for what they like, instead of making a list in their heads of all the negative things they hear.

We also believe that in the beginning of a workshop, there is a priority to reduce stress.

Then we ask the group to sing the song again, once more without us interrupting the singers.

Or perhaps they want to sing another song.

After 10-15 minutes or so, when it is time to start working in a focused way, then we pick 8 bars or so from one of the group's songs; a section that will be sung many times. Before the section is sung, we define what the current focus is.

In general terms, we divide the rehearsal process into:
blend (timbre; blending together)
phrasing
time
and intonation.

We think it is very important to explain to the singers what specific thing we want them to concentrate on while singing.

The current object of focus is called the "Item", in TRG terminology. We put a lot of effort into being clear about what the Item is, in each moment of a rehearsal.

When you give the singers just one thing to focus on, the level of concentration is increased. We are all humans, and in order to be able to give one thing complete attention, we need to forget some other things, for the moment.

With this method, the singers often understand better what is actually going on musically, and how they can contribute to improving the group, compared to a situation when they get several different instructions at the same time about how to sing.

After having sung a short section with such focus, negative feedback can have a positive effect, especially when the singers are active in the feedback process. They often want to sing the same section again, with exactly the same focus as they just had, and see if they can improve.

Each time they repeat the exercise, we evaluate the Item, and nothing else. When somebody gives feedback to something that is not the current Item, we point out that it is ok to fail with anything that is not in focus right now.

In our experience, to get many instructions at the same time can create confusion and frustration among the singers, when they try to remember all of it.

We look forward to meeting you all!

/The Real Group