

Reflection, Warm-Ups

Overall, my demeanor is still very restricted and very polished. As a pondering for this reflection, I'd like to address this. I prefer a no-nonsense approach. Too often, female conductors fall into two categories: too nurturing or too held back. Often, I find that I can pinpoint those who have had middle school or high school experience: they are often very demanding in their demeanor with students. They have a tough outer exterior and as a woman relating to this, I find it unpleasant and have found that my colleagues have agreed. This tough exterior comes, in my opinion from one simple place: insecurity. Even in the 21st century, woman do struggle to find their place of authority standing in front of people. From my experience, I have found that male students require a different approach if the teacher is male vs. female. This tends to either draw out a sense of nurturing in some woman, or a sense of insecurity which translates into a somewhat cold and demanding exterior.

Being aware of this, I have worked to create a persona which is initially calm, to the point and absolutely no-nonsense. This is my persona with all of my choirs and I carefully allow myself to loosen up over the course of time until the ending result is a nurturing conductor. I choose to do this so that my singers experience a level of comfortability, first in my control of the situation and then later in my ability to work with their individual needs. Would this work for high school? I am not sure. I know for a fact that the first aspect of the persona does work for Middle School, as I've used it as a Middle School teacher in a private school, and as a long-term Substitute Teacher in a Public Middle School. I am no-nonsense and to the point. Students will always know what to expect from me. They know that I will give them no more and no less than what they need and that I will expect no more and no less than 100% from them at all times.

That being said, I felt that the overall structure of the warm-ups was successful. At one point, I opted to veer from my lesson plan when I decided that a shorter and quicker warm-up would help to promote muscle support for air production. The group was sluggish at getting started (I was the first student to warm-up the group) and a fast warm-up which only allowed for vowel modification and not for much shaping would allow the students to engage without being able to think much about what they were doing. The overall goal of the adjustment was to promote healthy singing without a thought process behind it, so that poor habits could be avoided. I felt that it worked well.

The least effective aspect of the warm-up was the rhythmic response (sh, ch, guh). This is a method used by Jerry Blackstone to promote communication between the conductor and the singer while also creating rhythmic phonation. It worked to some extent but only after a while. This leads me to believe that either the style of my preps or the exercise itself was entirely unfamiliar to the group. I can imagine that, as there is a significant difference in the exercises used in this part of the country vs. the northern Midwest.

Overall, I was pleased. The persona is going to continue to cause some discomfort but it is part of a well-designed approach to conducting without being externally difficult due to insecurity or overly-nurturing in the beginning of a teaching experience-which would simply lead to behavior issues later down the road.