

# INTRODUCTION AND USER'S GUIDE

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This set of *Quick Start Choral Warm-Ups* is exactly as implied, a quick and easy way to create a beautiful choral sound at the beginning of each rehearsal. The 20 warm-up sequences contained in this volume are in line with my philosophy and proven-techniques (as well as many others) to prepare the ensemble and lead singers to their first piece in the rehearsal. My warm-ups always have five parts. Why are there only four parts in these sequences? Because the first part is a physical warm-up that utilizes various movements of the hands, feet, arms, with breathing exercises, etc. It really doesn't matter what physical warm-up you do, as long as it is healthy (orthopedic surgeons strongly caution against the 360 degree roll of the head), brief, and directed toward getting the choir focused before they sing. There are four warm-ups in each of the musical sequences: Warming Down - Warming Up - Diction - Chordal. Regular use of these sequences will most assuredly help choirs to develop a mature sound, and avoid having to fix a multitude of vocal and choral problems later. Here are concise explanations of each of the four parts:

**Warming Down** – Warming the voice down before warming 'up' is essential in bringing the head voice (top range) down, instead of pushing the chest voice (low range) up. In addition, I always warm down with the oo vowel. Why? It is the most natural vowel that humans sing. (I hope you are nodding your head 'yes'.) Starting with ee, eh, and ah vowels more often than not can produce ineffective results. The Warming Down should always start in the mid-range and stop before it becomes too high.

**Warming Up** – In these exercises, I incorporate a sequence of vowels. I do not believe (any longer) that typical, 'mah-meh-mee-moh-moo' - 'mee-meh-mah-moh-moo' sequences lead choirs to a beautiful production of vowels, and aid in good choral tone and blend. I have been successfully using and promoting the following sequence for warming up for quite a few years: 'noo-nee-noh-neh-naw'. Why? We start with the most successful vowel, again the oo vowel. The oo vowel is naturally produced with a small opening (aperture) between the lips, therefore making it an easy vowel to sing in any range (including high range). The other vowels, ee-oh-eh-ah (or aw – I'll explain that later as well) should all follow the shape of the mouth on the oo vowel. You will notice when creating this sound that the lips do not need to open widely for the successive vowels. As I (and many fine choral teachers with great choirs) have always maintained, keep the oo vowel concept in all vowels you sing for a proper blend. It is a common understanding in the choral world that spread vowels do not blend; vertical vowels do, and allow for choral 'ring' and blend. Combined with a 'high soft palette' (as if there is an imaginary small ball toward the back mouth), this will produce beautiful vowels. In simple terms, the ee vowel has an ee on the inside of the mouth with an oo on the lips. A word about why I like to use 'aw' for the 'ah' vowel instead of 'ah'. I believe that like the words saw and law, singers have a concept of 'aw' that will produce a beautiful 'ah' vowel that is not spread. Ask 10 singers to sing 'ah' and you will get 10 different productions of the vowel. Ask the same singers to sing 'aw' and you will (should) hear much more uniformity of the vowels. To produce proper blend, no two singers will ever have the same voices, but all singers should sing with the same (vertical, 'oo'-based) vowel production. To put it succinctly, uniform beautiful vowels lead to beautiful blend and choral sound.

**Diction** – Uniformity of vowels is achieved in the ‘Warming Down’ and ‘Warming Up’ sequences. Consonants are added to the Diction exercises. Some of these are tongue twisters, and some contain helpful, teachable messages about great choral singing. All of them should be fun to sing while achieving great diction. Most need to be taught at a slower tempo, then sped up, and even sung in different keys. These will engage the mind of the singer, as well as helping each of them to sing with crisp, clear diction. A few examples also incorporate rounds and canons as additional helpful options to the teaching process.

**Chordal** – These exercises allow the singers to incorporate the first three parts of the warm-up in a harmonic context. The goal of the Chordal warm-up (the last warm up before the first piece) is to culminate the warm-up session in a beautiful combination of vowels, consonants, and harmony, with the choir hearing the results of this sequence that again, has led them to this beautiful choral sound. The Chordal warm-up should be adjusted to conclude in the key of the first piece in the rehearsal.

*Quick Start Choral Warm-Ups* also allows for a ‘quick’ selection from the twenty warm-up sequences to be included in each rehearsal. Simply put: If the choir meets every day (5 days a week) during the typical 180-day school year, it would only need to repeat the same warm up 9 times during that entire school year. Directors can choose to present them in order each day, e.g., Day 1, No. 1; Day 2, No. 2, or they can keep track (or not) and say, ‘No. 13’ one day, ‘No. 5’ the next day, and so on. Twenty warm-up sequences, each with four parts, equal 80 warm-ups! I’m convinced that this is 75 more warm-ups than most choirs routinely utilize. Why? There is just not time to find (or think about) what warm-ups to use before every rehearsal. As anyone reading this can tell you, choral directors are among some of the busiest people on the planet! With this resource though, everything a director will need is here in one place. One only has to decide which sequence to use on any given day. And again, it can be as simple as starting with No. 1. When you get to No. 20 (twenty rehearsals later), start over with No. 1.

I would encourage you to use physical ‘correlates’ when planning your warm-ups. Master choral directors always incorporate physical movement in their rehearsals to assist with phrasing and vocal placement. Here are a few suggestions that I would recommend implementing: When warming down, start with the (right) hand coming down on the first note and then lifting up as the singers ‘warm-down’. The warming down exercises always begin with the highest note. To get the feeling of ‘coming down on the high note’, I always try to use the hand or even the whole body descending on the high note and ascending (the hand/body) as the notes descend. Following that, on the warming up exercise, start with the hand ‘up’, and as the singers ascend, bring the hand down on the highest note. (By the way, singers can still do this with one hand while holding their music in the other.) I am a strong proponent of using physical movement to assist with voice placement.

Another thought about ‘Quick’ – I have said for many years that in a typical choral rehearsal (normally 50 minutes), warm-ups should take no more than 7 minutes of rehearsal time. Why? Because it is not 20! The purpose of warm-ups is to effectively get the mind, body and voices prepared to rehearse the first piece, and hence the rest of the rehearsal. Of course, on the first day of rehearsing or meeting the choir, it may take longer, but if we are going to keep the choir’s attention, and have the highest engagement and musicianship displayed, the warm-up (and the rehearsal) must move along effectively to the first piece, second piece, etc. Another hidden bonus of the use of Quick Start Choral Warm-Ups is that choirs will learn to be better sight-singers. Most of these warm-ups cannot be learned by ‘call-and-response’ (spoon-feeding) from the director. These sequences require active engagement of the mind in sight-reading, even if they were repeated twenty rehearsals ago.

I am very excited by and hopeful that Quick Start Choral Warm-Ups will be a meaningful resource for choirs. It is my deepest feeling that incorporating these sequences into the daily rehearsal will result in greatly improved choral art with a more beautiful, musical, and exciting sound.

– Russell Robinson

# Sequence No. 1

## a. WARMING DOWN

① ♩ = 80

SA

TB

Sing: doo

## b. WARMING UP

②  $\text{♩} = 80$

SA

noo nee noh neh nah(w) noo nee noh neh

TB

SA

nah(w) noo nee noh neh nah(w) noo nee noh neh nah(w)

TB

Additional Idea: This exercise may also be sung as an *a cappella* canon, with voices entering at the asterisks.

c. DICTION

3 ♩ = 80

SA

loo loo loo loo dee dee dee dee

TB

SA

boh boh boh boh teh teh teh teh loo loo dee dee boh boh teh teh loo dee boh teh lah

TB

d. CHORDAL

4 ♩ = 72

SA

TB

noo nee noh neh naw

SA

TB

naw noo nee noh neh naw naw

# Sequence No. 3

## a. WARMING DOWN

9 ♩ = 92

SA

TB

Sing: noo

SA

TB

## b. WARMING UP

10 ♩ = 60

SA

noo nee noo noo nee noo nee noo

TB

SA

noo nee noh neh naw naw naw noo nee noh noo nee noh neh naw noo nee noh neh noh neh naw

TB



## c. DICTION

11 ♩ = 88

SA

When you sing your con-so-nants as crisp as you can,

TB

SA

and you sing the vow - els tall and long, the aud - i - ence will hear - each -

TB

SA

word you— sing. The con - so - nants and vow - els will make beau - ti - ful songs!

TB

d. CHORDAL (ROUND)

12 ♩ = 76

SA  
noo — nee — noh — neh — naw      noo — nee — noh neh

TB

SA  
noo nee noh neh naw      noo nee noh neh naw — noo nee noo — nee — noh neh      noh neh naw

TB

Performance Note: Sing in unison (accompanied) first time through. On the repeat, sing (*a cappella*) as a round, with the ensemble divided into two groups. The second group enters at the first asterisk when the first group reaches the second asterisk.