



*1990, 1993 & 1996 International Chorus Champions*

## **THE MOST OFTEN ASKED MUSICAL QUESTIONS**

*(A Primer for Incoming Members and a Listing of Accepted Principles for the Masters of Harmony)*

**by Dr. Greg Lyne**

### **1. What is the posture of this chorus?**

The body should be in line and prepared before a note is sung. Proper body alignment affects the mind and spirit, and consequently the tone.

- a. Allow for relaxation in the upper body by allowing the neck and head to move easily from side to side.
- b. The jaw should be relaxed and “unhinged.”
- c. The shoulders do not raise upon inhalation. Set the upper torso (chest) in a lifted position so that the diaphragm can do its job.
- d. Elongate the space from the top of the spine to the top of the head. Feel as if there’s a string lifting you at the top of your head.
- e. Keep your feet and legs aligned with your body by having them even with your shoulders. The outside foot should be slightly forward and your weight on the balls of your feet. Never sing “on your heels.”

### **2. Vowels — are they important?**

Yes! Concentrate on them, as they will always be of primary concern to us. Keep the tip of the tongue down and against the lower gum ridge at all times except when it must move to create certain consonants. Then, and only then, use the tip of the tongue to lightly touch the consonants.

- a. Shape the vowel in the mouth. An “oh” should look like an “oh”, an “oo” should look like an “oo.” The mouth must be active to sing proper vowels.
- b. Sing the primary vowel (vowel target) immediately. Sustain that vowel as long as you possibly can.

### **3. Does the director sometimes expect the face to be animated?**

He always expects it to be animated. Keep your face and body enlivened. Every moment you sing should show energy and involvement. Act—show emotion!

### **4. May I sing in a choppy, bumpy manner?**

Yes—but only when we tell you! So far we’re working only on smo-o-o-oth singing. We don’t want “cobblestones” in our music, so it’s necessary to take out all “bumps.” Allow one sound to flow smoothly into the next. Work on connecting one sound to the next.

**5. Do you like “T’s”, “P’s”, and “S’s”?**

Not too much, because these sounds do not contain pitch and tend to stop the flow of tone. However, we do like “m’s” and “n’s” and “ng’s” and “v’s” because they are *singable* consonants. Practice energizing (singing through) these, and practice minimizing those which are “not singable.”

**6. When I breathe, does my mouth need to remember anything?**

Yes. As you breathe, tell your mouth to form the upcoming vowel.

**7. When do I quit singing, and how?**

Music is made up of phrases, or musical/lyrical thoughts. In singing, we sing to the end of each phrase, making certain that the final word is completed—i.e., that musical tone is maintained as long as possible and not cut short. Moreover, we never “just stop” singing. Do not allow the pitch to droop or the tone to stop abruptly. Maintain “life” at the end of phrases, but be careful not to accent the weak syllables of words unnecessarily.

**8. Sometimes the chorus sings very softly. Would this be a good time for me to rest?**

Not at all. In fact, when singing softly you’ll want to work harder to assure that the tone is projected, energized and “spinning.” Rest after the rehearsal!

**9. Do you know I’ve done solo work?**

Yes, and we’re all very proud! Here, however, we work hard on contributing our respective voices to the chorus and yours should “fit” with the others. We don’t want voices that shake, warble, cut or bellow, but we are interested in having the best qualities of your voice join with the others.

**10. How do I breathe?**

We’ll continue to help you with this one in rehearsal. Do strive to keep a constant quality and volume of air underlying your tone. Get a full, 100% breath from deep within you every time you breathe.

**11. Some of the guys speak of staggered breathing. What is this?**

Sometimes when we sing extended phrases the singers are permitted to “stagger” or individualize their breathing. This means that they may breathe when necessary, but only in unobtrusive spots and at places when their neighbors might not be breathing. When doing this it is important that you “sneak out” to breathe, and (of even more importance) that you “sneak back in” again at a lesser dynamic level in the middle of another word. The main thing, though, is for you to sneak, but without letting anyone else catch you being sneaky!

**12. What is this thing called “resonation?”**

A good tone has freedom and ring to it. It happens when you fill all of the cavities in your head with sound. A free, spinning tone will have resonance and richness to it. An uninspired or hard tone will not contain any of those special qualities we associate with a pleasing, resonant tone.

**13. Is it a good idea to sing louder the higher I sing?**

No. The higher you progress in your range, the lighter you’ll want to sing. Use a free, “headier” quality and “round out” the tone as you move up the scale. However, when you sing lower in your range, you’ll want to increase your volume in order to “fill” the tone.

**14. Do you really do physical actions (moves) in the chorus?**

Yes. We try to present as interesting a visual package as we do a musical one. When you have a move to do, don’t just do it—get completely involved! Make any gesture look artistic and convincing.

**15. Do the singers stand on the risers all night?**

We’ll always take a short break in our rehearsals, but we don’t sing seated in chairs. When we’re “on the risers,” a positive, focused mental approach to singing is expected. You’ll have to concentrate, because one must expend both mental and physical effort to sing well.

**16. Are we expected to work on our music and our singing outside of rehearsals?**

Yes. This chorus learns quickly and you'll have to work regularly on your own in order to keep up. More importantly, you'll want to work at home in order to improve!

**17. Being in the chorus sounds like a lot of effort. Is it?**

Yes, it is. Come prepared to work, as work pays off and people will respect you for your efforts. You'll also find that you sing better than ever before and it will give you a tremendous sense of personal achievement and satisfaction.

**In Conclusion**

1. It is easy to read through these questions and responses.
2. It is not so easy to assimilate the principles and be able to perform them successfully on a consistent basis. Practice will help, though. Try working in front of a mirror. Listening to recordings of other fine choruses and quartets will also help. But what will help most is a desire on your part to constantly improve. Good luck, and good singing!

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