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Before The Concert

By Joshua R. Jacobson

There are some instructions which we, as conductors of school and community choruses, are required to repeat year after year for the benefit of the new members in our organizations. But after a while, we may take these instructions for granted, and forget to re-teach them.

Under this category come the instructions regarding proper behaviour at (and just before) concerts. For novices, especially, the first concert can be a bewildering as well as an exciting experience.

I would like to share with the ACDA membership the contents of a pamphlet which I distribute to my choruses a week before the first concert of each season. Feel free to excerpt, borrow, change, delete, or add your own ideas!

AN AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

The concert is an experience in which you will recreate, to the best of your abilities, the work of one or more composers.

After many rehearsals in which you were learning, through a variety of techniques, how to reproduce the composer's intentions, you are now ready to transcend the notes and delve into the essence of the music.

In one of the most intense experiences that humans can feel, you will become one with the music, sharing for a moment in the genius and talent of a great composer.

CONFIDENCE

In order to maximize your enjoyment of the performance, you should feel completely secure in your knowledge of the music. That knowledge includes not only "the right notes," but also correct dynamics, pronunciation, rhythmic phrasing, vocal tone, and ensemble awareness. If you feel that your musical confidence is less than complete, it is your obligation to put in the extra time outside of rehearsal, either alone, or with other chorus members.

DISTRACTIONS

To be able to give yourself over totally to the aesthetic experience, you must

free yourself of any potential distractions.

To enable the audience to participate with you in the music, you must make every effort not to distract them from the main event.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

A sloppily dressed singer can distract the audience's attention from the music. Be sure your concert dress is clean, well fitting, in good repair, and uniform. Excessive jewelry, heavy make-up, and flashy colors will call attention to you as an individual, and thus away from the chorus as a group.

For your own sake, avoid tight fitting clothes and uncomfortable shoes. For the sake of the singer standing next to you, before the performance shower or bathe, brush your teeth, and refrain from using any strong smelling perfume, cologne, or hairspray.

PERSONAL CONTROL

Before the concert begins, cleanse your head of any personal problems or distractions. Let nothing interfere with your total participation in the artistic experience, as you transcend your individuality.

As long as you are on stage, you are a performer. Just as an actor becomes an agent of the playwright whose material he is performing, you are an agent of the composer whose music you are singing. Do not "act" out of character by:

— talking, winking, or waving to someone in the audience or to another performer;

— fidgeting, bouncing, scratching, or checking your coiffure;

— smiling during a sad song, or standing rigidly emotionless during a lively number;

— unconsciously mouthing the words while a soloist or another section is singing.

Don't cease being a performer just because your part of the music may be finished. During instrumental sections, dramatic pauses, solo sections, passages which involve other singers, in short, whenever the conductor's hands are in the air, you should maintain in your mind the character of the music.

When you walk on to the stage (and when you leave), have a smile on your face. Proceed calmly, slowly, and silently, watching your step as you climb to the risers.

If there are chairs, wait for the signal to sit; then do so slowly and gracefully.

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