How to Get All Beginning Tenors and Basses to Match Pitch

Dan Davison – Retired JHS Choir Teacher – Puyallup, Washington

dandavison@comcast.net dandavisonmusic.com

Matching Pitch: Several Goals

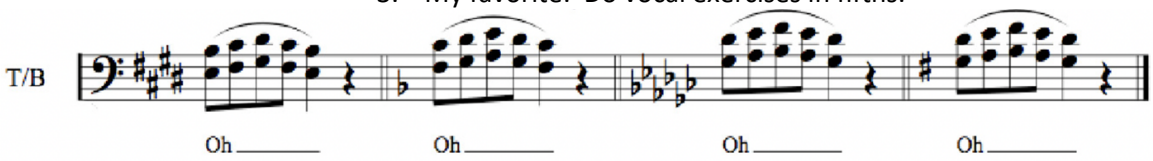
- Learning each student's low note -Learn to match pitch with the teacher
- Start getting them to feel comfortable - Start developing self-efficacy
- Start learning the range of each section. - Establish singing prowess as a currency

1. Find Each Singer's Low Note
    a. The method – Probably gather around piano in a small group. (4-5 students)
    b. Have an index card for each student on the piano.
    c. Also ask other students in the class not to pay too much attention.
    d. Guess at a note that most students will be able to sing: MS – Bb3. HS – F3
    e. Play that note on the piano. Sing the note. Then ask all five to sing it back.
        i. For female directors working with changed voices,
            1. Use the piano to help you. Sing an octave higher than them.
            2. You may need to use another student as a "translater."
    f. Ask the best singer to come to the middle. Give affirmation to the student.
    g. Ask the best singer to sing a half step lower until you find his lowest note.
    h. Identify the initial voice part of the singer. Tell him in an affirming way.
    i. Test the group again. Find the second-best singer. Repeat. Always affirm.
    j. After all are tested, divide into tenor and bass section. Make a seating chart.

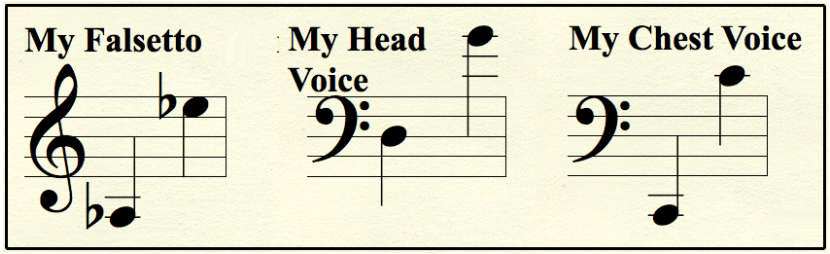
2. Establishing a Perfect Unison in Each Section
    a. Choose a section. Have the section sing together a single note on "oh."
    b. Listen individually. Affirm after every attempt. Then quickly move on.
    c. If the student sings the wrong pitch, affirm him, then you should match him.
    d. If the student seems confident, gradually bring the student to the original note.
    e. After all have sung, have them sing together again. It will sound better.

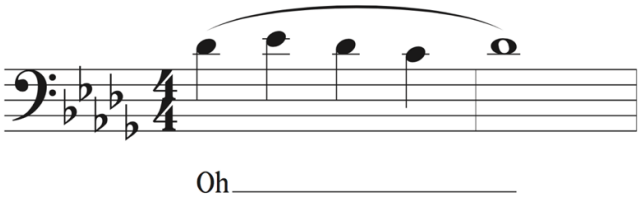
3. With Inexperienced Singers, Give Lots of Target Practice
    a. Every psycho-motor activity requires practice.
    b. Imitating short phrases is a great technique. (Target practice)
    c. A pentatonic scale works great. (No half steps)
    d. Length and rhythmic difficulty can gradually be increased.
    e. Scales are also target practice. Smaller ranges are better. (3-5 notes)
    f. For some beginners, louder = higher, and softer = lower.

4. Get an Idea of the Working Ranges of Each Section
    a. Write down what you think the range of each section is.
    b. Use this information to choose your literature and your vocal exercises.
        i. (Many teachers use exercises that are not in the range of their singers)
        ii. For the middle level, you have several choices
            1. Do only exercises that are in the "common range."
            2. Do vocal exercises separately, (low voices then high voices)
            3. My favorite: Do vocal exercises in fifths.



Developing Good Tone, Starting with the Tenors and Basses

5. Cover the Basics of Good Tone
    a. Look around to see if you need to tell students to open their mouths.
    b. Work on having pure vowels. Develop exercises that practice this.
        i. "Oo" = Pulling a string out of your mouth with pointed lips.
        ii. "Oh" = Pointing lips and drawing circles around lips with finger.
        iii. "Ah" = Gently putting fingers on the chin.
        iv. "Eh" = Putting index finger and thumb on either side of lips.
        v. "Ee" = Pointing a finger away from the lips making an arch.
    c. Work on adjusting placement. Use a dial that can be adjusted 1-10.
    d. Use Vowel, Volume, Pitch and Placement to achieve better blend.
    e. Three ways to demonstrate lifting the soft palate.
        i. Demonstrate "before and after." Use a "lifted palm" as a gesture.
        ii. Demonstrate "singing on the breath" with "floating ball" hand gesture
        iii. Demonstrate "wide" vs. "tall" with hands showing wide vs. tall
        iv.
    f. Understand the three registers of the male voice. (Chest, head, falsetto)
        i. Teach the male singers how to find their head voice.
        ii. Sometimes it is easier to start with "speaking" in the register.
        iii. Understand that female teachers cannot demonstrate this.
        iv. Female teachers – use the QR codes below for YouTube demonstrations.
        v. Do 3-note scales starting on Db4 on an "oh" vowel.

A Good Head Voice Exercise

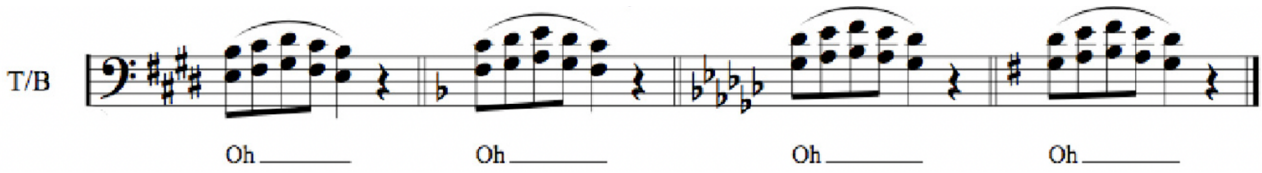
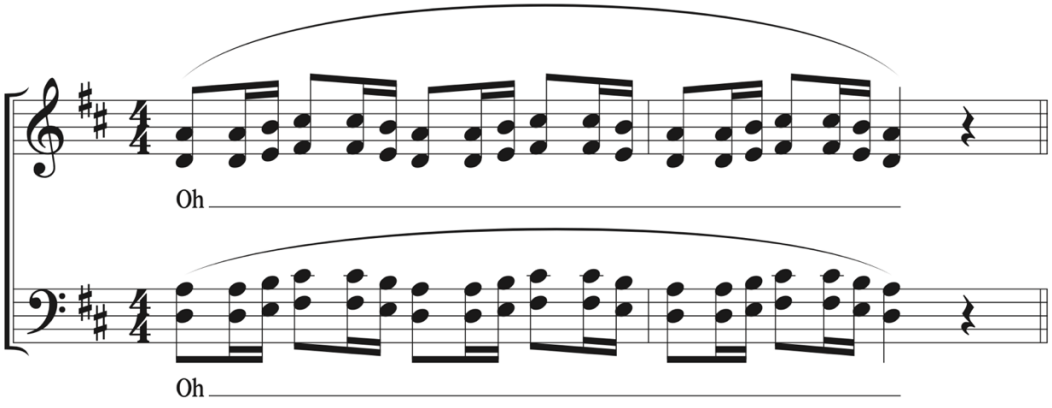
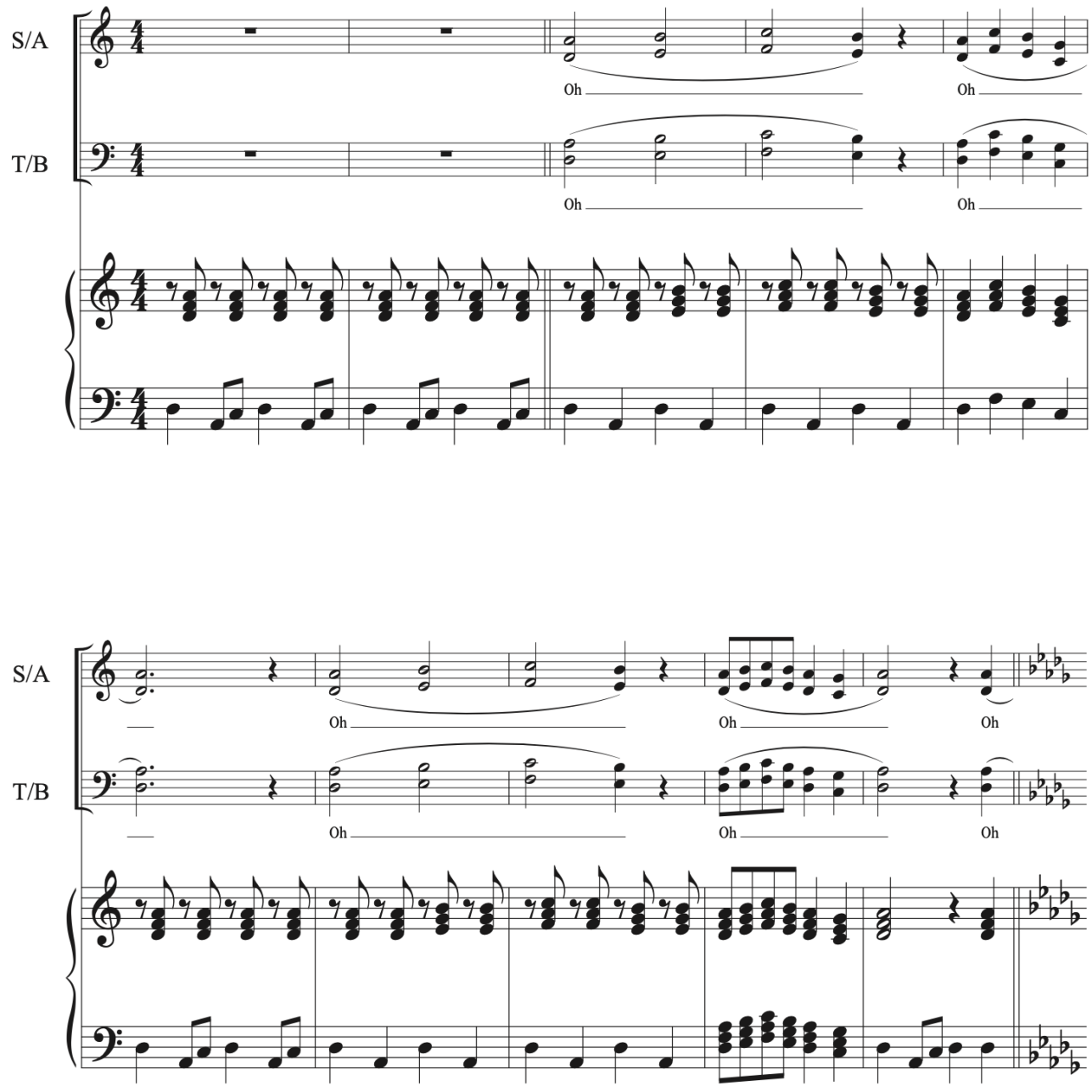


    g. For male teachers working with female singers, use falsetto to demonstrate.
        i. Teach the female singers about vowel modification:
            1. Start with an open "ah" vowel on Bb4.
            2. Show how the change from "ah" to "oo" vowel is extremely subtle.
            3. Remind the students to support by singing and adding a gesture.
            4. Have female singers do 3-note scales, on a "barely oo" vowel.
            5. Continue up to F5 or G5 as the high note.

How to Get All Beginning Tenors and Basses to Match Pitch
Supplemental Materials – Page 1

YouTube Videos on Male Voice Register
By Dan Davison

1. Overview of Chest Voice, Head Voice, and Falsetto	2. Use Speech to Learn Each Voice	3. Exercises For Chest Voice, Head Voice, and Falsetto

3-Note Scales in Fifths for Choirs with Changing Voices

Melismas in Fifths

How to Get All Beginning Tenors and Basses to Match Pitch
Supplemental Materials – Page 2

Dorian Exercise in Fifths