

Your
Ministry
of Singing in the
Church Choir

Roger N. Deschner



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Preface

Roger Deschner, minister, teacher, author, musician, academic administrator, mentor, and friend to countless choir members, students, and workshop participants, draws deeply from his own well of experience as music minister in *Your Ministry of Singing in the Church Choir*. He discusses the biblical foundation of worship and music as well as practical aspects of singing in the church choir. He shows that singing in the choir is an opportunity for real ministry to the congregation, as well as nurture and spiritual growth for the singer. He draws from early Wesleyan hymnbooks for fresh insights into congregational and choral singing.

Your Ministry of Singing in the Church Choir was first published in 1990. There have been substantial changes in worship and music style since then. In the first decade of the 21st century, an overwhelming majority of evangelical and mainline churches offer some form of contemporary or alternative worship that incorporates a variety of musical styles. In some churches, praise bands have replaced the pipe organ and praise teams have taken over the role of the traditional choir, while in others all of these serve together. The author's words speak with eloquence and practicality in all settings. They will benefit the praise team and the choir singer, the song leader and the music minister, even the organist and the guitarist. *Your Ministry of Singing in the Church Choir* will encourage all who sing the Lord's song, regardless of background or ability.

Dean McIntyre
Director of Music Resources
The General Board of Discipleship

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The Tradition of Singing in the Choir

To understand the importance of singing in the choir today, the story of how choirs came into our tradition must be told.

Through swirling, confused mists hiding our earliest Hebraic/Christian tradition, we cannot *see* much in detail about the use of music. But if we *listen* carefully and with imagination, we can surely at least hear the sound of lyre and pipe and shofar and trumpet. We can hear the voice of the ecstatic seer rising with quavering song in praise or prophecy, accompanied by a band of singers—usually women—beating drums and cymbals. Those sounds are in our tradition from the beginning.

Jubal is the earliest recorded musician (Genesis 4:21). In the seventh generation after Adam, Jubal, his two brothers, and his sister represented the whole of the working force and cultural life of the day. Jubal's brother, Jabal, was the first of the nomadic herders and cattlebreeders. His half-brother, Tubal-cain, was the first forger of instruments in bronze and iron. We know little about his half-sister, Na'amah, but her name signifies beauty. Then there was Jubal.

The name *Jubal* comes from a word meaning "ram." A ram's horn blown as a trumpet, a shofar, is the most ancient

musical instrument related to Hebraic worship, an instrument still in synagogue use today. Jubal, in the midst of herders and metal workers, was “the ancestor of all those who play the lyre and pipe” (Genesis 4:21). As we shall see below, singing was also implied as part of Jubal’s art, as these early musicians were usually both instrumentalists and singers. And so in the midst of busy industry and daily work, you have come to church to join Jubal’s tribe.

Jubal’s tribe exercised a powerful occupation. Music marked important events. A blast of trumpets brought down Jericho’s walls (Joshua 6:20). Music accompanied magical and near-magical incantations of great import; music surrounded prophecies. God’s great acts were clearly marked by singers and their bands as they gathered up the people’s praise in their song and dance. We see and hear Miriam as the Red Sea is crossed (Exodus 15:20, 21), Deborah at the victorious but bloody end of battle (Judges 5), and the women and men hailing David’s entrance with the ark into Jerusalem with dancing as they made music before God “with all their might, with song and lyres and harps and tambourines and cymbals and trumpets” (1 Chronicles 13:8). Music played an awesome role in the life of the society and in worship, as it still does in ours.

David was the person who changed the nature of worship music in our tradition. He organized official choirs of singers and instrumentalists in the temple. These were not roving bands of seers and prophets. He turned to priestly tribes who already had singing traditions and books of repertoire. “David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint from their kindred as the singers to play on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise loud sounds of joy” (1 Chronicles 15:16). The Levites appointed singers and players

from the families of Asaph the “gatherer,” Korah the “bald,” Hermand the “faithful,” Ethan the “long-lived,” Jeduthun the “pointer,” and others to perform the music of temple worship.

All together, 24 singers are listed in the choir, all of whom also played instruments (1 Chronicles 15 and 16). Seven priests dramatically played trumpets before the ark. Six played lyres; five of these players were also gatekeepers for the ark. (The lyre is a U-shaped string instrument with a sounding board at the bottom to which strings are led from a crossbar at the top. It is held at shoulder height and plucked.) Eight played harps. Realize that it was possible to sing at the same time that one played harp or lyre. All of the harps played according to the musical mode of the “Alamoth,” and the lyres played according to the “Shemenith” mode. Three of the principal singers—Heman, Asaph, and Ethan—were given the privilege of sounding the bronze cymbals.

The choir was directed by Chenaniah, the “leader of the Levites in music . . . for he understood it” (1 Chronicles 15:22). David made a smart choice. In those words we have what has always been the important basis for choosing our choir directors: They should be those in each church who best understand the music, its words, and its function in worship. And they should have the ability to lead others in making music.

We do not have any of the music the people sang in David’s time, but we do know quite a bit about what and how they sang. The book of Psalms is the main collection of texts with singing instructions. However, other texts that were sung are scattered through the Old Testament and, for a later period, a good group of New Testament songs is recorded as well.

The collection of psalms is made up of a number of smaller

books brought from the repertoire of the different families of temple musicians. Korah's family brought eleven songs, Asaph's eight, and Jeduthun is named in three. A collection of 16 "Songs of Ascent," the Pilgrimage Songs, must have been brought by one family. Other collections can also be found in the Psalms.

We think of the book of Psalms as the earliest hymnbook in our tradition, which it is. We must realize, however, that many of these psalms were anthem repertoire for the choirs, or at least the choirs led the congregation in singing them. Of the 150 psalms:

- 83 have musical references and instructions in their headings.
- 54 are addressed "To the Leader" — the one who understood the music and led it.
- 20 actually name the musical modes in which the psalms are to be sung, such as the "Shemenith" and "Alamoth" when accompanied by stringed instruments. (There were eight psalms for strings. Three are to "The Gittith," which refers to the ground dug vats for trampling out the grapes. The great psalms 8, 81, and 84 were sung to this mode! Three more are to the "Lilies," and another three are to "Do Not Destroy.")
- 32 psalms are specifically called "songs," a few of these naming modes.
- 11 are said to be a *maskil*, which referred to the use of special music with the psalm, perhaps at a festival.

As a choir member, make it an important personal project to read and study the psalms. A profound spiritual benefit comes in doing so. As a church musician you will benefit even

more if you will absorb the psalms with imagination. Can you see the rehearsals with the choirmaster? Can you visualize entering the temple with the other choristers? Can you imagine the worship services when at the most sacred moments you begin to sing? Hear the quavering Near-Eastern style of cantillation that formed the cradle for the words. Notice the sound of a choir of harps or lyres surrounding the sung words. Just imagine: today, as a choir member, you have joined the tradition of this early biblical choir.

When David organized temple music with official choirs of singers and instrumentalists, he knew the power that music played in worship. That power was not only the voice of celebration, it was also the act of prophecy itself. To us, this is a strange way of looking at worship music. But the ecstatic song of the ancient seers had always been a form of prophecy. Of those whom David picked for musical leadership, it is said of Heman, Asaph, and Jeduthun that they “should prophesy with lyres, harps, and cymbals” (1 Chronicles 25:1). Of Jeduthun (whose name comes from the act of pointing out with the hand that for which we are thankful or about which we confess) it was said that he “prophesied with the lyre in thanksgiving and praise to the LORD” (1 Chronicles 25:3).

The idea of prophecy in music might be strange to us, but it provides an important clue for those of us who join the choir and play instruments in our churches today. In the temple, music accompanied the deepest moments of worship when sacrifice was made at the altar. In the sacrifice—which was later replaced by the act of prayer in the synagogue—the people, through the priests, offered their best gifts to God and burned them at the altar. After making the sacrifice, they then waited for God’s returning gift. Music at just that point, through

the words of the psalms and the sound of the music itself, was part of the revelation of God's returning word. Music, with the words of the psalms, helped make hearable and graspable God's returning gift of God's word at the most sacred moment of the service. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us, the psalms, which were sung by choirs, were offered as prayer in dialogue with God, and they should still be sung in this way today.

Is this prophetic role too much to expect of church choirs today? No, it is not, for this understanding goes to the heart of what the choir is doing in the service. The choir, through the hymns, responses, and anthems that it sings, and through the very *act* of singing, is helping make God's word knowable in ways that speech alone cannot do. Music at its best arises from depths within us that words are powerless to express. Singing makes public the unknown, the inexpressible, which God has stirred within the composer and performer. Thus, music becomes prophetic. The music, when performed with the word, becomes like an environment in which the words are uttered, giving these words content and implications that speech alone cannot convey. The anthems, responses, and hymns that we sing become the means by which God speaks God's own new and surprising word back to us. Often in worship, it is in singing/praying that God's new word to us becomes real.

David and Jeduthun were right about the prophetic power of music in worship. As we join Jeduthun's tribe and its mission, let us confess the awesome potential of the choir in our worship today. Some of the earliest Hebraic names for the choir suggest this awesome prophetic nature. Just consider the following examples.

Huy-yedah could mean an acclamation of thanksgiving, but it also could mean the singers who made this acclamation.

Sometimes translated as a “thanksgiving choir,” the name is derived from a verb that meant to point out with the hand that for which one is thankful, and to sound out, sing forth, about it. This name declares that the function of a choir is to point out that for which we should be thankful, a prophetic function. Jeduthun, who prophesied with music, got his name from this same verb. *Huy-yedah* is not a name that rolls off the tongue as easily as “chancel choir,” but it certainly is a much more meaningful one.

Sharim and *mishererim* are related names given to a choir of celebrators who make a loud and vigorous song in honor of God or an important person, in response to the great things the honored one has done. In *A Literal Translation of the Bible*, Jay P. Green gives his version of Nehemiah 12:42-43: “The singers (*mishererim*) sang aloud with Jezrahiah as their director. And that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced. For God had made them rejoice with great joy. And the wives, and the children, rejoiced so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even at a distance.” The word *sharim* is also notable in having a form for a women’s choir. “Jeremiah also uttered a lament for Josiah, and all the singing men [*sharim*] and singing women [*sharoth*] have spoken of Josiah in their laments to this day” (2 Chronicles 35:25). Again, we find a meaningful name that goes to the heart of the choir office. Today, as then, we sing vigorously to celebrate God in response to what God has done.

Yet another example is that of *Zammarin*, the name given to a choir that sang with the accompaniment of plucked string instruments. Six psalms instruct the leader to perform in this way, and probably many more psalms included the instruction. For in Psalm 137 we are told that the children of Israel,

captive in Babylon, had hung up their lyres (or harps) and would not sing songs of Zion.

With the destruction of the temple, the choirs too were destroyed and dispersed. The people found it difficult to sing, even though the songs were still known. “[O]ur captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’ How could we sing . . . ?” (Psalm 137:3, 4).

In this lamentable condition, little groups of the faithful gathered together to learn and study the scriptures, to pray, and to sing the songs of Zion. Each group elected a head person to lead them in their congregation, their synagogue. He was a representative of the congregation, a *sheliach sibur*, as the Jewish tradition later called him. To fulfill all that was required, he had to be a man learned in the Scriptures, one who knew them and could teach them, *and* one “who has music in himself.” For how could God’s song be sung if the head of the congregation did not know the songs and was not able to teach and lead them? The functions of teacher (*rabbi*) and song leader (*chazzan*) were combined and of equal importance. It is extremely important to understand the equal importance of these offices in our Hebraic tradition.

Later, as the tradition developed, the two functions were given to two different people, but they still had equal importance in the life of the congregation. The leader of singing came to be called the “cantor.” The person played a powerful role in the worship service and in the life of the community. Thus we witness another confirmation of the power of music in our tradition, of its prophetic importance in worship, and of the ability of music to bind people together as a congregation before God.

We should not, then, be surprised that Jesus, who was called *rabbi* by his followers, led his disciples in singing songs of Zion on the night of the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26). If this supper was a Passover meal, then you can imagine Jesus and his groups of disciples singing from “the Hallel,” Psalms 113 and 118. Look at those texts and imagine singing them, as Matthew and Mark say, just at the profound moment when Jesus broke the bread and blessed the cup saying that they were his body and blood of the new covenant with God.

But Jesus, in this early tradition, was also a *chazzan*. Treasure that, as a choir member. In the center of all your efforts in the choir, never fail to see Jesus the *rabbi* teaching you the meaning of God’s words as you sing them. Never fail to hear Jesus, the *chazzan*, directing you and making vital the music that you offer to God. Jesus Christ—God incarnate—the teacher and the singer, is in the midst of your choir.

In the early church, deacons were responsible for many of the daily activities of care and nurture. They were teachers, and they cared for the sick, the homeless, widows, and orphans. They assisted in the worship services. But of importance to you, as a choir member, is the fact that the choir that sang in worship in the early centuries of the church was made up of deacons. Singing in the choir in worship was the particular service to which God called them and for which the church ordained them. They were, in fact, recreating the temple choirs of David’s time in which the Levitical priests sang the songs of Zion and made vibrant music with instruments.

Today, our church no longer ordains choir members, but it should if we took seriously our whole tradition, and the important position of music in the worship service as it is

linked with the proclamation of God's Word. We are willing to "consecrate" people as "directors of music" after they have fulfilled certain study and service requirements. Consecration is one step shy of ordination. No one has given thought to either the consecration or ordination of choir members. But again, we should.

If, as choir members, we are members of Jubal's tribe, exercising the awesome role that music can play in the life and worship of our church;

If as choir members, we have joined the tradition of the early priestly choirs;

If as choir members, we have joined Jeduthun's family who sang and prophesied with the lyre in thanksgiving to God;

If as choir members, we have been called to join the *huy-yedah* who in their singing point with thanksgiving to the unseeable, untouchable, yet knowable riches of God's power and grace;

If as choir members, we have joined the *chazzan* in participating in the equal acts of teaching and singing, of reading Scripture and praying;

If as choir members, we are members of the Body of Jesus Christ, who as God incarnate was both teacher and singer;

If as choir members, we function in worship music as the deacons of the early church did;

Then as choir members it should be possible that we be ordained into the ministry of Jesus Christ.

The church should find ways of training choir members in matters important to both music and the church. The church should find ways to encourage and nurture the spiritual growth of its members. Choir members should feel called to service in

the choir and should seek the cultivation and training offered by the church. After an agreed upon amount of study and a period of service, the church should find a way to make all cho-risters, directors, and instrumentalists true ministers of music.

The reality is, for now, that churches will not do that, as essential as it seems. But the lively choir and the faithful local church should proceed with training and spiritual nurture in the choir as if ordination were possible. That, at least, is an essential that should be met in any size church. As you join the choir and, in a much richer way, as you continue in it, your knowledge about what you are doing in the choir in worship should broaden; your talent and skill should grow; and your commitment to the service of God through the choir should reach profound depths you never before dreamed possible.

Martin Luther once said that he “had no use for cranks who despise music, because it is a gift of God.” He went on to declare that “next after theology I give to music the highest place and the greatest honor” (Tr. by Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand*).

In 1545, the year before his death, Luther wrote in the pre face to the Babst Hymnal, *Geistliche Lieder*:

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth! (Ps. 96:1) For our heart and spirit have been made joyful through God's dear Son, who was offered for us to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. [Those] who earnestly believe this cannot keep quiet about it; they must sing about it joyfully, and exult over it, and speak about it so that others also hear and come to it. Those who do not want to sing and speak about it, well, this is plain evidence that they do not believe it, and do not belong in a new, joyful covenant with God but in an old, corrupt, joyless relationship. (Tr. by Roland Bainton, alt.)

Entering the Choir: What Is Required?

If choir ministry, at its best, is participation in the prophetic ministry of Jubal, Korah, and Jeduthun, then what are the important things that you must do to enter into the choir?

Seek Ensemble With All Your Heart

At its best, the choir is an example of what the church should be. Yet, some pastors speak of their choirs as “the war department,” which reflects the hostility and imperiousness that sometimes mark the lifestyle of choirs. Or perhaps this attitude reflects the pastor’s lack of faith in the value of the choir’s personnel and functions.

But at its best, the church choir fulfills its function in the worship and life of the church because the choir itself has become what the church should be: a community, a body, an ensemble that is mutually sensitive to each member, yet together acts in the name of Jesus Christ.

The church has always understood itself as the Body of Christ. What a powerful image of who we are! Think of a human body. It is made of an almost infinite number of differ-

ent members and parts, functions and systems. But all of these work together to create a living person who can understand, speak, move, and act. This body can even sing!

In the church, we are all individual members, yet we are related, as it were, by nerve, blood, sinew, and bone. We feel for each other. We know each other. We are committed together to seek ways to speak and act. We listen, together, to God's word and yield to the power of God's Spirit. We move together to accomplish what God would have us do. The choir is best described as the church is described—as the Body of Christ, present in this world and striving to accomplish what God would have it do.

A choir that is not a body, an ensemble, is no choir! The choir is not simply a collection of individuals who know how to read notes and sing, even beautifully, and do so no matter how the other individuals do their part. Certainly one of the most important tasks of every choir member is to listen carefully to our neighbors as they sing with us. By doing so, we sing together as in a true body.

That means you will do your best to match the pitch, the variations of loudness, the tone quality, the rhythm and tempo, the pronunciation, and most important, the spirit of those around you. The music itself and the director will give indications about how these things should be done together. But you must agree to become a part of this body and to seek ensemble with every muscle of your talent and nerve of your attention.

When the body of the choir finds itself and comes together and when ensemble is achieved, the result is an experience of profound human and spiritual meaning. God seems present. The unity of the members is palpable. The Spirit moves the music and God's word is powerfully uttered. The choir is

being the church—the Body of Christ singing.

Seek the Best Performance You Can Do

If we stand in our Hebraic/Christian choir tradition, then nothing but the very best that our choir can do should be brought into worship. The temple sacrifice was done with the best—the unblemished—animals or grain. In a like manner, our offering of music and work, which in many ways parallels the temple sacrifice and the synagogue prayer, must be prepared with care, diligence, and imagination.

The concern for skill in music is also consistent with the traditions of early Methodism. See Appendices A and B for John Wesley’s rules for vocal training and singing. Our music must be offered to God totally, without strings attached, as at the altar, so that God can use our offering in God’s own way in our congregation and in the world at large.

As a member of the choir, this requirement falls on you personally. You must seek the best performance you can do as you rehearse, practice, enlarge your skills, and meditate on what the choir sings. In doing that, you will help your choir perfect the best performance it can give.

The “best performance” is not a competition pitting your choir against every other choir in town or against nationally known recorded choirs. “Best performance” is not limited to big city, big church choirs with professional staff and large budgets. “Best performance” is required of the smallest choir in the smallest church. “Best performance” is what God asks of the least talented choir member anywhere.

An ill-thought-out cliché has been on the lips of many church musicians. They say our choirs do not “perform,” nor do our organists, instrumentalists, and soloists. To them, per-

formance is a bad word. Performers are people who act out parts (whether they believe it or not) for personal accolades. Although we are all tempted to play that part, it is the opposite of what we are called to be and do in our tradition.

The problem is that performance, at root, has never had that crass meaning. We need the word in talking about church music; God uses the word in making demands on our choirs. It must be salvaged. If we are talking about “selfish uses of church music,” then that is what we should say, and that temptation to misuse church music must always be held to the light. But God asks us today in our choirs, as God has always asked, that we give—let loose of, offer—*our best performance*, that which we have carefully prepared for God’s use.

Performance simply means to complete what one has set out to do, to accomplish it with the special skills that are required. Performance asks us to take the time to complete thorough preparations for an anthem. Performance asks us to hone our skills so that a more perfect gift can be offered to God and our neighbor. Performance demands commitment, time, work, and a willingness to use our talents. The opposite of good performance is half-done, half-learned, misunderstood, shoddy, ragtag offerings of music in worship that too often afflict us and must embarrass even a caring, forgiving God. Shoddy offerings are signs of a lack of faith and commitment. Good performance arises as a necessity out of our faith and love of God.

Suggestions for Seeking a Good Choir Performance

Prepare yourself spiritually for rehearsal. Pray. Expect God’s presence. Form images in your mind of good rehearsal practices. See yourself doing well. Anticipate being there, work-

ing hard, enjoying accomplishment, and being part of a special group.

Sing as you drive or walk to rehearsal. Loosen up your voice. Try to remember and sing some of the anthems.

Arrive at rehearsal ahead of time if you possibly can. Use this time to make friends with other people. The director may need some help in setting up. You can get your music out and arranged, and prepare your mind for a good rehearsal.

Sit up comfortably straight. “Couch potato” posture during rehearsal yields material only good for mashed potato tones and precision. Find a chair that lets you put both feet easily on the floor. Sit forward just enough to be balanced, erect yet relaxed. Don’t squeeze up your shoulders. Let them hang like a good coat does.

Open your mouth more than you think necessary. Singing through tight lips or a closed mouth is like getting 10,000 competing distance runners through a single turnstile. A lot of pushing, tension, and unpleasantness is bound to erupt. Some directors will tell you to open your mouth about the distance of two fingers stacked on top of each other. Don’t be dogmatic about that. The point is that without locking your jaw, collapsing your soft palate, or squeezing up your throat, you should find a way to let your mouth be considerably open in all that you sing. Your tongue, when not forming syllables, should be at rest on the bottom of your mouth like a throw rug.

Many singing methods are being taught, but you will need to go with the advice of your director or local teacher. However, nothing will be hurt if you *strive after an open, relaxed tone*. Without tension, lift the soft palate in the back of your throat—you do that when you yawn. Inhale deeply and fully. Don’t prop up your shoulders and pack the air in

your upper chest so that you feel as if you are about to pop. Use the muscles in the center of your body to control the exhaling of air through your open and relaxed throat. Above all, listen. Listen to the tone you are making. Even imitate the sounds you like that are better made by those people around you. You will be surprised how easily you can do that. Be aware that different anthems require different tone qualities. Listen to other singers. Put tone qualities on as you put on different clothes.

Watch the director—it's the only way to become part of an ensemble. Get your music up in such a position that you can read it and still look easily over the top of the paper at the director. Keep your eyes in motion: look ahead of where you are singing on the page, and look up and down from the director to the page. As in driving, a sure sign of going to sleep at the wheel is when your eyes lock in one position.

As you sing, *extend your ears up and down the line of singers* to your right and left, in front of you, and behind. Like an elephant, spread your ears over the whole choir and listen. Listen with all the concentration you can muster. What is being sung? How is it being sung? How fast or slow, loud or soft is it being sung? With what emotion and style is it being sung? With what shaping of words and lines is it being sung?

It does not take a genius with a doctoral degree to listen. You can listen, no matter who you are. Listen and sing much, much more than you talk. How do you think young people learn the latest hits by memory and in style? Have they bought the music and learned it? No, they learn because they listen closely to radio, television, and CD's.

Have a soft-leaded pencil with a good, clean eraser at hand during the whole rehearsal. Lightly mark suggestions

from the director that you need to remember. Even the best singers discover that what was so clearly fixed in the mind during anthem preparation is gone with the wind during the pressure of actual performance.

If you need to, ask for help in reading the music. Most people do not know how to read music as well as you are reading these words. One common myth is that choir members easily read music, and this accounts for the most frequent excuse for not joining a choir or for not trying once a person is in a choir.

If you are just beginning in the choir, make sure someone has shown you how to find your part in the music, whether you are a soprano, alto, tenor, or bass. Your line of music is marked at the beginning of the anthem. If you do not know what voice part you sing or have never sung parts, don't give up. Talk with your director, privately, before your first rehearsal. Let the director assign you to a part. Don't be afraid. If you try, you will be surprised how quickly you will learn to hear and sing your part. The director may assign one of the better choir members to be with you during your first weeks of rehearsal.

Study the up-and-down contour of your line of music for a whole page. Note relative heights, depths, and repeated notes on level areas. The notes are like a mountain road, a "tone" road, over which you will drive as you sing. Relate words to the contour. Now, you are almost reading.

As you sing, let the accompanying instrument and other members of the choir signal you as to just how high or low your voice should go. If you listen as you "read," you will find that your voice moves correctly with relative ease.

It is not that important, particularly as a beginner, that you

know exactly how to read the width of each interval as you see it on paper, and how to sing that interval accurately. People who can do this will sing the music right off the page, unaccompanied and alone, but that is not the most important skill you need in a choir. You need to see and respond to the shape of whole lines of notes—a contour—which even a beginner can see. Rather than trying to read intervals, during rehearsals concentrate on getting the tone road right as you see it on paper and hear it around you. Try to memorize it. Sing it at home.

You can learn to read rhythms if you study and practice. Rhythm is the primitive, motivating basis of music. Hesitant rhythm saps the music's vitality. Thus, as a good choir member you must learn the rhythms.

Learning to read rhythms is not complicated. It is a simple mathematical procedure. But singing rhythms is not math. Even from the beginning it is more important that you learn to sing rhythms than just to read them. You learn to sing rhythms by listening to them and moving your body with them. Have them repeated for you. Listen closely. Get into them. Move. Practice a rhythm a day at home. Memorize them. Then, when you learn to read them, you will know how to perform them.

How you pronounce words when you sing is of singular importance. Nothing clouds the clear, beautiful ensemble of a choir more than thoughtless and varied pronunciation.

As a choir member you must carefully go with the whole choir in your diction. Call on your director to clarify how you should sound vowels and combinations of vowels and how and when to pronounce consonants. Many good books on choir diction are available for your director and you. You can even use the dictionary. But even if the director calls for a sound that is not "right," you and the whole choir should go

together on the sound the director wants rather than split up, with each member doing what is “best.” Achieving ensemble in diction benefits the church by adding great beauty to a choir’s singing, and by enabling the congregation to understand what your choir is singing.

If your eye is at the place in the music where you are singing, you are disastrously behind. Your eye should be absorbing the words and music a whole phrase ahead so that you have time to sense where the music is going and understand what the words are saying. Would you drive your car to an intersection, looking down out of the side window only at the place where the car is? If you do, a wreck awaits.

Aggressively try to sing, even when you make mistakes. Rehearsals exist just for mistakes to be made! Only by committing yourself to singing, even singing mistakes, can you correct yourself. Silent, shy people do not make mistakes. They do not sing much either—which is the biggest mistake.

Be faithful in attending rehearsals. For the choir to perform its given role in worship, the music must be beautifully performed and the words clearly enunciated. That takes practice even for the best talents. When you miss rehearsal, you have lost needed practice. Being a fast learner does not excuse you. Think of how much you could have helped the whole choir accomplish the goals of rehearsal if you had been there.

Rehearsal is much more important than most choir members understand it to be. Your presence at rehearsals is a measure of how important you think your choir’s role is in worship. Attendance is a measure of your faithful commitment. If you must miss rehearsal, talk with the director in advance. The director needs to know. Find out what the goals of the rehearsal will be. The director might suggest ways for you to

study the music on your own.

Take a copy of an anthem home with you, if you can get permission, for your times of meditation during the week. Study the words. Try to understand them with your imagination working. Apply them to your own spiritual pilgrimage. Let God be present in them. If they are scriptural, read passages before and after the text in the Bible.

Try to hum the part you sing in the anthem. If you can, actually sing your part out loud with the words. Focus on it; let it soak into your being. Imagine the sound of the whole choir, and if you can, sing other parts.

No conductor, or choir director, would come before a choir without having studied and internalized the music to be directed. Directors must know the whole shape and sense of movement in the music. They must understand the meaning of the words and how to pronounce them. You as a choir member should do no less. You will find it important to plan time outside of rehearsal to study anthems. But pledge, right now, that you will return the music to the choir promptly. To do otherwise is a terrible inconvenience to the choir, and if you keep the music, you have simply stolen it.

In the worship service, the rehearsal is left behind. The music and skills you perfected before, you now bring as a gift that you offer to God and to your neighbor as you worship together. For in the service, worship is your first concern. Your main task will be to use what you learned at rehearsal as you make your musical offering. In doing so, you help the whole choir offer its best performance—an offering of music and prayer to God, and of witness to the congregation.

Luther on Good Performance

Martin Luther was a great teacher, theologian, and reformer. He was also no mean musician and composer. He played lute and recorder, and he composed hymn tunes and at least one complicated motet on the text “I Shall Not Die, but Live.” Luther liked nothing more than an evening at home around the table with family and friends, singing polyphonic motets and settings of hymns. A friend of his, the composer Johanas Walther, said that Luther “seemingly could not weary of singing or even get enough of it.”* Referring to these imitative—and difficult—motets based on Lutheran hymn tunes, Luther wrote in the introduction to Georg Rhaus’s *Symphonae incundae*,

When natural music is sharpened and polished by art, then one begins to see with amazement the great and perfect wisdom of God’s wonderful work of music, where one voice takes a simple part and around it sing three, four, or five other voices, leaping, springing round about, marvelously gracing the simple part, like a square dance in heaven with friendly bows, embracings, and hearty swinging of the partners. Those who do not find this an inexpressible miracle of the Lord are truly clods and not worthy to be considered humans!¹

Seek God’s Word, Love, and Power in All You Sing

Oftentimes the hardest thing for the choir and for the preacher to do in a worship service is to worship. We become so busy, even preoccupied, with what we will need to sing

1 . *Here I Stand*, Roland Bainton, p. 342 from Walter E. Buszin, “Luther on Music,” *The Musical Quarterly*, XXXII (1946), pp. 95–96.

and say that we do not have ears to hear what is being said and sung. We do not listen for the still, small voice of God in the midst of the whirlwind of our worship activities. Of all the people gathered together to worship, the worship leaders, themselves, often are not worshipping. That we leaders do worship—that God moves us, speaks to us, creates with us in worship—is truly a miracle and a sign of God’s ultimate power in the face of our distraction and obstinacy.

As a choir member, particularly as a new choir member, the request cannot be too earnestly made that you seek God’s Word, love, and power in all that you sing—both in the worship service and during rehearsal. This reason supersedes all other reasons for being part of the choir.

Develop a spiritual discipline related to your choir membership. Let your prayer life include the choir. Pray for the mission of the choir in the life of the church and in the worship of the church. Pray for the choir members, the ill, the distressed; join those who are giving thanks. Pray for the unity of the choir, for its true peace, and for its presence in the Body of Christ. Meditate on the words of each anthem, response, and hymn you sing. Let these words move to the heart of your spiritual discipline. Study the words. Reflect on them theologically in the light of the church’s teachings and your own spiritual experience. Relate the words you sing to your Bible study. Envision those in the congregation who will hear you sing. Especially bring to mind particular people to whom for any reason you would like to offer the words and music as a gift.

A healthy choir is spiritually active. The choir is infinitely more meaningful to each member when it is. When the choir is spiritually active, it is more powerful in its intention to pro-

claim. It is also more fun.

Delight is one of God's choicest gifts. Feeling delight in rehearsal and in worship is good. Indeed, worship without joy is dismal. Yet a choir's real joy is not that of a typical luncheon club. Some choir members boast that they have fun in their choir and invite you to attend. When you do attend, you discover a lot of talking and joking throughout rehearsal (nothing wrong with that in its place!), but accompanied by low-grade attention and work. The next Sunday, you see and feel the anxiety over singing a half-learned anthem. You sense the guilt members feel for bringing into the presence of the congregation and before God a performance that is nowhere near the best that the choir could make. That is no fun.

A happy choir knows it has prepared the best performance that it can. A happy choir is spiritually turned on to what it is proclaiming in its music. A happy choir is aware of the powerful function of its music in the worship service and offers its gift of music to God and the people with few strings of self-importance attached. A happy choir rejoices in the ensemble that offers this music.

In a choir that perfects performance and seeks God's creative presence in all that it sings, a delight that is known in no other way suffuses the membership like warmth from a fireplace on a cold winter day. That feels good. That is joy. That is fun.

Thank goodness we do not know how God uses the music we perform in worship. To measure the "success" of our music performance by compliments received after the service is treacherous. Instead, we, as choir members, faithfully prepare our music as best we can. That music is for church and worship.

God alone is the one who makes that music sacred. God

uses the music to communicate a word to people in the congregation. God moves people and creates new stirrings in their lives through the medium of our music. If we could predict the results of our singing, if we knew ahead of time what God would do with the music that we offer, then we would become the basest sort of manipulators.

Thanks be to God: It is God who makes our music have the power of prophecy; God uses our music as revelation; God gives our music the power to move and change; God, indeed, makes our musical offerings sacred. Therefore, seek God's word, love, and power in all that you sing, for yourself as a choir member and for the whole congregation.

3

Temptations

Before Jesus began his ministry, he was tempted. So are we, as we begin and even continue our ministry of service in the church choir. The only difference is that our temptations are not once and for all. They seem to stay with us, and to our dismay, they can appear in each rehearsal or worship service. Lest we despair, remember that God loves us even as we are tempted, even as we embrace the tempter's lure. God would deliver us even from the most distressing results of our failures "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever."

High Talents

Even as most saints pray continuously for deliverance from temptation, so choir members with the best voices often seem most tempted. They are the highly talented ones. At least they are more talented than most in the choir, no matter what absolute level of talent that may be.

Those with the best voices probably have sung in choirs for many years. They have sung with exciting directors and with boring ones. They have more experience. They have seen choirs grow and falter. They have sung in healthy, happy

choirs, and in choirs sick unto death. They have an eye practiced in ferreting out the qualities of a choir. When they join your choir, they hope to be impressed by it and swept up in a glorious rush of music and word that moves the hearts of all who hear and reaches even the gates of heaven. Yet, they are tempted, too, to hope that their voices will be instrumental in forming this glorious rush of heavenly music.

God has given them great gifts. Their voices seem to soar above the others with an ease and grace that is entrancing. They learn the music quickly. The choir leans on them to get through difficult passages. Some of the weaker singers insist on sitting next to them. They often are idolized.

If they are soloists, they may view their talents with special care and consider others of similar talent with special possessiveness. They are eager to sing with other good voices in special duets, quartets, and even small ensembles that match their abilities or stretch their capacities beyond that of the usual anthems. They may be more tempted to form a small corporation with the talented members of the choir than to join the full choir. And down deep, as soloists, they are probably uptight about the possible room in this church for their singing. They may find that they themselves are divided between pride and misery as jealousy steps in. Temptations abound for high talents.

But ironically, their temptations bring equal temptation to the rest of the choir. You, as a regular choir member, may find yourself on the street after rehearsal, trying your own voice on a heroic note or two in imitation of them, and you might discover how dismally puny your voice seems to sound. So you may resent those who are more talented. The vacuum that exists between your own voice and that of a talented one can be disheartening. Those with better voices are recognized and

praised, and sometimes are not nearly as faithful in attendance as you. Such attention can be disconcerting. And certainly “concerting”—being of one ensemble—is one of the things we should want most in a choir. “Divide and conquer,” the Evil One says.

High talents in the choir can lead to divisiveness and sickness of the choir’s very soul. Maybe rehearsals should begin with a time for confession followed by pardon, and then proceed with prayers of thanksgiving.

Let us rejoice that God has given great musical talents to some. Let us pray that those who have these gifts will never bury them, but in using them will develop and increase their value. Let us hope they will find ways to offer their talents to God, rather than hoard them as investments in their own reputations. Let us pray that we can accept the gifts offered to God by those who are especially talented without feeling resentment or jealousy.

Our choirs simply could not exist without the support of people with high musical talents, even with the problems and temptations they may bring. We need their artistry and their leadership. We need the witness of God’s creative abundance that is found in them.

The Pits

One of your deepest temptations, especially in the exercise of music, is to fling yourself into the pit. Your voice is no good. Your voice wobbles. Your voice stands out, embarrassingly. Your voice cracks on high notes. Your voice buzzes like a beetle in a boot on low notes. You cannot read music. You have no knowledge about hymns or anthems. You have never heard of composers or authors everyone else seems to know. You are

afraid of singing when others are silent. You are the butt of all the director's criticisms. The whole section wants you out. You are getting a divorce. Your business is failing. Your child is hooked on drugs. How can you sing "the Lord's song in a foreign land"?

As a new choir member, you may have been tempted into the pits, especially if you have never been in a choir before. But even experienced choir members can feel in the pits when they join new choirs. The Hebrews called the pit sheol—the place we go when we die. Many in our choirs have been tempted to let their spirits die. Our faith clearly recognizes death but our faith says "no" to it!

Of all the places you can be, the choir should be the place that vitalizes you. When you are tempted to fall into the pit, the choir should hold you up. If the choir is part of the Body of Christ, then your failures are forgiven, your deficiencies are fulfilled by others, and your miseries are comforted by true grace.

Temptation to the pits is great. However, the power of the choir to be a redemptive ensemble of faithful singers is greater yet.

Those Who Know Best

If you lock a group of strangers in a room, in short time they will have a leader who knows best how to get out. That fact has saved many organizations and nations from disaster.

But the choir, of all groups in the church, seems to attract people who, almost as a profession, seem to know best about almost anything. Choir members know the choir should sing only evangelically stirring music; they know that the choir should sing only the great church music of great masters. They

know that if the director knew anything about conducting, then the choir would sing better. They know the choir could be twice as large as it is. They know the choir should use microphones; they know the choir should never be amplified. They know the choir should sing in the back of the church; they know the choir should sing in the front of the church. They know that to produce good singing tones you suck in your stomach; they know that all good singing is done without tension. They know that if they were section leaders, then their section would sound best in the choir; they know that if they were choir president, then the choir would suddenly grow and prosper. Dreary, isn't it?

Many of us choir members are tempted, on our own, to lead the choir in one way or another, especially in difficult times. What a disaster it would be if we all took over and tried to convince the choir to do what we know is best. The choir would be pulled in all directions at once, torn and shredded like confetti scattered in the winds.

As a new choir member, the church wants you to offer to God, through the choir, the talent and insight that you have. But church choirs are divided and made ineffective by those who use their talents and insight in a power game aimed not so much at helping the choir as establishing personal control. The choir does need leadership, therefore you have a director, and you probably elect officers and appoint section leaders. But these people should work together toward the unity and best functioning of the choir in worship, and not for their own exercise of power.

If you have suggestions to make about how the choir is run, about how the choir is conducted and sings, or about what style of music is sung, then by all means make these sugges-

tions to the director—in private. The choir member who keeps embarrassing the director during rehearsal is not trying to help the choir, but is establishing personal authority. In private, any director should be willing to hear you out and discuss with you the pros and cons of your suggestions.

The Bible takes leadership quite seriously. Royal leaders are not chosen just by lineage or skill. They become leaders as they are anointed with oil. As anointing oil runs down over the anointed's head, it is understood that the power of God's Spirit flows with it into the leaders' life, toward the end that God's will might be accomplished. The Hebrew word for anointing is *masach*, from which we get our word for "anointed one," Messiah. The Greek word for Messiah is *Christos*. Jesus Christ is our anointed one, the true head of the church; there is no other. As *Christian* choir members, we acknowledge that the focus and center of the choir's life is in Jesus Christ. We all function as servants of God, but with particular functions in the Body of Christ. Some decide things, and some carry things out. Some direct, and some prepare themselves for performance. Some teach, and some learn.

The Exclusive Club of the True Saints

The Pharisee stands on the steps to the choir loft and cries out: "O God, I am glad that I am not as these other choir members are—spiritually empty, blasphemers who claim your name in vain, lazy and worthless contributors to the choir! I study music twice in the week; I seek the hidden truths in the anthems we sing and give all that I learn to the many who cannot perceive" (Adapted from Luke 18:11, 12).

Our deepest, most grievous, and subtlest temptation in the choir is to join the exclusive club of the true saints. The very

characteristics that make good choir members can—if done for the sake of superiority—become grounds for our greatest failures. This is why, in his “Rules for Singing,” John Wesley dearly sought to balance the demands of art with those of worship (see Appendix B).

If we seek ensemble for the sake of power, if we perfect performance for the sake of perfection, if we take pride that we have deeper spiritual understanding of God’s word than others, if we use our musical sophistication to separate ourselves from common folks, then all of the good things that we have done to become good choir members have only isolated us in a small, prideful group. This group fails to have compassion for others and cannot risk being open to the deep stirrings of God’s Spirit. How sad. Cynicism is close at heel.

Somehow, openness to all God’s creation and to all God’s people—whatever their style, talents, or education—is near the center of the choir’s task. If we sing in all languages and sound like the song of angels, but have not love, we are noisy gongs or clashing cymbals. If our anthems have prophetic powers and reach to depths beyond the power of words to express, and if we have the tenacity to rehearse through mountainous musical difficulties, but have not love, we are nothing. If we give out all that we know and sing for the glory of God, but have not love, we gain nothing. Love is patient with children and kind to the unsophisticated; love is not jealous of other choir members or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way in the choir; it is not irritable or resentful when others have solo parts or special duties; it does not rejoice at embarrassment, but rejoices in fulfillment. Love bears all things and endures all things. Love never ends if it is love. (Adapted from 1 Corinthians 13:1-8.)

A Choir Member's Paraphrase of Matthew 4

Then the choir member was led into rehearsal to be tempted. And the tempter came and said, "If you are a clever choir member, then feed these dead, stony anthems to the congregation in such a guise that they think they are nourishing bread." But the choir member answered, "True food is in the word of God. When we faithfully sing the word of God, God makes bread."

Then the tempter took the choir member to the top of the choir loft and said, "Throw yourself down into the pit when the others are watching, so they will come running to you. Wallow and cry out, so they will notice you and comfort you and lift you up." The choir member said, "You shall not tempt your neighbor into serving you for your own sake, and you shall not tempt God to be gracious."

Again, the tempter took the choir member to a great convention where glorious choirs from all the world were met together making sublime music. The devil said, "I will give you such a voice and such personal charisma that all these choirs will idolize you and want you—if you will worship me and acknowledge me only as your guide." Then the choir member said, "Begone, Satan! We are to worship God! And God alone will we serve in all that we sing and do."

The tempter left. And behold, God's host in heaven and earth came to the choir member and together they sang God's great Doxology!

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
praise God, all creatures here below:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise God, the source of all our gifts!
Praise Jesus Christ, whose power uplifts!
Praise the Spirit, Holy Spirit!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Appendix A

Vocal Training Provided

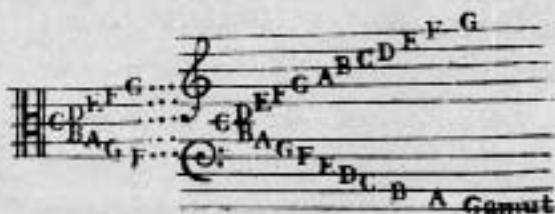
by John Wesley

By 1761 when John Wesley published his first carefully edited tune book, *Select Hymns: With Tunes Annexed*, he included a twelve-page instruction on the reading of music titled “The Gamut or Scale of Music.” Though Wesley did not approve of the use of anthems in his societies, it is clear that he wanted all members to be able to read the tunes he provided for their hymns. “The Gamut” is an almost humorously inadequate instruction manual, as you can see from the first page reproduced here. By 1765 “The Gamut” was replaced by a much superior instruction manual of 12 pages titled, “The Grounds of Vocal Music.”



John Wesley wanted to give people, no matter how meager their musical education, a solid and trustworthy foundation upon which they could build their musical skills. The Methodists were generally known for enthusiastic singing in their meetings. One journalist of the day called them “those lousy, stinking, canting [singing] Methodists!” They used no keyboard accompaniment, but we do know that John Wesley often took an oboe player with him to meetings who could line out the tunes on his instrument.

The pages reproduced here, besides being of historical interest, remind us of the concern in our tradition to seek the best performance possible.

The Gamut, or Scale of Music.



The Gamut is the Ground of all Music, whether Vocal or Instrumental, and therefore ought to be got by Heart both forward and backward, that is, up and down, very perfect. — Observe all Notes below Gamut are call'd Double, as FF and EE, &c. and all above the 5 lines in the Treble are call'd in ALT, as G. in Alt, &c. and lines added above the 5 lines in the Treble, and below Gamut are call'd Ljedger lines.

The three Characters in the above Scale are call'd Cliffs, because they determine what Part the Music is of, Viz.  is the G. Cliff, for the Treble or upper Part, and is always on the Second line.  is the C, or Tenor Cliff, and contains all the Inner parts of Music, as Tenor and Contra Tenor. this Cliff may also be of further use, for by placing it on any of the 5 lines you may often keep the Notes within their Compass, and thereby avoid Ljedger lines; and observe, that on

Appendix B

Wesley's Rules for Singing

Commentary

These rules, which were reproduced in the 1964 and 1988 United Methodist hymnals, were first published by John Wesley in his 1761 *Select Hymns: With Tunes Annexed: Designed Chiefly for the Use of the People Called Methodists*. Our contemporary reprints unfortunately do not contain the introduction in which Wesley explains why these singing rules are important for us in worship singing. The purpose was first to make our singing “more acceptable to God” and then “more profitable” to ourselves and to others in the congregation who hear. Hardly a better purpose could be expressed for a congregation’s or a choir’s singing than we find here.

“I. Learn these Tunes before you learn any others. . . .”

In 1742 a small, poorly printed booklet with 43 tunes appeared as *A Collection of Tunes, Set to Music, As they are commonly SUNG at the FOUNDERY*. The Foundery was John Wesley’s London headquarters, and so this booklet is taken as the first indication of what tunes the “Methodists” were using in their societies. The booklet is anonymous and John Wesley never mentioned it in writing, but it is still probably authentic since the majority of the tunes appeared 20 years later in

Select Hymns. By the 1765 edition of *Select Hymns*, Wesley had included 114 unharmonized tunes for the singing of 149 texts. In 1780 he published his last tune book, *Sacred Harmony: or a Choice Collection of Psalms and Hymns, Set to Music in Two or Three Parts for the voice, Harpsichord and Organ*. In this book 120 tunes were included for 128 texts. The tunes, though somewhat simplified and harmonized, were almost exactly the same as in *Select Hymns*. By the fifth edition (1786) of Wesley's final, large, texts-only hymnbook, *A Collection of HYMNS for the Use of the People Called METHODISTS*, one of 104 of the tunes printed in *Sacred Harmony* was indicated by name at the beginning of each of the 525 texts.

We are thus left with clear evidence of the tunes the first Methodists sang over a 40-year period. Although the collection of tunes is not large, it is quite varied in style. A surprising number of tunes were used over the whole period.

In his first rule for singing, John Wesley is simply asking his congregations to learn the same core of tunes. This allowed Methodists, and Wesley himself, to move between societies and still to be able to sing the hymns with confidence.

But Wesley also implied that this core of tunes should be memorized or at least learned with great assurance. Encouraging people to be familiar with songs is the real importance of this first rule. An unknown tune makes any hymn seem "new" and "unfamiliar." How good it would be if all of our churches today knew by memory the same core of tunes with meters varied enough to accommodate most of the hymn texts we sing in our worship. We sing that which we know by memory with more ease, openness, and sense of

relationship to other people than that which we read or attempt to read as we sing. Our choirs would fulfill an important mission if they—and their members, scattered throughout the congregation and its various gatherings—would help establish a known core of tunes, varied in style, within each church.

“II. Sing them exactly as they are printed here.”

Wesley is again concerned about unity in singing. He wrote in the Preface to his 1761 *Select Hymns*:

I have been endeavouring for more than Twenty Years to procure such a Book as this. But in vain: Masters of Music were above following any Direction but their own. And I was determined, whoever compiled this, should follow *my* Direction: Not *mending* our Tunes, but setting them down, neither better nor worse than they were. At length I have prevailed. The following Collection contains all the Tunes which are in *common* Use among us. They are pricked true, exactly as I desire all our Congregations may sing them.

“III. Sing All. . . .”

Wesley encouraged everybody to sing, even those who were tired or had poor voices and even when joining the congregation seemed like taking up a cross. Quite simply, those who refuse to sing withdraw themselves from the communion of those gathered in worship.

“IV. Sing lustily and with a good Courage. . . .”

When we sing hymns and anthems, we should do so vitally, longing for the goodness and pleasure that is in the singing. And when hymns and anthems seem dauntingly difficult, we should attack them with courage, not withdraw in fear or die in spirit.

“V. Sing modestly. . . .”

Worship is no place to create star performers, even though we all are asked to sing “lustily and with a good courage.” In our singing we seek true harmony in the unity of the congregation. Coke and Asbury commented on the section on singing in worship in the 1789 Discipline. They asked their congregations not to sing complicated, fuguing tunes during worship because doing so puffs up with vanity those who sing them and rarely leads to the true worship of Christ.

“VI. Sing in Time. . . .”

Often it is our best singers who try to “lead” the congregation (or the choir) by singing somewhat ahead of the rest. Wesley comments that it is the “lazy” who fall behind in a “drawling Way.” In order to stay together, the leading voices should listen and be with the congregation, even while leading, and the congregation should move with the leading voices. In Wesley’s time the problem seemed to be—as it is in many of our churches today—that singing grew slower and more labored until it had lost the vitality that characterized it when people were new to the faith.

“VII. Above all sing spiritually.”

“Have an Eye to God in every Word you sing” should be posted in every church entrance and in every choir room. Wesley has gone to the center of what distinguishes our singing in church. He makes two stipulations. First, one should know the meaning of what one sings. Wesley would often stop a congregation in mid-hymn and ask, “Now, do you know what you last said? Did you sing no more than you felt?” After that, the hymn would surely continue with sharpened attention

to what was being proclaimed.

The second requirement was related to the first. If one just revels in the music, one's heart is apt to be "carried away with the sound" without so much as one glance of the eye to God or to the meaning of the text. Luther, Calvin, and Wesley all treated music with great care, being concerned that music could arouse emotions, even erotic ones—emotions that could overcome one's spiritual attention. Nevertheless, despite this danger, they all came finally to affirm the vigorous, enlightening combination of music with the Word of God. We sing, yes, but "have an eye to God in every word [we] sing."

The Grounds of ^I VOCAL MUSIC.

I. A <i>Semibreve</i>	⊙	contains two Minnims;
A <i>Minnum</i>	∩	contains two Crotchets;
A <i>Crotchet</i>	∟	contains two Quavers;
A <i>Quaver</i>	∟	contains two Semiquavers;
A <i>Semiquaver</i>	∟	contains two Demisemiquaver;
A <i>Demisemiquaver</i>	∟	is written thus ∟.

II. The *Notes* in Music are usually placed within five Lines. If there be an extraordinary Line above or below these it is termed a *Ledger Line*.

There are in all *seven Notes* and no more, represented by the seven first Letters of the Alphabet. There seem indeed to be more in most Tunes: but they are only a repetition of these. In writing them C is placed on a *Ledger Line* below, D on the Space below the first Line, reckoning upwards, E on the first Line, F on the first Space, G on the second Line, A on the second Space, B on the third

That this Part of Divine Worship may be the more acceptable to God, as well as the more profitable to yourself and others, be careful to observe the following Directions.

I. **L**EARN *these Times* before you learn any others ; afterwards learn as many as you please.

II. Sing them exactly as they are printed here, without altering or mending them at all ; and if you have learned to sing them otherwise, unlearn it as soon as you can.

III. Sing *All*. So that you join with the Congregation as frequently as you can. Let not a slight Degree of Weakness or Weariness hinder you. If it is a Cross to you, take it up and you will find a Blessing.

IV. Sing *lustily* and with a good Courage. Beware of singing as if you were half Dead, or half a Sleep ; but lift up your Voice with Strength. Be no more afraid of your Voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sung the Songs of *Satan*.

V. Sing *modestly*. Do not bawl, so as to be heard above, or distinct from the Rest of the Congregation, that you may not destroy the Harmony ; but strive to unite your Voices together, so as to make one clear melodious Sound.

VI. Sing *in Time* ; whatever Time is Sung be sure to keep with it. Do not run before nor stay behind it ; but attend close to the leading Voices, and move there-with as exactly as you can ; and take care you sing *not too slow*, This drawling Way naturally steals on all who are lazy ; and it is high Time to drive it out from among us, and sing all our Tunes just a quick as we did it first.

VII. Above all sing *spiritually*. Have an Eye to God in every Word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself, or any other Creature. In order to this attend strictly to the Sense of what you sing, and see that your *Heart* is not carried away with the Sound, but offered to God continually ; so shall your singing be such as the *Lord* will approve of here, and reward when he cometh in the Clouds of Heaven.

Roger Deschner grew up in rural Goliad, Texas, in a family of German immigrant farmers. The whole family converted to Methodism in 1905 in a series of meetings held by a Circuit Rider preacher. His father and several uncles became Methodist preachers, as did his brother and later his son. After fourteen years (1961-75) as Minister of Music at First UMC in Houston, Texas, then the largest church in the denomination, and with divinity and music degrees from Union Theological Seminary and the Yale School of Music, Deschner became Director of the Graduate Program in Sacred Music at Perkins School of Theology in 1975. At the time of his death in 1991, he was Associate Professor of Church Music and Director of the Seminary Singers at Perkins School of Theology, and had served as secretary to the Hymnal Revision Committee that produced the 1989 United Methodist Hymnal.

Roger Deschner reminds us that the role of the choral singer in Christian worship is an office of the church. Singers, regardless of worship style, find their roots planted deeply in the biblical tradition. Their role is a vocation that is as important as the clergy in embodying worship. This little book articulates beautifully what it means to be a part of that special community in the life of the church—the choir.

C. Michael Hawn, Professor of Church Music and Director
Sacred Music Program, Perkins School of Theology
Southern Methodist University

These few but meaningful chapters give voice to Roger Deschner's passion for church music and musicians. Those who read them can only be inspired to give their best performance in their ministry of music.

David L. Bone, Executive Director
The Fellowship of United Methodists in Music and Worship Arts

Rogers Deschner's *Your Ministry of Singing in the Church Choir* reflects the late author's contagious enthusiasm for and dedication to the art and craft of church music making and ministry. I heartily recommend it to singers and choir leaders.

Carlton R. Young, Professor of Church Music, Emeritus
Candler School of Theology, Emory University

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