



Chantage workshops

Chantage are proud to present the **Chantage Interactive Choral Workshop**, a fantastic new singing experience, with a whole range of physiological benefits.

In 2005 Chantage was awarded a training grant from Making Music (The National Federation of Music Societies) to fund a project *“to design a structured, educationally fulfilling and interactive choral workshop, to be deliverable by a team of singers in almost any circumstances.”* Conceived by Chantage’s Musical Director, James Davey, and with professional training from David Lawrence, one of Britain’s finest workshop leaders, this unique choral workshop has been proven to achieve its key aims:

- To enable effective collaborations between choirs by encouraging interaction.
- To provide a foundation for less experienced singers in some basic choral skills.
- To introduce individuals in Chantage to leadership and teaching roles.

The duration of the workshop is flexible, and rather than one workshop leader, the responsibility for leading the session falls to a selection of trained members within the choir. Teaching healthy singing and vocal technique forms an important part of the workshop and, through vocal development training, simple singing exercises and by creating a highly engaging and supportive environment, we address a wide range of personal and social skills. From building confidence to facilitating group interaction, you can read more about the benefits of the **Chantage Interactive Choral Workshop** in ‘The Science bit...’

The workshop is divided into three main sections:

1. The Ice-breaker

- * Team tasks and games
- * Introduction to creating sound and singing
- * Developing group interaction and communication

2. Warming-up

- * Posture and Breathing
- * Resonance Team tasks and games
- * Vowels and Intonation
- * Diction and Articulation

3. Workshop songs

- * Be treated to an inclusive selection of songs including; Jazz Classics, World music, gospel and Classical. The workshop songs are a very entertaining feature of the workshop, and are especially chosen to suit the group!

How can I book my Chantage Interactive Choral Workshop?

Easy - Just get in touch. The workshop is designed to suit any group of willing singers and, don’t

worry, there is absolutely no need to have any previous experience of singing – Chantage workshops are for everyone! We look forward to hearing from you soon...

The Science bit...

Singing has a wide range of personal benefits besides learning about music and how to create it. As well as developing and improving healthy singing techniques, and also being a thoroughly enjoyable experience, a recent education research project at Roehampton University has shown the workshop to have multiple physiological and social benefits for the participants.

Working with the voice brings many physical benefits (such as improved posture and respiratory strength, increased energy levels and also stimulation for the mind), but there are also many social and personal benefits (boosted self-esteem and confidence, improved communication and listening skills, raised self-awareness and awareness of others, and developed team working skills).

By supporting a highly engaging and inclusive environment for social interaction, the Chantage Interactive Choral Workshop can significantly enhance collaborative encounters between choirs, and the following chapters explain why this is so important:

- Social Capital
- Bonding / Bridging
- Collective Identities
- Competitiveness
- Health and Well-being
- Ice-Breakers
- Co-operative Learning
- Warm-ups

Social Capital

“Apart from having a musical function, collective singing has, undoubtedly, a social function. Humans are essentially social animals; music is essentially a social activity. The very structure and nature of the communal singing activity makes it a social phenomenon. As with team sporting activity, choral singing enables people to work together toward a common goal. People come together with others who have a common interest. People of different backgrounds, social status, and ethnicity can relate to one another through musical participation.” (Durrant, 2003 p.45)

The concept that underlies social capital dates back to the 19th century, and has since developed a variety of definitions in modern sciences, many of which pertain to socio-economics. The term describes a type of capital gain to be had from engaging in social activity by forming relationships and connections with other people in order to do things as teams or organizations that could not be achieved by an individual alone (Everingham, 2001). In the same way, relationships are required in a singing group in order for the goals of that group to be reached, such as singing a multi-part song, which could not be achieved with just one person singing on their own.

According to Foley and Edwards (1998) it is through the voluntary sector that individuals can form these types of relationship. Robert Putnam (1993) argues that choral societies are an essential form of social capital (Vertovec, 1997), and a recent major study of regional government in Italy would

appear to support this theory, showing a clear relationship between the geographic density of choirs and the effectiveness of government institutions in those areas. “Communities that sing together (literally and metaphorically) better achieve the government they desire” (Kaufman, 1999).

Social capital cannot occur without social interaction, and if the amount of human interaction increases, people are more likely to help one another. Some level of person-person tolerance is required for this to occur, as otherwise people in a group would not be able to interact.

“The creation and presentation of art often inspires a raft of civically valuable dispositions – trust, openness, honesty, cooperativeness, tolerance, and respect... The arts are a superb means of building social capital.” (Kaufman, 1999)

Bonding / Bridging

Although little is known about the neural processes involved in social bonding, it is likely that they are evolved from the same processes that stimulate the maternal behaviour necessary for reproductive success in placental mammals. The type of social bond experienced by members of a choir, such as attitudes of loyalty to a social group and its culture, appear to have evolved from these same brain systems. (Pedersen, 2005)

Whilst the term “bonding” can apply to all types of social and cultural connecting between people, it has only been used with regard to interpersonal relationships since 1976. In this sense the distinction is that “bonding” almost always implies a voluntary act, of entering in or remaining in a relationship from a wish to do so. In order for bonding to take place it is obviously necessary for there to be some social interaction occurring, without which there can’t be any development of interpersonal relationships, and this is important if individuals are to build social capital.

Laya Silber describes how this environment is facilitated through not just the environment of a group singing activity but through the activity itself: “While any group musical endeavour can be an exercise in interpersonal skills, multi-part singing, with its particular demands, generates a wide range of inter-relational dynamics in a unique way. One might say that the multi-vocal ensemble is a metaphor for relationship, where the individual is called upon to control her own voice, and at the same time blend with the voices of others in balance and with appropriate dynamics.” (Silber, 2005, p253)

Silber goes on to discuss some of the personal skills required for an individual to find their place (or relevance) within a singing group, and mentions the need for trust – For instance, trusting that those around them will also sing their line and contribute to the team effort – and suggests why it might develop more easily in a singing group, than in other types of social group. “As an inherently cooperative and interdependent enterprise, multi-vocal singing offers a number of non-verbal conduits in which singers can be heard and can express their feelings and inner voices without risking unnecessary personal exposure.”(Silber, 2005, p262)

Collective Identities

“When a people lose their song, they often lose identity, cohesion and morale. When people do sing together, they often find the experience meaningful, energising and refreshing, and they come away with hope, a lift of spirit and a sense of belonging.” (White, 2001)

This sense of belonging may be termed ‘collective identity’, a term that is regularly applied to collective groupings such as those defined by gender, age, race, sexuality, religion, etc. Snow

describes collective identity as “a shared sense of ‘one-ness’ or ‘we-ness’ anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity and in relation or contrast to one or more actual or imagined sets of ‘others’.” (Snow, 2001) Snow continues to explain that collective identities are forged through the (inter)actions of the collective group, and that a collective identity can continue to modify and transform through the ongoing (inter)actions of the collective – that collective identities are indeed transient.

If the actions, or interactions, of the collective (or group) are acting to define the identity of the group, then it seems reasonable to assume that in the case of a singing group it will be the activity of group singing (and associated behaviour) that defines its collective identity.

In their article ‘Developing identities in music education’ Hargreaves and Marshall describe how students will identify with some types of music, but not others. They suggest educators may benefit from looking for a middle ground, choosing songs which students can connect to that aren’t too difficult to learn and perform, either musically or technically (Hargreaves & Marshall, 2003). However, just because a student doesn’t identify with a genre or style of music does not necessarily mean that they cannot, or that they do not have a response to it. In essence, the constituents of the music making experience, both positive and negative, will contribute to the design and strength of the group identity.

Competitiveness

As Stamer explains in ‘Choral Student Perceptions of the Music Contest Experience’, competitive behaviour between choirs, such as at choral contests, can be beneficial to group cohesion, largely through encouraging a sense of team responsibility (Stamer, 2004). However, competitiveness of this type can also lead to some group exclusivity; results of a competition may potentially create negative attitudes between separate competing groups.

Although competitive behaviours can be useful in building teams, in the Interactive Choral Workshop we decided to avoid inclusion of competitive elements, preferring instead to concentrate on creating, and building on, a sharing environment. It is, however, possible for competitive behaviour to arise in the absence of any competitive goal structure. Frequently this occurs when seemingly objective performance standards are implemented but past levels of achievement are not used to guide goal setting. Instead of considering personal improvement against the objectives, a student may instead consider personal improvement in comparison with (and potentially in competition with) other students. (Austin, 1990)

White, in a paper given at the National Rural Health conference, Canberra, (2001) suggests that there is an aspect of normal competitive behaviour apparently absent in a group-singing environment. White says that singing can “be a gender-balanced activity where men and women share rather than compete, that is not based on physical prowess, and is free from the threats associated with a re-distribution of power (for a couple of hours at least)”.

Health & Well-being

"Because singing is visceral (relating to, or affecting, our bodies), it can't help but effect change" says Suzanne Hanser, chair of the music therapy department at Berklee College of Music, Boston.

Studies of human emotional response have found that participating in musical activity can bring more enjoyment than many other leisure activities, enhancing our willingness to interact with others, and “at least one study has suggested that involvement in the arts, including as a spectator, can prolong your life.” (Kaufman, 1999)

Professor Graham Welch tells us that people who sing are healthier than people who don't. Singing exercises the lungs and tones up the intercostal muscles and diaphragm. Singing also causes deeper breathing than many other forms of exercise, opening up the respiratory tubes and sinuses as well as increasing aerobic capacity. This leads to a greater intake of oxygen, benefiting the heart and circulation, and decreasing muscle tension. (Welch & Thurman, 1997, White, 2001)

Further studies have linked singing with a lower heart rate, decreased blood pressure, and reduced stress. In Hancox's study on the perceived benefits associated with active participation in choral singing, 84 members of a university college choral society were surveyed to see whether they felt there were ways in which participation in the choir may have benefited their health and well-being. Some participants reported feeling more positive, feeling more alert and feeling spiritually uplifted. With respect to health benefits, 84% of participants gave responses, of which the main themes related to improved lung function and control over breathing, improved mood and stress reduction. The study showed that significantly more women than men experienced feelings of well-being and relaxation. (Hancox, 2001)

Several studies have found that singing also enhances immunity, one study, conducted at the University of Frankfurt, finding that singers had higher levels of immunoglobulin A and cortisol (indicators of enhanced immunity) after singing Mozart's "Requiem" than before. The activity of singing is also thought to block some of the neural pathways that pain travels through (Hancox, 2001).

Researchers at the University of Manchester have discovered that the sacculus, an organ in the inner ear connected to the part of the brain responsible for registering pleasure, responds quickly to low frequency, high intensity sounds, commonly found in singing. Under the right circumstances this can lead to the release of pain relieving, or pleasure giving, endorphins. (White, 2001)

Increased confidence and self-esteem are further benefits that teachers and educators deliberately aim to develop in their students. As Silber tells us, "self-esteem, where the personal and the relational meet, is also an area where the choir can contribute. The development of new skills, the successful mastery of the complex tasks involved in choral singing, and the affirmation that comes after a well-received performance, may contribute to a positive self-image." (Laya Silber, 2005, p254)

Ice-Breakers

"Engagement, and level of motivation, depends on the level of ownership of their music making; on their autonomy within it, and the extent to which they can exert control." (Hargreaves & Marshall, 2003, p.272)

In the opening section of the Interactive Choral Workshop participants are required to break off into smaller sub-groups, and to work together, independently of the other small groups, to develop their own version of the simple melody that the leader has supplied. As well as being a social ice-breaker, this type of activity can help to develop musical independence, as Enouch and McLemore tell us:

"Participation in instructional decision making encourages students to take responsibility for what happens to them, and it engenders a greater sense of commitment to the outcomes of the music program. In music education, where large group performance-based instruction is prevalent,

students often feel that they are alienated, and the programs do not meet their personal needs. This is sometimes known as contract learning.” (Enouch & McLemore, 1967)

We can perhaps perceive contract learning as being a way towards building social capital, as Stamer explains that students will tend to be motivated to participate with more commitment as they realise the group can't function without their input. This approach also helps to give students a sense of ownership of their music, as Stamer notes:

“In the process of making academic and musical decisions, they draw upon prior and new knowledge and experience and they exercise problem-solving skills... When performing music, students share their own artistic interpretations. Because they make the musical decisions, the performance reflects student knowledge and perceptions rather than being simply a re-creation of the teacher's wishes. This experience is highly motivating.” (Stamer, 2002)

Co-operative Learning

“Most musical activity is carried out with and for other people – it is fundamentally social – and so can play a part in promoting interpersonal skills, teamwork, and co-operation.” (Hargreaves & Marshall & North, 2003 p.160)

The small group strategy described in the Ice-breaker section can also be considered a method for facilitating ‘co-operative learning’, a widely used educational tool. Co-operative learning is when students rely on each other to achieve their personal goals, whilst working together to achieve a shared goal (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). “Every student embraces a responsibility for learning the assigned material and for making sure that all members of the group learn it, too” (Johnson et al, 1998, p29).”

Groups of four to five students are usually considered best for this strategy. Too few group members will obviously result in fewer social interactions, but too many in the group can actually prevent group cohesion. It is also suggested that students of different abilities should be equally distributed amongst the groups, as peer influence can be beneficial to this type of learning. (Kassner, 2002)

Grouping people in this way will not necessarily lead to co-operative learning, as the individuals may not collaborate. To ensure co-operation the experience must be structured so that the students appreciate they can't achieve the shared goal on their own, requiring what Johnson and Johnson term ‘positive goal interdependence’ and ‘individual accountability’ (Johnson et al, 1998).

“Music making requires many qualities that are inherent in cooperative learning: positive interdependence, individual accountability, emphasis on tasks, direct teaching of social skills (as they relate to music making), and frequent teacher observation and intervention” (Kassner, 2002)

Warm-ups

“Warm-up exercises are a series of activities that get the body and brain into gear and introduce healthy and effective singing practice at the same time... We all learn in different ways and each singer will respond to different stimuli. Some people need to understand the physical processes before enjoying an action, while others respond instinctively and are less interested in the techniques involved.” (Brewer, 2002, p.2)

Breathing exercises have the benefit of sending larger amounts of oxygen to the brain, but the effects of stretching exercises are not entirely obvious. Stretching can certainly help to improve circulation, and exercises to lengthen the body are particularly good for this (Dennison & Dennison,

1989). Neck-rolls, in particular, can help with circulation of blood to the head, but also have the benefit of heightening binocular vision and binaural hearing.

This type of exercise is also expected to be beneficial to those participants for whom singing is a new experience, and Dennison and Dennison, authors of Brain Gym, give a detailed explanation of the body processes involved:

“The Brain Gym Lengthening Activities help students to develop and reinforce those neural pathways that enable them to make connections between what they already know in the back of the brain and the ability to express and process that information in the front of the brain... The front portion of the brain, especially the frontal lobe, is involved in comprehension, motor control, and rational behaviours necessary for participation in social situations. The Lengthening Activities have been found to relax those muscles and tendons that tighten and shorten by brainstem reflex when we are in unfamiliar learning situations.” (Dennison & Dennison, 1989, p16)