

Planning for the Efficient Rehearsal

David W. Music

The efficient use of rehearsal time is a significant element in any successful choral program. One of the keys to this efficiency lies in thorough planning. The first step is to map out a long-range plan. This involves setting the specific date when each anthem will be performed. Next, the director should study each anthem, looking for smaller units that can serve as the focal point for a single rehearsal. These may vary in length from piece to piece and even within a single anthem, but each should contain an amount of material that will take about ten minutes to rehearse. After the anthem has been broken down in this manner, the number of units should be totaled and, counting backward from the date of performance, one section should be scheduled for practice at each rehearsal, always adding an extra rehearsal or two for final polishing. (The extra rehearsal can also come in handy when a rehearsal has to be cancelled or an anthem proves more difficult than anticipated.) Using this procedure, an anthem will normally be rehearsed for 5-7 weeks. After the schedule has been determined, an outline for the individual rehearsals will begin to emerge. Each will include some pieces that are in final polishing, others that are just being introduced, and still others that lie somewhere in the middle. As a rehearsal draws near, the director should make a detailed plan which includes the names of the pieces, the sections to be covered, and the time allotted to each. The last-named is best expressed by specific clock times (7:00-7:10) rather than total minutes. In the heat of a rehearsal it is easy to lose track of how much time has actually been spent on a piece; the clock is more trustworthy! The rehearsal plan should allow about ten minutes for each piece. This may not seem like much, but remember that you will be concentrating on only one section of the music. Ten minutes at each rehearsal means that over five weeks a piece will receive 50 minutes of work! At the first rehearsal for a new piece it should be sight-read in its entirety, then one section pulled out for concentrated work. At subsequent rehearsals, the section(s) learned the previous week(s) should be reviewed briefly and a new portion learned. Resist the temptation to sing through the entire anthem at every rehearsal. A plan such as this can and should be adapted to varying circumstances. If more rehearsal time is needed on a piece, take it; but remember that this has a "domino effect," leaving less time to work on other pieces. Some of the advantages of this approach are that it allows the choir exposure to more pieces at each rehearsal, keeps them anticipating what the anthem will sound like when it is put together, cuts down on wasted time, and sets an achievable goal for each rehearsal. Of course, other factors are involved in achieving efficiency in the rehearsal, such as the order in which pieces are practiced and how well the director knows the music (see Austin Lovelace's "Preparing a Score for Rehearsal" in the previous issue of Music in Worship). But the result of adequate planning is usually choirs that are comfortable with the music, directors that are confident about the next service, and the congregations that are led to worship in spirit and in truth. David W. Music

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