50 AWESOME CHORAL WARM-UPS for CHURCH CHOIRS

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INTRODUCTION

Choral warm-ups are an important and powerful tool to get your group singing together with a good tone, resonance, and proper breath support (source).

Plus, there are many ways to include pedagogy and teaching in these first few minutes of the rehearsal that will save you time later.

If you spend just a few minutes thoughtfully planning warm-ups that prepare concepts from the repertoire, warm-ups become a valuable teaching tool.
Your choir will be more engaged. By mixing up the warm-up exercises each week, you offer your choir a new challenge every time they come to rehearsal. They will likely pay more attention and be more engaged while singing.

You will spend less time introducing new pieces. By preparing new concepts in the warm-ups (e.g. triple or compound meter or vowel placement or a melodic phrase), your choir will be practicing a challenging spot from a new piece without even realizing it!

You can isolate specific choral singing skills. During warm-ups, you can focus on tone and resonance and remind singers about taking deep, low breaths. You can practice part-singing or singing in canon. Choir members can focus on their sound without being distracted by music reading.
HOW TO USE WARM-UPS

Use warm-ups to prepare new musical concepts (intervals, phrasing, melodic patterns, etc.), support vocal development, and foster the development of individual and collective musicianship.

Plan 5–7 minutes worth of warm-ups at the beginning of each rehearsal. Vary the warm-ups from week to week to foster the development of a variety of musical skills and keep your choir on their toes.

Consider choosing warm-ups that highlight contrasts: for instance, major and minor mode, ascending and descending patterns, legato and staccato articulation, vowels and consonants. Play a starting chord and demonstrate the pattern for your choir.

Repeat each warm-up pattern several times, ascending or descending by half step (or whole step for an added challenge) with each repetition, so as to cover the entire vocal range. Avoid doubling the vocal pattern on the piano. Add in a vocal sigh or siren between exercises to help singers relax, work the passaggio (natural transitions or “breaks” in the voice) and get the breath moving.

Warm-ups should be sung without notation and unaccompanied as much as possible. Encourage singers to use their ears, listen to those around them, and move their arms or hands when appropriate to help with phrase- or vowel-shaping.
INTERVALS

Use these warm-up exercises to help prepare your choir to sing a variety of intervals they may encounter in anthems.

Ascending 4th:

Minor 3rd + Descending 5th:

Major 3rd + Descending 5th:

Major 3rd:

Ascending 5th:

Me ah

Zee ah
Descending 5th:

\[ \text{Mah meh mee moo} \]

Descending 3rds:

\[ \text{Na nee no nee na nee no nee na} \]

Stepwise motion:

\[ \text{Nee _ neh _ nee _ neh noo} \]

Interval training, ascending (sing on numbers):

\[ 1 2 1 3 1 4 1 5 1 6 1 7 1 8 \]

Interval training, descending (sing on numbers):

\[ 8 7 8 6 8 5 8 4 8 3 8 2 8 1 \]
BREATH & ARTICULATION

Use these warm-ups to help teach your choir about breath and singing with proper support and control.

Breath support:

Staccato:

Steady, sustained breath:

For more breath exercises, see "Breathing Exercises for Choirs of All Ages"
Energy:

\[ \begin{array}{c} \text{Zing a zing a zah zing a zing a zah zee oh zee oh zee} \end{array} \]

Articulation:

\[ \begin{array}{c} \text{Gah lee nah lee na na na} \end{array} \]

Articulation:

\[ \begin{array}{c} \text{Me roh oh oh (flipped “r”)} \end{array} \]

Arpeggio:

\[ \begin{array}{c} \text{It's a fine day to-day.} \end{array} \]
TRIPLE & COMPOUND METER

Use these warm-ups to teach your choir about compound meter.

With turnaround:

Doo dah dee doo dah dee doo

With repeated note:

Loo lah lee loo lah lee loo lah lee loo

With descending 3rd:

Al - le - lu - ia a - men

Tip: Slow them down and conduct in three to help prepare your choir to sing in triple meter.
Use these warm-up exercises to promote resonance, or vibrations in the mouth and nasal passages.

“v” or “ng” sounds:

\begin{eqnarray*}
\text{Va veh vee vo} & & \text{voo} \\
\text{Sing sing sing sing} & & \text{si - ng}
\end{eqnarray*}

“ng” sounds:

\begin{eqnarray*}
\text{Ni - nga ni - nga noo}
\end{eqnarray*}

Buzzing:

\begin{eqnarray*}
\text{Vim vee vim vee vim vim vim}
\end{eqnarray*}
Use these warm-ups to promote and foster pure vowel formation when singing.

**Sustained vowels:**

![Musical notation with the text: "Ah - leh - loo - ee - yah"](image)

**Vowel placement:**

![Musical notation with the text: "Shoo - ee shoo - ee shoo - ee shoo - ee shoo"](image)

![Musical notation with the text: "Doo - bee doo - bee doo - bee doo - bee doo - bee doo - bee doo"](image)

*Tip:* Make sure the corners of the mouth stay tucked in for these exercises.
PART-SINGING

Use these warm-up exercises to help prepare your choir to sing in parts. Start with 2-part, then work your way up to 4-part harmony.

**Major scale (may be sung in 2-, 3-, or 4-part canon)**

\[\text{Do re mi fa sol la ti do} \]
1 2 3 etc. or neutral syllable

**Minor scale (may be sung in 2-, 3-, or 4-part canon)**

\[\text{La ti do re mi fa sol la} \]
1 2 3 etc. or neutral syllable

\[\text{La sol fa mi re do ti la} \]
8 7 6 etc. or neutral syllable
Major scale, ascending and descending (may be sung in 2-, 3-, or 4-part canon)

Do re mi fa sol la ti do ti la sol fa mi re do
1 2 3 etc. or neutral syllable

Scale degrees, sung on numbers (may be sung in 2-, 3-, or 4-part canon)
Tallis’ Canon (may be sung in 2-, 3-, or 4-part harmony) — Thomas Tallis

Use text from “All Praise to you, My God, This Night” or the “Doxology”
Jubilate Deo (may be sung in 2-, 3-, or 4-part harmony)

Michael Praetorius

A great way to transition from warm-ups to repertoire!
Remind your choir to sing with pure, tall, rounded vowels.
Use these warm-ups to promote smooth, lyrical singing, phrase-shaping, and agility in the voice.

**Phrase shape:**

```
C4 D5 E5 F5 G5 A5 G5 E5 D5 C4

Al - le - lu - i - a

C4 D5 E5 F5 G5 A5 G5 E5 D5 C4

Zee____ zah____ zoo_____
vee____ vah____ voo_____
```

**Agility:**

```
C4 D5 E5 F5 G5 A5 G5 E5 D5 C4

Doo________ lee_________ doo_____
```
Minor mode:

\[ \text{\textbf{Na neh nee no noo}} \]

Legato:

\[ \text{\textbf{Doo dah dee doo dah dee doo dah dee doo}} \]

Stepwise motion:

\[ \text{\textbf{Do - na\, no - bis\, pa - cem.}} \]
Use these warm-up exercises to warm up the voice, tongue, and lips, and prepare your choir to sing crisp, clear consonants.

Double consonants:

Flee flee flee flee flee flee
Plea plea plea plea plea plea
Flee flee flah
Shoo-la loo-la loo-la loo
“s” or “t” sounds:

```
\begin{tikzpicture}
\node at (0,0) {\texttt{\textbackslash{\LaTeX}} code for musical notation};
\end{tikzpicture}
```

```
\texttt{Sip saw sip saw sip saw sip saw soo_________}
\texttt{Tip taw tip taw tip taw tip taw too_________}
```

“f” sounds:

```
\begin{tikzpicture}
\node at (0,0) {\texttt{\textbackslash{\LaTeX}} code for musical notation};
\end{tikzpicture}
```

```
\texttt{Fum fee fum fee fum fee fum fee foh___________}
```

“y” sounds:

```
\begin{tikzpicture}
\node at (0,0) {\texttt{\textbackslash{\LaTeX}} code for musical notation};
\end{tikzpicture}
```

```
\texttt{Yee yeh yah yoh yoo}
```

“p” sounds:

```
\begin{tikzpicture}
\node at (0,0) {\texttt{\textbackslash{\LaTeX}} code for musical notation};
\end{tikzpicture}
```

```
\texttt{Pah pah pah pah pah}
```

Tongue Twister:

```
\begin{tikzpicture}
\node at (0,0) {\texttt{\textbackslash{\LaTeX}} code for musical notation};
\end{tikzpicture}
```

```
\texttt{Summer sooner summer sooner summer sooner summer sooner summer sooner sum}
```
**A FEW TIPS**

**Mix it up.** Take a familiar pattern and mix up the syllables. Use different consonants or vowels, based on the music you are working on. Add dynamics. Choose special exercises for one or two sections of your choir.

**Pull from the repertoire.** Create your own warm-ups with melodic or rhythmic patterns from pieces your choir is singing (or a piece you plan to introduce!). Think of challenging intervals, melodic lines, or text that may be challenging to sing. Be creative!

**Choose a variety of exercises.** Spend 5–7 minutes at the beginning of rehearsal touching on several different choral singing skills. Choose 3–4 exercises from different categories. Do some faster, upbeat patterns to get the voice moving. Do a slower, drawn out pattern to reinforce good breath support. Sing an exercise that focuses on vowels, then one that focuses on consonants, etc.
MORE RESOURCES

Pick 'n' Mix Warm-Ups for Choirs
The Value of Unison Warm-Ups
SFFS Children's Chorus Warm-Ups
Meaningful Vocal Development through Purposeful Choral Warm-Ups
The Ultimate Guide to Children’s Choir Warm-Ups
Breathing Exercises for Choirs of All Ages
10 Choral Warm-Ups for Children
The Voice, Warm-Ups, and Vocal Technique
The Art of the Vocal Warm-Up
About Ashley

Ashley Danyew is a church musician, music educator, writer, and creative entrepreneur. She received a B.A. in Music from the University of Georgia and completed an M.M. and Ph.D. in Music Education at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. She also received the Certificate in Arts Leadership from Eastman’s Institute for Music Leadership.

Ashley teaches piano and writes a blog for church musicians and music educators (www.ashleydanyew.com) where she creates and shares practical, digital resources and online training courses to help people in their music ministry and teaching.

She lives with her husband, Steve and their rescue dog, Rory in Rochester, NY.