

Working with vocal ensembles, part III

In my two previous articles I have shared some guidelines which could prove helpful at the start of our work with vocal ensembles. One of the priorities I have mentioned was even, uniform sound. I have also said that at start the ensemble should sing in unison as much as possible, so that our vocalists concentrate on proper vocal technique and are not required to tackle the issues of polyphonic singing. When we are certain that our ensemble has acquired even sound, and every vocalist is conscious of their own voice, only then can we try polyphonic singing. There are many ways to introduce this next element - one of them, which I particularly value, is singing canons. Their advantage is that everyone is learning the same melody and can still focus on what is very important at this stage - vocal technique leading to the even sound of the entire ensemble. Despite the fact that the entire ensemble will effectively sing the same thing, the form of canon will introduce some simple polyphonic structures (at this point I would like to emphasise one very important thing one more time: **uniform vocal technique and even sound is not equal to loss of individuality**). Of course, canon singing should be introduced only when we are sure that the main melody was properly mastered. Every canon can be performed in many ways by changing dynamics, articulation, key. The lyrics of a canon can also be replaced with syllables or vowels, depending on what we expect from our vocal ensemble and what tendencies or performance issues are present. Our goal is to make them sensitive to every musical element. I think that we should strive to a situation when polyphonic singing is done very consciously, not by automatically repeating learned melody patterns. Every singer should be aware of what they are singing - in all aspects. It is therefore preferable to start simple and achieve quicker progress, and not drown the vocalists in complicated harmonies which they will not understand and will not

draw satisfaction from performing. It is important that polyphonic singing is not associated with something difficult and stressful, but that it creates a feeling of joy from singing together. I am certain that appropriate pacing will yield results much faster than fulfilling often excessive ambition. Canon is a very simple form and I think that it is due to this fact that it is often neglected. But I believe that it almost always brings solely positive results. Of course, there are many canons which vary in difficulty. Below I would like to present several of them which I use very often when working with vocal groups. I wish you success!

Example 1.

opr. Piotr Markowski

Voice

Example 2.

words ad libitum

opr. Piotr Markowski

Voice

Example 3.

Once again

opr. Piotr Markowski

Swing

1 C G Am G/B C Dm G

Voice

Du - bi du - bi du - bi du - bi du - bi dup bi-du - Dup dup dup dup

6 C F G D7 G 2 C G

dup dup dup dup do it once a - gain and Sa - ba - da - ba - da - ba - da - ba sa - ba - da - ba - da - ba - da - ba

11 Am G/B C

Sab - bi dup bi - du - Sab du - bi - du - bi - du - bi Sab du - bi - du - bi - du - bi Du - wa

16 3

Do it now sa - ba - da - ba - da - ba Do do it Sab bi dup bi - du - Ba

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du - bi - du - wa Du - bi - da - Do it once a - gain and

Piotr Markowski