



The Making Of A Choral Group In A Community: A Panacea For Peace And Unity

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ABSTRACT

A choir is a group of people singing together. The choir is the oldest of all musical groups. Before humans thought of making musical instruments, they used their own voices to make music together. Choral music comes directly from the people and it has a powerful and emotional impact than instrumental music. It is quite moving to hear a choir throw their hearts into a song, singing in harmony, various types of songs in various pitches, high and low. The purpose of this paper is to examine the process of forming a choral group in an African society with a view to standardize its formation and to take it to the next level of development and patronage. This paper will give a brief history of choral music and provides for adequate knowledge available to communities who need to form choral groups in order to make music accessible to the society and how a good choral group can be assembled in a society outside the church organization to foster peace and unity.

Keywords: Choral, Music, Community, Panacea, Peace, Unity

INTRODUCTION

Before humans ever thought of making musical instruments, they had been using their voices to make music together. The simple definition of choral music is the singing together by a group of people. Although a complex style of choral music has developed in the history of musical development, it is the western musical cultures that have influenced various styles of choral music all around Africa. In the western concept, choral music is specifically written and performed by various groups of adults, children, women, men or both. Due to the colonization and the coming of the missionaries to Africa, the concept of choral music gained a powerful footing in the musical cultures of modern African societies. It is quite moving nowadays to hear an African choral group singing powerful emotional songs with great impact than any other music. The differences in pitches and melodic lines in a contrapuntal style produce the harmony. The difference in pitch makes the counterpoint harmonious with the different independent melodic tunes as each singer or group sings in various harmonic pitches that can be classified as Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass lines as the case may be.

The different ways of singing include solo, unison, harmony, or accapella style. Making music accessible is one thing that every society or community needs. Forming a choral group is essential. The purpose of this paper is to improve and provide solutions as panacea for peace in a modern society. It is worth noting that, there is no one way of forming or creating a choral group. However, the making of a choral group in a community depends largely on the determination and the emergent needs of such community.

Forming a Choral Group

Forming a choral group requires a strong advertising strategy and a well-developed program for singers to learn how to sing and grow. Friendship and love, passion and commitment must be established in the community and the focus must be well articulated.

Western choir or choral music effectively began in the 6th century A.D when Pope Gregory I, known as the Great, established song schools in the European Centre of Christianity in order to ensure the correct performances of liturgical music in the church. It was in the 16th and 17th centuries that the range of choral music was extended beyond the liturgy. Choral festivals became frequent in the 19th and 20th centuries. From the formation of western choirs until about the 12th century, the style or genre has been chant, motet, anthem, madrigal songs that were composed by great masters of church music like Giovanni da Palestrina until the Baroque period when outstanding music composers; such as Bach and Handel made remarkable points with their Oratorio and Cantata style of choral music.

In the sense of western music and choral music tradition, members of the communities forming the choral group must be willing to learn how to sight read and the interpretation of music sheet. They must be familiar with singing and principles of general musicianship attitudes that bring and keep alive the spirit of the songs inside and outside performance. Therefore, a workable strategy has to be worked out for the making of a choral group. For example, the role of the director or coordinator and the ability of the intended members have to be articulated. The space for training and rehearsals should be adequate. Suitability of the timing for training and rehearsal, future and immediate plans must be articulated adequately to enhance the benefits of good planning. Provision must be made ahead of time for the commencement of the programs.

Choir Master: The Role of Choirmaster

A choirmaster is a music director or a choir conductor, or someone who conducts, performs and supervises rehearsals. Below are qualifications of a Music Director or Choirmaster:

- (1) He must be anyone that has basic knowledge of music.
- (2) A visionary personality
- (3) He must be able to give a spiritual, personal and musical leadership.
- (4) He must be aware of the ability and unique nature of music to minister to people's spiritual and entertainment needs.
- (5) He must be aware of the potential of the good and evil attached to the power of music.

Personal Qualities of a Choir Master or Music Director

- (1) Sincerity and humility.
- (2) He must not desire musical directorship simply because of the authority he can exert over others.
- (3) He must love people of all ages.
- (4) He must develop a genuine friendship with each individual in his various groups.
- (5) A director must learn to sensitize himself and deal positively with it.
- (6) He must be sympathetic.
- (7) Neat, well groomed appearance.
- (8) Ability to inspire others.
- (9) He must have the attitude of good organization and promotional ability, humour, aggressiveness, and tactfulness.
- (10) The ability of poise, knowledge, naturally to command respect from those he leads.
- (11) He must learn to work in harmony with the society or community.
- (12) He must have the necessary innate musical ability.
- (13) He must be ready to learn and develop himself in every area in music development and performances.

Recruiting or Selection of Members of Choir or Choral Group

Membership of a choir or choral group usually starts with the activities of peer group who may have common aims and objectives to learn and improve their skill in choral music. Generally, such usually begins among church members, high school graduates or among a group of local musicians or professional colleagues whose interest is common and identical purpose. For example Prof. Laz Ekwueme's choral group, Lagos City Society Choral Group, University of Jos Choral Group and a host of others.

The condition of recruiting a member in this case is basically based on the musicianship of the member. Although, spiritual and other conditions may be used as criteria of being a member of a choral group. There should be announcement and a date for auditioning fixed date for selection of new and qualified candidates. On no account should a person be begged to become a member of a choral group. From the onset, they should be told that membership of a choral group is not a license for displaying individual talents. Rather, it is the blending of many talents and personalities into a composite force that has unusual possibilities for providing spiritual/musical inspiration to enhancing the growth and development of choral musical tradition that brings unity and service to enhance human development and dignity in the society.

Some of the qualities that should be looked for and encouraged among members are as follows:

- (1) In general any action or attitude that will dampen the enthusiasm of the present or future of the choral group should not be allowed to flourish among the members.
- (2) Unfriendly attitudes towards other members.
- (3) Forming of cliques within the group.
- (4) All the qualities of a potential director should be identified and encouraged among members.

In developing and maintaining the group morale and interest, the director should purposely try to maintain a relaxed, friendly relationship with his choir. He must exhibit a sense of seriousness and businesslike attitude and this should be evident in the way the director conducts and manages time and resources of the group.

In an organization, a choral group needs a patron or matron. There is need for a constitution and byelaws that governs the group. Because of the enormous administrative and complex nature of a choral group, there is the need to have persons and members to function along with the director for good administration. For example, the post of a President, Vice President, who handles the administration in the absence of the President, a Secretary, Treasurer, Librarian, Public Relations Officer, and a Social Welfare Officer, Costumes Officer. Generally, the first part of getting people interested in a choral program is in making sure that it is going to be exciting, entertaining, educational and profitable in all its ramifications. The director then calls for an audition. He chooses the members by evaluating their potential vocal ability as compared to his expectations. He then listens to each singer sing and determine their range and vocal quality to properly balance the voices between all parts – Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass. The main purpose of choral group is towards building a community in harmony. The fun and joy of achieving this aim must be emphatically in learning and singing songs that promote harmony and unity in the community. Furthermore, directors and members must be excited and make this a big part of their lives.

Members of the choral group and communities must look forward and expect performances in which new friends are made, leading to a close community built on healthy rapport establishing peace and unity, that brings development to the community. The group can achieve much of these in choosing appropriate costumes for every performance. The music repertoire must include traditional, classical, and technical songs of interest to the community. A good balance will boost their confidence and expand the unity and peaceful development in the society.

To achieve these aims and objectives, the director of the group should prepare a detailed rehearsal plan. He should discuss the music with the backup instrumentalist as the case may be. More time can be spent on making sure notes, diction, phrasing and rhythmic patterns are given proper interpretation. The choral group is to shape the sound, use it to bring understanding, entertainment

and unity to the people. Therefore, proper articulations of good rehearsal that brings good performances must be adhered to. For example, the director must make sure all his cuing, beats, patterns, facial expressions and ictus points are well recognized by the members. In other words, good performance depends on a good rehearsal and good singing technique, proper breathing and posture, which should significantly help to put the group in a true performance mood that presents itself to the audience and unites the singers with the people present experiencing joy, pathos, exhilaration, comedy, emotionally and spiritual upliftment. By this, the group experiences and gives out more musical menu than we would normally feel on a regular day or time. Once this is done and these technical aspects are rightly handled, the spirit of communicating and sharing joy and peace will then be the ultimate goal. When this happens, words will spread and the group performances will start attracting people and soon consciously or unconsciously what Plato says about music will begin to happen and its positive impacts will surely enhance peace and unity in such a community. "Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and to everything" (Plato).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, choral singing is a multifunctional activity that involves a combination of social, effective, cognitive and physical aspects that may confer additional health benefits, social benefits and peace building. In other words, the formation of a choral group and its activities are a formidable panacea to the problem of individualism, segregation, marginalization, crisis in various communities that breeds distrust and disunity.

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