NPM News

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PASTORAL MUSICIANS ARCHDIOCESE OF KANSAS CITY IN KANSAS AND KANSAS CITY/ ST JOSEPH

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ZOOM MEETINGS

Board Meetings: Separate MO/KS — **Aug**

Open Chapter Meeting All Members — **Sep**

Contact a Chapter Director (above) or Kristen Beeves at Npm2.kcks@gmail.com to receive email notifications for our Zoom meetings

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

HANG UP OUR HARPS…OR LIVE IN JOYFUL HOPE

Back in March, newly "distanced" and working from home, I happily put together plans for the July issue of our local NPM Newsletter. By June, those plans seem completely overcome by events. We finally were able to open our church, St. Joseph in Shawnee, KS, to a physical assembly the first weekend in June, but they are an assembly that is not allowed to sing. In the spirit of Vatican II's call for full, conscious and active participation by the assembly, rather than have our parishioners physically present, but silenced for their part of the Mass, we are not having any sung prayer. The future of choirs gathering again and ministering at liturgy seems bleak and far in the future. Talking about ways to sing more beautifully, choose repertoire or any of the topics that interest us at a normal time, seems fruitless.

By the streams of Babylon, we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.
On the aspens of that land,
we hung up our harps. Ps 137:1-2.

Or did we? I hope that few of you have hit the lows of depression during this COVID crisis, or, if you have, that you have been able to come out of your slump with the help of prayer, family and friends, rather than complaining, alcohol and sweets. Our former English translation of the Mass included the beautiful phrase, "as we wait in joyful hope." As we make our way through this new, greatly altered liturgical world, put that thought front and foremost. We must continue to live in hope that our fears about spreading COVID will ease. We hope and trust that our medical and scientific community will be able to ascertain facts about transmission rather than supposition, and that new and improved treatment to quickly and completely heal those who are hit hard by the virus is developed without delay, in addition to creating an effective and safe vaccine.

Scripture and prayer have benefited me greatly, particularly at this time. I normally attend Mass daily, and the Scripture chosen by the Church never fails to give me at least one line of inspiration for the day. When I feel too weak to creatively solve issues, or do my daily work, I read:

On the day I called, you answered me;
you increased the strength of my soul. Ps 128:3

On the days when I wonder how far off the time might be when we can again all praise God in sung prayer without fearing disease, I read:

Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth…
Come before God, singing for joy. Ps 100:1
Sing a psalm to God's name, who is gracious. Ps 135:3
I will sing of your faithful love, O Lord, forever. Ps 89:2

How CAN we sing a song to the Lord in this foreign, masked land? Maybe not this moment, but we have sung our praise, love and hope in our God for thousands of years. We must trust that our gifts will again be put to His use.

(Hang Up Our Harps continued on page 5)

How to Achieve Mastery and Find Joy in Practicing by Kevin Vogt, Part II

In my last article, "How to Make the Most of Limited Practice Time," I suggested practicing as little as possible for the next urgent event, and only those things that you don't already know well. I also suggested using the majority of whatever time you have allocated for practice to a longer-term project that presents a musical and technical challenge—not for the sake of that challenge, but in order to practice leisure, that experience of finding life-giving joy in what you are doing rather than focusing on a secondary end. The ability to find and sustain joy—to be at leisure—is the prerequisite state for worship. Mastery is a part of the process of sustaining joy.

How can we find and sustain joy? In his book, *The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness,* psychologist Edward Hallowell describes a five-part process that he has observed through his clinical work with people with ADHD, who rather than being "deficient" in attentiveness often have a heightened capacity for attentiveness:

- Connection—a safe environment, often involving safe human relationships
- Play—exploration within the safety of boundaries, in which is discovered that which is virtuously pleasurable

(Practice Time continued on page 3)

St. Rose Philippine Duchesne, St. Cecilia and St. Gregory, pray for us!

THE AGING VOICE by Barbara Leyden

What to do with a problem aging voice in your choir is a frequent question and workshop presentation topic. The questioner or the singer herself generally wants that instant solution—a quick fix. The most obvious and intrusive vocal timbre is the wide, slow, wobbling vibrato. This problem is most noticeable, it seems, in women's voices--the wobbling soprano is the cliché of a voice that ruins the choral sound or psalmist/song-leader ministry. Lack of air is another frequent problem, not as noticeable in a group setting, but bothersome to the solo singer who cannot phrase as they wish.

Research has shown that singers of all ages respond to effective voice training. Physiology and exercise research shows that an older person loses muscle tone more quickly than a young person, but the older person's body responds to exercise in the same way as a young person. Bottom line: a healthy body and a healthy singing technique will keep you happily singing your entire life. But unfortunately, poor technique hinders the older person's voice even more than when they were younger and ill health ruins the singing voice.

Vibrato has been researched and discussed intensely. In my own voice, vibrato is most affected by air and vocal cord pressure combined with tongue position and tension along with hard palate space behind the tongue.

The only "instant fix" seems to be moving the sound forward in the mouth, by the teeth, and ensuring that the singer's tongue is relaxed and positioned properly for the vocal register. The following exercises should help your entire choir, not just older singers.

Have the singer(s) stretch their tongue completely out of their mouth, then relax it, then put the tip behind their bottom teeth and roll some of the tongue forward, nearly outside the mouth. Have them sing each separate vowel on one pitch, starting with the tongue well forward. Next add having them lower the back of the tongue and raise the soft palate. There will be a sweet spot where the singer sounds bright and clear with minimal vibrato. This sweet spot will be different in widely different ranges, and also in the vocal "break" area.

Also try singing one vowel on one pitch at a time, beginning with the sound completely in the nose, keeping the tongue forward by the bottom teeth. Gradually raise the soft palate (yawn feeling) until the sound is full and rich, but again with minimal vibrato. Adding some nasal resonance can be especially helpful in a woman's lower and transitional pitch ranges. (i.e.) the "break."

The purpose of the frequently-done warm-up of singing "hung—ah" on pitches is for this same purpose—the" hung" incorporates nasal resonance but the singer needs to be aware of tongue position and keeping some, but not all, of the nasality in the "hung" as you transition to the open vowel. This exercise should be done on all vowels: a, e, i, o, u and more.

Our voice can sound nasal if the sound is sent through the soft palate to the nasal passages, but when the soft palate is rigidly closed the voice also can sound "nasal," i.e., like a person who has a bad cold. Experiment to see where your soft palate is. If you can't feel it internally or by listening, look in the mirror and see where your uvula—the piece of flesh that hangs from the soft palate, is. Practice singing while looking in a mirror until you can sense and hear the position of your soft palate.

The purpose of the "ee/Y-ah" vocalize is also to bring the tongue forward (for the ee) then relax or open slightly behind the tongue on the "ah," "oh," etc. If choral singers are made to sing these exercises too quickly, they will not be able to move the tongue or resonance to the "sweet spot." Try sustaining the "ee" a bit longer and keep your tongue forward in the "ee" while adding the "ah." Choral vocal work or "warm-ups" are often done too quickly and can be counterproductive. Working with these exercises on a particular chord or phrase that your choir is singing helps intonation and blend.

Air and vocal cord pressure are more difficult to explain through words only. Vibrato on a wind instrument can be controlled by the diaphragm relaxing and tightening and can also affect singing vibrato. If you play even the humble soprano recorder, you can experiment with adding vibrato to the normally straight tone of that instrument, and then transferring that sensation to your singing. In ensemble singing a wide, faster- or slower-than-normal vibrato will not blend with others in the group. In the interest of time, choir directors either audition their singers and only allow singers with a blending vibrato in the group, or they require the singers to eliminate vibrato. As a quick fix, try placing a singer with an objectionable, non-blending vibrato near a singer who does exhibit the sound you desire, and then ask singer number one to blend with singer number two.

Tightening your vocal cords and singing a thin, softer, yet very intense tone will eliminate vibrato. I have my singers sing with "the softest, most excited tone" they can produce. Imagining that you are singing a wonderful secret sometimes works. This works for people who don't have a strong air/vocal cord connection.

The underlying problem for some singers is excess tension. For these people, asking them to attempt singing a very breathy tone, or starting a sung pitch with whispering first, will help them relax their vocal cords. Other people need to consciously tighten their vocal folds by groaning or sounding a guttural "ah, ah" helps them to sense their tight vocal folds and then tighten/relax. This technique is similar to relaxation therapy where the client consciously tightens each limb and then relaxes it.

Breathing exercises will help all singers. Exercises that encourage good posture and strengthen the muscles involved in breathing should be incorporated into every rehearsal. Singers who do not engage in regular exercise will especially need this routine. Controlled staccato singing and panting (on perhaps repeated "f," "sh," "s," or "ch," exercises engage the abdominal muscles, diaphragm, rib intercostals and muscles of the back. Exercises based on blowing, puffing, hissing and chanting are useful in developing supported exhalation. Sighing, first on a single pitch, then extended to sighing from high to low is the next step.

After experimenting with a relaxed and forward tongue and palate space, again start with a single pitch and vowel and sing repeated notes, "bouncing" a few pitches with a slow and relaxed staccato and then sustaining. Another technique is to groan the pitch and then relax the vocal cords or the diaphragm to see how it affects the vibrato. Advanced level breath/phonation exercises are buzzing the lips (lip trills) or, even more difficult, a sustained rolling of the tongue through musical phrases or vocalizes. Lip and tongue trills will demonstrate tongue stiffness and gaps in breath pressure.

The vocal trill is stylistic in much Renaissance, Baroque and Romantic music. These cannot be sung unless the vocal folds are sufficiently relaxed to be flexible and alternate pitches rapidly. The diaphragm also helps with the rapid fluctuation. Working on these in individual voice lessons may help with vibrato issues, as the singer gains command of this multi-faceted physical challenge. the phrase, and standing for long periods of time; are all positive and essential to good physical, spiritual and mental health.

(Aging Voice continued on page 6)

(Practice Time continued from page 1)

- Practice—the repetition of those things that are virtuously pleasurable
- Mastery—the result of practice
- Affirmation—he sense of belonging to a larger community of those who have achieved similar mastery, a new environment of safe relationships in which the process continues and expands

It is easy to see how this model might be applied to leading or teaching others, but how might it apply to the solitary work of keyboard practice?

Create a safe environment within yourself. In his very easy read on conquering performance anxiety, *The Inner Game of Tennis*, Timothy Galway described two "selves:" "Self 1" being the analytic, judging part of our mind that can sometimes hold us back or even paralyze ourselves if the judgment is focused on oneself; and "Self 2" being the subconscious part of our mind that simply knows how to perform every simple and complex thing that we have practiced and mastered. Keep Self 1 focused on the music and not on you. Eliminate all the negative self-talk that gnaws away at your self-esteem. The only job of Self 1 is to observe and analyze what's going on and to troubleshoot solutions. Self 1 has no business in judging you!

Make a game out of it. Mary Poppins was right! A spoonful; of sugar does help the medicine go down. This is where breaking problems down into small pieces can be helpful to "define your sandbox." Start with the last measure! Maybe it's just a single chord on a whole note. Turn on your metronome (slowly) and play the last chord precisely on time. You did it perfectly the first time? Great. Do it again! Enjoy the glory of that last chord. Take victory lap! Actually, do everything at least three times (once, twice, three-times a lady—to quote Lionel Ritchie—or better yet, once each for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!) Whatever you do, set yourself up to do it perfectly the first time, and then repeat that rather than repeating mistakes (which gives Self 1 and the devil a chance to attack you.) Then add the previous measure, and the previous and so forth. What a great game!

Practice the game. The cool thing about playing the backwards game is that, as you play, you keep going over more and more familiar territory. The more you repeat it, the more enjoyment you have. Quite the opposite the hard labor of plowing into unfamiliar territory.

Mastery is discovered, not achieved. Once the game is finished for the day, you will discover that you have practiced something, and that something has been mastered. The most important thing that has been mastered, however, is not the musical *product*, but the process of sustaining joy. That is the real gift given to you and that you have available to share with others in your music.

Affirmation is presence and belonging. Having been attentive to the music, and the process of enjoying it deeply, you have created the safe internal environment to come back another day. You sense that you belong to a company of others who have known the joy that comes with musical discipline, which is an awful lot like Christian discipleship.

Filtering Wedding Music Choices through Ritual Intention by Chloë Stodt

**Although written in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the observations in this article apply to pandemic-free liturgies celebrated according to Church norms.*

How many of us, when assisting couples in choosing fitting music for their weddings (or any liturgy, for that matter), ask the question, "What is the intention of the Rite at this moment?" Thirteen years removed from the publication of *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (2007) and three and one-half years since the mandated implementation of the English translation of *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (2016), the cultural pressures of commercialism and individualism continue to influence liturgical music recommendations and choices – and I confess I'm not totally immune. But there is help if we look no farther than the rituals under our noses. Let's look at the revised Order of Celebrating Matrimony *within Mass*.

For us as musicians, the most obvious changes in the revised marriage rites are:

- Better-defined options for the entrance procession
- Prescription for an entrance chant/song/antiphon for either entrance form
- The Gloria is sung/said
- New (congregational) acclamation after the Reception of Consent
- Optional (congregational) hymn/canticle of praise after the Blessing and Giving of Rings

(Chant notation is provided for the Nuptial Blessing)

I'll comment only briefly on each of the above, except for the Nuptial Blessing.

I find that most couples still expect a traditional processional order that affords the bride a "special," almost separate, entrance. But the rite offers several options. Perhaps the *most liturgical* of these might be: ministers, attendants, parents, couple. ONE festive piece of instrumental music accompanying this order communicates the one entrance, and its unitive purpose, that is envisioned by the entrance procession at every Sunday liturgy. If most guests are regular churchgoers, a familiar hymn may instead be sung by all. In my experience, this works best when the assembly is made up of a tightly knit group of friends, family, and local parishioners – not so much with more religiously diverse groups.

If instrumental processional music (either one or two pieces, depending on processional order) is played, the rite calls for the recitation/singing of the entrance antiphon. Three antiphon options are given in the Commons section of Roman Missal, 3rd ed., V: For the Celebration of Marriage. Paul Turner writes, "If there is no sung music at the beginning, then the antiphon needs to be recited. This can be done by the priest, a reader, or a small group. If the words are put into a worship aid, the entire community could recite them together immediately after the procession."[1] Alternatively, an opening hymn following an instrumental processional may serve as the "entrance chant."

(Wedding Music continued on page 5)

Tips for Leading from the Keyboard

The following information was compiled for a local NPM workshop in March of 2020. The lively discussion, led by Matthew Baumler and Barbara Leyden helped solidify the tips. First, these eight areas were identified. Details are added below.

- Accuracy
- Lift
- Tempo
- Volume
- Simplify to assist
- Support the appropriate mood of the text
- Always listen
- Repeat assembly hymns often

Accuracy:

If you play the wrong melody note or rhythms, the singers will follow you

Check to see if your hands and fingers are striking the keyboard together and not unintentionally rolling, which does not lead as strongly.

Lift:

1. After the introduction, 2. between verse and refrain, 3. where all should breathe, 4. before a triplet or to make a 16th- note sharp, quick and clean, 5. between repeated notes (organ)

Know the text phrasing so you can breathe/lift/detach with the assembly. Not all verses are articulated the same. Know the text of each verse as often syllables fall on different notes or beats (e.g. "I am the Bread of Life") and play the notes as they are to be sung.

THINK LIKE A SINGER. Leading means to be first focused on the text, not the harmonization. Lifting for consonants like p/b, k and t sung by the choir or cantor both allows them to be heard and leads the cantor/choir to articulate them rhythmically and accurately.

Lift at the ends of phrases correctly and don't extend the length because your cantor is sustaining too long—they will just continue and make the note even longer.

Look for the unnotated rest at the ends of phrases. The music often has a dotted half note when it is really a half note, followed by a quarter rest; or the music has a half note when it is truly a quarter note followed by a quarter rest—especially in the cantor/assembly music.

Tempo:

Keyboardists set and sustain congregational tempos and breathe life into the words.

Tempo is determined by: the length of the phrase, how long the average untrained singer can comfortably sing, the acoustics of the room. Sing the hymn without any accompaniment and find the naturally best tempo.

The tempo of the introduction must be the SAME as the tempo of the song that follows.

Maintain a steady beat (have you practiced with a metronome lately?) Although slight easing of the tempo at the end of a hymn, or slightly less at the end of a verse, may be helpful.

Put in metered and predictable pauses at the ends of verses that do not end with a rest so all can breathe together. Sometimes they are notated with fermatas; other times, not. Examples are "All Praise and Glad Thanksgiving "(GOTT VATER SEI GEPRIESEN) and "All Hail, Adored Trinity "(OLD HUNDREDTH). Extending the final quarter note to a half followed by a beat of rest for the breath usually works well.

A fast tempo does not guarantee the liveliness of a hymn—it is deft use of accent, silence and dynamics that make a tune joyful and buoyant.

Many church hymns that are notated in ¾ meter are actually in 6/8. Publishers possibly think it will be easier for musicians to read, but the accent pattern of downbeat/upbeat is very different. Energy and liveliness comes from accenting the downbeat and rising through the upbeat, rather than speed.

(Tips continued on page 7)

HAVE YOU PRACTICED TODAY?

(Hang Up Our Harps continued from page 1)

When I am battered by the anguish, anger and seemingly unsolvable intractability of continued racial prejudice—a problem we have been attempting to rectify for now hundreds of years, I read:

I sing a song of faithful love and justice: I raise a psalm to you, O Lord. Ps 101:1
There is hope for your future; I will gather you together and bring you home. (Antiphon, morning prayer June 27)

The June/July issue of Pastoral Music, NPM National's magazine, includes many helpful and positive articles for us. Our NPM president, Steve Petrunak, wrote an encouraging column, "finding calm in a challenging time." Challenging, indeed! He closes his article with, "In the end, in the words of Julian of Norwich, all shall be well." Trust that all shall be well.

If you aren't a member of NPM, you will not be able to read the magazine. Consider joining this year if you are financially able. Unfortunately, many church musicians don't have a job, so membership dues may be beyond reach. This current issue also contains information on how to create a virtual choir, a beautiful article on how our liturgy normally immerses us in all the senses—taste, touch and smell. Our live-streamed Masses, although certainly better than not joining in communal prayer, lack all but sight and sound and are immeasurably lessened by this loss. Another article shares memories of Ray Repp and the impact he had on post-Vatican II liturgy.

Catching up on professional reading is one of the positives of our COVID isolation. I hope many of our readers were able to make this a time of growth. Although we would rather be back fulfilling our call to minister through music in full force, you may still have time. Planning too far in the future seems futile with liturgical requirements and restrictions changing frequently. Instead, most of us were forced to learn more about technology than we ever wished—between live-streaming, posting online worship aids, Power Points, Zoom meetings and classes, and virtual choirs. I used the time to organize and inventory 1300-plus titles of our parish choral music, so now if someone asks, "do you have copy of….I can see or borrow," I can find it. Extra time for prayer and spiritual reading helps make real the psalmist's plea to "strengthen my soul," as well as guide us with God's Wisdom.

The articles included in this issue are fruits of the time and my focus during isolation. The "Tips for Leading from the Keyboard" were compiled for our local NPM meeting March 7 at Good Shepherd, Smithville, MO. "Help for the Aging Voice" includes a personal focus and vocal technique understanding I developed while singing vocal jazz the past two years. Kevin Vogt continues his article from last issue on "How to Make the Most of Limited Practice Time" with "How to Achieve Mastery and Find Joy in Practicing." Chloë Stodt writes an informative article on wedding music. Finally, the editor attempts to summarize and separate COVID and singing fact from fiction. Read. Enjoy. Pray. Trust. Love. Hope. *The Editor*

(Wedding Music continued from page 3)

Following the priest's introduction and welcome, the Gloria is now included because wedding Masses are viewed *at the same level of celebration as all Sundays, solemnities, and feasts.* How cool is that?! Again, in my own experience, singing the Gloria at wedding Masses works best with a refrain-verse setting led by the cantor. To include everyone, however, best practice may still be to recite this prayer, especially if a congregational opening hymn has just been sung. We limit sung options to two of the *most familiar* Mass settings within this parish.

The two added options for music occur within the Marriage Rite itself, and *are intended to give the assembly an active role in affirming the couple's promises.* Following the exchange of vows and reception of consent, the priest says "Let us bless the Lord" and all are supposed to respond "Thanks be to God." Without a worship aid, prior catechesis, or a clear invitation by the priest, however, the assembly's response is likely to be weak to nonexistent (i.e., only the priest saying the response). My clergy colleagues and I decided early on to invite a sung response ("Let us bless the Lord *in song*.") We've found the easiest (for the assembly) and most effective solution simply to repeat (one time) the same Alleluia used before the Gospel. I searched for other options within our parish hymn repertoire – familiar hymn refrains (e.g. "Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks . . .," "Glory and praise to our God…," "You are all we have. . .," "Bless the Lord, O my soul. . .," "Blessed be the name of the Lord…", etc.) have also proven to be easy and effective options. The priest could also use a simple tone to chant the invitation, with the assembly chanting the response.

The second music option with the Marriage Rite occurs after the Giving of Rings, and is again *intended to be sung by the assembly*, not by a soloist. Within the past 25 or so years, several fresh, new hymn texts specific to Christian weddings have emerged ("This Is a Miracle Moment," God of Love, Embrace Your People," "Love Has Brought Us Here Together," "God, in the Planning," When Love Is Found"). Most of these are set with meters that fit well-known (interdenominational) hymn tunes, such as LOBE DEN HERREN, HYMN TO JOY, HYFRYDOL, SLANE, BUNESSAN, KINGSFOLD, O WALY WALY, etc. Although some may be "tired" of these tunes, wedding assemblies are always going to contain some level of diversity, and it's good practice to rely on melodies that have stood the test of time in order to make it possible (hospitable) for the greatest number of people to participate.

These are just some of the practical and effective musical options we've employed at Holy Trinity (Lenexa). Readers may wish to re-read a print copy of Volume 40, No. 2 (January 2016) of *Pastoral Music* titled "Celebrating Matrimony" (not yet available online) for additional background and recommendations.

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1. Rev. Paul Turner, "The Revised Marriage Rite: An Overview of Changes to the Liturgy" in *Pastoral Liturgy* [November-December 2016], http://www.pastoralliturgy.org/resources/TheRiteofMarriage.pdf

(Aging Voice continued from page 2)

Vibrato often flies out of the choral blend as the singers run out of breath toward the end of the phrase or when singing louder than their technique will allow. Vocal exercises on a single pitch getting louder will demonstrate how far the singer can beautifully sing louder. When the vibrato becomes slow and/or wide, they have gone too far. "No pushing" is often heard in choir rehearsals. Singing crescendo/decrescendo exercises is very difficult, as singers get louder, but when trying to sing more softly, usually the air and cord pressure drops out completely unless they are well trained and concentrating.

Lung capacity does decline for most people as they age. Doing deep breathing exercises benefits good overall health, as well as helping maintain singing ability. Older singers may need to breathe more frequently; directors may need to plan more breaths for an older (or very young) group, and soloists need to plan well and get a good breath each time.

Chronic hoarseness can be a vocal problem throughout life. If it onsets at menopause, lower estrogen levels may be the issue. The vocal folds sometimes begin to absorb excess fluid because of the hormonal drop, which lowers the fundamental pitch a woman can sing, while perhaps lowering the upper range.

Various medications can also cause vocal issues. Antibiotics, antihistamines, hormones, diuretics, Vitamin C, aspirin and other anti-inflammatories have all been shown to negatively impact singing in some people. Excessive drying of the upper respiratory tract is the most common side effect. Singers need to keep a regimen of drinking plenty of water—an ounce for every two pounds of body weight is the recommendation for overall health, plus extra for aerobic exercise and singing. If you suspect that something you are taking is causing hoarseness, the only way to determine if that is the cause is to work with your doctor and stop taking it. If the symptoms stop, it is the medicine. Unfortunately, just like food sensitivities, this can be difficult to be sure, as multiple factors can be causing hoarseness, including allergies to various food or environmental irritants, unhealthy speaking or singing technique or acid reflux. Acid reflux can cause hoarseness, even if the person has not noticed a lot of burping. Some singers begin to habitually clear their throat which irritates the vocal folds, causing more drainage, so then more clearing, etc.

Finally, older age brings the challenge of reading glasses and hearing loss. Dim lighting is especially difficult for singers with vision loss, as is environmental noise. Hearing aids and hearing loss make it harder to separate outside sounds from what the singer needs to hear. For example, chatter by other choristers while the director is giving direction will prevent the hearing aid wearer from understanding.

Improving one's singing technique to allow continued enjoyment of the activity is important. Singing in a choir has been shown to improve quality of life for people of all ages, but especially seniors. The joy gained from working toward a common goal of beauty and praise for our Lord; the human and divine connection found while singing; and the physical conditioning earned while breathing deeply, exhaling slowly through the phrase and standing for long periods of time; are all positive and essential to good physical, spiritual and mental health.

Killing Me Softly With His Song? An attempt to find facts

One of the casualties of the COVID crisis is the loss of singing. Early on, a choir in Washington State had a rehearsal after which many singers became ill. Similar experiences of choirs spreading COVID as they met for performances occurred in Amsterdam, Berlin, and Yorkshire, England. The severity of illness and death for some who catch COVID causes many to try to prevent the spread at any cost. As Roberta Flack sang in the 70's, are we "killing me/others with his/our song?"

As an avid singer and choir director, I want to return to singing the Mass as soon as possible, continuing the tradition of centuries of worship. The attempt to find facts and to research results and evaluations is difficult, and certainly difficult to do without letting one's own bias unduly sway the discussion. Researching science is difficult, as the nature of research is to postulate theories, discuss them, argue over the results and review each others' experiments and validate or invalidate the results. We in particular are unable to completely "trust the science" right now, as this virus is new, and there is very little research on how singing and playing instruments spreads the virus. Not one, mutually-agreed-upon answer exists for some aspects.

Most researchers agree the virus is spread to others via respiratory droplets that get into other people's respiratory areas—nose, mouth and eyes, in sufficient numbers to cause illness. The recipient's immune system may or may not be able to fight off smaller amounts. No one knows how much COVID it takes to infect the average person. Droplets are spread by unprotected sneezing, coughing or talking/singing loudly with a lot of saliva spewing. Some people have spread more than others as a natural factor of their physiology during research, the so-named "super spreaders." No one knows the how, why or who of these people.

The major unknown question as it regards singing and wind instruments is whether or not aerosols also can carry the virus in sufficient quantity to infect another. Aerosols are smaller than droplets, but, because of their tiny size they tend to hang in the air and infect a room over time. **We don't know if aerosols spread COVID but it seems likely.** Meanwhile, because the disease can be so vicious for some, while others don't know they have it and go around infecting others, we live in caution with our singing and wind instruments.

IF aerosols carry the virus, physics experiments show that aerosols are dispersed more in a larger room, with air flow bringing in fresh and pushing out old air, or outside, particularly if there is a breeze. Physical distancing doesn't help very much, as the aerosols fill a closed, stagnant space regardless of how far away the speaker/singer is. Speaking spreads aerosols at possibly the same rate as singing—so large groups speaking prayers together would fill the room perhaps just as much as if they were singing the prayers.

Since droplets carry the virus, preventing one person's droplets from touching another is helped by physical distance, face masks or shields. Washing hands frequently and not touching your eyes, nose and mouth help in case droplets were picked up on surfaces, although some research and the CDC now say that it is unlikely one will be infected from a surface. Mask-wearing by everyone is now proving to be one of the best preventatives for aerosols and droplets.

(Killing Me continued on page 7)

(Tips continued from page 4)

Volume:

Instrumental musicians are to lead and support singing without dominating or overpowering it. (From Sing to the Lord # 41). Assembly members need to be able to hear themselves and their neighbor singing—if they cannot, the music leadership is too loud.

Use volume as a signal that it is the assembly's turn to sing. The basic plan for all organists should be to play on the swell or choir manuals choosing a soft volume for your space under the cantor. Then, as the standard practice, the organist switches to the great when the assembly enters. This practice works well for any responsorial psalm, Gospel Acclamation, communion antiphon with refrain, or hymn with solo cantor on the verses and all present joining in on the refrain.

Play softer/louder on the piano to achieve the same purpose as above.

If an instrumental ensemble is present, the guitars, bass and other instruments should not play (or play softly) during the solo cantor parts, but instead enter as a cue for the assembly, especially for the repeat of the refrain the first time. Solo instrument parts can cover the initial proclamation of the refrain, hindering assembly participation.

Simplify to assist:

If the assembly seems tentative on a hymn they may not sing as often, or if it is a new hymn, the accompaniment needs simplifying so the melody can be easily followed. Leave out the alto note in particular, or some of the extra eighth-note frills in a contemporary arrangement. Play the melody note only, or those pitches in octaves.

Adding clear, rhythmic bass pedal or left-hand octave notes help lead a quicker tempo.

Keyboard arrangements for hymns must sometimes be adapted for single keyboard/cantor leadership, particularly when the composer writes a note higher than the melody. Members of the assembly will learn the wrong pitch and may consistently sing it incorrectly.

Support the text: Vary the sound of the accompaniment on the verses, according to the words. "Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume, breathes a life of gathering gloom," begs a different instrumental color from "Glorious now behold Him arise?" Similarly, verses three and four of "Lord of the Dance" are a different mood from verse five.

An exception to simplifying is to add the "missing" guitar strumming pattern on hymns that were written with the guitar in mind. Those types of rhythms are difficult and messy to notate, so sometimes they are left out. Playing them on the piano when needed to create rhythmic pulse (not replicating an entire guitar down, up/down pattern, but occasionally) helps. O'Connor's "Seek the Lord" refrain is an example of this.

Listen:

Listening to the assembly is paramount and part of a trifecta of attention: (1) the correct notes played in the correct, singable tempo; 2) the cantor, choir or conductor who is part of your ministerial combo, and (3) the assembly. The keyboard player first has the music sounding correctly in their inner hearing and reproduces it.

Depending on the situation, the keyboard player is either following the conductor's lead, conducting the choir from the keyboard, or leading and supporting a song leader.

If the keyboardist is leading alone or with a single cantor, listening to the assembly is especially important. Liturgical musicians are capable of multi-tasking to the highest level.

Repeat often:

Assembly members come to pray, not to learn new music.

As new music is introduced, listen and see how well the assembly is singing before changing it. New music will take several weeks for the assembly to learn, and they may not sing a new Mass setting well until the second time it is scheduled. Introducing a new hymn for a season is a good rule of thumb.

(Killing Me Softly continued from page 6)

One research example is a 2003 SARS COV-1 study—an airplane flew with one sick passenger and everyone within seven feet got sick with SARS. That study is one of the bases for the six-feet physically distanced guidelines and seems to reinforce the droplet as a means of spreading at least that corona virus mutation.

One has to have the virus to spread it. Obviously, anyone with symptoms must stay away from others. So the first thought was that choirs could take temperatures and screen for symptoms every time the group gathers. The problem with COVID19 is that many people are asymptomatic and it now appears that people are likely MOST contagious the 24 hours or so before they show symptoms. Some research in China showed that asymptomatic people probably don't spread the disease, but, since it is impossible to know if someone is pre-symptomatic, screening is probably not that useful.

Two hairdressers at a Great Clips in Springfield, MO, unintentionally tested the protection of mutual mask-wearing. They cut hair for a week with active COVID—their symptoms were so mild they thought it was just the usual allergies. All 150 or so people were watched closely for the quarantine period and no one got COVID. Germany researched the difference in COVID spread between Jena, a city that mandated mask-wearing for everyone, and other similar cities. Their results also demonstrated the effectiveness of mutual mask-wearing in preventing disease spread.

As church musicians, it is likely not our decision whether or not the assembly or choir will be allowed to sing during Mass. At some point, though, we may be strongly encouraged to re-start our choral programs and directors will have to weigh the factors and decide, or at least make all the accommodations necessary to keep everyone as safe as possible.

(Killing Me Softly continued from page 8)

NPM CHAPTERS FOR THE DIOCESE OF KANSAS CITY/ ST JOSEPH AND THE ARCHDIOCESE OF KANSAS CITY IN KANSAS NEWSLETTER

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(Killing Me Softly continued from page 7)

The University of Colorado is currently undertaking research on the spread of aerosols that may help answer that question more clearly. They are replicating a German experiment that measured aerosol spread by singing and playing the various wind instruments. The Colorado experiment will also look at the aerosol spread by actors on stage, and then will study how to lessen the aerosol quantity in rehearsal and performance spaces. Neither research is looking at whether or not aerosols can carry the virus, so one hopes the medical scientific research community is studying that aspect, as that knowledge is critical—if aerosols DON'T spread the disease, then all of our worry and care are unnecessary. The German study, done by Dr. Christian Koehler, found that trained singers spread aerosols less than 18 inches in front of their mouth, trumpets and the other brass instruments only a few centimeters, and that the flute sent an "air jet" of personal air more than two meters away. Preliminary results of the Colorado study are to be released in July.

As bishops and pastors continue to guide our church re-opening, they will have to weigh various factors. Some questions to ask are:

- What is your community's herd immunity status? For example, in New York City, 25 % of the population now has antibodies. Since the infection rates in Kansas and Missouri are relatively low as a percentage of the population, fewer people have antibodies.
- What is your community's current rate of infection? If the disease is spreading like wildfire, your choristers are more likely to be pre-symptomatic. If there are no active cases, singing would be less dangerous.
- What is the general health of your choir and your assembly? High-risk populations that will more likely become very ill, need hospitalization or even die, include those over 65 or those of any age suffering from diabetes, high blood pressure, or chronic heart or lung disease. People with compromised immune systems are more likely to succumb.
- Are there effective treatments for those who become more ill? At first, this virus was new to every-doctor. Since then, treatments have improved. Presently there are three: an antiviral medicine, a biologic drug that suppresses the immune system for those in which an overactive immune system is damaging organs, and plasma containing COVID antibodies. These treatments are not available every where, especially if the number of cases at any one point in time exceeds hospital or medical personnel resources. And, of course, there is the much-hoped-for vaccine.

Initially COVID appeared to have a much higher Infection mortality rate than influenza. The number of deaths among those who contract the disease continues to lower as antibody testing increases and it is realized that many more people contracted the disease and either were asymptomatic or had a mild case. This developing information is one to watch.

Our dioceses stated there is to be no singing by the assembly. Kansas is now allowing the assembly to take their mask off while in the pews. If aerosols spread COVID, the assembly speaking the prayers will also spread the virus, whether or not they sing, and particularly if air flow is limited and the room is not very large. Continuing to have everyone wear masks through the Mass seems prudent.

Much of the information for this article came from Dr. Heather R. Nelson. Dr Nelson earned a PhD in vocal pedagogy and works as a church musician as well as a private voice teacher. Her website is a good source for links to studies, videos of aerosol transmission and more. You can find it at www.drheathernelson.com. She summarizes various studies or articles at the same address plus "/covid-research. She uses the original source for studies, rather than media articles, which may, or may not, be accurate. The reporting on the Skagit Valley Chorale COVID outbreak in Washington State which occurred in March is a good example. Various journalists have written numerous articles and some readers have interpreted the multiple articles as multiple cases of choir rehearsal COVID outbreaks. Dr. Nelson links the reader to the actual CDC report of their investigation. The CDC's investigation concluded that the social and physical aspects of the rehearsal were likely as instrumental in transmitting the virus as the singing itself. The choir members were not six feet apart, did not wear masks, most helped stack the chairs at the end, snacks were shared, and the choir members changed formations four times during the rehearsal. The result was that most of the choir present became ill.

Another good discussion is found on Chris Munce's Choralosophy podcast series. The question-and-answer session of Dr. David McKinsey moves fairly quickly through a variety of pertinent topics. The link is: https://choralosophy.com/2020/06/03/episode-36-are-we-asking-all-the-right-covid-questions-with-dr-david-mckinsey-of-research-medical-center/

NATS (National Association of Teachers of Singing) and ACDA (American Choral Directors Association) sponsored and shared publicly a panel discussion about the dangers of singing during the COVID crisis. The link to the lengthy conversation has been shared widely. ACDA has since published, on June 15, 2020, a "COVID-19 Response Committee Report." The conclusion of this report reminds us to read all reports carefully: "In the haste to transmit information, many organizations delivered and continue to deliver speculation and opinion. Data are not altogether clear, though the general consensus is that singing produces unique challenges in addressing the spread of the virus." The report goes on to say that we must: "….extend tolerance to one another. Directors may feel varying degrees of comfort with multiple scenarios to be implemented across the nation, and we must respect their choices with grace."

We long to sing, yet we fear literally killing others with our song. Let us continue our prayer while keeping an open mind to new research as it is completed. Let us be cautious but hopeful in these next months. Be wary of the source of information and try hard not to take sides. *The Editor*