

VOCAL LESSON #6

PERFORMANCE SKILLS AND SHOWMANSHIP

The visual characteristics of the barbershop style include high energy, natural body movement (in addition to planned choreography), facial animation and unity of a contemporary visual appearance.

A successful performance results when complete rapport is established between the performer and the audience. Communication is a two-way street; as the performer establishes contact with the audience, the audience responds to the mood or emotion established by the performer.

Poise And Command

The performer opens the line of communication by putting the audience at ease. In order to do this, the performer must appear poised and in command. This does not mean there is no room for nervousness, but that the successful performer makes constructive use of nerves. Even veteran performers feel a certain amount of healthy apprehension before facing an audience. The successful performer focuses on entertaining the audience rather than worrying about whether she will remember words, notes or choreography. Her unspoken message to the audience is "I am here to entertain *you!*"

A poised, confident and self-assured attitude is paramount if the performer is to succeed in evoking an emotional response from the audience. When the performer exhibits nervousness through such actions as trembling hands or knees, fidgeting fingers or failure to make eye contact, audience attention is drawn away from the performance to the nervous action and members of the audience are unable to enjoy the performance because they are concerned about whether the performer will make it through.

Physical Expression

While the term "choreography" is used to describe planned movement, "physical expression" describes the *unplanned*, natural body movement that occurs during a performance. Appropriate, *natural* body movement is one of the indications to the audience that the performer is involved in the performance. Effective physical expression reinforces the fact that the performer feels the music, and supports the musical performance so naturally that it cannot be recognized as separate from the music.

Good posture is the basic foundation for effective physical expression. The goal is to present the audience with the qualities of freedom and spontaneity in performing style, rather than rigidity, while maintaining the best posture for good vocal production. Arms and hands should fall relaxed and naturally to the sides, where they will attract a minimum of attention, yet be readily available to flow freely and naturally into gestures.

Facial expression is a major component of physical expression, for effective facial expression is the best tool available to the performer in visual communication with the audience. The face can convey a wide variety of moods ranging from joy, sorrow, grief, anger, excitement, pain, nostalgia, reflection, apprehension and fear to the extreme opposite of each. Appropriate facial expression reflects the message of the song; inappropriate facial expression confuses, distracts and sends mixed messages to the audience. The stage performer realizes that more intensity and animation are required in a stage performance than in a face-to-face interaction, because of the distance that must be spanned. The performer's job is to communicate with the last row of the audience, not just the director.

Choreography

Choreography is planned moves that are integrated into the total performance. The purpose of choreography is to visually enhance, illustrate and add meaning to the musical presentation. Often, choreography also aids in achieving desired musical expression, since physical movement generally results in vocal emphasis.

Choreographed moves are designed to showcase the performers as one unit. Because of riser positioning, and depending on the size of the group, it is not always possible for all members of a chorus to make all movements or gestures. When the front row is performing additional dance moves, the appearance of unity can be enhanced by having the remainder of the chorus either simulate the motion assigned to the front row, or perform the same motion on a smaller scale. Individual movements need to be accomplished with a common approach. Noticeable differences in body stance, attitude or size of motion can detract from the unit presentation.

Audience rapport

Another significant element in establishing rapport with the audience is sincerity. A good actor plays a role with such sincerity that the character becomes believable. When the performer is gripped by the music she is performing, whether it be a tender ballad or a jazzy uptune, she is able to put heart into the voice and the audience catches the contagion of her mood. Audience rapport is a circular phenomenon: The performer creates a mood; the audience responds to the mood and to the performance. The performer, sensing the positive response, feeds more energy and vitality into the performance, eliciting a heightened response from the audience!

Energy

Energy is the force that propels all aspects of musical performance. It adds a special shine to the visual performance, taking it beyond routine into magic.

Costume

To help us perform as a unit, we choose to wear costumes to perform in that are appropriate to the songs we are singing and the audience we are performing to. In a competition, we wear showy stage costumes that respond well under stage lighting and work well with choreography.

For our performance on Friday night, we will be wearing a costume derived from items we hope you already have in your wardrobes:-

- Black trousers or skirt (with black pantyhose)
- Solid coloured blouse with button front, collar and sleeves (either short or long)
- Black shoes

Makeup

When we are performing under stage lighting, we use makeup designed especially for stage use as it is less likely to fade under stage lights. This makeup is purchased through our chorus in a kit that comprises the basic items we need and in uniform colours to reinforce our unit appearance. For performances, we strive to apply makeup in such a manner that individuals blend into an overall picture.

For performances under general lighting, we may wear 'every day makeup' that is applied heavier than for normal day wear. This heavier application is used to define facial features so that the audience is aware of, and can respond to, the performers' facial expressions. For the performer to evoke an emotional response, the audience must be able to identify the lift of an eyebrow, the sparkle in the eyes and the subtle changes that play across facial features during a performance.

For our performance on Friday night, please wear makeup consisting of:-

- An all over foundation and translucent powder
- Blush applied to the cheek bone
- Eyeshadow in colour of your choice applied to the whole eyelid area and blended to the brow line
- Eyeliner in dark shade (black, charcoal, brown etc) applied to edge of upper lid and outer 1/3rd of lower lid
- Mascara in dark shade
- Eyebrow pencil (if your eyebrows are fair)
- Lip liner (to define lip edge)
- Lipstick in a bright shade (red, plum, burgundy etc)

We have several members who do not ordinarily wear makeup products or who cannot use regular “over-the-counter” products due to allergic reactions. If you have any concern about wearing makeup for our performance on Friday night, there will be a question and answer time set aside at the end of rehearsal this week when we hope we can find a suitable solution for you.