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Best Practices: making the most of our rehearsing, practicing, and teaching

From the Editor...

Sing more, talk less. Keep a practice journal. Study the score away from the instrument. We all have those “best practices” that help us to be productive, efficient music makers. But there is always room for improvement! Some off-beat advice that has been helpful to me:

- Consider the Golden Mean in your rehearsals and do something different (announcements, joke, new technique) two-thirds of the way through. For some reason that’s a great time to re-direct energy.
- Girls need warmer rehearsal space, but boys do better with chilly choir rooms.
- Confuse your students. They learn better when confused.
- Write detailed rehearsal plans, down to the minute.

Our writers in this issue have shared some of their tried-and-true techniques for practice and rehearsal. Sarah Hawbecker shares some techniques for preparing weekly organ work when time is at a premium. Jim Loeffler challenges us to reclaim our art and passion (gold organ shoes and muscle shirts, Jim?). Ryan Hostler reminds us to care for the hearts of our choristers. Dr. James Brown gives plans for a well-paced, inspiring, productive rehearsal.

Connie Millberg recommends some of her favorite compositions. Viktor Andersson has a beautiful service for Advent Vespers.

Please send ideas and good stuff to me at clifford.badgley@gslchurch.org

or call me at 919-848-1573. Blessings on your ministry!



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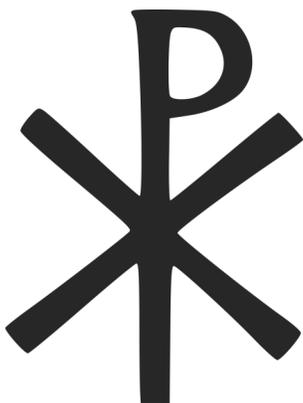
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From the Vice-President...



Getting better...

Schools have started again. Having recently left my oldest at college, I was reminded of my own *higher education* experiences. Upon earning my Master's degree somewhere back in the 90s, I was convinced that I was finished, educationally. I didn't want or need another degree. I would never set foot in a classroom again, and I was now poised go off and pursue my goals and dreams!

By the turn of the millennium, I found myself in a full-time job, a full-time dad with three kids, and a skillset which was seriously lacking the luster of its former days. I had allowed my talents to deteriorate and rarely if ever made time to practice. It showed. Like a person who has put on weight and finally come to realize it, I made a plan—a plan to get better.

As church musicians, we tend to shy away from being a “hotshot” organist. We leave the concertizing to the people in the magazines. We like to stay in the loft, lead the hymns ably, direct the choir adequately, and slink out the back door without much fanfare. Maybe we should reconsider this humble approach.

I'm not suggesting we don golden shoes, or a skin-tight muscle shirt. I'm suggesting that we make a deal with ourselves to get better at our craft and to reawaken the concert artist within us. For me, it was walking through the AGO certification process. I took the necessary steps to earn the AAGO and FAGO in consecutive years. It turned out to be the very best educational experience for me. Attending workshops or even just going to concerts is a good place to start.

Like a partner you've been with for a long time, you must find ways to keep the fires burning between you and your skills. Don't let them die or be content to leave them smoldering from week to week. Here are some of my own habits:

Set aside practice time. You must practice. The old adage “no one will notice” is an absolute lie. People DO notice. They just don't say anything, out of kindness. I like to pretend that one of my teachers has slipped in and is sitting the back pew.

Get a good metronome. I always have one handy. Without a metronome, those ‘spots’ that are never quite right, won't magically become right. Start slow, increase by 5 metronome points until you're at performance tempo. If it's not perfect, start over.

Don't shy away from difficult pieces. The only thing standing between you and a piece you don't know is time. Take on a BIG piece for Christmas or Easter. Start learning it now, slowly, with your metronome. (See #2) There's nothing I can't play, given enough time. :)

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Remember where your talents came from.

God gave them to you. Don't bury them in the ground for fear of losing them. Take them out and display them. Others will be attracted to them and be drawn into the place where the Gospel is preached and shared.

You're more important than you realize.

We tend to brush off our abilities and think "I'm just a church musician." (J.S. Bach was just a church musician, too.) You are probably THE ONLY live musician most people see and hear during the typical week. That's an important role, and one which I think we all can perform... better.

Have a great year!!!
Jim Loeffler
jim@rlcplano.org


John 15:5

ALCM Region 2 Conference

June 27-29, 2016

St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Franklin, TN

Soli Deo Gloria! Bach For Everyone

You are invited to an intensive two and half day hands-on encounter with the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. Rick Erickson, Director of the Houston Bach Choir, will lead the conference choir, which will prepare Cantata no. 4, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, for a public Vespers service on Tuesday evening. Rehearsals will deal with not only musical issues, but also homiletical and translation issues. Two Morning Prayer services and a closing Eucharist will use Bach's music in a variety of very practical ways, and will be led by Bishop Julian Gordy. There will also be "Bach Breaks," offering workshops on other topics. Reading sessions, bibliographies, and handouts, in addition to the invaluable hands-on experience of singing under Rick Erickson's leadership, will send you home inspired and armed with practical ideas.

Two Hymn Festivals...

...OUR HOPE FOR YEARS TO COME...

A Hymn Festival with John Ferguson, leader.

Sunday, October 4, 3:00pm
at

Advent Lutheran Church
7550 N. Wickham Road
Melbourne, Florida, 32940

WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU?

*A Hymn Festival with the choirs of
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Chapel Hill
Binkley Memorial Baptist Church, Chapel Hill
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Raleigh*

Sunday, November 15, 3:00pm
at
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
7000 Creedmoor Road
Raleigh, North Carolina, 27613



From the President... Rehearsal Tips for Organ Practice

Do you ever long for your student days when you had several hours of practice time every day to work on a jury piece or a recital program that was months away? In the “real” world, there are multiple pieces of music that must be ready each week, meetings to attend, and email folders to organize (a never ending task). Time on the organ bench to *really* learn a new piece of music can often feel like a luxury. I have learned to make organ practice a priority, because I am more productive and happy in every area of my life when I keep up my “organ chops.” Practicing feeds my soul as well as hones my skills.

There are really only two things to remember: 1– Make the time to practice. 2– Make efficient use of your practice time. These are simple ideas, but putting them into practice is easier said than done. Here are some tips:

- Plan your organ repertoire several months out, if possible. Strive for a balance of difficulty, styles, composers, and musical periods, taking into consideration not only the church year, but your own personal schedule. Estimate how many weeks or months of practice each piece will need.
- Schedule your practice time. A little bit *every* day is always better than cramming it all in on a Saturday. If you know you will have a busy administrative day, practice for 30 minutes before you even turn on your computer. (We all know how email can suck up all of your time.)
- Even fifteen minutes can be productive if you use it well. Waiting until a three hour block of time is available might never get the job done!
- If you don’t have access to an organ every day, figure out what you can practice at the piano. You can work out fingerings and learn manual parts. You can also study the score or listen to a recording.
- Don’t let your smartphone distract you. If you must have it with you, place it where you cannot see every little notification that pops up.
- Use your pencil! Write in fingerings. Write in pedaling. Mark accidentals. Write down registrations. These will all be helpful reminders the next time you return to the piece, especially if it’s several years later.
- Use your ears and save your hearing! Unless you are specifically rehearsing registration changes, practice on softer stops, perhaps just a single 8’ stop, or 8’ + 4’ flutes. Lighter registration will allow you to hear more clearly what you’re doing right and wrong so that you can correct your mistakes.
- Use your brain! Isolate the difficult passages and practice them in small chunks. It could be a phrase or even a single measure. There’s a difference between practicing and playing.
- Have a plan each time you sit down to practice. Although it’s fun to just sit down and play, it’s much more efficient to have a plan. If it helps you to write it down, do it. A sample plan could look like this:
 - * Practice the alternate harmonization for Sunday’s opening hymn
 - * Set up the registrations for the anthem.
 - * Work on the last page of the Bach fugue (and don’t be tempted to go back to the beginning until you’ve completed everything else on your list!).
 - * Write in fingerings for the first two pages of the Christmas Eve postlude.
 - * Do some slow practice on the toccata.
 - * Work with the metronome on your Reformation Sunday prelude.
 - * Review any difficult transitions (page turns, key changes, registration changes) for Sunday’s postlude.
 - * If you have time, you can reward yourself by playing something that you really enjoy playing!



Finally, I highly recommend the book [The Talent Code](#) by Daniel Coyle. He writes about the concept of “deep practice,” which is one of the keys to success in developing a skill, whether it is music, sports, math, or anything. It is a very interesting book which will inspire you and probably change the way you think about learning music and teaching others. Happy practicing!

Sarah

From the Member At Large...

Rehearsal techniques number in the thousands and are often shaped by your teacher and your setting. But the one common technique and method we share in ministry is the shaping of both heart and mind, music and Word. The ministry of choral (or bells, instruments, etc.) music requires preparation of both heart and voice. The following devotionals, used at either rehearsal or before worship, will provide a spiritual element much as vocal warm-ups provide the musical element. I have used each of these resources over my years of ministry and highly suggest each one of them.



I would highly suggest the Lectionary based devotions, Soli Deo Gloria, published by Augsburg Fortress. Authors include Jennifer Baker-Trinity, Wayne L. Wold and Craig Mueller. Soli Deo Gloria is a collection of devotions for the choir, the choir director, and music lovers. The collection features brief meditations based on the texts given in the Revised Common Lectionary, emphasizing the choir's leadership role in worship. Also included with each devotional is a hymn text appropriate for the day, and rehearsal planning pages. I often use the suggested hymn (ELW or often in the LBW or LSB) in our warmup, either as a sight reading exercise or, if the hymn is known, for phrase shaping, dynamics, or breathing warmups. You will also find these devotions on Prelude Music Planner, included as part of the yearly subscription.

Another wonderful devotional resource published by MorningStar Music is written by Nancy Raabe. These useful books, One Minute Devotions for the Church Year, are a personal journey through the church year with reflections on the scriptures in the Revised Common Lectionary. The reflections are short and to the point and quote authors and hymns. They encourage church musicians in their spiritual growth. The book may be used as choir devotionals or may be used for personal devotions. They would also make wonderful gifts for choir members, ministry leaders, or colleagues.

Hope Publishing prints Singing in the Spirit, by Mary Kay Beall. This collection is designed to provide devotional materials for music ministry which are spiritually provocative, timely, and brief. Though not based on the Revised Common Lectionary, these devotions are grouped by themes and the church year, and they provide material for the whole year.

I hope you consider using one of these resources this year in your weekly rehearsals or personal devotion time.

Peace in Christ



Welcome New Members!

John Apple, Charlotte, NC

Jon Arnold, Suwanee, GA

Ronald Butts-Boehmer, Jacksonville, FL

Martha A. Caulder, Lexington, SC

Michael Ging, Houston, TX

Lauren Johnson, Banner Elk, NC

Elizabeth Jordan, Fayetteville, NC

Tamara Lewis, Sanford, NC

Timothy Olsen, Pfafftown, NC

Karen Shevenell, Irmo, SC

Daniel Sigmon, Missouri City, TX

Joshua Starnes, Roanoke, VA

Ted Wilson, Nashville, TN

Youth Big Band from Flensburg, Germany

October 21, 2015, 7:00pm

at

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church 7000 Creedmoor Road
Raleigh, North Carolina, 27613

The Youth Big Band, conducted by Martin Grosser, plays traditional and modern jazz, also pop and funk. Their concert is free and open



to the public. The musicians are students at the Altes Gymnasium in Flensburg, a town that lies on the border between Germany and Denmark. They have toured internationally and have won numerous awards.

Born a Savior Born a King, John Purifoy. Lorenz Corporation.

Great for Advent. Choir, chamber orchestra, narration. Use worship dance and projected visuals for more interest!

Tapestry of Darkness, Ruth Elaine Schram. Jubilate Music.

Lent or Good Friday, Choir, chamber orchestra, narration. Add drama and worship dance. Very moving.

Expressions for Solo Piano, Joel Raney. Hope Publishing Company.

Beautiful arrangements. Try "Jesus Loves Me" on All Saints' Day with a PowerPoint projection of members' loved ones .

Timeless Hymns with Ageless Classics, Marilynn Ham. Alfred Music Publishing.

O Sacred Head Now Wounded with Beethoven's Symphony No. 7, Second Movement. Beautiful.

Down to the River to Pray Mary McDonald. Hope Publishing Company.

with "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying."

Hosanna and Hallelujah!, Cindy Ovokaitys and Kevin D. Thomson, arr. Joel Raney. Hope Publishing Company.

For choir, children and handbells.

A Mighty Fortress (incorporating Widor's Toccata from Symphony No. 5), arr. Joel Raney. Hope Publishing Company.

SATB/piano/organ/handbells/brass quartet.

He's Got the Whole World with This Is My Father's World, arr. Joel Raney. Hope Publishing Company.

SATB and children's choir.

Connie Millberg is Minister for Worship Arts at St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Longwood, Florida.

Send your submissions to our editor, Clifford, at clifford.badgley@gslchurch.org. Thanks!

Song Lovers...

Children of the Heavenly Father ELW #781; LSB #725; CW #449

Lina Sandell, or Carolina Sandell Berg, 1832-1903, Swedish. She loved her father, a Lutheran pastor, and often worked next to him at her own little desk as a child. By age thirteen she had a notebook of her own hymns. She could read German, French, and English. She saw her father fall from a boat and die, and two years later her mother died. She married a merchant, Carl O. Berg, and their only child died at birth.

Two stanzas that do not appear in our hymnals:

Lo, their very hairs He numbers,
And no daily care encumbers
Them that share His ev'ry blessing
And His help in woes distressing.

Praise the Lord in joyful numbers:
Your Protector never slumbers.
At the will of your Defender
Ev'ry foeman must surrender.



TRYGGARE KAN INGEN VARA

Possibly a Swedish folk tune with German heritage.

Sources: www.cyberhymnal.org, www.hymnary.org, www.grandemusica.net,
Westermeyer, Paul. Hymnal Companion to Evangelical Lutheran Worship. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2010.

Whether you are a full-time or part-time church musician, we all want to do the best for our choirs and make rehearsals worthwhile and enjoyable. It's hard to think of a learning format more dynamic than a music rehearsal. The information given and the feedback received are constant in both directions. It is a symbiosis in which the conductor is entirely and utterly dependent on the choir, and vice versa. It fosters teamwork that surpasses even that of a sports team, because, no one is ever left "sitting on the bench" in choir. The choral experience aligns a group's collective energies into a common goal and transforms its diverse personalities into a true *esprit de corps*. So what are some effective rehearsal techniques that one can implement to create an uplifting environment of music making that is not only effective, but inspires? The following techniques are "tried and true" that I implement into my work with any ensemble.

1. Start with singing, not talking.

Kick off the rehearsal with a brief warm-up...not only vocally, but even physically. Singing is an "athletic event." Consider the following: What is the average age of my choir? Am I implementing warm-ups that will extend their vocal abilities and prepare them for the vocal expectations of the rehearsal?

Some of my best rehearsals have begun with singing the hymns for Sunday. It allows the choir to consider the message displayed not only in the text, but the music. Starting with hymns can create a "teaching moment" where you can challenge the choir to sing the hymn like their anthem...considering dynamic contrast, text painting, phrasing, etc. Encourage your choirs, dare them to reach beyond what they think their music capabilities are. You may be surprised!

2. What do you need to accomplish? What would you like to accomplish?

Hone in on the sections that need the most attention and make those the central work of the rehearsal. In order to know the sections that need the most work, as directors we need to establish more time for planning ahead in the liturgical year and knowing the score. I find the summer months to be the most effective time to read through the upcoming calendar year of scriptures for the different times within the church year (cantatas, Youth Sunday, confirmation, etc.), as well as consider any special events that might be happening within the church's history.

After familiarizing yourself with scriptures for the liturgical year, we must know the score. Knowing the score informs our musical decisions, effectiveness in teaching the music, and our ability to celebrate the gift of song through a positive learning environment. Don't just run the anthem, and then ask the choir if there are any questions. You have the unique opportunity to share specific moments in the music (whether it be text or a specific musical moment that inspired you to select the particular anthem to be shared). In addition, you are a spiritual leader, an encourager. Be compelling. Challenge the members in your choir to consider their own faith journeys/experiences and celebrate them through the music. Think about your choir's strengths and weaknesses. If you could improve only one thing what would it be? Tone? Ensemble? Intonation? Connection to the text?

Settle on one aspect and use that as the focus for the rehearsal. Be sensitive to the non-verbal cues from the choir and consider letting go of issues in the music that they may be struggling with at that particular moment. If the problem is in something for Sunday's anthem, make it your first priority in rehearsal on Sunday morning through "new eyes, and a refreshed spirit."

3. Finish on a "high"

A "high" for the members of our choir(s) vary just as much as their personalities. During my time as a church choir director, the things that inspired my choir members always amazed me. While many were moved by the music, the prayer that concluded rehearsal touched others. Consider the "ups" and "downs" of the rehearsal and be sensitive to the spirit working within the practice. If you don't do this already, ensure time to run something you've worked on during the rehearsal. Affirm positive moments that took place in the practice and how much you appreciate their dedication.



*Dr. Brown is Assistant Professor of Choral Music,
Troy University in Troy, Alabama.*

In a darkened sanctuary, strings strike and hold an open fifth, as a saxophone plaintively weaves a sinuous strain in and out of the suspended fifth, slowing eventually to set the pitch for the processional chant. As our seminary intern enters, bearing aloft a bowl of fire, a cantor intones “Maranatha.”* Everyone echoes the chant as the bowl is slowly carried up the aisle from the font. The flame dances off the high ceiling and walls; flickering light splashes the faces of the assembly. By the third melodic variation of the sax and responsive “Maranatha” chant, the procession has reached the altar. Candlelit-luminous, the chancel and the large wooden cross, draped in brilliant blue are brightened by the flame. Thus begins our Advent Vespers.

Texas, being the champion bullriding-sized buckle of the Bible belt, churches abound, as do their Christmas concerts. Plus there’s oodles of orchestra, chorus, dance and theatrical programs. So we decided to offer Advent Vespers on the eve of Advent II. Components have varied over 13 years, but the service is essentially word, song, and sacrament. Everybody is invited to get away from the hurly-burly craziness of hectic holiday preparations—to breathe—to grab some “down” time, time for contemplating the meaning of Christ’s presence. Inner reflection summons us to join Mary in her saying, “Behold, I am the Lord’s servant—let it be to me, according to your word,” as we join in singing the *Magnificat*.

Here’s a thumb-nail sketch of Advent Vespers:

- **Readings** summon us to ponder the astounding reality of Christ’s incarnation, presence and return— taken from scripture, the early church, mystics, theologians, spiritual guides, native Americans, and from religious communities such as Taizé.
- **Prayers**, ancient and modern as well as silence call us to center our thoughts.
- **Eucharist** gathers us to tangibly recognize the presence of Christ.
- **Music** stirs a vast array of emotions—from quiet reflection to joyful exuberance, Gregorian chant—*Creator of the Stars of Night*, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*, as well as the *Missa Orbis Factor*, is interwoven with favorite Advent hymns as well as choral, orchestral, keyboard and handbell works.
- **Ballet** stirs us as well—original choreography danced to a contemplative setting of the *Magnificat*.

Fellowship and sharing continue at the celebratory reception following the service.

“Sometimes our light goes out, but is blown again into flame by an encounter with another human being. We each owe the deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this inner light.” Albert Schweitzer

**“Maranatha” (Aramaic for “Lord, come” or “the Lord is come”) is the enthusiastic liturgical expression reflected, interestingly, when we sing “Be present at our table, Lord” or say “Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest” at grace before meals.*



Viktor Andersson is Director of Music Ministry at Calvary Lutheran Church, Richland Hills, Texas.

In the Spotlight...

Kathleen O'Neal Cartledge
St. Paul Lutheran Church
Aiken, SC



Where were you born and raised?

El Paso, TX and Augusta, GA.

Where did you go to school?

Augusta College (now Augusta University), BM;
Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, MAR—
Theology Track.

Who is in your family?

My husband George. Also 2 brothers, 2 sisters,
Dad, Stepmother—Wink (she's really an angel!)
and lots of wonderful in-laws, nieces and nephews!

Any pets?

Two orange tabby cats: Suzie Q and Aristotle.

What two people have most influenced you?

Other than my parents, Dr. John G. Schaeffer, my organ and music literature professor. He often reminded us that we are beloved children of God, and that whatever we do is worth doing well just because of that! Also Dr. David Yeago, theology professor, who taught us to “unpack” everything. Just as our theology guides our life of faith, our music can shape our theological understanding as the church. Take time to unpack the music—examine it prayerfully, research it a bit. What does that tell you? How does that shape the song? How does it work with the melody, parts, and accompaniment? Now put it all together and examine how we live in faith as we sing that song. Make room for the Holy Spirit to open our eyes and ears, and move us into bringing something more into the music.

What are your favorite movies or books?

Movies - Guardian of the Galaxy, the Marvel movies, and Krull. Books— anything by Isaac Asimov, Anne McCaffrey, Patricia Cornwell.

What is your passion in music ministry?

Music is such an integral part of our lives and our worship - as conversation with God—it can be repeating God's Word, proclaiming God's message, or responding to God's love and grace. Everyone can have a part in creating that musical moment, whether in formal worship, or listening to an opera, orchestra, or band! A good music leader finds ways to help everyone sing and participate in the music to the glory of God, and to make music accessible, not part of an elite “country club” where if you haven't got a

professional solo act you can't perform. Musicians have to learn to follow—and that is something we can teach and model to our congregations, helping them in their response in worship, and in life as followers of Christ. Music can bring us into the mystery of God's presence, proclaim God's message, hope, and promises, and also be our congregation's response to God's love.

How do you like to spend your free time?

Painting, bicycling/walking, reading, and spending time with friends.

Do you have a favorite hymn?

Soli Deo Gloria and *When Peace Like a River*.

Favorite food?

Grilled salmon.

Describe a moving moment you have experienced during worship.

Near the end of communion, I often improvise as the ministers and assistants finish serving and straighten up the altar. One day I began to do so and my hands “wandered” into Jerry Sinclair's “Alleluia.” The choir began humming the parts (although I had not taught them this piece) and I began to line out the words at the beginning of each repeat— “Alleluia,” “He's my savior,” etc. I eased off the keyboard and we were singing it softly in parts, when I realized I heard the music coming from the congregation, not just the choir. The pastor and assisting ministers were bringing communion out into the congregation to several folks who could not make it to the altar. The congregation was beginning to sing and hum the Alleluia! They swelled the volume at each repeat and got softer at the end of each section, repeating the Alleluia over and over. It was a tangible, powerful moment. Then, as the altar was cleared up and we waited, the senior pastor waited for the congregation to stop singing before he approached the altar. To many of us, it was a deeply beautiful Kairos moment—where the music held us in the mystery of suspended time with Christ and those that Christ was reaching out to, was coming to, as they could not come to him at the altar. It was powerful.

What was your most embarrassing moment?

While I was in college, I worked at three church jobs over four years. One year I overslept and barely made the sunrise service! Fortunately, I was the cantor, and the choir wasn't singing until the next service. But it was still embarrassing and humbling to be putting on my robe as the entire procession waited for me. I apologized, and the minister and acolytes were very gracious.