

CHURCH CHOIR TRAINING

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649744244

Church choir training by J. Troutbeck

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

J. TROUTBECK

**CHURCH
CHOIR TRAINING**

INDEX.

CHAPTER I.	
Formation of the Choir	1
CHAPTER II.	
Training of the Choir	6
CHAPTER III.	
Music for the Choir	13
CHAPTER IV.	
The Cathedral Choir	20
CHAPTER V.	
Unions of Church Choirs	28
APPENDIX A.	
Table of Notes and Time-Signatures	31
APPENDIX B.	
Table of Vowel-sounds and Consonants	32
APPENDIX C.	
Preface to the "Cathedral Psalter"	33
APPENDIX D.	
List of Services and Anthems	38
APPENDIX E.	
List of Works and Authors	49

CHURCH CHOIR TRAINING.

CHAPTER I.

FORMATION OF THE CHOIR.

ON entering upon the subject of church choir training, the first question which presents itself for consideration and settlement is that of the formation of the choir, in other words, the source, character, proportion, and arrangement, of the materials of which it should be composed.

It will at once be perceived that there are cases to which any remarks which may be offered upon this part of the subject have but partial reference; the cases, that is, of cathedrals, collegiate churches, chapels attached to colleges, schools, and public institutions; of all places, in a word, where the composition of the choir is fixed by statute, immemorial custom, necessity, or obvious convenience.

Over and above these exceptions, however, and they are not very numerous, there remains the great mass of the parish churches of the land, where the choir is formed, as a rule, more or less entirely out of the general body of the worshippers, with the view of their taking the lead in the musical portion of the service.

I refrain from making any observations upon the different theories of divine worship considered by some persons to underlie and be illustrated by what are commonly called "cathedral" and "parish church" services respectively.

For the present I am chiefly concerned with those choirs which in the main confine themselves to the performance of such music as the congregations which they lead, and out of which they are formed, are able to join in.

It need scarcely be said that in every parish the composition of the choir must in great measure depend upon the materials available, but to some extent upon the kind of service it is intended to establish.

It is taken for granted that, wherever it can be done, a full choir of four parts will be made up. If for any reason all the four parts cannot be obtained, either the music should be specially arranged for three parts (S.A.B., S.T.B.), or else the voices should be in unison, unison-singing being decidedly preferable to mutilated harmony, although in itself it is not desirable, except for first attempts in church, or as occasionally affording an effective contrast to singing in parts.

In forming a choir, the decision will first have to be made, where choice is possible, whether the choir shall contain male voices only, or voices both male and female. If it is intended that the choir should be surpliced, the question is thereby decided; but the position of the choir in church cannot justly be held to decide it; for whether the time-honoured west gallery be assigned to the choir, or, what is immeasurably more suitable on every account, the body of the church, or the chancel, the choir can be properly arranged, however it is constituted, girls and women being no more out of place as members of a choir than boys and men.

This may be the place to remark that if the cassock be not used with the surplice, the dress of both men and boys, with or without the surplice, should be of studied sobriety, both in colour and in fashion; and likewise the dress of girls and women, when they are members of a church choir.

It is no part of the object of this primer to decide for or against the use of the surplice by church choirs, but only to give hints as to the advantages and disadvantages, from a musical point of view, of choirs variously constituted.

The voices of boys are generally thought to be more pleasing than those of girls and women, but they have the disadvantage that they do not last long; and, besides, a boy seldom learns to sing tolerably until just before his voice breaks. It may be said that the voices of girls and women, the question of the surplice

apart, have the advantage of being able to receive more continuous training, it being usually possible to retain girls and women in the choir for a much longer time than boys. On the other hand, there are difficulties connected with the weekly practices, especially in country districts where the population is widely scattered, which make it easier to arrange for the employment of boys than of girls and women.

The parish school will generally be the nursery and the mainstay of the choir. Boys and girls of sufficient musical capacity to be taught to take their places creditably in the choir are to be found in most schools. From private schools for boys also, efficient choristers are often drawn; and it is unnecessary to point out that from the hall, the grange, and the parsonage, aid in the matter of the choir can often be successfully sought. In the practice-room, no less than in the church itself, a most healthy and useful mingling of the various classes of society may take place, productive of much benefit, and, with the exercise of good sense, of no subsequent difficulties. With the view of binding the members of the choir together, the sense of their equality in God's sight should be carefully fostered. If there is a guild or association of church-workers in the parish, it certainly ought to include the members of the choir.

Two or three points should always be insisted upon. The members of the choir, of whatever age or rank, should be chosen from the homes of respectable, honest, God-fearing people, and, as a general rule, from such homes only.

Anything like showing-off should be carefully discouraged, and especially singing on week-days in places of mere amusement. However pleasant and advantageous it may be to sing secular music as well as sacred, it will not tend towards deepening in the congregation a sense of respect for religion, or for the choir, if the leading boy, for example, were to be heard of as singing at a music-hall, or at a public-house, on Saturday evening, and seen at church in his surplice on Sunday morning.

The great difficulty which choirmasters usually have to encounter, is to secure and keep up a supply of alto voices. When

women are not employed, or are not to be had, it will probably be found to be the most feasible plan to depend upon youths who have been trebles in the choir, the adult male alto voice of endurable quality being rare, and consequently difficult to obtain.

Where opportunity offers, the employment of trained professional vocalists, one of each part on each side, will be found to give confidence and cohesion to the body of amateurs in the choir.

The smallest proportion which the several parts should bear to each other, when the choir is complete, is as follows:—

6 trebles, 2 altos, 2 tenors, 2 basses: 12 in all.

14 trebles, 4 altos, 4 tenors, 6 basses: 28 in all.

20 trebles, 6 altos, 6 tenors, 8 basses: 40 in all.

There should be *at least* as many effective boy or girl trebles as there are voices of the other parts collectively; indeed a larger proportion of trebles, as far as half as many again as there are voices of the other parts collectively, and under some circumstances even twice as many, will not destroy the balance. When there are two or more altos and two or more tenors, an additional bass may be employed with advantage.

When the treble part is sung by women, it will generally be found sufficient if the trebles are twice as numerous as the altos or the tenors; thus:—

4 trebles, 2 altos, 2 tenors, 2 basses: 10 in all.

8 trebles, 4 altos, 4 tenors, 6 basses: 22 in all.

12 trebles, 6 altos, 6 tenors, 8 basses: 32 in all.

The arrangement of the choir which has in its favour antiquity, convenience, and efficiency, is that half of the choir should sit, in two lines, trebles in front, altos, tenors, and basses behind, on either side of the nave or the chancel.

The book desks should be open, ample in size, and of sufficient height to allow any one with ordinarily good sight to stand and read from them without stooping. The kneeling arrangements should be such as to allow of the body being kept erect without effort, a perfectly easy position being among the first requisites for good singing, inasmuch as all muscular exertion, even the

retention of an uncomfortable position, involves expenditure of the breath, which during singing ought to be applied, with the least diminution possible, to the production of musical sounds.

In placing the choir, the usual plan is to put the basses the nearest to the eastern end of the church, next to them the tenors, and then the altos. There is no special law beyond that of custom and convenience to guide one in this matter. Where all the choir are thoroughly and equally efficient, the opposite order is perhaps preferable, the piercing notes of the alto penetrating further than the rolling thunder of the bass.

Before I pass on to the special subject of the training of the choir, I wish to point out clearly to those whom it concerns that there is no "royal road" to success in this branch of teaching, more than in any other.

The possession of this primer, or of any similar work, will not act as a charm, and make up for the absence of those qualities upon which success depends.

Adequate knowledge, both theoretical and practical, painstaking industry, perseverance, patience, good temper, tact, and firmness, are alone to be relied upon to deserve and ultimately to achieve success in the management and training of a choir.

CHAPTER II.

TRAINING OF THE CHOIR.

As soon as the questions concerning the formation of the choir are settled, it follows to take in hand its systematic training.

We are met at the outset of our consideration of this part of the subject by the important inquiry: Under what management ought the choir to be placed?

Where the means are fully available, it is presumed that there will be three officers employed:—

1. The Precentor.
2. The Choirmaster.
3. The Organist.

The exact duties of the precentor, from the performance of which he takes his name, are in modern times almost, if not altogether, in abeyance; but the selection of the music, and the disciplinary control of the choir, should be in his hands, even if he is not possessed of sufficient technical knowledge of music to be the referee on purely musical points. In most parishes one of the parochial clergy executes what remains of the precentor's office. The power of admitting to the choir and of dismissing from it is sometimes exercised by the precentor. Admission and dismissal, however, are matters in which the incumbent of the parish should have the chief voice.

The choirmaster, when there is one, ought to be in fact the teacher, and the conductor of all the practices; while the organist should be strictly the accompanist, his services being generally given at full practices only. At the same time it should be remembered that the organ or the harmonium should be used very sparingly at any practice, separate or combined, in order that the choir may learn to depend upon themselves, and not upon the accompaniment.

At festivals, or other occasions when there is a large increase