

NOTES FROM VISUAL SESSIONS

**Attended and compiled
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at

**INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM
(IES)
2006
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, USA**

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NO 1.

BODY LANGUAGE FOR PERFORMERS

by
Tori Postma

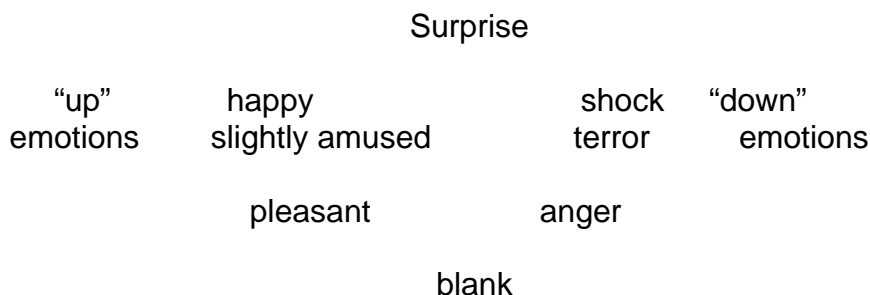
How to give a 'believable' performance.

- Be a REAL person –don't 'put on' a performance.
- Communicate with the audience and let them 'in'. Share your emotions and let them see the real you.
- Learn to express what you feel. Don't wear a mask.
- Believe in yourself- your audience will never be judgmental when they see 'honesty' in you, the performer.

Communication – 7% -words used
38% - inflection
55% - body language.

Earn the right to be confident and know your work

Facial Expressions These go in a circle.



*Your face on stage should never be less than pleasant.

* Always have faces “up” when singing.

Start with energy and face and then combine with choreography

SO... how can we sing sad songs with “up” faces?

Use nostalgia – (looking back after the event) because this takes the edge off the emotion.

Animation in performing, is about communicating the emotion and the attitude of the entire song. If you are doing this, you cannot let the animation down on the breath or while you 'read' difficult passages in your head.(The last point for baritones!)

When performing, start with the base line energy of the song (attitude, emotion and character) and only then can you overlay gestures. You can only communicate with the audience when you have base line energy and moves.

Self talk as you are entering the stage.

e.g. "I'm glad I'm here.

"I'm glad you're here"

"I know my stuff."

N.B. Negatives are not perceived by the mind. (If in doubt about this, say to yourself "do not visualise the Harbour Bridge.")

SO, keep self talk positive. DON'T say –"Don't forget the tag."

" Don't forget the new move."

Keep everything "up".

Eyes

Eye contact is very necessary if you want your audience to relate to you.

When walking on stage, make eye contact 3 times –left, right, centre. Do this while self talking.

Front row people must 'spot' an audience member before they turn around.

Then, as they turn, they look back at that person again.

If the choreography calls for you to turn 'down the tiles', never think "I'm looking away from the director". You'd better be looking at someone.

N.B. One of best faces in the chorus has to be upper left. That's where audiences' eyes go when they have nothing else to look at.

Body Angles

Where our chest points is important. While a chest is facing you, the person hasn't finished. So, you turn your chest to the audience (down the tiles) when you want to acknowledge them or tell them that this part is important.

Hand gestures

The thumb and index fingers are strong.

Palms up are more inviting than palms down.

NOTE

When performing, be aware of the size of the room. In a big room, more than one person will think you are looking at them.

Also remember....the bigger the room, the bigger your gestures.

NO. 2

CREATING A VISUAL PLAN

**by
Sue Beck**

Ask why a particular performance is memorable eg Circus Soliel or Bette Midler?

.....probably because they have good visual plans

Visual plan is about every detail of performance

Objectives of this class –

- To find out what all is needed to create a complete package – one that sells the product
- To encourage the involvement of the musical team – include the director in all aspects of visual plan
- Communicate all the time

Create a choreographic plan

Planned choreography is what the choreographer comes up with

Unplanned choreography is what you tell yourself to do

You NEVER stop doing

Creating a costume plan

What is the general theme

How can a costume support this plan

If there is no “theme” what now?

Workshop –

Form groups and one person take on each of the following roles –

1. choreographer
 2. costumer
 3. director
 4. reporter – reports on the meeting
- how meeting started
who ran it
did each creative entity come with a plan
if so how is it presented to others
barriers – how to overcome them
what is final product going to look like
parameters – Chorus midsize 40, it for a show, 2 songs need to be for competition

Purpose of this activity was to see how the group worked together

Wrapup –

The focus of the showmanship category is the evaluation of the salesmanship of the musical product

Elements of preparation, the visual plan and the creation and communication of on-stage magic

The presentation/performance is where it all comes together and comes alive!

No. 3

HOW TO BE MEMORABLE FROM THE START

by
Sandi Wright

Kinesics *The study of behaviour patterns of non-verbal communication (body language).*

*The importance of Space.

We are all creatures of space and we “own” our own spot. When we see another chorus perform, we first look to the person standing in “our” position. Then we observe the centre (director and front row), and when we have taken that in, we start scanning the group as we read, starting top left-hand side. So....put a great performer in that spot.

- You need to space chorus suitably on stage. If people are too close, they look insecure, if too far apart they are not a unit.

*Space invasion.

If performing in a small, intimate venue, be careful not to work too close to audience and be “in their face”. If this is unavoidable for the director, she should speak to those people before starting and put them at ease.

*Microphone stands are a barrier between performer and audience. Make sure you sing through and beyond them and that they are not too high. Never try to sing ‘into’ the microphone.

*On stage you must be careful not to make subliminal moves that exclude the audience. Stop this happening by –

*include audience by looking directly at them. Don’t have non-focused gaze.

*be careful not to work too far up-stage.

*don’t turn your chest more than 45 degrees away from the audience at any time.

*the chorus’ focus must go beyond the director. Watch her of course, but don’t exclude audience.

***Persons and non-persons.**

If a chorus performs without relating to the audience, then they make that audience feel like a ‘non-person’. So make them ‘persons’ by including them using body language and planned visuals. Use an outstretched hand to them, use “down the tiles’ moves and make eye contact. Use the director to come out and include audience and bring chorus with her.

*Who is your audience? – an extension of the chorus. The word **performance** comes from the base word **perform** meaning **complete**.

Body Talk.

- Posture i.e. good body alignment, shows confidence
- Feet together = scared and you can't move without tensing.
- Feet too far apart = intimidating
- Arms must be strong (no noodle arms) but also be fluid and graceful. Too much tension is aggressive.
- Hands are very expressive and gestures add meaning. So use the correct digits.
- - thumb is the strongest
- Index finger is strong and accusatory
- 'Pinky' adds grace.
- Ring and middle finger are tactile fingers so use those if wanting to invite someone in.
- Make eye contact – 'look and hold' the gaze.
- Mouth – lips must always be soft. Correct mouth shape for good vocal production.
- Eyebrows –not drawn together (looking pained)
- Tilt of the head can be expressive

How to Create audience Rapport

*If on a stage, stand as close to the audience as possible. Also plan downstage moves.

*Put energy and emotion into your performance (See other handouts for details.)

*Take command of the stage with confident posture (body alignment).

*Don't let your costume be more powerful than you are. So keep the costume simple and appropriate to the songs you are performing. Don't have the audience wondering when you are going to sing the song that matches the costume.

*Make rapport happen –especially the front row. Every chorus member has to ensure there is eye contact.

*Take in the whole audience, especially on applause.

***Hold the applause.**

No. 4

PUTTING THE EMOTION IN THE MOTION

by
Sandi Wright

Our aim is to **move the audience**

You need to create the illusion

eg

If you are wanting a strong move then lead with the Thumb - it is the strongest digit

If you are wanting a softer move then lead with little finger – it give a softer feel

We can create the illusion through understanding what our faces and bodes need to show in the **motion** when we are portraying a particular **emotion** -

Innocence and vulnerability (eg young girl singing in Mes Mis)

- Eyes are soft and wide and looking up
- Chin down or loud
- Head is straight
- Mouth is open and lips relaxed
- Voice is reverent or breathy
- Arms down – if raised palms are up
- Shoulders down
- Feet open

Love (eg Celine Dion singing)

- Eyes soft and moist
- Chin is down
- Head is tiled or may tilt
- Mouth is open with lip corners up
- Voice is soft and breathy
- Arms raised close to body
- Palms are up
- Shoulders may raise

Fear (eg Judy Garland)

- Eyes are wild, intense and darting (suspicious)
- Chin down
- Head level
- Mouth is open with lips pulled back (fear on face)
- Voice quivers

Arms close to body (fight and flight)
Shoulders ready to go into fetal position
Feet closed

Anger (eg Liza Minnelli)

Eyes are narrow and intense, as if to intimidate
Chin level or down
Head is straight and down
Mouth – lips are small and tight
Voice – may be loud or soft, but is always short and firm
Arms – wide and frantic
Shoulders are down
Feet – wide

Pride (Sinead Twain)

Eyes are direct and focused
Chin up
Head is straight
Mouth is open and lip corners may be up voice is firm
Arms may be open
Shoulders are down and pulled back
Feet are wide

Anguish

Eyes are narrow and brows down
Chin down
Head tilted
Mouth is very side with corners down
Voice may be loud or soft
Arms closed in fetal position or begging position
Shoulders up and hunched
Feet are very close

Joy (eg Barbara Streisand)

Eyes are narrow and moist
Chin is up
Head is tilted
Shoulders are up
Feet wide
Mouth is open and smiling
Voice is alive
Arms are wide and open and palms up

General information -
Motions are often complex

Why Barbara Streisand says she is successful is because “I am an actor who can sing not a singer who can act”

You want to be believable!

Exercise –

Use your hand like a mirror – look into it and make the emotions as though looking at yourself then replicate the emotion without looking at hand

Often the director is the “4th Wall” – this is not good – push past the director

We have to be more than just pleasant

It can be a learned behaviour

It is technical and can be quite left brained

Can't drop face to effect vocal skills

Emotions are complex

No. 5

THE BEAT GOES ON!

by
Asa Hagerman

NOTE: UNFORTUNATELY WE ONLY WERE PRESENT AT THIS SESSION FOR ABOUT 15 MINUTES

What gets in the way of the beat/rhythm?

Beathing, Soft/louds, bridges, choreography, tempo change, tricky lyrics, stamina

Breath and move in tempo then our muscles will remember

Heart breathing – yoga breathing

Eg. Put finger on nose (one side) and breathe in through one nostril then change to other nostril and out – then in and out in reverse

Using your body can help with rhythm

Breathe is beginning of the line not reward for the end of the line

Internalise tempo with chorus before you start eg clapping and moving to tempo

Director should be able to set tempo in breathe

No. 6

CHOREOGRAPHY WORKSHOP

by
Erin Howden

- Choreographers must be musicians as well as visual presenters. We have to enhance the musical product e.g. embellishments, repetitions etc.
- Never try to teach choreography from a left-brain perspective. Train the chorus to go with the emotional moment and keep trying changes. You can only release your creativity as a choreographer if you can work 'in the moment.'
- Choreographers need to inspire and invigorate, so make your sessions fun.
- Stop trying to be 'right' and don't feel the need to put on a show for the chorus.

Exploring the Intent of Characterisation.

When deciding on the character of the song, pick a character that has authority and not a "cute" character as the intent will influence how the chorus sings. The chorus needs to be given a character as this helps them develop unity, consistency and aligns their performance. To help develop this, have a "character night" where they come dressed as the storyline character and try to stay in character all night (e.g. act and talk as that person.) Use this time to build the character and work the music emotionally and do this well before introducing the choreography.

Every song has emotional 'staircases'. The intent of the lyrics takes us to the highs (dynamics). The Bridge takes us into the next "room" and you can talk about the emotions (colours) there -i.e."no pillow for my head" –softness, expressive.

Split the song into sections and 'tag' each section
e.g. /intro /middle/ tag =each section. This creates different songs within the song and will keep the energy up and dynamics in place.

To help your chorus understand the interpretation of the song, display the lyric lines and go through the words and talk about the emotion and attaching believability.

Help them think it through.

After you have been through the interpretation, get the chorus to sing the song a few times and do their own choreo. This will let you see who has bought in to the interpretation.

When creating moves, ask “what is the meaning of this?” Allow the emotion and motion for the whole phrase or thought and choreograph accordingly. Don't use pantomime moves. Only choreograph the individual word if it is poignant. These words are 'puff points' –places in the lyrics that will help the singer ride the emotion

-"I love the **coolness** of the **water**." Make sure these places are the same as the directors!

Stage the song so it makes sense. Build a scene that is in keeping with the writer's purpose.

Passion and energy are created by purpose. There must be a motive for each move. Does it add to the passion, suit the character, help tell the story or set the scene?

Effective and Efficient methods of Teaching.

Teach the moves from general to specific. This emphasises “the journey not just the destination” –(how to get from move A to B). The reason for this is so they remember the emotion and also because the energy is created by the journey. They may not be comfortable with this at first but manage their expectation e.g. “Come with me. If I like it, I'll fix it, if not we'll move on.”

Minimise questions during teaching. Ask them to trust you not to make them look stupid. Explain that once they get the emotional stuff then they'll understand the move.

Don't assume that they know what you know about the plan.- be patient.

Demonstrate the desired way of performing a move. If you can't do physically what is in your mind, get someone who can do it to demonstrate.

If you want a bigger performance, explain that they are giving you the **living room** but what you want is the **stadium**.

If someone's performance is “over the top”, don't ask them to back off, just ask them to be a little more honest.

If you have a dead group of performers on the risers, find the main offender and bring up her performance. The others around her are probably trying not to stand out next to her.

Don't work on 'faces'. If faces aren't animated, it's only a symptom of them not buying into the emotional character. Do more work on characterisation.

Keep the moves buoyant so chorus doesn't perform into the floor.

Energy and Execution

Energy in a chorus must be holistic. Energy comes down like a tidal wave from the back of the chorus and the front row are the surfers. If the wave crashes, the front row falls.

Take these points into consideration.

*Meaning, honesty and purpose of the visuals and musical plan.

*Powerful character and storyline definition

*Passion going beyond the moves.

When the primary focus goes to the limbs, this overrides the emotional focus. So bring them back to the primary emotional focal point.

*Perform in the present. Do it to the best of your ability every time.

*Consistency = stamina + passion.

Chorus needs to understand that what they practice is what happens on stage. Without this practice, you can never predict how they will perform when it counts.

So, if they don't do it, stop and ask them if that is their best? Have they given their all? The chorus has to be responsible for their own improvement.

*At rehearsals, have surprise calls where you ask just one row to sing this time. This will make everyone responsible for the sound and stop them leaning.

*Constantly check stance and posture (now called 'alignment') – including director's.

*Concentrate performance singing in the lower body (80/20)

Exercise

Arms up and move them R,L. Concentrated energy in shoulders and hold a note.

Then, concentrate energy in 'butt' and do same moves.

*Be careful when choreographing on the down beat. Sometimes this can cause the chorus to "sing into the floor".

Breaths are part of the music. They are watching your emotions, so breathe in a way that is meaningful. You need to launch continuous body energy into the breaths.

*Strong moves that have resistance, come from keeping the energy focus around the buttocks ('butt' singing).

*Keep the emotional staircase of passionate energy.

*Recognise the way people walk. We don't want "boppers" (front foot engaged first.) The back foot should generate the power (power walk) and you should get the impression of hydroplaning. Walk low – this helps give visual extension.

*Faces are a weapon, so get your director to turn around to audience.

*Turn up the fan. When you have challenging sections of a song that require more air or stamina, turn your internal fan up to 'high' right before that moment. So get the chorus to play with the fan in their air supply and by turning up the speed of their fan, they can generate more air.

*Riser power. A lot of power generates from the centre of the chorus because the director has those people in her sights and this is a subliminal affirmation that they are important. The outside people don't have this luxury, so move groups of outside people into the centre at times and then they remember the power of the centre when they are back in their position and can reproduce the feeling and strength.

*Riser placement. People on the extremities of the chorus have to have a similar way of moving to create unity. The 'champagne flute' in the centre of the chorus is the visual power centre, so make sure those people are capable performers.

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Back row  x x x x
           x x x
           x
           x
front row  x x x x
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*Unity and Alignment in the chorus occurs when there is character unity (definition and strength), a well developed story line, visual unity (same energy level), and the emotional volume unified.

*Creating unity of movement.

Exercise

Play some flowing music (piano) and have chorus choreograph their own moves. Stop them to analyse. Direct them towards using a flowing move for the whole phrase. This idea is to stop too many movements in a phrase (giving it a 'bouncy' look. Then get some of them to move to every downbeat while the rest move on the phrase. It is not unified.

N.B. The best arrangements align the "puff" points with the flow of the lyrics. This gives unity to the song. Also try and get the director to direct the "puff" points only.

No 7

Making Warmups Fun and Productive

by
Asa Hagerman

Warmup for ½ hour minimum

Why Warmup?

Teach so many things that we want to transfer over to chorus work
Set the tone for whole night
Physical and mental process

Set tone –

Have fun
Use movements
Use rhythm as a tool for rest of night
Use dynamics
Team building exercises
Emotional message or communication eg incy wincy spider (good for intervals)

Warmups need to cover:-

Posture
Breathing
Phonation – vocal space in throat/mouth
Resonation
Articulation

Cover full range and register
Interval training
Vowel placement

Combine all of the above

Order of warmup –

1. Do it first (don't talk)
2. they will imitate
3. Give the purpose
4. Sing again
5. Continue to sing and coach – reinforce things that are important

LESS WORDS MORE ACTION
TAKE CHARGE
MAKE PARTICIPANTS FEEL SAFE

Activity – Groups of 7 – get each group to make up a warm-up using the above elements and then get them to perform it and explain how they incorporated the elements.

What ever you do in front of a group you are the role model

Words can one thing but body language says another thing, therefore has to be whole of body energy

Activity –

Stand in a circle and each person to take do some movement – the group is to focus on one person and imitate then swap to next person

Be aware of what chorus needs eg octave work etc

Adult learners want to have fun but also time efficiency

Learn more from contrast – go to extremes, learn from polarity
Tension vs relaxation

No 8

RIP YOUR SHOWER CURTAIN OPEN

by
Lynne Smith

Introduction:

To enhance showmanship, everyone needs to be comfortable performing
We need to understand what might be undermining their best performance.

_ fear of judgment – director, peers, audience

_ not fully prepared OR plan/music is beyond their level

_ low self-esteem or self-image

_ do they replay “old” messages in their head: i.e. ‘you sing flat’

Visual people need to be aware that sometimes confidence has to be built slowly

by always providing a positive, safe environment for chorus members.

**I’ve taken points in my notes and added them to the appropriate number in the handout, “Techniques to Create Energy and Enhance Your Showmanship”*

1 Exercise

Do the Sweet Adeline step at a C level; move it up to B; B+; A level.

NOTE – More energy and stamina is needed each time. It’s your choice to do it at a more advanced level.

4 Exercise

Partners – one sings lyrics of song while other “oo”s, then reverse. The “oo”s must be as animated as though you were singing the words.

SO...when you don’t get the lyrics, your performance must still be at its best.

5 Get over-“Where should the hand actually be?”

Release the emotion and make the arms say it.

6 If you need to, apologise ahead of time for invading your neighbour’s space. (It shouldn’t worry them – after all we are a “touchy/feely” group!)

8 Body Language exercise.

In partners, sing “Happy Birthday” with a variety of emotions. Emotion written on board, seen by Person 1 and acted out. Person 2 guesses emotion portrayed (i.e. scared, sexy etc)

Discuss how they knew the emotion –talk about body language.

10 Exercise

Sing “You Are My Sunshine”. Add emotion (vocal texture) to the following words one at a time.

“only”

“happy”

“never”

- 11** Be who you are and happy with it.
Be willing to share your passion and risk it.
Completely trust your director, musical leaders or quartet members.

20 ENERGY

Are you contributing or sucking it away?
There are only these 2 choices. Choose wisely.

No. 9

THE RED VINE THEORY

by
Anna-Lisa Glad

Positive teaching/learning techniques for choreography.

Philosophy:

How flexible is your chorus? The longer we are set in our ways, the harder it is for us to bend.

Chorus members need to know that they can succeed or the visual team will meet with resistance. It is then that people less flexible to change, will revert to their old habits and attitudes.

Members need to take ownership of the choreography. They must feel comfortable with it.

Attitude is everything

People need to cultivate a positive attitude to change and update ideas on visual presentation. The bar has been raised and we must respond.

A member with a negative attitude?

*Take them aside and explain that they are the only one with a negative attitude and the chorus can't afford dissention. You would like them to try, but if they feel they can't, you want them to sit out this song.

*Passive/aggressive people – ask: "How can I help you?"

*To help people 'come on board', pull out a row at a time to watch and get the big picture. They can then choose who they want to emulate.

Successful teaching methods.

- Make them laugh.
- Be prepared –so they respect your expertise.
- To lower resistance, ask them to be "flexible" first.
- Build a good personal relationship with chorus.
- If you have something to teach that may meet with resistance, introduce it in warm-ups. Here you can teach the 'flow', rather than as individual moves.
- Rule of 3 – Don't allow for questions until everyone has done the move 3 times. Tell the chorus this, and make the questioners understand that if they are focused on the question they are about to ask, they cannot take in the info that may make the move easy for them to master. This is necessary as people do not like to have their train of thought interrupted by questions.

NOTE: Chorus members have a big responsibility in the learning process

No. 10

Getting Comfortable Acting Barbershop Style

by
Lynne Smith

Fitness, Flexibility and Control to develop physical and vocal stamina. Physical Warm-ups.....

Right finger in air and describe a circle

Left "" "" "" "" "" ""

Repeat R and L clockwise and anti-clockwise.

Describe a square Right finger and then left

Describe Right a circle and left a square x2.

Write Christian Name in air Right finger and then both R and L fingers.

Repeat with full name.

The above develop flexibility and visual awareness

2) Awareness to develop and maintain openness and interact with other performers, director and the audience.

8 people lie in a circle with heads in and feet out like spokes of a wheel.

Sing a given note, round the circle. When Lynne shouts 'Chorus' everyone sings any note.

Repeat, starting on a different note

Ask everyone how they felt about this?

3) Imagination and Spontaneity. To develop ability to use imagination in a spontaneous way physically, mentally and emotionally.

The Tribe

10 singers in a bunch...no holding hands but can touch each other.- Small shuffle steps to right led by Lynne.

Tribe now continues itself. Round to and fro etc. until Lynne says STOP.

"Who took the lead?' and "Who felt frustrated?'

4) Character and Emotion with sound.

Lynne put a pile of boas, hats,toys etc. in the center of a circle.

*This was an excellent exercise. Lynne taps someone on the shoulder and they have to use the one or two articles they choose . However they **cannot use them** in the way they are intended. i.e..

The boa as fairy floss A ball as soap

A book as an aerobic step skipping rope as a tie.

glove as a shoe bat and ball as mascara and mirror

Use music if you wish

5) Concentration and Focus To develop ability to concentrate instantly and stay in the moment.

Give 3 volunteers a job eg cooking, cleaning making beds
they need to do these jobs in response to different types of music eg.
RAP Country and Western Gavotte

Lynne's workshop was in an open space. There were plenty of volunteers. I
would extend this by including pairs moving as the Three Musketeers with
fencing swords. Move with French swagger to suitable music. This helps
characterisation.