A Survey of Choral Ensemble Memorization Techniques

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A Survey of Choral Ensemble Memorization Techniques

Margaret Alley
Masters of Music in Music Education Final Project
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Laura Stambaugh
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Why memorize?

• Practical
  – We memorize all the time
  – LGPE, competition requirements
  – Performances
  – Better musicianship

• Personal
  – More connection between ensemble members and the message of the music
  – Emotional communication
  – Communication with the director/teacher and audience
What information on memorization is available?

- Types of memory
  - Aural, Visual, Structural (Formal), Tactile, Kinesthetic
  - Strategies
    - Holistic, Segmented, Additive, Serial (Mishra, 2002; 2005; 2011)

- Expert Performers
  - How they memorize and what strategies do they use

- Challenges and Strategies
  - Generally anecdotal and instrumental
  - Address what strategies help each type of memory
Notable Vocal and Choral Studies

• Ginsborg, 2004 and Ginsborg & Chaffin, 2007
  – What is more effective: learning words and music together or separate?
• Doeble, 2002
  – Collection of forum responses about memorizing choral music
  – Original forum was specifically for foreign language
  – This is the only choral memorization source I could find.
Purpose of the Current Study

(1) To fill the gap in memorization literature about choral ensemble memorization techniques

(2) To create a list of memorization techniques that can be used by choral directors and teachers at any level
Method

• Materials: Choral Ensemble Memorization Techniques Survey- 16 questions
• Paper and electronic format
• 73 potential participants at all levels of choral directing/teaching
Results

• Participants: \( n = 14, \ 19.2\% \) (out of 73)
• Q1- 5 counties
• Q2- 5 types of ensembles:
  – Elementary school
  – Middle school
  – High school
  – Community
  – Church
• Q3- Range of years teaching: 1 year - 30 years
Results

• Q6- Do your ensembles memorize music for performances? Why?
  • 11 replied yes
  • 2 replied yes with exceptions
  • 1 replied sometimes
  – Communication and musicality

• Q9- On a scale of 1-5, how much music of performance music is memorized?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale of 1 to 5</th>
<th>Total number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (none)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (all)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q11: How and where is music memorized?
Results

Q14: Most difficult

- Text: 39%
- Pitch: 26%
- Rhythm: 9%
- Dynamics: 9%
- Articulation: 9%
- Enunciation: 5%
- All: 4%
- All but dynamics: 4%

Q15: Easiest

- Text: 60%
- Pitch: 25%
- Rhythm: 10%
- Dynamics: 5%
- Articulation: 0%
- Enunciation: 5%
- All: 5%
Results

• Q12- What memorization techniques are director-implemented?

• Q13- What memorization techniques are student-implemented?
Compiled Memorization Techniques

• Repetition
  – Whole piece
  – Sections (segments) of music
  – 4 Step Process
    • Learn the music
    • Have music open but do not look unless necessary
    • Close music
    • Put music away and rely on director

• Text/Lyrics
  – Discussion of text/lyrics
  – Fill in the Blank
  – Find the Error
  – Copy the text/lyrics
  – Word for word translation

• Outlines
  – Numbering
    • By form of the music
  – Acronyms
    • Guided by text

• Mnemonics

• Story

• Trigger Words
  – By form of the music
  – By different lyric phrases

• Call and Response
  – Text or music

• Gestures by Director/Teacher

• Choreography
  – By director/teacher
  – By ensemble members

• Memory Quiz or Test
Implications for Choral Music

- Repetition is not the only memorization technique!!
- There are benefits to memorizing performance music for the ensemble members and the audience
- Varied techniques seem to be effective
- Different ensembles require different techniques
Future Research Needs

• Evaluate the efficiency of the techniques listed
• Increase the sample size to find more techniques or variations of techniques
• Look at differences in techniques between auditioned and non-auditioned choral ensembles
• Compare School schedules (block vs. 7-period)
• Block piece learning vs. mixed piece learning
• When is the optimal time to start memorizing (too early or too late)?
• Compare memorization techniques between new teachers and experienced teachers


Questions??

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