A Survey of Choral Ensemble Memorization Techniques

Margaret A. Alley

Georgia Southern University, ma00008@georgiasouthern.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/pkp

Part of the Music Education Commons, Music Performance Commons, and the Music Practice Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/pkp/2014/Graduate/2

This presentation (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences & Events at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Phi Kappa Phi Research Symposium by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.
A Survey of Choral Ensemble Memorization Techniques

Margaret Alley
Masters of Music in Music Education Final Project
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Laura Stambaugh
Spring 2014
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: 9%
- Rhythm: 9%
- Dynamics: 26%
- Articulation: 4%
- Enunciation: 4%
- All: 4%
- All but dynamics: 5%

Q15: Easiest

- Text: 60%
- Pitch: 25%
- Rhythm: 10%
- Dynamics: 5%
- Articulation: 0%
- Enunciation: 0%
- All: 0%
- All but dynamics: 0%
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??

Please email Margaret Alley
margaret_a_alley@georgiasouthern.edu