

“That Was a Bit of a Stodgy Start!” (Director Pete)

The functions and effects of verbal imagery in choral rehearsals.

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Abstract

The title phrase was encountered during doctoral research into the contexts and efficacy of verbal imagery in choral rehearsals. The investigation was completed over five years and adopted a multi-method approach, using videoed observations, questionnaires and interviews. Twenty-one directors and over 330 choir members across 15 choirs contributed to the research; sung responses to the imagery were examined in their rehearsal context and the data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The research established the types of imagery employed and whether and how they were understood by singers. The research defined what role imagery plays in choral directing and provided implications for choral directors’ practice. This article focuses on three main questions:

- *What is verbal imagery?*
- *What is the function of verbal imagery in choral rehearsals?*
- *What are the implications for choral directors?*

Imagery is influential in developing singers’ understanding of the concepts involved in choral singing and in enabling singers to create and modify vocal sounds in response to their director’s requests. Choral directors can employ these findings to inform their thinking and practice, combining imagery with other rehearsal techniques in the knowledge that it is a useful and effective strategy.

Key words choirs, rehearsal, imagery, directors, language, communication

Introduction

The author had encountered and invented many examples of verbal imagery, such as the one in the title, during experience as a singer and choral director. However, consideration had never been given as to why directors used that type of expression nor whether the imagery fulfilled any purpose. Many questions began to form in relation to verbal imagery, three of which will be examined here:

- What is verbal imagery?
- What is the function of verbal imagery in choral rehearsals?
- What are the implications for choral directors?

Extant literature demonstrated a lack of focus on verbal imagery in choral pedagogy, despite its obvious existence in vocal and choral practice. Choral conducting guides such as Kaplan (1985) and George (2003) avoid focus on what directors actually say to their

choirs. It may be the case that more recent emphasis on the technical proficiency of training conductors (Garnett 2009, 203) has triggered even less prominence on verbal communication. However, Durrant's nine point initial conducting course (2003, 176), places sufficient emphasis on the "use of imagery, analogy and demonstration" as to include it as one of his rehearsal strategies (2003, 177). According to Geisler (2012), there have been only three pieces of research focusing on imagery in choral rehearsals in fifty years, Funk (1982), Jacobsen (2004) and McCarthy (2002). Of these, Jacobsen's study is the most wide-ranging in terms of examining the outcomes of imagery, though even this is limited to vocal function. In contrast there is ample evidence of imagery being used in vocal pedagogy, for example in Potter(2000) or Sell (2005).

What is Verbal Imagery?

It is expedient initially to provide a definition of verbal imagery:

an image, metaphor, analogy, simile or other figurative language, which is employed verbally by choral directors in rehearsals to enhance explanations and whose function is to affect singers' responses (2015, xv).

There are several variations of figurative language here, in the same way that Spitzer assembles a range of terms for his use of metaphor (2004, 3). Petrie and Oshlag have a similarly extensive list of linguistic forms (1993, 579), and Ortony fails to see any important cognitive difference between the terms (1975, 52).

In this context therefore, imagery is being employed as a collective noun. The imagery takes on the role of a prompt in choral rehearsals, as the purpose of the imagery is that choir members actually produce or change a sound. This is dissimilar to the type of musical imagery Godøy and Jørgensen refer to, where the music is imagined rather than heard (2001, ix). In rehearsals, the imagery is the cause and the sound is the effect; it is employed to help singers imagine something that triggers part of their physical apparatus to respond in a way which produces the sound the director requires. This needs to be executed efficiently in rehearsals in terms of both time and accuracy as Price and Byo point out (2002, 335). These three factors alone, appropriate vocal responses, accuracy and time-saving, should be of interest to those who direct choirs and are willing and able to improve their rehearsal processes.

What is the Function of Verbal Imagery in Choral Rehearsals?

One of the first ideas explored in relation to imagery's purpose was that verbal imagery was being employed to explain what cannot be seen. First, this relates to the inner singing mechanism; much vocal pedagogy relies on singers having a conceptual understanding of physiology and the processes involved, some of which is not visible. Zbikowski's conceptual models relating to the voice are essential here, as "it is difficult to find the physical object that correlates with vocal sound" (2002, 111).

The second invisible aspect for which imagery may be utilised is what does not appear in the notation but is heard in performance, that is, the nuances of the sound which might be termed expression or interpretation. In the same way that a composer “articulates subtle complexes of feeling that language cannot even name,” (Langer 1969, 222), singers then need to interpret these. Schippers too noted the need for something “beyond the tangible” (2006, 214). Several aspects of expression and interpretation are certainly evident in scores, depending of course on the composer. However, choirs who use notation need, at some point, to focus more on the sound produced than on the written page. The notation guides singers and their directors but there remains much of the overall performance which is not in the notation. Directors might suppose that imagery is most useful for those “inexpressible” characteristics to which Ortony refers (1975, 48).

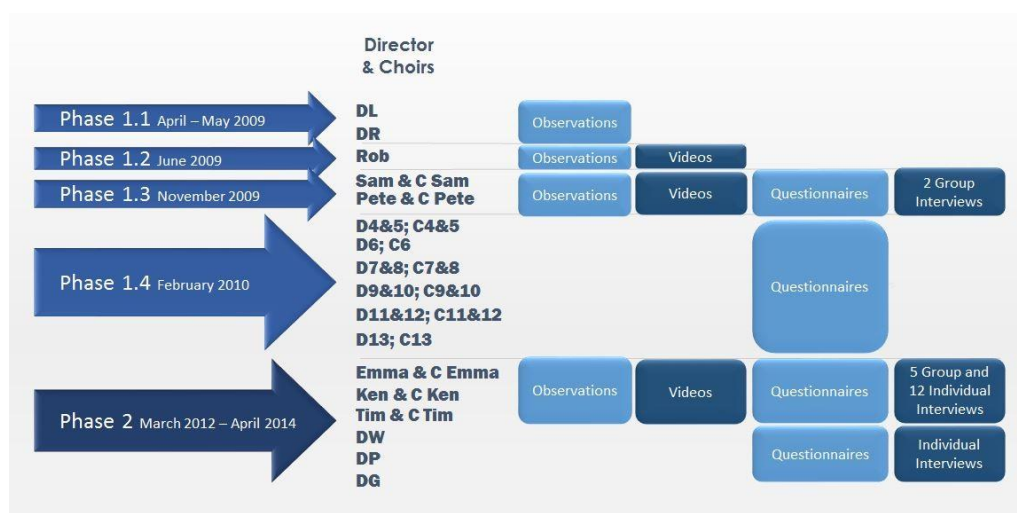
Research

Having provided answers to the first two questions, it is appropriate now to demonstrate briefly what type of research was undertaken, the methodology and partial results.

Methodology and Materials

The data were collected over a five-year period, in two phases, the first of which tested the validity and reliability for the second. Ethical approval was gained for the research. Overall, 15 choirs, 330 choir members and 21 directors contributed to the research. All choirs were amateur but several directors were professionals. Initial choices of directors and choirs were based on geographic location, availability and willingness to take part, though a more diverse group was approached in Phase 2. A variety of choral experiences existed, ranging from those who had not sung in a choir before, did not read music and were taught pieces by rote, to a double-auditioned university chamber choir of seven singers all of whom had weekly vocal tuition.

Table 1



Four different types of materials were used (see Table 1 above): observations and video recordings captured the imagery in its regular context and ensured that images were examined alongside the vocal responses to which they were allied. Questionnaires enabled large amounts of information to be gathered in a limited time and were employed mainly to supply contextual evidence. Interviews made a deeper investigation possible; during these, singers and directors (separately) viewed excerpts from their previous week's rehearsal at a point where the choir had sung a phrase or note, the director had used an image and the choir had subsequently sung the same phrase again. Respondents were asked to focus on and compare the sounds pre- and post-imagery, to explain what, if any, differences they heard. Feedback became more varied and richer as the research progressed.

Analysis

In order to analyse all the data, a set of categories was devised, and all the Phase 1 data were filtered through these to determine their reliability. Any problems or anomalies were eliminated, and a revised set of categories was created, see Table 2, which was utilised for all Phase 2 data. The word *effect* as the heading of column 2 is important, as it focuses on the result of the imagery, that is the vocal response singers made. The categories were informed by Chen (2007), Jacobsen (2004) and Mountain (2001), amongst others and demonstrate a very wide range of effects.

Table 2

Categories		
Voice production and technique	Breath management /control, support, respiration, energy, air flow	B
	Tone quality, register, tone colour, resonance, vibrato	T
	Voice production, projection, how or where sound is created, larynx, phonation, placing the sound	V
	Stance, posture, body position/alignment, facial expression, mouth shape	Po
	Articulation consonants, vowel shape or formation, diction, pronunciation	A
	Flow of piece/phrase; line, shape of phrase, phrasing, how phrase moves, urgency, legato (not breath flow)	F
Expression/interpretation	Expression, interpretation, imagination, mood, style, may or may not refer to text	EX
Motivation	Motivation, enthusiasm, readiness, concentration, confidence, alertness, use of humour to motivate	M
Musical elements	Dynamic, volume	D
	Rhythm, accent, emphasis, rhythmic reading and accuracy, detached, staccato, timing, entries or exits together, attack	R
	Pitch, intonation, range, melodic reading and accuracy	Pi
	Texture, balance of voices, parts interweaving, eg one voice part standing out	TX
	Speed, tempo, pulse keeping, ie metronomic measure	S

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [(Flowers 2008), (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009)] was determined to be the most appropriate analytical strategy, as it focuses on the participants making sense of their experiences. In the case of this research, the phenomena were the vocal results of the imagery and the interpreters were the singers and directors who had experienced those phenomena in their regular rehearsals. The images all related directly to a specific note or phrase so they were not extracted from the music and examined out of context. Instead, all the imagery examples were heard as they had applied to the music, and because the analysis was carried out by the same participants, as much ecological validity as possible was maintained.

Results

The research as a whole found five types of imagery and nine functions and effects. However, it is not possible in the scope of this article to examine all of those. This article will focus on five of the functions of verbal imagery, presenting evidence, which is predominantly from Phase 2 directors, as that was the most complete.

It is important to state initially that verbal imagery's primary role is as a method of communication. Durrant's research emphasises "the capacity to communicate clearly and unambiguously" as one of the requirements of an effective choral director (2003, 100). Although it is mostly within the director's role to make decisions about how the music is performed, in reality it is the choir who perform. Therefore, the director's vision of the interpretation needs to be shared with choir members. There are several ways in which the communication happens, including gesture, vocal demonstrations, facial expression and these are examined elsewhere (2015). The focus in this article is on communication via the images employed by directors.

Function 1: Imagery functions as a mnemonic

It is evident from director Tim's¹ interview that he utilised imagery as a memory aid:

I call that the memory moment .. because if you know what you did, and took the memory .. of what you did at that moment, then you know how to repeat it again. So if it's .. a bad thing, then you take the memory moment of what's bad and what to avoid, but if it's good, you take the memory moment of what's good. So that's why I call it the memory moment (Tim p. 6, fq).²

Tim deliberately made his choir aware of the link between the vocal response they were creating and the fact that they should store it in their memories. He used the term *memory moment* both to draw attention to the correct response and to establish it as something which choir members could and should return to at a later date.

¹ All respondents are anonymised.

² Quotations refer to sections within the recordings made at the time of the data gathering.

Evidence that imagery functions as a mnemonic was also demonstrated during the data gathering process. At least a week after the images had been introduced during the rehearsal, both Tim and his singers were able to recall the meaning of a particular image during their interviews. Not only could they recall the meaning but, more importantly, the associated appropriate vocal response was also remembered. This recurred with each image and with each choir at Phase 2. Therefore, the association between the imagery and its response is a strong relationship. Imagery is not employed simply to provide variety, entertainment or humour, although it frequently fulfilled that role. The fact that singers could remember how to respond is important and crucial to influencing director's rehearsal strategies.

Function 2: Imagery can be a substitute for technical terminology

For the purposes of this research, *technical terminology* includes the Italian terms, musical terms and any terms which relate to vocal function or physiology.

All the directors in Phase 2 demonstrated and acknowledged that they replaced technical terminology with imagery. This was true even for director Emma, the most experienced and competent professional singer, who still sometimes chose to employ imagery instead of technical vocabulary. Director Ken was eager to keep technical explanations simple, especially with amateur singers. He used imagery to describe musical terminology, here for example, the relative length of notes:

When you get long notes [...] watch me, ok? The particularly bad one, is when you go to 'um' on *Te Deum*, yeah? Just a bit sluggish moving to it and then coming off it so just be aware of that (Ken-R1, p. 17:2).

In this example, the imagery highlighted the importance of how and exactly when the note started and finished. The negative³ image, *sluggish*, demonstrated that the speed of articulation of the consonants was the main aspect Ken wanted to affect. He was capable of describing it technically, but he chose not to do so. In the research, the vast majority of imagery examples utilised as a substitute for technical terminology related to category T, which comprises register and tone colour or quality, see Table 2. Tone quality or colour is perhaps the most difficult aspect of vocal function to explain without imagery, even when the speaker has excellent vocal technical knowledge. This is probably because tone colour is the aspect of singing that is least visible and the most abstract, as a professional choir director based in the U.S. commented:

I mean you have to find images for them [choir members] . . . that they can do, because . . . the important thing to remember is that the voice is the only instrument that exists, that you cannot see the mechanism (DP interview, p. 1).

³ Negative images are a type of imagery identified during the research. They highlighted what the director wanted to eradicate.

There is evidence that imagery has been used in vocal pedagogy for many decades, (Mason 2000), (Miller 2006), (Williams 2013). The depiction of tone quality is one of the main functions imagery can produce in both amateur and professional settings.

Function 3: Imagery can affect the response in several ways simultaneously

All the directors were aware of this function and in fact, Tim was not only aware of it, but he required that type of complex response. Tim explained his image *singing without fear* like this:

A lot of people .. they hold back part of their voice within themselves because .. sometimes they don't think it sounds really nice. Now I don't mind if you get some of the harshness in. [...] I try and get people just to sing out .. and sing without fear [...] cos a lot of times people are think-singing all the time, instead of just singing, enjoying it and just letting go, letting the emotion happen (Tim, p. 5, ex. 4).

In this example, motivation, breath management and interpretation were the categories Tim expected to be affected. He was aware that in order to produce the freedom of breath for which he was aiming, the tone colour might be affected but he was prepared to accept that as a consequence of the *letting go*. Evidently, a single image can generate quite diverse results.

Below are responses from singers 1, 3, 7, 9 and 10 in Tim's choir to the same image, *singing without fear*:

- 1Tim Yeah, you can hear sometimes people holding back aren't they, they know the song, they've sang the same song for years but they still hold back.
- 3Tim You've got to have soul!
- 7Tim He often says let it out whether it's right or wrong.
- 9Tim It's feeling free with the song and then you bring the finer points afterwards.
- 10Tim Just to go for it to begin with, and then we can get it to sound better.

These plainly demonstrate that singers understood the notion of motivating confidence and the resulting freedom of breath even though they did not use those terms. The expressive ideas of *feeling free* and having *soul* were also transmitted to the singers. All of these aspects were communicated from Tim to his singers through a single three-word image.

Function 4: Imagery can be generated from the text and used to illustrate it

Some composers will illustrate the text they are setting by creating music which closely corresponds with the words. This may be on a small scale, for example in word-painting, or it may be the creation of a more generalised impression of the text as a whole. Several examples of this emerged in the research, including the following from Ken; the text was *the seas are dark with wrath* from Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man* (2003). Ken selected the word *wrath*, and instead of trying to explain what the word meant, he said simply, "Put in the meaning" (Ken, p.1, ex.1). When he was asked what type of response he expected from the choir, he replied:

I wanted them .. to create .. that feeling of anger and determination, everything that the word means, and translate it into sound .. so therefore, I know .. I suppose that's ambiguous .. isn't it. But quite often people understand what the word means, and they know how to react vocally to it (Ken, p. 1, ex. 1).

This explanation reveals that Ken realised he did not need to provide a definition of the word *wrath* in order to enable singers to respond to it. He merely highlighted the word and allowed his singers to create their own portrayal, albeit there might be differences in interpretation amongst them. Singers understood the meaning of *wrath* and used this to create a sound full of anger and determination. In terms of the categories, singers produced the sound by changing the tone colour and using a stronger flow of breath. The understanding needed to respond to Ken's image *put in the meaning*, was confirmed by two of his choir members:

4Ken Trying to create the sense of anger and .. the enormous nature of it all, so.. although I don't think he needed there to be explicit about what wrath meant, I think he just had to go so far as to remind us to put in the meaning.

6Ken Wrath, it's an angry word isn't it. [...] You interpret what he's trying to elucidate [...] he's kind of relying on you to get what he's on about.

It should be noted first that the singers were not aware of Ken's explanation, which had been given separately in his interview. It is interesting to discover that each singer independently recognised what Ken's approach was and were positive in their ability to be able to react appropriately, realising they had been given the task of responding to the *wrath* image without further description from Ken.

The text of any piece of choral or vocal music is a likely source of imagery, provided of course it is understood by singers and director; this comprehension refers to both the language and the more subtle meanings transmitted by it. The fact that imagery can be generated from the text may be one of the more predictable functions of imagery but is one which naturally distinguishes choral ensembles from instrumental ones.

Function 5: Imagery is used to change the singer's thinking

This function would be difficult to evidence except for the information gathered through the interviews and it appeared initially that some responses were too vague to be worthwhile investigating. For example, when a respondent in Emma's choir was asked how she knew what to do in response to the imagery, her reply was:

It's really hard to describe when you're asked (...) I think it changes your consciousness a little bit (...) you'll take it a little bit differently and you'll think about it a little bit differently (1Emma p. 1, ex. 1).

In fact, answers like this served to highlight in practice Ortony's idea of the "inexpressibility" of imagery (1975, 48). Some of the directors also recognised that changing the singers' thinking was crucial as it enabled the singers to alter the sound. For example, this is how director Sam explained his image *let the music dance*:

I think a word like dance is good because it lifts it (...) into a different kind of sphere and gets [them] to think about the physicality and the dance-like nature of the rhythms (Sam, p. 1, ex. 1).

Here Sam suggested that imagery enabled the singers to transcend the reality of the rhythms and text, by thinking about it differently. He recognised that a change in cognitive understanding allowed a different vocal response to be created. It is possible to identify similar thought processes from respondents 4Ken and 6Ken, quoted in Function 4 above, as they explained the compulsion to assume the responsibility of thinking how to change the sound themselves, without necessarily being given direct instructions by director Ken.

Function 5 is therefore one of the most important functions of imagery. Imagery only has value as a rehearsal strategy if it can affect the sound; if not, it becomes merely elaborate description.

What are the Implications for Choral Directors?

Having provided a definition of imagery and explained five of the functions of imagery, it is now pertinent to focus on the implications of these for choral directors.

1. Directors should incorporate imagery into their rehearsal strategies

It has been shown earlier that imagery functions as a mnemonic. This is extremely useful as most directors have a limited time-schedule and certain musical targets to achieve by the end of it. If imagery can help singers remember how to perform a phrase from one rehearsal to another, that in itself is an advantage. However, the more important finding was that, not only did singers recall the image but in addition, the vocal response allied to it. In the case of one singer, the image and response were recalled after at least five years. Directors should therefore be reassured by these findings and consider imagery as an essential rehearsal tool. Those directors who already employ imagery can be confident in knowing that it is a valid and effective strategy. Those directors who do not currently use imagery should be encouraged to include it within their rehearsal strategies. It is interesting to note that every one of the directors in the research did use imagery, though it was probably personal choice as to the frequency.

2. Directors need to have good vocal knowledge and experience to devise appropriate images

Singers in the research had a very wide range of skills and experience in singing; for example, those in Emma's choir had weekly vocal lessons and performed solos on a regular basis whereas the majority of Tim's singers had no prior involvement in singing nor any experience of vocal teaching. Whatever the skill level of the singers, all the directors in the research substituted imagery for technical terms. Therefore, directors need to know the technical terminology themselves in order to achieve that. It is not

sufficient to have read information about singing. Directors need adequate vocal knowledge, and essentially the experience to apply that knowledge in order to easily explain what they require vocally from their singers and how singers are to achieve it. One well-practised director in the research had taken vocal lessons specifically to gain sufficient technical information and practice to be able to do that. Directors who are limited in vocal experience or knowledge should be encouraged to embark on vocal education and training if they are to enhance the singing of their choir.

3. A director requires a creative, fluent imagination and vocabulary, matched to the choir

Directors need to devise appropriate images which match technical requirements to the desired response. If this is to be beneficial to the choir, images need initially to be explained in detail so they are understood across the choir. Directors who have an extensive and creative vocabulary are able to demonstrate this with little effort. One of the directors in the research, whose command of the English language was restricted, had some difficulties in transmitting her ideas to the singers, despite her advanced vocal and conducting abilities.

It should be remembered that many technical terms are, in fact, images, for example, *head voice* or *forward tone*. This is particularly true of descriptions of tone quality and the hidden singing mechanisms discussed earlier. Directors therefore require the ability to explain even the most elusive terms.

Directors in the research who conducted more than one choir stated that they adapted their vocabulary according to the singers with whom they were working. Explanations were not necessarily simplified but were modified appropriately, especially in the case of technical terminology. This is easier to accomplish if, for example the choir is attached to a particular institution in which the director is also involved, but is more difficult when directors are new to a choir or take single, stand-alone rehearsals. All this implies that the more the director knows choir members in general, the easier it will be to devise appropriate images which are in the experience of the singers.

4. Directors can change their singers' thinking with imagery

Once a director is aware of this advantage of imagery it may be easier to implement, even subconsciously. Callaghan, Emmons and Popeil state, "the musical instrument that is the voice is the whole person" (2012, 560). Most directors are aware of this in the sense that they will plan when to rehearse the most challenging music or which piece to finish with, so they can maintain momentum and concentration during a long rehearsal. If we examine Callaghan *et al's* description of singing further, it appears almost impossible to conceptualise:

A vocalist's body may be thinking language and music while apprehending internal sensations of vibration, movement, and sound, and while attending/responding to external sensations: the sound of the voice; the sight and sound of instrumental accompaniment; other singers, and an audience. Plainly the brain is the most important vocal organ! (2012, 560).

As noted earlier, some parts of the vocal mechanism are not under conscious control, which implies that singers need to engage their brains during rehearsals, more than perhaps many directors, or singers, realise. If directors are asking singers to change their vocal sound, something needs to affect the brain in order for them to consider the sound in a different manner. An example was provided in Function 4 above, with discussion of Ken's image *put in the meaning*. The director needs to create an idea, concept or vision in the minds of the singers which is the stimulus to generating that change. This is where imagery can be most effective. The research showed that most of the images employed were not visual, kinaesthetic or auditory but were conceptual, provoking singers into thinking about the sound differently. Some of the images were so novel and inspired that singers were immediately drawn to consider their impact.

5. Directors can develop conceptual understanding with imagery

It has already been shown that directors use imagery to change the way singers think and therefore enable singers to change the sound. However, this is beneficial not only with individual words, phrases or notes, but also in developing ideas and concepts over a longer period. Directors who are interested in expanding and advancing their singers' understanding of musical and vocal ideas can employ imagery for that purpose, rather than consistently trying to invent new images when new repertoire is begun. The idea of educating choir members as they are rehearsing is expected if the singers are younger and less experienced but there is no reason why this should not continue, even with singers who have rehearsed in the same choir for decades.

Two examples will illustrate the notion of affecting singers' conceptual understanding. Rob and his choir had previously performed a concert of mainly Haydn; when they embarked on rehearsing Haydn's *The Creation*, Rob complained the sound "hasn't got that Viennese glitter" (Rob, R1). Rob and his choir between them had already established a concept of the type of sound and presentation which suited the Viennese classical style of the composer. He was trying to return to that idea by reminding them of the brightness and liveliness required through the *glitter* image they had previously shared.

In a second example, Ken's choir were singing a dotted quaver, semi-quaver, quaver sequence on three syllabled word with a slow tempo. He explained, "if we get slower, it's death to the music," (Ken, p.5, ex.3), to clarify how the sequence should be performed. His reasoning focused on the fact that "musically, little notes matter ... they mustn't drag, and often notes after a dotted note, do come out too slow, especially in slow music" (Ken p. 5, ex. 3). His choir were experienced notation readers but Ken realised that theoretical accuracy was not necessarily the key to performing accuracy. Rather, he was keen to educate his singers in the longer term, so they would be able to apply the generic idea that *little notes matter* in the future and not let the music *die*, especially if the tempo was slow.

6. Directors can use imagery to explain complex sounds succinctly

Function 3 above demonstrates that imagery can affect the sound in several ways simultaneously, for example, pitch, timbre and breath management. This is an enormous

benefit since vocal sound itself is multi-faceted, being comprised of the same variety of categories. The advantage of this to directors is that there is no necessity to dismantle every sound in order to explain each category separately. Complex concepts such as the *stodgy start* quoted in the title can be encapsulated in one phrase. In this image, Pete was trying to make changes to the rhythm, breath management and articulation of the beginning of the piece, which he was able to affect by describing it with the negative image *stodgy*.

7. Directors can use imagery to spend less time talking

One of the advantages of not needing to explain each facet of the desired sound separately is that directors can avoid lengthy explanations by utilising imagery. The main result of this is that choir members can spend more time actually singing, which most singers would regard as a benefit and rehearsals become less tedious for the director too. If directors spend more time talking than the singers do singing, rehearsals lose their momentum which can negatively affect motivation levels and this in turn has an adverse influence on attendance. Efficiency in accuracy and utilising time are key ingredients for effective directors. Those who might still be sceptical about imagery's value might employ it simply on the grounds that it can positively affect motivation and attendance.

8. Directors can use lyrics or whole texts as inspiration for imagery

It was demonstrated in Function 4 above that images can be generated from the text. Therefore, when preparing a new score for rehearsal it is advisable that directors read the whole of the text in isolation, in addition to when it is integrated with the music. During this process directors may find individual lyrics or phrases stimulate specific images which relate to that lyric. Directors may also find that an impression of the text overall inspires them when describing to singers the types of effect they require. Some of these images can be transferred from piece to piece, or between pieces in the same style or by the same composers. Director Rob's *Viennese glitter* image seen earlier is an example which was taken from one Haydn piece to provide inspiration for the next.

9. Imagery can develop the bond between director and singers

Directors who are confident in their vision or concept of the whole of a piece may wish to share this with the singers to enable them to fully understand the director's overall aim in terms of interpretation and expression. Conversations about the background of the piece, its style or origins for example, are beneficial particularly when introducing a piece. This enables singers and their director to work towards creating a shared holistic impression which in turn can be presented to the audience. Reference was made earlier, Function 4, to director Ken rehearsing sections of *The Armed Man*. During the whole rehearsal he employed images of battles and warfare, and at the end dismissed the choir saying "you've been very heroic tonight!" (Ken, R1, p. 18:1). This prompted comments about *fighting together* from choir members, demonstrating they felt they had been working towards the same goals. Any strategy which allows the creation or development of such a positive relationship between performers is worthwhile. Directors might therefore employ imagery to assist their descriptions and benefit from what initially seem to be indirect and unexpected

ways. It may be a novel idea to some that it is beneficial to the directors to develop or maintain a close rapport between them and the choir but it is something which all directors should be aware of. The advice in Implication 3 above, to choose images which are relevant to the choir, can also positively affect the relationship between them. Motivating singers to attend rehearsals and to concentrate whilst they are there can all be influenced in the subtle and intangible ways for which imagery is renowned and valued.

10. Directors can use imagery to save rehearsal time

When planning rehearsals, either in the long or short term, directors will have a finite length of time in which to achieve their performance goals. Efficient rehearsals should include using imagery as it saves time in the two ways highlighted previously; directors do not need to describe individual characteristics of the sound but utilise an image instead. In addition, singers remember images and their associated responses, so once an image has been incorporated into a rehearsal, directors need only remind singers of it using one or two words. The succinctness of imagery is an extremely valuable rehearsal tool. It is surprising therefore that most of the directors in the research did not cite saving time as a reason for including imagery in their rehearsals. Rather, they thought that helping to interpret the music was why they incorporated imagery most frequently.

Conclusion

There is a growing body of research exploring the ways in which sounds are created in response to semantic cues. This ranges from Parise and Pavani who “observed consistent sound symbolic effects on vocalizations,” (2011, 373), to the more recent experiment by Wallmark, Frank and Ngheim, who recognised the “consistencies in the linguistic conceptualization of acoustic attributes” from prior research (2019, 1). Although Wallmark *et al*’s responses were not vocal, the prompts were a series of adjectives which includes many found in choral rehearsals examined for this article, for example, *bright, rich and harsh*. Wallmark *et al*’s conclusion that “affective verbal prompts can systematically influence sound production,” (2019, 10), cannot be ignored and gives support to the current research.

This article has provided evidence for and examples of five of the functions of verbal imagery in choral rehearsals, namely:

1. Imagery functions as a mnemonic;
2. Imagery can be a substitute for technical terminology;
3. Imagery can affect the response in several ways simultaneously;
4. Imagery can be generated from the text and used to illustrate it;
5. Imagery is used to change the singers’ thinking.

The functions *per se* are interesting and useful but it is beneficial that choral directors

also know what the implications are for their practice. It is of assistance to any director who is interested in improving their rehearsals to know they can employ imagery to help build concepts, save time and develop the relationship between them and the choir. However, it is even more valuable for directors to be able to rely on imagery to affect the sound their singers create. They should be aware though that their experience and understanding of vocal technique needs to be the foundation of the images they devise.

Directors may have encountered similar scenarios as those described above but may not have been aware of what imagery is, why it is utilised and, more importantly, what its effects are. This article has highlighted the fact that singers respond to imagery, so directors may use it more consciously, aware that the sung responses can be affected. The research has demonstrated that verbal imagery is an effective, even indispensable strategy in efficient choral rehearsals.

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