

Have a week of choir auditions held after school. Be sure that kids have multiple opportunities to meet you. You must get out into the hallways and talk to students about your program.

Use your current students' knowledge to find out about students who sing but are not enrolled in any ensembles. Most of these students have grown up together. They will remember who sang in elementary and middle school or who currently sings at church on Sundays. Tap into this information.

Create and send an invitation to the non-choir singing students to come to the choir room and meet you. Your personal invitation might say that one of their friends has selected them as a person who would enjoy and benefit from participation in the choir. This idea could be used in conjunction with Choir Awareness Week.

Produce a recruitment DVD. Include both rehearsal and performance footage along with student and teacher (you) interviews. Show your singers engaged in team building activities, joking around, and having fun. Include quotes from recent graduates and maybe even parents. Duplicate the DVD. Give it to everyone applicable and post it on your choir website.

**Target Group:**  
**High School Boys Who Have Sung  
in the Past but Are Not Singing Now**

Don't give up on guys who have sung in the past but dropped out. For many of us teachers, a number of students have told us they wished they had stayed in choir.

Go to the guidance counselors and get your old choir rosters. Find those singers who left because "they didn't have room in their schedules." Tell them that they are missed, they already read music, and might even miss singing and you!

**Conclusion**

Don't give up! You may feel that no matter what you do, you cannot improve your numbers. If you have followed through with many of the above activities and nothing is happening, reach out to your colleagues across the state for other suggestions.

If you are doing your part, the number of students in your choral program will increase. If it happened to me, it can happen to you!

Stay creative. Stay positive. Believe!



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All our progress is an unfolding, like a vegetable bud. You have first an instinct, then an opinion, then a knowledge as the plant has root, bud, and fruit. Trust the instinct to the end, though you can render no reason.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

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**Battling the October Blues:  
Stimulus Variation in Rehearsals**

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(Used with permission of Alabama's *Reprise*, Fall 2013)

Fall brings such beauty to our region of the country. We have perfect sunny days and cool nights, less humidity, and glorious fall colors. But if you're like me, fall can also bring challenges into the rehearsal room. By this time, your choir(s) may have already performed at least once, or you may be preparing for an upcoming performance.

I always find that in mid-October, attendance problems pop up along with occasionally dazed and overwhelmed singers. Additionally, you may find your own energy waning. My gas tank is perpetually running on low at this time of year. Yet, our list of "to-do's" gets longer, and the pressures of daily work get heavier.

How do we continue to be the best teacher/conductors we can be while keeping our singers' attention and motivating them to do their best?

First, we must take care of ourselves. As conductors, we understand the meaning of the word *sacrifice* all too well. But we also know that lack of sleep, lack of healthy eating habits, and lack of exercise make it harder to do our best and work at our optimum level.

I learned the hard way that my lack of respect for my body was keeping me from performing at my best. I have found that

by putting in a little extra time exercising, watching what I eat, and taking time for myself—yoga, massages, turning off the phone and computer to spend time with my husband—made me more productive and efficient on a daily basis. But I still find myself falling back into old habits only to be reminded again of what I really should do to help myself.

Second and equally important, we must continually find new ways to challenge our singers. As much as we complain about singers and their occasional lack of motivation, I am also aware that we conductors are asking them to do more than ever before. It seems that I can almost feel their lack of energy as they walk into the rehearsal room during this time of year.

Family, work, personal relationships, and school obligations weigh heavily on students just as they weigh on us. I often blame myself for uninspired rehearsals, but if I sit down and analyze what's happening, the definition of insanity comes to mind! How can I expect different results when I follow the exact same procedures and activities day after day (e.g., vocalises, structure of the rehearsal, language describing musical elements).

Recently, I've begun employing a concept taught to me by one of my graduate school professors whose teacher was Lawrence McQuerry. Stimulus-variation is largely a wind band rehearsal concept, but I adapt it and use it with great success in our choir rehearsals.

During those "October blues" days, it's important to change things. Don't be hesitant about getting your singers' attention through creative means no matter what their age. Try something new. You'll be surprised at the positive results. Here are a few suggestions.

- Walk out from behind the podium while conducting.
- Walk between the rows of singers.
- Have singers stand and sit during rehearsal.
- Vary the seating chart often—with each work, for example.
- Have the women sing to the men and vice versa. Don't be surprised by the giggles that result!
- As a teaching tool, share YouTube videos of one or more of the works you are rehearsing.
- On a particularly beautiful day, take students outside for rehearsing. Sing near the cafeteria (a recruitment op-

portunity) or for the principal, dean, and/or secretary or just for the trees!

- Use kinesthetic movement. Form circles while singing.
- Use walking, marching, and running in place to reinforce musical concepts such as sub-division, etc.
- Take time for the students to get to know one another using games. A good example is The Secret Game. Feel free to contact me if you are interested in learning more about this game.
- Have each section put together a skit to share on a Friday.
- Plan a fall retreat. We often travel to a retreat center in Tennessee for several days where we rehearse, relax, and bond with one another. I usually schedule this activity for the end of September or early October.
- Ask one of your mature, more advanced singers to lead vocalises and/or calisthenics. Students take ownership in the choir during this process.
- Introduce props into your rehearsal such as a choir mascot, large elastic bands (low breathing) or soccer balls (bounce in hands for staccato).
- When learning a Renaissance work, have each section stand in a corner and sing toward the middle of the room.
- Stage short, mini performances. Again, have the women sing for the men and vice versa.
- Ask an advanced, capable student to rehearse the choir.

Extend the ideas above or develop new ones. You'll reinforce learning and change the flavor of your rehearsals. Adding "spice" provides variation both visually and kinesthetically. Such activities stimulate students and promote learning. Boredom is banned to the back hallway. Adopting any number of these activities will, in my way of thinking, keep the choir's momentum going through October and November and into a successful concert season.




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One's philosophy is not best expressed in words. It is expressed in the choices one makes... and the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility.

—Eleanor Roosevelt

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## Stuck in the Middle—Finding Multicultural Repertoire for Middle School Choirs

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(Used with permission of Northwest Division's online newsletter; [www.nwacda.org](http://www.nwacda.org), March 2014)

Recently, I have been contacted by several middle level choir directors, all of whom wanted to know if there were lists of multicultural works appropriate for their ensembles. If you have taught at the middle school level, you know that there are no absolutes when it comes to literature. Songs that were sure-fire winners three or four years ago may not work this year because none of the basses can sing below a D3 (D below middle C) or nearly every girl in your choir is truly a soprano, and the alto part is written too low.

As frustrating as this situation can be, trying to reuse music that at one time was a prime candidate for teaching musical concepts is even more frustrating when you purchase a new work for your choir in July and then discover that it will not work for the ensemble when classes begin. Most of our choral budgets, as you know, are limited. Where do we find literature that is age-appropriate, represents a variety of cultures, and teaches musical skills and concepts? Here are several ideas worth pursuing:

- Talk to colleagues you trust. Mentoring comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. Sometimes we need a person we respect to suggest that we try a particular work. This

is helpful; however, many of us teachers are regionally insulated. We only hear music our colleagues perform with their choirs. We miss out on what may be happening outside our region.

- Do your homework. Between publisher websites and YouTube, you will find a vast amount of literature available in mp3 or video formats. Use these resources in class to help students develop critical thinking skills and expand their vocabulary when they offer comments. A possible downside? You may find yourself spending four or five hours on YouTube researching music, all to no avail because you will not have found the right literature for your ensembles.
- Investigate [www.ChoralNet.org](http://www.ChoralNet.org). ACDA has been the driving force in creating a web presence that is interactive, broad-based, and that also supports the needs of choral directors at all levels—everything from programming ideas, vocal pedagogy, and middle school singers' challenges to types of fabrics to avoid when purchasing formal wear for your women. On ChoralNet.org, you can ask questions and receive input from choral experts on a huge array of topics. For example, if you would like to perform a piece in Latvian, you can find a person to help you with a good translation or a pronunciation guide. Be patient. Begin asking your questions on ChoralNet.org early on. You'll hear from colleagues from around the world!

Below is a list for those who are interested in finding middle-level multicultural literature. You'll find many different voicings and music from various cultures. Information on each work includes the title, voicing, accompaniment, composer/arranger, publisher, and the culture out of which the music sprang.

The music below is appropriate for sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade choirs of varying ability levels. I have either played through each work, performed it with a middle-level choir, or have had a trusted colleague who has used it.

*The Drover's Dream* (Australia)

TB, piano, opt. guitar

arr: Vijay Singh

National Music Publishers