

# **CHORAL TECHNIQUES FOR CHILDREN'S CHOIRS: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH**

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## PERFORMANCE COMPONENT:

Three concert performances (MUK901, MUK902, MUK903)

### PROGRAMME I (24 August 2002)

The first performance served as a pilot project for determining strong and weak areas related to particular choral techniques in the performance of a children's choir. The programme was compiled according to the standard preferences for concerts given by children's choirs, and included a wide variety of composers and musical styles ranging from sacred works to light arrangements and traditional indigenous songs. Specific problems identified during the said performance have a direct bearing on all subsequent practical and theoretical work.

1. **Magaliesburgse Aandlied**  
Tradisioneel/Traditional: Afrikaans  
Verwerk/Arranged: Danie Hyman
2. **Sanctus** – from "Mass for Many Nations" (1994)  
for Multiple Divisi Treble Voices & Piano  
Musiek/Music: Rupert Lang  
Woorde/Words: *Text adapted from the Book of Common Prayer.*
3. **Jaakobin Pojat** (Die Seuns van Jakob /The Sons of Jacob) (1976)  
Pekka Kostiainen
4. **In the Garden**  
Gegronde op Hooglied van Salomo 8:12-13  
Based on Solomon's Song of Songs 8:12-13  
Musiek/Music: C. Austin Miles  
Aangepas/Adapted: Salóme Hendrikse

5. **Can you hear me?** – Incorporating sign language/’n Lied wat gebaretaal aanwend  
Bob Chilcott
  
6. **Heilig ist der Herr, “Zumm Sanctus”** -  
Uit/From Deutsche Messe, D872 (1827)  
Musiek/Music: Franz Schubert  
Verwerk: Ferdinand, broer van Franz, vir gelyke stemme (1852)  
Arranged: Ferdinand, brother of Franz, for equal voices (1852)  
Woorde/Words: Johann Philip Neuman
  
7. **Gott in der Natur**, opus post. 133, D757 (1822)  
Musiek/Music: Franz Schubert  
Woorde/Words: Ewald C. von Kleist
  
8. **Psalm 23**, opus 132, D706 (1820)  
Musiek/Music: Franz Schubert  
Woorde/Words: Moses Mendelssohn
  
9. **La Pastorella**, D528 (1817)  
Musiek/Music: Franz Schubert  
Woorde/Words: Carl Goldoni  
Verwerk/Arranged: Hans P. Keuning
  
10. **Come Colours Rise** – A South African Carol (1995)  
Musiek/Music: Grant Mclachlan  
Woorde/Words: Frank Barry
  
11. **Umtwana wa Afrika** (’n Kind van Afrika/ A Child of Africa)  
Elizabeth Fourie  
Verwerk/Arranged: Danie Hyman
  
12. **Thula Babana: language Zulu** (Wees stil klein baba, moenie huil nie/Be quiet little one, do not cry)  
(International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM) Award: 07.2001)  
Hendrik Hofmeyr
  
13. **Masithi Amen**  
Stephen Cuthbert Molefe  
Verwerk/Arranged: Henk Barnard  
Aangepas/Adapted: Bloemfontein Choir/Koor
  
14. **Uqongqothwane** (The Click Song)  
Tradisioneel/Traditional: Xhosa  
Verwerk/Arranged: Danie Hyman

15. **Nuwejaar**  
 Tradisioneel Kaaps-Maleis/Traditional Cape Malayan  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Enrique Breytenbach 1981
  
16. **Arihe Morija**  
 Tradisioneel/Traditional: Sotho  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Danie Hyman  
 Marimba: Ian Roos
  
17. **Walamba**  
 Tradisioneel/Traditional: Zoeloe/ Zulu  
 Verwerk/ Arranged: Danie Hyman  
 Marimba: Ian Roos
  
18. **Ingolovane**  
 Tradisioneel/Traditional : Xhosa  
 Opgeteken/ Transcription: Alna Smit 2002
  
19. **Dubula**  
 Tradisioneel/Traditional: Xhosa
  
20. **Verlore Liefde** – Drie Liedere vanuit die Wes-Kaap c.1930 /Three songs from the Western Cape c.1930  
 Tradisioneel Kaaps-Maleis/Traditional Cape Malayan  
 Opgeteken/Transcription: Jaqueline Bartie  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Marthie Driessen
  
21. **Amabhayisikili**  
 Tradisioneel/Traditional: Zoeloe/Zulu  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Ellen van Eyck
  
22. **Balefatse**  
 Tradisioneel/Traditional: Sotho  
 Arranged/Verwerk: Danie Hyman  
 Piano improvisation/Klavier improvisasie: Nicol Viljoen  
 Saxophone/Saksofoon: Abri van der Westhuizen
  
23. **Beestepote**  
 Tradisioneel Kaaps-Maleis/ Traditional Cape Malayan  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Isa Hanekom/Tersia Jonck
  
24. **Short People** (1977)  
 Randy Newman  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Simon Carrington (1992)

25. **National Anthem United States of America – Star Spangled Banner**
26. **When You Wish Upon a Star –**  
 Uit/From Walt Disney's "PINOCCHIO" (1940)  
 Musiek/Music: Leigh **Harline?**  
 Woorde/Words: Ned Washington  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Paul Ferreira (2002)
27. **A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes –**  
 Uit/From Walt Disney's "CINDERELLA" 1950  
 Mack David, Al Hoffman & Jerry Livingston  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Dick Averre
28. **Bridge over Troubled Water**  
 (1969) Paul Simon  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Kirby Shaw
29. **Summertime**  
 Musiek/Music: George Gershwin  
 Woorde/Words: Du Bosse Heyward  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Danie Hyman
30. **On the Sunny Side of the Street**  
 Musiek/Music: Jimmy McHugh  
 Woorde/Words: Dorothy Fields  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Steve Zegree (1997)
31. **Theme from "New York, New York"**  
 Musiek/Music: John Kander  
 Woorde/Words: Fred Ebb  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Frank Metis (1977)
32. **Limburgse "Volkslied"** van Vlaams-België & Nederland (1909) **"National Anthem": Limburg** from Flemish-Belgium & The Netherlands  
 Musiek/Music: Hendrik Thyssen  
 Woorde/Words: Gerard Krekelberg
33. **Catche Me** (2002)  
 Musiek/Music: Antoinette Tronquo  
 Woorde/Words: Ludo Khoos (Vlaams/Flemish)
34. **El Barquito** (Die Klein Bootjie /The Little Boat)  
 Tradisoneel/Traditional: Venezuela/ Venezuelan  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Alberto Grau (1996)
35. **J'entends Le Moulin**  
 Tradisoneel Frans-Kanadees/Traditional French-Canadian  
 Verwerk/Arranged: Donald Patriquin (1993)
36. **Adiemus** from Songs of Sanctuary (1995)  
 Karl Jenkins

## PROGRAMME II (25 October 2003)

This programme consisted of 15 works dating from 1900-2002 and included a variety of composers and styles. The main purpose of the programme was to illustrate the development of choral composition and choral techniques for children's choirs during the twentieth century. Each composition posed special technical problems and problems of expression. Specific challenges were the handling of double-part writing for chorus, for intonation, vowels, intervals and tessitura (Ave Maria: Gustav Holst); Hungarian pronunciation and intonation in unusual ancient modes (Angyalok és Pásztorok: Zoltán Kodály); repeated notes and accents (Cantate Domino: Rupert Lang); free tonal singing and the intonation of pitches that appear as if they were from 'nowhere'; pronunciation of the Finnish language (Revontulet: Pekka Kostiainen); changing meters and the natural inflections of a linguistic text (The Sower: Imant Raminsh); free rhythmic improvisation, noteclusters and the improvisatory use of speech and whispering (Aglepta: Arne Mellnäs).

1. **Ave Maria**, Op. 9b (1900)  
Gustav Holst (1874-1934)
2. **Messe Basse** (1907)  
Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)  
**Kyrie eleison**  
**Sanctus**  
**Benedictus**  
**Agnus Dei**  
Soloist: Anrie Pienaar
3. **Angyalok és Pásztorok** (1935)  
vir dubbelkoor/for double choir  
(Engele en Herders/Angels and Shepherds)  
Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967)
4. **Ave Verum Corpus**, Op. 154 (1952)  
Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)
5. **Cantate Domino** (Ps. 117) (1990)  
Vir driestemmige kinderkoor en sintetiseerder/ children's choir and synthesizer  
Rupert Lang

6. **Turn Thou to Me**  
 Vanuit/from : My heart is Ready (Prizrí na meñià) (1989)  
 Yuri Yukechev (1947-)
  
7. **Ps. 25:16**  
**Here, wees my genadig** (2002)  
 'n Opdragwerk/A Commissioned work  
 H. Pieter van der Westhuizen (1931-)
  
8. **Exultate justi in Domino** (Ps. 33: 1-3) (2002)  
 Brant Adams (1955-)
  
9. **Gloria Tibi**  
 (uit Mis/ from Mass: 1971)  
 Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)
  
10. **Cipósütés** (1935)  
 (Die bak van 'n ronde brood/ Baking of round bread)  
 Béla Bartók (1881-1945)
  
11. **Wind-Song** (1988)  
 Richard Kidd
  
12. **Revontulet** (1983)  
 (Aurora borealis – the Northern lights)  
 Pekka Kostiainen
  
13. **The Sower** (1987)  
 (Uit/From: Songs of the Lights)  
 Imant Raminsh
  
14. **Aglepta** (1969)  
 (Based on Swedish troll proverbs from Småland, nineteenth century, by Bengt  
 of Klintberg)  
 Arne Mellnäs (1933-2002)

### PROGRAMME III (24 October 2004)

This programme contained specialist repertoire for children's choirs exploiting twentieth-century compositional challenges such as overtones, polychords and stacked chords.

1. **Past Life Melodies** (1991)  
Sarah Hopkins (b.1958-)  
Arranged for Treble Voices a cappella: Sarah Hopkins
2. **Poselství Hudby** (The Message of Music – 1982: sung in Czech)  
Zdenek Lukáš (b.1928-)  
Text: Markéta Prochásková
3. **The Chariot Children** (March 1992)  
Imant Raminsh (b.1943-)  
Text: Cyril Dabydeen
4. **Firefly Song** (1987) From: 'Songs of the Lights', Part II  
Imant Raminsh (b.1943-)  
Text: Ojibway Indian (Vertaling/Translation in Afrikaans: H.H. Schooldraft)
5. **Anthem for Ants** (Opus 60 – 1988)  
Aulis Sallinen (b.1935-)  
Text: Aulis Sallinen
6. **Dreams 1** (Opus 85 - 1977)  
Erik Bergman (b.1911-)
7. **To Everything There is a Season** (Opus 108 – Sept. 2000)  
Eskil Hemberg (1938-2004)  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (Composed for the Bloemfontein Children's Choir)
8. **African Dawn** (January 1997)  
Niel van der Watt (b.1962)  
Text: Niel van der Watt  
Translation: Joel Mathala
9. **Sounds of Africa** (1997)  
Albert
10. **Paihuenmapu** (To Be Peace on Earth – 2004)  
Marcelo Fernández Mauro (b.1965)  
Commissioned: Songbridge 2004  
Text: Pedro Zalazar  
Language: Mapuche



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This thesis is dedicated to all the members of the Bloemfontein Children's Choir since 1987 who inspired this study.

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#### *Addendum A*

#### DATA FROM LITERATURE REVIEW AND QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

#### *Addendum B*

#### MATRIX TABLES

# ORIENTATION

## 1.1 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Children's choirs gained recognition during the twentieth century as one of the recognised categories in Western choral music. It has subsequently evolved so dynamically that there is now ample opportunity for artistic and scholarly investigation of this choral category, because the instrument has continuously transformed itself artistically. As will be indicated later on in this study, the phenomenon of the children's choir has within recent decades attracted much attention through the increasing occurrence of competitions, seminars and workshops. Despite this intensified worldwide focus on the different aspects needed to build excellence in children's choirs, limited evidence of qualitative research on choral techniques for children's choirs could be found.

Although Rao (1987-2001), Ashworth Bartle (1993, 2003) and Pohjola (1993)<sup>1</sup> made valuable contributions to the field of children's choral singing, it became evident that the views and experiences of renowned conductors of children's choirs have not been documented yet to serve as a work of reference for future research.

In order to address this hiatus, this study aims to expand the body of knowledge on choral techniques appropriate to children's choirs by investigating the techniques and practices of internationally renowned conductors. As the phenomenon of the children's choir has become a viable area of academic interest, its skill of choral conducting has become a highly specialised field.

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<sup>1</sup> The recent publication *Who is who in choral music* (2007), edited by Lazri and Simon, is an extremely valuable source providing detailed information on the biographies of various leading choral conductors, their publications, as well as their contact information. While such documentation is not the scope or focus of the present study, this publication confirmed that not many books were published on the children's choir as such, and that participants selected for participation in the present study sort among the most highly ranked choral conductors internationally.

In order to understand the circumstances that have led to the worldwide establishment of this focus, it is necessary to briefly consider some historical factors that have contributed to the development of the children's choir as a specialised choral category during the course of the last century. (Note that this aspect is addressed more fully in Chapter 3.)

In the United States of America (USA) there has been a strong and interesting movement emphasising the importance of the development of the young voice. Phillips (1985) explains that even before 1930, this endeavour was connected to the so-called school movement of singing. At the beginning of the twentieth century Francis Howard (1895), one of the USA's most influential choral authorities, published *The child voice in singing* (Phillips 1985:21-22). This book became one of the most extensively used textbooks on children's vocal training in the USA. Even though conductors apparently debated his views, his book remained authoritarian until the 1930s.

Another important compatriot was the educationalist, Lowell Mason, who convinced the Boston School Committee in 1838 to include singing in the public school system. His programme included fundamental voice-training exercises for school children, which were closely associated with Pestalozzian principles emphasising the instructional side of teaching. The result of this practice was that music teachers started emphasising the rudiments of music more than the actual singing.

Karl Gehrken advocated a turning away from formal exercises and vocalisation and started to propagate the "song approach" – even among detractors of his method. Ultimately, as a result of this approach, vocal pedagogy ceased to form an important part of formal music training in the USA and it has since become debatable whether this development may have had detrimental effects. Together with Gehrken, Howard moved away from the principle of mere voice training to the singing of songs, from which all other educational aspects later emerged (Phillips 1985:21). However, not all music educators in the USA abandoned vocal pedagogy for children and Phillips (1985:22) refers to the work of Dann and others who recommended the forming of good singing habits from an early age through the use of vocal exercises. This approach was also supported by Ruth Jacobs's influential work, *The successful children's choir* (1938), reprinted in 1981.

It might be argued that the above-mentioned "singing approach" (during the latter part of the twentieth century) resulted in the rise of the children's choir and consequently brought about a completely new emphasis to choral training by striving towards "emulating the English boy choir sound in all repertoire" (Lamb 2006:9). This approach was contrary to Thurman's perspective (1998:236), which pointed out that choral pedagogy became popularised in the 1980s as choral conductors and choirs began to include voice skill and voice health training: "The source of such vocal training has been teachers who have been educated in the tradition of vocal pedagogy with its operatic bias."

However, it is necessary to note that the significant impact of choral techniques on the performance effectiveness of choirs that are either mixed or comprise solely girls – as opposed to the tradition of boys' choirs – was recognised during the latter half of the twentieth century. The influence of this change had already manifested itself during and even before the 1940s as the children's choir movement gained momentum in various countries, and particularly in Bulgaria and Hungary. As Pohjola (1993:13) observes: "Years earlier major composers, like Zoltán Kodály, started to write music for soprano and alto voices with a clear image of children in his mind – and not adult women – doing the singing." Ultimately these developments contributed significantly to the rise and establishment of the children's choir as a renowned category of choral music. Van Aswegen (2005:2-2), however, proposes that mixed children's choirs have become a well-known and popular focus since the Second World War.

Within the international terrain of choral music the importance of children's choirs is also increasingly highlighted through the ideal that in understanding other cultures, children are part of our striving toward world peace through music. The endeavour toward the understanding of different cultures is thus also part of this evolvement. The "Songbridge" principle founded by Pohjola (1993:111ff), for example, forms an integral part of the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM).

Among other significant undertakings which can be mentioned in this regard is the International Children's Festival for Friendship, which was held from 13 to 19 June 1997 in Stockholm, Sweden, where children's choirs from war-ravaged countries were invited



for a week of concert performances, and cultural workshops with the objective to learn about each other's cultures and to make contact on musical, physical and social levels. As part of these activities, practical workshops were presented which highlighted the different cultures, while social events where the children interacted without antagonism, were also organised.

Important choral organisations such as the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), as well as the internationally recognised International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM) founded in 1987, also contributed substantively to the establishment of the children's choir as a specialist choral category. Children's choirs which these organisations consider to be among the leaders in the field always form part of the performance programmes at the symposia. Festivals and competitions where sections for children's choirs are included have also become a widely-accepted practice. Among the well-known competitions are the European Music Festival for the Young People in Neerpelt, Belgium, which has been in existence since the Second World War, and the popular Llangollen International Music Eisteddfod which was initiated in 1947.

Other events which deserve mention here are the Béla Bartók competition in Debrecen, Hungary, the Children's Choirs Festivals in China, Japan, the already mentioned Songbridge Festivals, Europa Cantat, the Tuscany International Children's Chorus Festival in Florence, the Kathaumixw International Choral Competition in Canada, the Tolosa Choral Contest, Spain, and the International Choral Sympaatti for youth and children's choirs in Finland.<sup>2</sup> An annual Olympiad Competition is currently being held in different countries where choirs from all age groups are competing in different categories. In the USA many competitions and festivals are held for children's choirs in which children from many countries around the world participate. The initiative for these occasions comes from individuals, choirs and choral societies.

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<sup>2</sup> Over the years competitions for the children's choir evolved as divisions of different categories according to the different ages of the contestants. A children's choir category can comprise two sections: one for junior choirs under the age of twelve years, and another for choirs of children aged eighteen years and younger. Some organisations, however, define a children's choir as consisting of children aged fourteen years and younger.

The events cited above often include workshops where clinicians give lectures on aspects regarding specific choral subjects, and the development of specialist skills for choral conductors.

This background is proof that the optimal development of the children's choir as a unique instrument has become a matter of great importance for the conductors of children's choirs. As the children's choir movement evolved, the need to broaden the knowledge of specialised rehearsal and conducting techniques has become evident. In this regard it should be noted that conductors themselves started to contribute to the development of the instrument in an important way through the design of didactic methods that would generate specific artistic results – a body of knowledge that is still evolving and which is continuously disseminated through publications and symposia.

At this point a selection of literature that focuses on methods advocated by a few prominent authors contributing to the subject of children's choirs needs to be considered.

Doreen Rao, professor in choral conducting with a special interest in children's choirs, discusses this category as a specialised musical instrument in the series *The choral music experience*, which also includes an impressive selection of original and arranged music, ranging from easy to difficult. This series includes compositions for children's choirs from many parts of the world. The compilations serve to guide the inexperienced conductor into the artistic realm, starting with the old masters and folk songs and progressing to very difficult pieces for the specialised children's choir and conductor. Doreen Rao, in the national sphere of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), founded the National Committee on Children's Choirs in 1981, a committee which sets standards in choral repertoire and practices throughout the USA (Rao 1998:253).

In 1993 Pohjola published his *Tapiola sound*, describing the origin and growth of the famous Tapiola choir of Finland. He does not only explain the development of this choir, which was founded under his leadership in 1963, but also the methods he used to build this unique choir.

Jean Ashworth Bartle, renowned conductor of children's choirs, published her methods for developing children's voices during 2003. Her first thought communicated in the

introduction to her latest book is the following: "During the past thirty years, children's choirs have become instruments of artistic excellence treated with the same respect that has usually been reserved for adult choirs, orchestras and opera companies" (Ashworth Bartle, 2003:v). Ashworth Bartle also published *Lifeline for Children's Choral Director's* (1993).

Lois Choksy (1981), music educator, academic and musician, has intensively studied the methods of Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967), and the great artistic and academic influence of this composer on the development of children's singing since the 1930s made a strong impression on her. Kodály promoted excellence in this field through his wide knowledge of the Hungarian folk-music idiom and his own compositional gift, as well as through publications, lectures and his widely-used sight-singing exercises. He was also a pioneer in the development of the role of singing in a general music education programme. Choksy's (1981:98-143) main contribution is vested in her explanation of the use of Kodály's principles in the musical training of children and children's choirs.

The immense value of articles by various other specialists on aspects regarding the young voice as listed in the bibliography, and discussions focusing on this topic in a variety of publications should also be mentioned here, such as the ongoing service to choral conductors, for instance in the esteemed choral bulletin of the ACDA.

The leading experts cited above express valuable views on the development of the desired qualities of children's choirs. Their advice broadens the knowledge of correct rehearsal techniques for this choral category, which is informed by important recent sources reflecting on this specialist body of knowledge, rather than by relying on knowledge of choral techniques in general.

The above paragraphs sketch the development of the children's choir as a specialist choral category, which is based on specific historical circumstances, and demonstrate that it is a category which is gaining momentum internationally. The purpose of the study presented in the following section has been formulated against this background.

## 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The argument presented thus far states the need to systematically investigate both theoretically and practically 'consistent' factors regarding choral techniques to expand the existing body of knowledge on the topic, while at the same time highlighting idiosyncratic approaches by eminent conductors of children's choirs. Limited evidence of extensive qualitative research on this topic obtained by interviewing conductors of excellent children's choirs is available which resulted in a need for documenting their responses in a detailed way.

Ashworth Bartle (2003:15) describes the principles involved in the development of this instrument as follows:

To build an outstanding children's choir, the conductor must understand the basic tenets of singing, exquisite tone, effective breath support, clear diction, musical phrasing, and perfect intonation are among the concepts that need to be nurtured during every rehearsal ... The selection of suitable repertoire is of paramount importance if the children are going to succeed in all of these areas.

In reality, however, many young choral singers go out into the world with a misguided idea of how to use their voices correctly. Consequently as adults they may use inferior singing techniques in their capacities as singers or conductors. Under all circumstances the production of quality choral sound exerts a positive didactic effect and artistic force. If produced in an uninformed or negligent way it may be harmful to the development of young voices and also have other negative musical consequences. In order to contribute to the existing approaches that provide information on developing the musical instrument of the young child, the following questions were formulated in the context of the present study:

- How can the conductor contribute in guiding his/her choir to excellence with musical and technical knowledge?
- Which strategies and techniques do leading conductors use to produce children's choirs with exceptional vocal abilities in order to be classified as top choirs?

- What guidelines could direct conductors of children's choirs to ensure a vocal sound of exceptional quality?

As will become clear in Chapter 4, which offers a more detailed explication of the methodology, these questions were encompassed in a comprehensive research question that was presented to conductors participating in the survey (see 4.2.3).

### **1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore the techniques and practices of leading conductors of children's choirs in order to develop and document their individual approaches in a substantive manner. This research thus aims specifically at amplifying the existing body of knowledge of choral techniques for the young voice as used by a selected group of internationally recognised choral conductors.

Fundamental to all facets of this project is therefore the documentation and interpretation of the technical foundations of choir training which result, in the case of all participants, in flexible and expressive artistic contexts. This calls for an exhaustive, methodical documentation of a broad range of musico-technical foundations of children's choral singing as practised by leading figures in the field of vocal production, choral diction and performance practice, including a reflection on the role of the conductor as a diversified 'manager' of a specialist type of group dynamics.

The above purpose will be realised in terms of the following objectives:

- To review the role of the conductor in securing excellence with regard to musical and technical knowledge concerning children's choirs.
- To document the strategies and techniques leading conductors use in order to produce children's choirs with exceptional vocal abilities by means of a focused qualitative investigation.
- To highlight aspects of the above that could serve as a didactic framework for future research on this topic as set out in paragraph one.

## **1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

In order to realise the objectives described above, this study comprises a literature survey and a qualitative investigation, as well as an interpretation of the data.

### **1.4.1 Literature study**

This study consists of a survey of relevant sources concerning all aspects of choral conducting, focusing on matters of special importance for the training of children's choirs. This literature survey is presented in two separate chapters, the first providing a general overview of choral conducting and choral techniques, and the second focusing on techniques relevant to children's choirs.

### **1.4.2 Qualitative study**

This dimension of the study involved an investigation of the rehearsal practices of leading conductors in South Africa and abroad. In-depth interviews were conducted to get "under the skin" (Duff 1992:87) of the participants regarding the technical, didactic and artistic aspects of their work. In this regard, the participants were selected by virtue of their expertise in the area of choral conducting. Conductors of choirs other than children's choirs have in some cases also been included due to the relevant aspects of their knowledge.

Since no specific number of participants had been decided upon before the study commenced, the researcher continued to conduct interviews until theoretical saturation was reached (cf. Goetz & Le Comte 1984:176). The participants represent a variety of countries as it was argued that a diverse group of participants would provide a broader scope of opinions on the topic.<sup>3</sup> By striving toward a representative investigation and making use of participants who were able to supply relevant information, the researcher had to ensure the realisation of the principle of "letting the object speak for itself", aimed at achieving as objective a 'picture' as possible (Niemann, Brazelle, Van Staden, Heyns & De Wet 2000: 284-285; Smaling 1994: 18).

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<sup>3</sup> See 4.3 for a discussion of limitations of the study.

In order to obtain an in-depth view of the issues at stake, a grounded theory approach was used to document the information in Chapter 4. Since all the participants agreed to be co-researchers in this project, confidentiality of their identities was not considered necessary. The researcher made use of in-depth personal interviews as well as non-rigid e-mail questioning. However, the open nature of this form of data collection necessitated some form of guidance, which was provided by means of an open-ended question which structured responses only minimally (see 4.2.3).

Regarding the documenting of interviews, the researcher first had to obtain each participant's permission to use a recording device to record their responses. As mentioned above, all interviews and e-mail correspondence were conducted in an informal manner and the researcher refrained from asking leading questions and expressing any positive or negative personal views. Some of the participants preferred to communicate their thoughts via e-mail correspondence, and these responses were also considered to be valid responses.

After each interview the exact words of the participants were transcribed and organised for analysis purposes. In this regard, the method of analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman (1984:26,211-213,215-231) was used. The various themes that arose were coded by awarding symbols to segments of words that represent a particular category or theme. A matrix table containing the various themes and words of the participants was then compiled in order to compare the data and thus reveal differences and similarities. Consequently, the themes that emerged from the data were used for reporting purposes.

In order to enhance the reliability and validity of the research, member checks were conducted, which meant that the final report of the data was referred back to the participants in order to check whether the responses were interpreted and reported as intended by the participants (Niemann *et al.* 2000: 285; Goetz & Le Compte 1984: 217). All the recordings, transcriptions, e-mails and notes of the interviews were preserved to enable independent persons to verify the findings.

## **1.5 DEMARCATION OF THE FIELD OF STUDY**

The study focus and the specific area to be researched are vital to the building of an excellent children's choir. This information was obtained through collaboration with national and international conductors of leading children's and other choirs. By implication an investigation of specialised choral techniques will open up specific aesthetic possibilities of this choral category. In order to investigate this dimension of choral singing, practical and theoretical aspects emerging from the collected data were investigated and described.

## **1.6 CHAPTER DIVISION**

Following the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents a general discussion of choral techniques in mainstream literature considered to be an essential part of choral conducting. Chapter 3 focuses on the special technical and artistic needs of children's choirs.

Chapter 4 provides an exposition of the methodology used in this study, followed by a presentation of the viewpoints of leading conductors that were selected for the qualitative investigation. From this emerged a formulation of the most important facets involved in the training of an exemplary children's choir, presented in Chapter 5 as a synthesis of the research findings. These findings could serve as a highly individualised and professionally informed body of information relevant to all conductors of children's choirs, which could provide a didactic framework for future research.

## **1.7 VALUE OF THE RESEARCH**

Due to the analysis of the complex relationship between individually formulated, idiosyncratic rehearsal techniques and artistic interpretation, this project might be of significant value to conductors of children's choirs as it serves as an academically substantiated and professionally authenticated reference work for everyone involved in choir training and performance. From the vantage point of qualitative research and a methodical conceptualisation of all parameters involved in choral singing, the ultimate findings of the study will benefit both practical and theoretical concerns, and will open up the topic for future research projects.



# GENERAL ASPECTS OF CHORAL SINGING

As stated in Chapter 1, the aim of this study is to focus on those elements that are vital for producing excellence in children's choirs.<sup>1</sup> Hence Chapters 2 and 3 will provide a literature review of choral singing and techniques. The researcher, however, often had to resort to rather dated sources to provide a detailed overview of the development in the field of study over a period of time. In Chapter 3, the study focuses on contexts particularly relevant to children's choirs. Chapter 4 then reflects the statements by eminent conductors and personal experiences as documented by the researcher.

## 2.1 CONDUCTING PRINCIPLES

In an introductory paragraph on conducting, Decker and Kirk (1988:7) state the following:

A conductor must have a complete understanding of the composer's intention. Without this, there is no significant or important message to communicate. Assuming that a clear, artistic message has been discovered and researched, the conductor must develop skills essential for communicating through gesture.

The importance of the conductor is evident from the growing number of book chapters, articles, workshops and seminar discussions devoted to this topic. Thus, it is only to be expected that many different viewpoints are voiced. The following writers and conductors are but a few who have made significant contributions: Ericson (1976), Kaplan (1985), Busch (1984), Gordon (1977:15–37), Pohjola (1993)<sup>2</sup> and Rao (2001).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Within the context of this study, a children's choir is defined as a choir consisting of young singers from the age group eight to sixteen years, singing in three, four or more voices.

<sup>2</sup> This information is derived from an informal discussion with the presenter and conductor of the famous Tapiola Choir in Sydney, Australia, after a lecture, *Composition Workshop with Tapiola Choir*, presented on Monday, 12 August 1996, at the Fourth World Symposium on Choral Music.

<sup>3</sup> This information is derived from an informal discussion with Doreen Rao during *The World of Children's Choirs*, Vancouver, Canada, 18-22 March 2001.

While each of these authors in an important way contribute to the topic, Ericson (1976:99) underlines the basic tenet that a conductor must arrive at every rehearsal with a clearly defined musical concept, as well as a complete technical command of the piece to be rehearsed. Only under these conditions, he argues, will the conductor be able to give the necessary attention to movements through which the music will be “transformed into choral sound” (Ericson 1976:99).

Apart from the above-mentioned aspects, the researcher views the following three principles as indispensable to good conducting practices:

- [a] Firstly, it is absolutely imperative that the conductor should project no strain, and that all movements should originate from the centre of the body. Hanken<sup>4</sup> puts it as follows:

The body must be balanced, and then the hands must be lifted in their normal position until they reach the middle of the body. Bring them almost together in a cupped position towards the middle of the conductor’s torso. The reason for this position is that high gestures elicit a strained sound. Tension from the conductor could influence the sound negatively in the sense that it could subconsciously lead to the straining of voices and therefore requires a relaxed body; otherwise the sound of the choir might become rigid. Tension even affects interpretation negatively.

In addition, McLachlan (1992:143) argues that the wrong kind of tension will lead to faulty intonation.<sup>5</sup>

- [b] The second principle, proposed by both Rao (2001)<sup>6</sup> and Pohjola (1996, 2004)<sup>7</sup>, is that conductors should strive for what they describe as “quiet conducting ... which takes a lot of courage”.

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<sup>4</sup> Hanken, a former professor at the Oslo University and secretary general of the Norwegian Choir Association, provided the researcher with this information during an informal discussion on conducting on 14 July 2003 at the Drakensberg Boys’ Choir School, South Africa.

<sup>5</sup> These viewpoints reflect the influence of the Swedish Choral School, and in particular that of the choral conductor Eric Ericson, one of the most respected Swedish authorities on choral music during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

<sup>6</sup> Derived from an informal discussion with Rao during *The World of Children’s Choirs*, Vancouver, Canada, 18–22 March 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Information derived from informal meetings and discussions with the former conductor of the Tapiola Choir.

[c] Thirdly, it should be kept in mind that conducting gestures play a key role in the standard of the music delivered by the choir. In order to mediate a successful performance, the psychological support projected by the conductor need to be effectively communicated to the choir.

It should be noted at this point that it is debatable whether these principles are applicable to stage performances of authentic folk music. It is intrinsic to the nature of folk music that it is usually sung in contexts related to everyday social activities such as, for example, playing, working, and so on. Under these circumstances, folk music expresses a natural spontaneity, and little interpretation is involved. Also, in their authentic form, they are never sung under the leadership of a conductor.

From the argument presented above, it is clear that choral conducting is an art in itself. Therefore in the following sections, aspects of conducting will be discussed which are of paramount importance to the choral conductor who wishes to excel in this form of communicative artistry.

### **2.1.1 The leadership of the conductor**

Bo Johansson, the conductor of the Adolf Fredrik's Girls' Choir in Sweden, is of the opinion that everything musical coming from the choir results from the musical leadership of the conductor.<sup>8</sup> McLachlan (1992:164) stresses that a conductor can never spend enough time studying his chosen repertoire. From this follows that the conductor should cultivate musical skills and sensitivity through studying, reflecting, listening to other music and choirs, and attending every available course to gain more knowledge in order to be able to evoke musical singing during repetitions and concerts. Musical growth, as described above, must always take place.

Joseph Flummerfelt (in Shangkuan, 2004:13ff) maintains that, although the notes and the rhythm must always be correct, choral conductors should be careful not to overemphasise the cognitive: perfection should not be a substitute for spontaneity. Shangkuan (2004:10ff) confirms the views of Flummerfelt in saying that the conductor needs to concentrate on making music, to make the group perform, and not so much on the elements of

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<sup>8</sup> Personal communication: 10 July 1999, Rotterdam.

intonation, rhythm and other technical aspects. Conducting is about transforming a score into a complete picture of sound, line, and colour, symbolising a text. Thus Rao (2001)<sup>9</sup> is of the opinion that, “to be alive, conducting gestures should strive, with passion, to convey the emotions coming from the text and music at that particular moment”. The musical nuances in a choir’s interpretations will, however, not be complete without the conductor’s utilisation of both an intuitive and a studied knowledge of correct musical style.

Through the researcher’s personal observations, it has become clear that outstanding conductors such as Pohjola are in command of certain dramatic capabilities that are used to put musical ideas across. As a result, not only the interpretation of a text is powerfully mediated, but special images of sound may also be created. An example of this ability is, for instance, his choir’s performance of *Aglepta*, composed in 1969 by the late twentieth-century Swedish composer Arne Mellnäs (born 1933) as sung by the Tapiola Choir. This work was first recorded on a CD with the title *Water Under Snow Is Weary* (1988; conductor Erkki Pohjola) and later, in 1996, with the CD-title *Rainbow Sounds* (conductor Kari Ala-Pöllänen). Former conductor Pohjola (1993:69-73), who introduced this fascinating work to the world, explains something of its creative process:

The composer chose as his text a magic spell or incantation from 19<sup>th</sup>-century Sweden from the province of Småland: *To leave an enemy without an answer. Say these words to him: ‘Aglaria Pidhol garia Ananus Qepta’, and blow in his direction; then he will not know where to go or what to say.* The composition displays the new relationship of modern choral music to the text ... this spell (was) a truly avant-gardist offering at the time of its appearance ...

Robinson and Winold (1976:53,54) also point out that the key to a satisfying choral experience on the individual level is a conductor who can create a performing environment in which each singer realises his or her inherent vocal potential.

Against the perspective of the above paragraphs, Stanton’s (1971:i) statements that “from the conductor comes everything” and “His choir rises no higher that he lifts them”, may rightly be cited. Hyslop (1964:6) also maintained that “a choir is generally as good as, and not better than, its choirmaster”.

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<sup>9</sup> Notes taken during Rao’s lecture at *The World of Children’s Choirs*, Vancouver, Canada, 18–22 March 2001.

## **2.2 REQUIREMENTS FOR QUALITY CHORAL SINGING**

This section examines those factors that are universally considered as being intrinsic to the successful training of choirs.<sup>10</sup> The discussion focuses not only on aspects brought to the fore by literature on the topic, but also on issues and viewpoints raised by conductors during national workshops and international symposia, and on those communicated through correspondence, informal discussions and interviews.

### **2.2.1 Effective auditioning**

As a general rule, it is the responsibility of the conductor to select singers for a particular choir by evaluating their musical abilities in a fair and responsible manner. This process might already reflect individual views of the conductor – even during auditioning, for example, an ideal choir sound, which might significantly influence the selection process – is kept in mind. Yet, conductors rely on certain universal principles, which underlie auditioning procedures. Boyd (1970:31-42) dedicates a whole chapter to such methods of auditioning, while Gordon (1977:70-74) provides a list of possible criteria that include the testing of intonation, range, tone quality, vocal control, diction, sight-reading and musicality.

Robinson and Winold (1976:74) emphasise that a vital choral sound is wholly dependent on a well-balanced, carefully selected group of singers, and that this ideal can only be attained through careful auditioning. The search for coherent criteria has, however, proven difficult due to the diverse roles according to which different choirs function, as well as their widely diverging stages of development. For this reason conductors are often forced to set their own standards and methods for auditioning.

### **2.2.2 Balancing cognitive and psychological dimensions of choral singing**

The psychological aspects involved in choral singing can have a very positive influence on both the cognitive and psychological dimensions of a human being. Robinson and Winold (1976:202) refer to the “capstone of artistic choral singing” which transmits the intentions of the composer from the choral ensemble to the audience through the projection of emotion, love, dedication and mutual respect.

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<sup>10</sup> In Chapter 3 these aspects are treated more comprehensively as relevant to the context of the children’s choir specifically.

The benefits of choral singing may manifest, however, also on a very intimate, individual level. In citing the thought of Gardner, Rao (1988:68,69) maintains that "... skilled action is a form of knowledge." In this regard she explains the views of Csikszentmihalyi, who is convinced that the cultivation of artistic skills (in this instance singing) serves as a powerful means of self-confirmation and self-esteem. Rao (1988:224) further explains that: "As a manifestation of human emotion the voice is closely associated with actual feeling"

Robinson and Winold (1976:53,54) find that the choral experience offers special opportunities for the development of personal commitment and growth, as well as a deepening of cultural and aesthetic pleasure. They refer to the intense feeling of community – a special *esprit de corps* – fostered by a dynamic conductor who creates a powerful bond of fellowship, which is beneficial to all participating in the choral experience.

For this reason McLachlan (1992:145ff) emphasises the need for the conductor to have insight into the human psyche, so as to be able to motivate choir members to totally involve themselves in the choral experience. Rao (1987:5) is similarly aware of the complex interconnectedness of psychological and physiological aspects in choral singing. Apart from defining vocal technique as a skill, she states that the "vocal production of musical tone is a vital process which involves the body, mind and emotion".

### **2.2.3 Sound production**

The sound production of a choir is irrevocably tied to the capabilities of the conductor, who must be able to convey an envisaged tone-image to the choral singer. Pohjola (1993:91) reflects on the uniqueness of the instrument by stating that, if there is anything mysterious or supernatural about the shaping of a choral sound, it is in the blending of the voices. Thus, he finds that two fairly mundane sounds, when sung together, may come across as "something from another planet" (Pohjola 1993:91).

This uniqueness is reiterated by Stanton (1971:40) who contends that a beautiful choral tone results from a process of tonal homogenisation, which means that different voices with different voice-qualities are moulded into one artistic tone-image which the conductor projects onto a group of singers. Stanton continues by stating that choristers progress through a whole process to achieve this end product, starting with the warming-up of the voice, followed by voice exercises pursuing different technical and artistic goals.

The development of the choral sound does, however, not only rely on the projection of a particular sonic ideal, but also on the development of the singer's vocal abilities. In this regard, Ohlin (1976:107) believes that, though methods may differ, the training of an individual voice and the development of a good choral sound are not contradictory endeavours. In each case, he argues, the goal is to develop and improve the ability of singing. Ehmann (1982:viii) supports Ohlin by stating that every good voice teacher realises the importance of sensible vocalises. Although these exercises can be used to develop any voice, amateur or professional, their importance for the development of a sound individual vocal technique, is indispensable.

The development of the singing voice may, however, also be approached from a cultural perspective. Ala-Pöllänen<sup>11</sup> is, for instance, convinced that versatile ways to produce the singing voice enrich the sound production of a choir. This view is strongly supported by Cook (1999)<sup>12</sup> who uses "varied vocal colours" as a voice training method.

Ehmann (1982:viii)<sup>13</sup> emphasises that, in an amateur choir, voice building is of special importance. He proceeds to say that "[n]ature gives us an effective vocal mechanism: the infant breathes and speaks in a healthy way". Ehmann further holds the opinion that the fundamental principle is therefore that one should strive for developing 'natural' abilities: "the natural functions of the voice must serve the artistic needs for good singing. From this perspective, choral voice training leads into the science of singing" (Ehmann 1982:vii).

Certain key factors need to be in place in order to build an excellent choral sound. Ehmann (1982:xi,xii) mentions three cornerstones which, in his opinion, form the basis from which all choral sound should depart: imagery as an instrument, development of the anatomy of the vocal mechanism, and phonetics. Ehmann and Haasemann (1982:68) also believe that there is a 'sound ideal' for each compositional period.

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<sup>11</sup> Personal communication, 9 August 2008, Wakayama, Japan.

<sup>12</sup> Lecture delivered 9 July 1999 on Voice Building at the Fifth International Choral Symposium in Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

<sup>13</sup> *Handbuch der Chorischen Stimmführung* 1981, translated by Brenda Smith in English as *Voice building for choirs* (1982).

## 2.2.4 Posture and breathing

When correct spinal alignment is present, vocal tone may flow uninhibited from a comfortably positioned larynx. As MacDonald (2004:44) explains, there must be a thorough understanding of the synergistic relationship between the skeleton, which forms the structure of the body, and the muscles, which provide shape and mobility. Correct alignment is attained through a lengthening of the spine from its juncture with the skull right down to the lowest part of the lumbar spine. Through this flexible spine, precise neurological messages from the brain are sent to the body.

Both Jacques (1963:35) and Høgset (1994:7) define sound production as correlated to breathing by way of a simplified explanation, which involves the following physiological actions:

- The lungs supply the motive power, which is the breath.
- The breath, coming into contact with the vocal chords, causes them to vibrate, creating the sound.
- The larynx is the vibrator where the activity of the vocal chords divides the air flow into even puffs, creating tones.
- The sound is then amplified by the resonating cavities in the nose (nasal passages), mouth, neck (throat), the pharynx and chest.
- Thereafter the tip of the tongue, the lips and the teeth articulates the result of the process.

Breathing as 'the fuel of singing' is a much-discussed subject amongst choral directors, and naturally this aspect is very important. In the popular concept of correct breathing, it is accepted that breathing for singing combines the use of the diaphragm and the lower ribcage; this is called costal-abdominal or low breathing [cf. Cook (1999) and Choksy (1981:116)]. According to Ohlin (1976:110) and Jacques (1963:16), among others, this type of breathing provides the best control of exhaled air, and thus of singing tone. Accordingly, Van der Sandt (2001:4-5) clarifies terminology with regard to breathing in the following manner and Ehret (1959) points out the dangers.



- **Breath support:** "... to have enough breath pressure to produce a tone" because otherwise, states Ehret (1959:17), flatting (in the realm of intonation) will occur.
- **Breath control:** "... the smooth maintenance of breath pressure over an extended period of time." When this does not happen, intonation problems will occur; especially again, flatting (Ehret 1959:18).

Fusing the above views, Choksy (1981:115,116) says that the breathing apparatus is of the utmost importance in the forming of vocal tone, providing the power for the voice when used correctly. She then proceeds in citing Kodály, who stressed that breathing organs had to be used correctly and that "breath is to singing what wind is to a sailboat: the power that keeps it moving" (Choksy 1981:115). Choksy (1981:115,116) explains that one actually sings through air pressure, and that, while the diaphragm is the breath-controlling muscle, the abdomen is the 'power'.

In support of the above authors, Pohjola (1993:101-106) and Albrecht (2003:7-17) agree with Charlene Archibeque<sup>14</sup>, Kari Ala-Pöllänen<sup>15</sup> and Pamela Cook<sup>16</sup> that principles relevant to the development of good choral sound are as follows:

- Relaxation of the musical instrument (the body).
- A well-aligned posture.
- Correct breathing to utilise the vocal instrument at its best.

From these basic principles, free, relaxed sound production must follow, as well as a certain concentration of tone, enriching the sound through various methods that broaden the range of the voice, as well as develop the handling of registers and enable the control of dynamics. For this reason, Decker and Kirk (1988:vi) define the singing process as dependent on "breath management", "phonation", "resonance" and "amplification".

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<sup>14</sup> As derived from a lecture entitled "Teaching Conducting", The Fifth International Choral Symposium, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 9 July 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Lecture delivered on 12 July 1999, The Fifth International choral Symposium in Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

<sup>16</sup> Pamela Cook delivered a Lecture *Exploration* regarding voice building, The Fifth International Choral Symposium in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 9 July 1999.

Breathing and its important correlation to singing is vitally important for both choral directors and those who teach individual singing. As breathing involves the resonating cavities of the body, a short discussion of this aspect needs to be included here.

### 2.2.5 Resonance

Regarding resonance, Jacques (1963:36,37) observes that the two tiny vocal chords, which, with their vibrations, create the initial sound, cannot in themselves produce the full, rich tone which issues from the lips of a good singer. Therefore, the sound needs to be amplified by the singer's resonance cavities.

Ohlin (1976:112) agrees that the tone created by the vocal chords has to be reinforced in order to become "strong", "full of colour" and "beautiful". This reinforcement takes place in the throat and in the cavities of the mouth and nose. Robinson and Winold (1976:96) and Ransome (1980:14), as well as Ohlin (1976:112), stress that the use of vocal exercises, such as humming on the consonants *m*, *n*, *ng*, is an acclaimed method for exploring the different resonance cavities of the singer's body and Robinson and Winold (1976:96ff) point out that the primary resonance cavities discovered by using the above-mentioned sounds are the mouth, top of the throat, back of the mouth and postnasal cavities. Ohlin (1976:109) refers to the quality and 'colour' of tone that is affected by the use of the resonating cavities.

Van der Sandt (2001:4-5) points out that, when tone is produced correctly, it will naturally resonate in all available areas. According to Ransome (1980:14), this leads to brightness and volume of sound. It would be safe to assume that excellent resonance is the result of correct habits of breathing and diction, which leads to the uniformity of vowels and production thereof. Ohlin (1976:115) cites that, in creating a vowel sound in singing, one should not create the impression that the instrument is changed for each vowel, and therefore he refers to the "equalising" of vowels, which, according to his view, is one of the conditions for a good legato. Cook (2000:5) stresses that legato singing is crucially important and in this she receives strong support from Rao (1987:13) who is convinced that vowel formation is the essence of vocal technique.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> It seems that both Cook and Rao are supported by different writers on this subject, for instance Choksy (1981:118), Robinson and Winold (1976:115), Fuchs (1967:52) and Ohlin (1976:115), to name but a few authors.

## 2.2.6 Pitching and intonation

Carrington (1999)<sup>18</sup> aptly describes the vital importance of correct intonation for choral singing: "... what joy can then be found in tuning and blending that rare phenomenon, the perfect chord!"

Robinson and Winold (1976:239) discuss the phenomenon of intonation with reference to pitch as a separate entity. Thus some reflection on this phenomenon seems to be warranted at this point. Pitch is considered to be one of the three major auditory attributes of sounds along with loudness and timbre. However, while the actual fundamental frequency can be precisely determined through physical measurement, it may differ from the perceived pitch because of the presence of overtones. In this regard, it should be noted that pitches other than 440 Hz may be used for tuning. In historical terms this A has been tuned to a variety of higher and lower pitches which is relevant when singing older Western music.

The choral singer with the ability of hearing a note and identifying the pitch immediately has an interesting musical ability, namely absolute pitch also called perfect pitch. This is "the ability to identify the frequency or musical name of a specific tone, or conversely, the ability to reproduce a frequency, frequency level, of musical pitch without comparing the tone with any objective reference tone, i.e., without using relative pitch" (Ward 1998: 265-298).<sup>19</sup> Some singers or musicians may even possess both absolute pitch and relative pitch ability. Absolute pitch is not a prerequisite for developing a high level of talent as a musician. The conductor strives to develop musicians who have good relative pitch, a skill that can be learned (Brady 1970: 883-887).

Robinson and Winold (1976:239ff) stress the fact that the pitch aspect of musical performance presents two separate but related problems: the discrimination of different pitches, and the development of sight singing skill, which requires for individual pitches to be realised in correct relation to others – an all-important part of the development of

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<sup>18</sup> Lecture entitled *Exploration*, The Fifth International Symposium on Choral Music in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 9 July 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Absolute pitch is more common among speakers of tonal languages such as most dialects of Chinese or Vietnamese, which depend heavily on pitch variation across single words for lexical meaning. (Mandarin with four possible pitch variations, Cantonese with nine, Minnan with eight and Vietnamese with six.) The prevalence of absolute pitch is considerably higher among individuals with early childhood in East Asia (Deutsch, Henthorn & Dolson 1999:2267).

intonation. One goal of ear training is the development of relative pitch. To this end, scale – degree numbers or movable-doh solmisation (doh, re, mi, etc) can be quite helpful.<sup>20</sup> The essential goal for the chorister in the researcher's view would therefore be to gain a sense of each tone's place in the scale, as well as of its function in the key, which implies that the chorister should be able to hear its position and relationship to the other pitches within the mind's ear. As will be stated in Chapter 4, an awareness of the harmonic structures that support a song is an additional bonus.

Singing pitches with the correct intonation often presents a formidable challenge for the choral conductor and his/her singers (Robinson & Winold 1976:239-254). For every choral singer, however, a well-developed sense of intonation is essential. Intonation in choral performance is a barometer that indicates the development reached in the exact listening skills as communicated through a well-developed instrument – in this case the voice. Already more than three decades ago, Kortkamp (1969:113) stated that the ability to sing in tune is dependent on the capacity to listen perceptively, to hear inwardly, and to reproduce accurately a sound transmitted from an external source (as cited in Heffernan 1982:56). "In tune" thus also refers to the idea of pitch function, which assists the singer "in the mechanical task of finding the right notes but also ultimately helps him to understand the relationships between notes and the way they function as parts of a tonal hierarchy" (Robinson & Winold 1976:254). Alldahl (1990:1) comments that intonation is interwoven with vocal technical difficulties and those difficulties "that a pure, Pythagorean and tempered tonality give rise to". Thurman (1983:6) similarly believes that good intonation skills result from the development of voice skills.

### **2.2.7 Phonetics/Text**

All of the above aspects come into play with regard to the interpretation of the music as set to a specific text. Tibbetts (1998:249-250) is convinced that interpretation of the text is an artistic ability that delves into the concept of tacit knowledge whereby the singer gains deeper understanding of the text, and thus becomes able to bridge the gap between the words and his or her own understanding thereof. Rao (1988:149) observes that "when the voice sings a text in the form of musical expression, it is both soundful and meaningful. This may be one of the bases for the affective power of the voice in music."

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<sup>20</sup> Fixed-doh solfege symbols are something different: it is a label for absolute pitch values.

Singers therefore process what they have been presented with in the score, and relate it to their own experience as well as that of their audience. This means that a singer may use a text to creatively mediate meanings, which the composer and/or the poet intended. By this means, singers may function as “artists” rather than “artisans” (Rao 1988).

### **2.2.8 Compiling the repertoire**

When considering suitable repertoire for a choir, McLachlan (1992:163), as already stated earlier in this chapter, suggests that a conductor must first strive to enrich him/herself with an adequate knowledge of repertoire. In this respect, it should be noted that, in the twenty-first century, this task is simplified considerably not only by advanced technical media such as the internet, but also by the growing number of international workshops where relevant information on this topic is disseminated. Decker and Kirk (1988:150) quote Sir Edward Elgar who made the following comment at a choral competition in northern England in 1903: “To get real artistic expression out of a piece of music it is necessary that some real artistic impression shall have moved the make of it.” This remark thus suggests that the conductor, prior to interpretation, must be convinced of the work’s compositional craftsmanship. Thus it would not be exaggerated to expect of such texts to speak to the conductor as “poetry”. However, criteria for selecting good quality music need to be based on more than an emotive response (cf. Choksy 1981:139); this is confirmed by the fact that most handbooks for choral conductors devoted many pages to this important topic.

An argument often arises about the use of original texts with regard to the choice of repertoire. Should a composition or folk song always be sung in the original language because the musical phrasing matches the textual phrasing? While it might be argued that the artistic uniqueness and the explicit meaning of the text might be lost in translation, Stanton (1971:2137) argues that “most choirs will achieve more musical results with translations, and their audiences will come closer to understanding (because of the translations) what they are singing”. Zoltán Kodály’s stance on this matter as cited by Katalin Kiss<sup>21</sup> represents a decisive opinion in this regard:

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<sup>21</sup> Derived from a lecture delivered by Katalin Kiss, Fifth World Symposium of the International Federation for Choral Music with the theme: Children’s Choirs, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 13 July 1999.

Kodály himself opted for performing in the original language, but sometimes he did make an exception in cases where there was no chance for right pronunciation with a foreign choir.

Regarding repertoire and programming, and taking into consideration the needs of the audience, Zegree (2002:67) states that conductors have to carefully consider all the various elements of a performance in order to create a programme that includes a variety of emotions and experiences, while simultaneously, it should strive towards an educative, entertaining and inspiring purpose.

### **2.2.9 The conductor's preparation and the maturing of the end product**

Eminent conductors agree on the importance of score study for quality choral singing. According to Roy Wales (1993),<sup>22</sup> a conductor should be well acquainted with the piece and its separate voices before approaching the choir. He is of the opinion that the conductor must be able to identify the difficult parts in compositions for the singers from the start, and suggest methods to make those sections of the work easier. He recommends that one should work per phrase and line. Rhythms and their cross-interrelationships must be checked and dynamics studied carefully, while harmony should also be investigated.<sup>23</sup> Eric Ericson (1976:99) states that if the conductor neglects this preliminary work, the repertoire of his/her choir will become limited to a few well-known works

As has also been stated under 2.1, it is thus clear is that the conductor should arrive at each rehearsal already with a clear musical concept of new pieces that are to be studied. This is especially important in the case of twentieth century compositions where scores are often built around new compositional trends (Robinson & Winold 1976:473). In such cases, different, unconventional sounds may be incorporated, key signatures may be ignored, and complex intervals may be used. Thus the conductor needs to consider beforehand ways to understand the chosen music and its specific style, and how to give structure to such pieces once the choir has mastered them.

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<sup>22</sup> Personal communication, London, 21 June 1993.

<sup>23</sup> Personal communication, London, 27 June 1993.

Also, it will be equally unsatisfactory to have a choir rendering a piece of music before the phrase, the music itself and the text have become 'part' of the singers. There is in every artistic endeavour time needed for the maturing of the end product; for that all conductors need time for which they must plan.

The aspects of choral conducting as discussed above form a vital part of the striving towards choral excellence. In Chapter 3, similar topics relevant specifically to the context of children's choirs will be investigated in more depth.

## CHORAL DIRECTING IN THE CONTEXT OF A CHILDREN'S CHOIR

*The vital thing to remember, however, is this: All children everywhere can be touched by the profound beauty of the choral art. They all can learn how to sing great choral music.*

Ashworth Bartle (2003:85).

A foundational perspective on children's choral singing necessitates an examination of the development of this choral form as based in both musical and non-musical facets, and needs to pay special attention to the role of the conductor. Before these didactic considerations come into play, however, first the historical development of the children's choir as a unique artistic instrument is described, since this historic foundation presents the basis from which more recent developments, as represented in this chapter, originated.

### 3.1 THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S CHOIRS

#### 3.1.1 Early developments up to the nineteenth century

Schoeman (1985:31) points out that the activity of people singing together has, since the earliest times, been part of the history of humankind. Throughout the ages, first communal, and later choral singing has played a formative role within different social, spiritual, recreational, cultural and aesthetic spheres. Robinson and Winold (1976:6) observe that, from the earliest times, the choral experience has been a natural outgrowth of humanity's quest for worship, beauty and communication. They attribute this phenomenon to the close association between the school and the church, which existed since the Middle Ages, and to the imperative influence of each upon the other in the development of choral art prior to the seventeenth century. Instruction in choral music during these early times was an outgrowth of religious necessity, and of the need for trained singers to participate in activities connected with religious rites (Robinson & Winold 1976:6).



Robinson and Winold (1976:27) further indicate that, for nearly two thousand years, the church has provided an opportunity for choral singers to express their deepest thoughts as acts of worship and praise. In the early history of church music, however, this opportunity was reserved only for men and boys; the cultivation of boy's soprano and alto voices as part of the European history of music in churches was an outgrowth of the fact that, until the early seventeenth century, women or girls were not allowed to sing in church choirs (Van Aswegen 2005:2-2). From this developed the tradition of boys' choirs as associated with religious choral singing.

Concerning the development of the children's choir as a specialised category, the influence of this centuries-old tradition cannot be denied. According to Greenall (2002:4), in great religious centres such as Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, the King's College Choir at the University of Cambridge, as well as many other Anglican cathedrals, to this very day the tradition still forms a crucial part of the training of young singers. Van Aswegen (2002:2-2) cites well-known examples from other contexts that include, among others, the well-known Thomanerchor, the Montserrat Monastery Boys' Choir, and the Wiener Sängerknaben.<sup>1</sup>

### **3.1.2 Twentieth century and onwards**

With the diminishing influence of the church in the nineteenth century, ordinary schools increasingly became the patrons of choral singing (Robinson & Winold 1976:27). In this regard, developments in America deserve special mention. Before 1930, the so-called school movement of singing had already emphasised the early development of children's voices. Francis Howard, one of America's most influential early authorities on the child's voice, published *The child voice in singing* in 1895 (Phillips 1985:21-22). Despite Howard's controversial views (cf. Phillips 1985:21-22), it became one of the most extensively used textbooks on children's vocal training until the 1930s.

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<sup>1</sup> The Wiener Sängerknaben, founded in 1498 by Maximilian I, belongs to the *Hofmusikkapelle* in Vienna, where Franz Schubert became a member of the choir in 1808.

An important figure in the United States of America (USA) was also the educationalist Lowell Mason, who convinced the Boston School Committee in 1838 to include singing in the public school system. Mason included fundamental voice-training exercises for school children that demonstrated close ties to Pestalozzianism and its emphasis on the instructional side of teaching. This practice, however, resulted in music teachers emphasising the rudiments of music more than the singing thereof.<sup>2</sup> Francis Howard, together with Karl Gehrken, moved away from this method of voice training to the singing of songs as the source of instruction from which all other aspects must follow (Phillips 1985:21; Van Aswegen 2005:2-7).

Howard introduced this principle in 1938 in USA schools (Phillips 1985:21). However, not all music educators in USA abandoned the earlier system of vocal 'pedagogy' for children. Phillips (1985:22) mentions Dann and others who recommended the forming of good singing habits by way of vocal exercises. In 1938, Ruth Krehbiel Jacobs wrote *The successful children's choir*, a publication considered so valuable that even after several decades it was reprinted in 1981.

An important outcome of the new emphasis on the children's choir as a specialist category demanding specialised conducting methods, was the development of girls' or mixed children's choirs. As opposed to the tradition of boys' choirs, this phenomenon came to the fore during the last half of the twentieth century. According to Van Aswegen (2005:2-2) and Pohjola (1993:13), children's choirs consisting of both genders only became popular during the Second World War. The influence of this change had already manifested itself even before and during the 1940s as the children's choir movement gained momentum in different countries, including Bulgaria and Hungary (Pohjola 1993:13).

Simultaneously, a growing number of compositions written especially for the instrument started to emerge internationally. Decker and Kirk (1988:58-69) provide an overview which clearly demonstrates a new focus on the concept of mixed, children's and/or girls'

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<sup>2</sup> The South African school system during the 1950s might have been influenced by a similar instructional method; as a primary school child during that period, the researcher recalls that, in singing classes, children were drilled in theory, voice and pitch training connected to the concept of the relative doh-system. Time spent on singing songs were thus not ample.

choirs, citing works by eminent twentieth century composers such as Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951), Anton Webern (1883-1945), Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), Charles Ives (1874-1954), Carl Orff (1852-1982), as well as numerous other composers from England, France, the USA, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Scandinavia, specifically Eskil Hemberg (1938-2004)<sup>3</sup>, and Knut Nysted (born 1915).

During the twenty-first century the development of the children's choir as a unique instrument has become even more prominent, and is therefore a matter of great importance to its conductors (Van Aswegen 2005:2-2, 2-3). This emphasis has come to the fore in publications of foremost conductors such as Ashworth Bartle (2003) and other contributors. As the need for specialised rehearsal and conducting techniques grew, conductors themselves started to contribute through the development of didactic methods that generated specific artistic results. This body of knowledge is still growing by means of publications and symposia.

It is obvious that the above described focus on children's choirs as a specialised choral category placed considerable demands on the conductor. In the next subsection, this aspect will be explored in more detail.

### **3.2 THE ROLE OF THE CONDUCTOR IN CHILDREN'S CHORAL SINGING**

Within the context of the children's choir, the conductor fulfils the role of communicator in the most practical sense of the word, being not only the 'translator' of all technical and artistic dimensions of the music, but also a teacher who forms members of the choir on a most personal level. Thus, while the conductor strives to attain certain didactic goals, simultaneously working towards an aesthetically satisfying product, these aims can only be attained through effective communication that addresses each member on the individual, humane level.

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<sup>3</sup> In September 2000 Eskil Hemberg (1938-2004) wrote a composition for the Bloemfontein Children's Choir *To everything there is a season* (op.108) based on Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. The choir first performed the composition in Bloemfontein on 28 July 2001.

The role of the conductor becomes especially pertinent if one assumes that musicality, with its diverse aspects, needs to be systematically developed in children as both a uniform and an individual ability. There is a valid reason for this: even the musically most gifted child does not possess a 'ready-made', fully developed musical insight.

It is thus safe to state that, in the context of the children's choir, the successful development of correct singing techniques is directly related to the capabilities of the conductor. Pohjola (1993:31) stresses that the conductor should have a sound knowledge of the vocal instrument. Flummerfelt (cited by Shangkuan 2005:13) advises a conductor "to be the best musician he or she is able to be", and argues that this calls for the development of a sound, trained musicianship, a good ear, and sensitivity to musical style.

As advised by Decker and Kirk (1988:81), as well as Flummerfelt (cited by Shangkuan 2005:13), the conductor of a children's choir should thus have extensive knowledge of choral techniques, as well as a well-developed professional musicianship. This ideal is attainable only through the practices of constant listening, reflecting, studying, and also through being adequately informed about other art forms. The latter aspect is mentioned because the researcher is convinced that, in a sense, all art forms are related in their development.

From this may be concluded that the conductor of this instrument must possess knowledge of all aspects relevant to leading a children's choir, which includes aspects such as the ability to conduct auditions properly, to be informed on repertoire and score studying, as well as on all technical aspects concerning correct posture and breathing, the development of intonation, and the cultivation of the child's voice and his/her ideal of sound. He/she must assist the choir in the ability to read music, and to develop rhythmical acuity, memorisation and all other relevant aspects. Apart from this, the necessary psychological insight is needed, since, "as a manifestation of human emotion the voice is closely associated with actual feeling" (Rao 1988:224). At this point, it is obvious that the demands formulated above are manifold and diverse: According to Harold Schonberg (1968:15, cited by Van der Sandt 2001:2-6), the conductor is someone with a "commanding presence, infinite dignity, fabulous memory, vast experience, high temperament and serene wisdom".

### 3.3 AUDITIONING

Within the context of children's choirs, the auditioning process should be tailored to the specific needs of the choir concerned. Thus, auditioning procedures for a concert choir, for example, may differ considerably from those relevant to the choral programme of an amateur choir.<sup>4</sup>

Auditioning procedures are, however, not only a matter of musical consideration, since, in some cases, issues which are unrelated to music may also come into play. For instance, during a personal interview<sup>5</sup> the Swedish conductor Bo Johansson stated that, during the preceding two decades, he had found it increasingly difficult to find true soprano voices for his choir.<sup>6</sup> An experiment conducted at the school where he is employed also showed that children suffered from considerably more allergies towards the end of the twentieth century than their counterparts did fifty years before. This may be one reason for this phenomenon. Further research would be needed however, to indicate whether the increasing tendency toward allergies does indeed play a role in this regard.

#### 3.3.1 The correct age for prospective choir members

In a choir of young voices the age of incoming members is of particular importance. The eminent conductor Bo Johansson of the Adolf Fredrik Music School in Sweden is convinced that children should start singing at an early age; the entrance age for children at his school is ten.<sup>7</sup> Similarly Zoltán Kodály (cited by Choksy 1981:103) argues that "[b]elow the age of fifteen everybody is more talented than above it; only exceptional geniuses continue to develop. It is a crime to miss that talented age". The past leader of the famous Tapiola Choir, Erkki Pohjola (1993:96), believes that the correct age for prospective singers should be even younger: "New singers are generally from 7-10 years

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<sup>4</sup> Examples of concert choirs that may be cited here are, among others, those of Ashworth Bartle (Canada), Elena Svetozar (Russia), Bo Johansson of the Adolf Fredrik's Choir School (Sweden), and the Drakensberg Boys' Choir School (South Africa).

<sup>5</sup> Stockholm, Sweden, 22 September 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Two well-known South African choral conductors of university choirs, Renette Bouwer and Corné van Pletzen, also testified to the fact that they auditioned very few sopranos in relation to other voices. Van Pletzen in fact indicated that, for every twenty voices he auditioned, only five would be sopranos. Information derived from personal interviews: Hartenbos, South Africa, 28 July 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Personal interview, Stockholm, Sweden, 22 September 2004.

of age". Ashworth Bartle (2003:5ff) also stresses the fact that children should start singing at the age of six or seven. From this, it may be assumed that the younger the age of children who join a choir, the more beneficial it will be for their own musical development, as well as for the choir.

### **3.3.2 The process of auditioning**

According to Choksy (1981:99-102) and Ashworth Bartle (2003:79ff), the most important aspect of auditioning is the accuracy of musical memory. This presupposes the presence of a natural aural ability and of musical intelligence. Choksy (1981:99-102) is of the opinion that a conductor must be able to adequately assess the voice range, rhythmic ability, level of sight-reading skill, keenness of the ear, and quickness and correctness of the child's musical memory to place him or her correctly in a choir. Gräbe<sup>8</sup> also considers sight-singing skills to be very important.

Departing from the viewpoint that intonation is coupled to the uniformity of the vowels and therefore to good intonation, and that clear diction is an essential quality in choir singing, good pronunciation is profitable to both the candidate and the choir. A natural use of the voice is preferable to a candidate who has already been taught to sing in an unnatural manner, because it is not always possible to correct such a fault. Proof of an outgoing personality will reflect positively in performances, and will also be beneficial to the social context of the choir.

Ashworth Bartle (2003:78-81) explains how she selects her singers by means of an audition that takes about half an hour. She looks at certain aspects of the child's personality by observing non-musical aspects such as: Do they show up? Do they arrive on time? How do they walk into the classroom? Do they seem interested or bored? Some of these traits reflect the organisation of the family rather than the disposition of the child, and might therefore not influence the ultimate decision, but according to Ashworth Bartle (2003:79) it is very important to form a general picture of the child. She stresses that every child is unique and that, therefore, every child's audition is to be treated somewhat differently. For Ashworth Bartle (2003:79) the most important facets of the audition are the ear test and tonal memory exercises, because the musical ear and tonal memory are precious gifts indispensable to choral singing, indicating innate talent.

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<sup>8</sup> Email correspondence, 17 July 2007.

In terms of the above, Bouwer<sup>9</sup> indicates that perfect pitch is an asset, but that it is not necessarily a blessing, for if the choir would go off pitch, a singer with perfect pitch will try to maintain the correct pitch. Therefore it might be argued that a good sense of relative pitch might benefit an aspiring choir member more.

### 3.4 BALANCING COGNITIVE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

For conductors of a children's choir, the relation between the development of the child's self-confidence and the resulting educational profits deserves special consideration. Doreen Rao<sup>10</sup> emphasises that "a good conductor empowers the child and develops the child's identity and sense of social 'we'". Bo Johansson,<sup>11</sup> who states that, in the context of a children's choir, both "the cultural we and the personal 'I' are developed, because "each child is unique", supports this view.

In this regard it is relevant to touch on an aspect that is potentially destructive to all human beings, but especially to children (in particular if they are as sensitive as most children's choirs' members tend to be). Johansson points out that criticism and sarcasm as voiced by the conductor directly influence the performance of the child in a choir. He therefore finds it a great pity that some conductors undermine the self-confidence of their singers through a lack of patience. Rao<sup>12</sup> further stresses that the conductor's positive attitude is the most influential factor in building the child's disposition, not only towards music, but also to the 'self' and to the 'other'.

Notable conductors thus see conducting as an involvement of the conductor's whole being coupled to a deep understanding and emotional conception of people and of music. As Rao puts it, in the case of a children's choir, it is the conductor who provides "that place of sanctuary for them".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Personal interview: Hartenbos, South Africa, 28 July 2006.

<sup>10</sup> In a lecture delivered on March 2001 in Vancouver, Canada, at the First International Symposium for Children's Choirs (The World of Children's Choirs, 18–22 March 2001.)

<sup>11</sup> Lecture delivered on 10 July 1999, Rotterdam, The Netherlands at the Fifth World Symposium on Choral Music.

<sup>12</sup> Lecture delivered March 2001 in Vancouver, Canada at the First World Symposium for Children's Choirs (The World of Children's Choirs, 18–22 March 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Lecture delivered in Vancouver, Canada at the First World Symposium for Children's Choirs (The World of Children's Choirs, 18–22 March 2001).

### **3.5 SOUND PRODUCTION AND THE YOUNG VOICE**

In discussing factors that influence sound production in the young voice, several aspects are of vital importance. With regard to tone quality, conductors need to be in possession of a very definite view on what is expected with regard to the production of a beautiful tone. Register is another subject imperative to the topic, as are questions concerning the conductor's sound ideal, and its interaction with the concept of choral memory. As we are living in a "global village", the position of the young voice in the language environment is another aspect that needs to be considered. There is also the question of whether climate and singing customs may affect sound production.

In the ensuing section of the chapter, first these aspects will be investigated, after which the discussion considers also matters of breathing, posture, warm-ups, muscle co-ordination, the process of developing pitching and intonation, as well as the phenomenon of the changing voice.

#### **3.5.1 Tone quality and the young voice**

In terms of tone quality Cook (2000:5) emphasises that the beauty of tone emanating from a well-balanced choir can mesmerise the ear, and move the hearts of the audience more than is the case with any other instrument. It is therefore important that conductors help singers to produce a beautiful tone, not only for their own, but also for the audience's satisfaction. In this regard Wolverton (2005:33-34) argues that the most important aspect of choral singing is the quality of the sound; he believes that "if the sound is right then correct intonation will follow", emphasising that the group must have "one ideology and one understanding".

It is important to mention here also the viewpoint of Rutkowski (1998:202) who deems it logical that a child must gain use of the singing voice before intonation problems can be evaluated. The development of vocal tone is therefore a natural result of this strategy, and takes on a unique nature with regard to the young voice. In this context only accepted vocal techniques, which cannot harm the young voice, should be used. Unfortunately, the focus on the production of excellent sound quality is not always a positive didactic and



artistic force. If approached in an uninformed or negligent way it may be harmful to the development of the young voice, and may lead to other negative musical consequences as well. The researcher is convinced that this phenomenon directly relates to the fact that sufficient research is not readily available on how the musical instrument of the young child should be developed in a choral context.

The leader of a choir for young voices must handle this instrument with the utmost care and knowledge of the particular age-related voice group. Within the context of the children's choir, building an individual voice is out of the question. This should be undertaken only when an individual is physiologically fully developed and the vocal organs have stopped growing. The current conductor of the Tapiola Choir, Kari Ala-Pöllänen<sup>14</sup> strives for versatile ways (cf. p. 18) to produce the singing voice according to geographical, traditional, linguistic or other connections. Gorbatenko (1999)<sup>15</sup> stresses that sound is the main condition of the expressiveness in the choir as is the case with any other instrument, and that expressiveness mostly depends on the sound's beauty, timbre, and richness. She further points out that the training and development of timbre ('a tint of a sound') has priority in her mind, and that characteristics of timbre which should be considered are the lightness, freedom, and 'flight' of a sound, as well as the presence of high overtones, so that the sound can be "sent forward" and "rounded": "it should be sung with energy, resiliency, should be coloured and flying into acoustics".

Thurman (1983:5) supports the above argument, as he is convinced that the sensitive and informed choral conductor can assist the choir members by attending to the development of sound singing skills. Thurman (1983:9) believes that, if conductors would spend enough time on voice education during rehearsals, the required musical skills will be developed.

Dunn (1998:980) explains that, because young children have shorter vocal cords than adults, when using a 'head tone',<sup>16</sup> their ranges and purity of tone can be amazing. The

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<sup>14</sup>Lecture delivered on 12 July 1999 by Kari Ala-Pöllänen on *Building a Choir Sound*, Fifth International World Symposium on Choral Music in Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

<sup>15</sup> Lecture delivered on 10 July 1999 by Galina Gorbatenko on *Repertoire*, Fifth International World Symposium on Choral Music, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

<sup>16</sup> The use of this expression leads into the discussion of registers, which is also controversial amongst some singing instructors and conductors.

physical changes involved in puberty manifest themselves in the lengthening of the vocal cords in both genders. For the choral conductor this is a phenomenon that needs to be considered throughout vocal training, which has the aim of building an excellent children's choir.

Zimfira Poloz<sup>17</sup> from Russia, now residing in Canada, advocates that children should experiment with their voices, making different sounds related to those of small babies crying, sadness, joy, a thin sound, etc. This suggestion coincides with methods used by other conductors, such as Kinoshita<sup>18</sup> and Scherr<sup>19</sup>, who emphasise that one should always remember that the speaking and singing voice are interconnected.

According to Rao (1987:5), the vocal production of musical tone is a vital and creative process, which involves the body, mind and emotion. This implies that the conductor must be able to convey an envisaged tone image to the choral singer. The wonder of the shaping of sound is reflected in the previously mentioned statement by Pohjola (1993:91): "If there is anything mysterious or supernatural about the shaping of a sound, then it is in the blending of the voices. How is it possible that two fairly mundane sounds can come across, when sung together, like something from another planet?"

Stanton (1978:40) contends that beautiful choral tone results from a process of tonal homogenisation. This means that different voices with different voice-qualities are moulded into one artistic tone image of the conductor for his group of singers. He proceeds by saying that the singers then move through a whole process to progress towards the end product. Ohlin (1976:107) also emphasises this process because he believes that, although methods may differ, the training of an individual voice and the development of a good choral sound are not contradictory endeavours. In each case, the goal is to develop and improve the ability of singing.

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<sup>17</sup> Lecture delivered at the First World Symposium for Children's Choirs in March 2001, Vancouver, Canada (The World of Children's Choirs, 18–22 March 2001) and also during three master classes delivered on July 24, 25 and 26 July 2008 at the 8<sup>th</sup> World Symposium on Choral Music in Copenhagen, Denmark.

<sup>18</sup> Lecture delivered on Vocal Sound Building for Young Voices on 28 July 2005 at the Seventh International World Symposium on Choral Music in Kyoto, Japan.

Lectures delivered on Vocal Sound Building on 2–3 August 2005 at the Seventh International World Symposium on Choral Music in Kyoto, Japan.

In the setting of the exemplary children's choir, the ultimate result is to strive for a homogeneous choral sound. The implication is that the singers approach the vowels and consonants in a uniform way, creating unanimity of sound within individual parts and between all the parts. According to Pohjola (1993:103), there are "no short cuts" to developing this kind of sound ideal. New strength, sensitivity, depth and rich colouring have to be prized out from one rehearsal to the next – but never at the expense of the 'chamber music' feel, based on the singers listening to one another. He encourages his choristers to "throw their voices forward" and to "imagine that their voices are coming out of their eyes" (Pohjola 1993:103).

The following aspects may be considered as also being vital to good sound production:

### **3.5.1.1 Registers**

The sound in children's voices must be equalised by various methods because various registers do occur in children's voices (Ohlin 1976:115).

Ohlin (1976:108) quotes Helga Christensen in stating that "a register is a series of notes which seem to be created in the same way and which have a similar sound quality". Clinicians are in accordance with the above, though there are different opinions on the whole topic regarding registers. While touching on this, 'registers' as such will not be discussed in this study. Ohlin (1976:108), for instance, is of the opinion that there are four registers. Robinson and Winold (1976:65,66), while acknowledging various opinions on the topic, emphasise the principle that a vocal register refers to "that section of the *tessitura* of the voice where the vocal cords readjust themselves for pitches of faster or slower frequencies. Such a change is reflected in a homogeneous tone quality, a different resonance placement of the voice, and a noticeable change in amplification".

The change in timbre, however, reflects the adjustment in the size of the resonating cavity because one can hear when the quality of the voice suddenly changes while children are singing any downwards series of notes, for instance a major scale, where the movement from a 'head tone' to a 'chest tone' is necessary, as well as the smooth handling of the consonants and the equalising of the register. This can be heard when the quality of the voice suddenly changes while children are singing a descending series of notes.

Arpeggios on different vowels and descending scales consisting of the sounds of different vowels give the desired result of equalisation of registers, as advocated by Ohlin (1976:108) and Høgset (1994:16).

### **3.5.1.2 Staccato**

Ohlin (1976:116) explains that staccato exercises are useful and necessary, because the short notes require a light but firm attack and demand careful intonation. Staccato exercises help heavy voices develop a thinner, lighter tone. In terms of resonance, staccato singing gives a higher placement of the sound. Ehmann and Haasemann (1982:43-45) support the opinion that staccato singing is especially useful for training the high voice, because it relies on the spontaneous reaction of the vocal mechanism.

As a choral conductor, however, the researcher finds that children experience serious intonation problems in staccato singing. Thus the proposed exercises of the above-mentioned authors would be considered to be quite difficult for children, especially those containing a leap of an octave, or the use of the arpeggio principle (Ehmann & Haasemann 1982:43). Since staccato singing is, in itself, not an easy technique, it is however also obvious that children's choirs prove their excellence by being able to handle this technique successfully.

### **3.5.1.3 Choral memory**

Although choirs are organisations that are always in the process of changing, it was exhilarating to find that even the academic Beynon (2002:34) concurs with Pohjola (1993:87,100) on his proposition that the stability of choral memory is an integral component of a viable and healthy choral programme. Pohjola explains that it is critical for the choir as a whole to be actively involved in the process of achieving a particular sound ideal, and therefore each child should understand the voice production goal envisaged for the group. His statement implies that choral conductors of leading choirs should have a certain concept of sound in mind, and should continuously work toward this model in a methodological manner.

The researcher has observed this interesting sound phenomenon with all choirs working for a prolonged period of time with one conductor. If one closes one's eyes while listening to recordings, and one is familiar with the choirs, it is easy to identify these choirs purely by their sound. As mentioned, the Tapiola Choir under the direction of Erkki Pohjola, has, for instance, the specific "Tapiola sound":

We did not step into the footsteps of the *Wiener Sängerknaben*, nor any more into those of the children's choirs of Hungary and Bulgaria that left such an impression on me. Equally, I can hardly believe that imitating the sound of the Tapiola Choir would as such be of much good to anyone (Pohjola 1983:87).

By stating that the striving towards a uniform sound ideal would certainly be a waste of effort if the choir members do not have the same mother tongue and cultural legacy, Pohjola (1993:87) stresses the importance of the influence of language on choral tone.

Buell and Rose (1998:54) confirm the existence of mental memory by discussing what they term the "dual trace hypothesis". This concept builds on the principles of "mental imagery". Crucial to this phenomenon is the idea of memory image, which 'records' how things look, sound, feel; that is, a verbal-symbolic mode that also contributes to the process of memorisation. Conductors, who are in the first place teachers, make use of their voices and movements for the explanation and description of various kinds of visual analogies. For example, when a conductor is trying to explain the character of a soft sound that he has in mind for a certain piece, he might also make, apart from his explanation of the particular sound, a further comparison: "Stroke your arm as if you are stroking it with a feather, I would like the soft sound to have that quality".<sup>20</sup> Since the whole sound concept and 'choral memory' of the choir are closely interwoven with the verbal and non-verbal communication of the conductor and the choir, it is of the utmost importance to gain deeper insight into the various didactic, technical and musical strategies used by leading exponents in the field – a topic which will, therefore, again be addressed in chapter four.

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<sup>20</sup> The researcher's example.

In conclusion, it is possible to concur with Beynon (2002:39) that, when expert conductors strive to incorporate their own concepts of vocal technique, musicianship and pedagogy into their concept of a specific choral sound, the tonal quality develops and settles as a basic consistent foundation over time.

#### 3.5.1.4 Resonance

Principles of resonance seem to be the same for both adult and young singers. In both cases, Ohlin (1976:112) stresses the need for exercises that reinforce the tone created by the vocal chords in order for the sound to become strong, colourful and “beautiful”. This reinforcement takes place in the throat and in the cavities of the mouth and the nose. To this purpose, both Ohlin (1976:112) and Ransome (1980:14) stress the importance of the resonators of the face as one of the best-known and oldest auxiliary tools.

As was already emphasised in the second chapter of this study, the importance of exercises for resonance cannot be stressed enough. With regard to the children’s choir, it should be noted that the same exercises that apply in the general context, may be used with children. Robinson and Winold (1976:96ff) similarly stress the importance of resonance as part of the vocal technique, and recommend practical exercises in this regard. Since the vibrating column of air must reach the primary resonance cavities, namely the mouth, top of the throat, back of the mouth and postnasal cavities, they propose that the choir begins with a ‘hum’ or ‘mm’ sound. Thereafter they coordinate resonance with breathing and breath support, doing repeated chords on ‘mm’ and later, from the *m*-sound, they let the vowels flow: ‘mm-ah-mm; mm-eh’. Ehmann and Haasemann (1981:11) also use ‘n’ for nasal resonance, while Albrecht (2003:12) includes the humming sound in her exercises.<sup>21</sup>

It thus seems as if experienced conductors, in striving toward specific outcomes, make use of similar methods. While Ohlin (1976:109;112) is convinced that the quality or ‘colour’ of tone is affected by the optimal use of the resonating cavities, Van der Sandt (2001:4-5) and Hylton (1995:15) point out that, when tone is produced correctly, it will

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<sup>21</sup> Dave Perry (in Albrecht 2003:12) suggests the use of ‘mm’: “Use this as a gentle warm up, beginning in midrange, then expanding upward and downward as the voice wakes up”.

naturally resonate in all available areas. According to Ransome (1980:14), this leads to brightness and volume of sound. It would be safe to assume that excellent resonance is the result of correct habits of breathing and diction, that is, a uniformity of vowels and the production thereof.

Rao (1987:7) warns “long explanations of anatomy and physiology are inappropriate at the initial stages of voice development”. Therefore the conductor has the momentous task to do scientific work only by way of suggestive remarks to invoke the correct reaction from the children. Ohlin (1976:115) substantiates this viewpoint by stating:

Vowels can be compared to instruments for each has its own special size, form and character. In creating a vowel sound in singing, you must not make the listener think you are changing your instrument for each vowel ... without becoming imprecise, the vowels become more like each other, each lending to the other its special advantages and qualities ... The equalising of vowels ... is one of the conditions for a good legato.

Because the vowels are so important in singing, Cook (2000:5) again emphasises that a balance of resonance is the aim on all vowels: “dark and bright must be present on all vowels and at all pitches”. She also agrees with Ohlin that *legato* singing is of the greatest essence; “the vowels of words should be held as long as possible and bridge the resonance from vowel to vowel”.

Exercises to build resonance are mentioned in various books and articles on building the choral sound. In this regard, Rao (1987:13) is also convinced that vowel formation is the essence of vocal technique. In this she is supported by Choksy (1981:117), Robinson and Winold (1976:115) and Fuchs (1967:52).

To expand on viewpoints relating to resonance as cited above, as well as the comment of Pohjola regarding language and sound in the previous section and to link this information to that introduced in the next section of this chapter, the researcher might add considerations regarding the interesting phenomenon of language, relevant especially to choral singing in South Africa. Most indigenous Africans do not speak softly. This probably has its origin and foundation in an older, indigenous belief that one has to speak loudly enough for all people in one’s vicinity to hear. Listeners then also know that the person speaking is not talking about them, or trying to keep secrets from the community. The sounds of the different African languages spoken in South Africa have a

natural resonance embedded in vowel sounds. The speaking voices of Africans therefore usually have a naturally resonant quality, and they find it quite normal to raise their voices to speak to someone a distance away. There is, however, seldom, if ever, ugliness in the rendering of their vowels. Their singing voices are also, as a rule, resonant and strong, more so than those of white South African children.

In this regard environmental factors might also be considered. In South Africa, the family and educational environments of black, coloured, and white English speaking children from English-speaking families are much less inhibited<sup>22</sup> than those of most Afrikaans-speaking children who stem mostly from a strict Calvinist upbringing. It might be posited that less inhibited children sing with more confidence, and thus explore the possibilities of voice production, of vocal sounds and of resonance specifically, more freely.

### **3.5.1.5 Language and sound production**

The singing community exists all over the world: each country has its own language(s) and its characteristic sounds. For choral singing this is an important facet, because the most outstanding choirs, including world-famous children's choirs, have to develop that special and daunting ability to be able to sing convincingly in the sound idiom of a specific language. The Tapiola Choir has their own artistic reasons for favouring singing songs in their original mother tongue. Pohjola (1999:112), the former director and founder of this children's choir, emphatically states that a translation seldom fits perfectly with the music. Because of the 'global effect' the issue of the relation between language and different characteristics of the sound produced in regions and countries is now far better understood and accepted by leading conductors. Interesting aspects that relate to a specific language should always be noted. According to Pohjola (1993:103), finding the right resonance, for instance, is closely intertwined with the language of the song, which calls for a specific placement of the voice.

After a visit to Sweden with the specific purpose of observing Swedish choirs, Anderson (2001:35) describes the following characteristics of the Swedish choral sound. He finds

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<sup>22</sup> Tracey Eksteen, an Arts and Culture teacher at a double-medium school, Grey College, in Bloemfontein, South Africa, which proffers Afrikaans and English as their two languages of educational instruction, confirmed this on 26 October 2006.



that in Swedish choirs a model sound, greatly influenced by their famous mentor and choral conductor Eric Ericson, is preferred by all conductors. This concurs with the previously mentioned view of Beynon (2002:33–40) who stresses building a choral memory of a specific sound.

As part of Anderson's (2001:35) study of the Swedish sound, he also did an analysis of components present in both adult and children's choirs. His observations were that both types of choirs showed the existence of an excellent *legato* line, with emphasis on proper vowels and excellent intonation. He found the language to be extremely helpful in the rendering of this beautiful 'Swedish' sound, and was therefore convinced that the characteristics of the Swedish play a vital role with regard to the formation of choral sound because "all syllables are created equally and are to be spoken and sung with more or less equal weight" (2001:35). Therefore, in his opinion, the sound flows and lends itself to exemplary legato singing, which is sometimes far more difficult to achieve in other languages.

At the International World Symposium on Choral Music in Copenhagen, 19-16 July 2008, it again became clear that it is an art in itself to sing in an idiomatically correct way when performing works from another culture. At the Songbridge event in Copenhagen on 23 July 2008, this was clearly illustrated by the four participating choirs, each performing in their own idiomatic style, but in the section where they had to participate in the singing of a folksong of each of the participating choirs, which is a prerequisite of this prestigious occasion, problems regarding pronunciation and difference in sound were observed. When the Bloemfontein Children's Choir of South Africa took part in the first Songbridge event held in Wakayama in Japan from 6-10 August 2008, this principle was again highlighted as a problem for the Japanese choir of Wakayama under leadership of Haruhiko Numamaru, and the Chinese choir under the leadership of Mingjing Xie to sing in the sound idiom of the South African children in their rendering of an authentic folk song.

#### **3.5.1.6 Climate and sound**

Climate may also play an important role in the development of the young voice, and in building its natural quality. According to Pohjola (2000),<sup>23</sup> in the Scandinavian context, the normally cool and well-hydrated climate might be related to a specific timbre in

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<sup>23</sup> Personal interview: Linz, Austria, July 2000.

children's voices. The researcher could however not find any scientific evidence to support his hypothesis. It would however be interesting to establish through further research whether climatic conditions affect the development of children's voices.

### **3.5.1.7 Singing customs**

Singing customs definitely play a role in sound production. According to Choksy (1981:16), young black children from America prefer a lower singing range than other children. She ponders on the possibility that this might be a result of the chest voice used in gospel singing. Townsend (1998:252-255), in his intensive research on the use of chest voice in Afro-American religious singing, supports Choksy's finding because he observes "congregations as a whole accepted chest voice as a means for producing vocal sound. To sing in one's head resonance would not be accepted as an adequate example of singing praises to God." He found that choristers and singers, also young singers, are therefore accustomed to use the chest voice and the resulting resonant vocal sound, because "using the chest voice is the preferred vocal production technique in African-American churches" (Townsend 1998:255).

Armstrong<sup>24</sup> in his workshop entitled "Interpreting the Afro-American Spiritual with Integrity" made a similar observation. This is in concurrence with the findings of Townsend, who posited that the characteristic sound of Navajo Indian children, who have an early high singing range without pitch problems, may also be the result of the falsetto ceremonial singing of Navajo men, as also described by Choksy (1981:16).

Last, Townsend (1998:255) is convinced that using the chest voice for singing folk music is a feature of many folk-singing cultures. When children sing naturally and unobserved, they almost always use the middle ranges of their voices. Johansson, Bouwer and Van Pletzen might arguably, relate this habit in children to the scarcity of soprano voices, a distinct problem for conductors as noted<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Anton Armstrong is Professor of Music at St Olaf College and Conductor of the St Olaf Choir. He also conducted the World Youth Choir with concerts in Venezuela and the USA. In January 2006 Armstrong was selected to receive the Robert Foster Cherry Award for Great Teaching – the highest such honor given in the USA. (Information from the Delegates Handbook: 8<sup>th</sup> World Symposium on Choral Music 19-26 July 2008 in Copenhagen Denmark.)

<sup>25</sup> Johansson: personal interview, Stockholm, Sweden, 22 September 2004; Bouwer and Van Pletzen: personal interviews, Hartenbos, South Africa, 28 July 2006.

### 3.5.2 Breathing and posture

“Philosophers have laboured to explain the marvellous instrument of the human voice: how can the air projected by the light movement of the tongue and an even lighter movement of throat produce such an infinite variety and articulation of the voice? And how can the voice sound forth so powerfully?”

The above statement by Martin Luther, as quoted by Rao (1987:7), sums up the perplexing wonder of the singing voice as most basic of all instruments, a view reflected also by Dunn (1998:106) who suggests that singing is a far more complex phenomenon than some suppose. Indeed, it is his belief that a voice joyfully raised in song is not only a complex human achievement, but also one that is nearly miraculous in nature.

It is the contention of the researcher that correct breathing and posture are two elements in singing, which are of the utmost importance for bringing about the ‘miracle’ of the choral sound. In the popular concept, it is accepted that breathing for singing combines the use of the diaphragm and the lower ribcage, resulting in what is called costal-abdominal or low breathing.

Conductors and tutors of the singing voice however understand the underlying principle of correct breathing for singing differently. Thurman (1998:233ff), for instance, comments on these differences in approach by citing examples from experiences in his own career as a singer in choirs and as a soloist. He points out that, up to 1980, the education of choral conductors and choirs was non-existent regarding vocal skill and voice health training (Thurman 1983a:5; 1998:233–244).

This view was upheld also by the famous singer Viktor Fuchs (1967:16) who, more than thirty years before, found that “in no country is there a single authority whose judgement on singing is universally acknowledged”. Fuchs (1967:73) also observed that “opinions on breathing differ more widely than on any other topic in singing”.

Robinson and Winold (1976:83) describe some of the prominent approaches to breathing in their well-known publication on choral techniques. Their views on the topic clearly demonstrate the importance of correct breathing for all choirs and conductors, which again emphasises the importance for finding appropriate instructions regarding the correct vocal technique as relevant to the building of an outstanding children’s choir.

Cook (2000:4) indicates that a sustained, intense tone produced at constant air pressure is fundamental to good singing for both adults and children. The way to obtain this is to avoid any tension in the jaw, tongue, lips, necks and shoulders. Cook (1999)<sup>26</sup> is convinced that “the precise management of breath and subglottic pressure” is one of the most important factors in good singing and a healthy voice; “Singing demands effective skill in the handling of airflow and subglottic pressure” as loudness and pitch have to be independently controlled, and also matched to articulation requirements. Thus the abdominal, flank and back muscles are actively involved, and time must be spent on exercises to develop the abdominal muscles.

Decker and Kirk (1988:119) point out that exhalation is governed by maintaining the balance and position of the ribcage, which allows the abdominal muscles and diaphragm to function. It is important for the child not to allow the rib cage to be pulled down. The spine needs to remain long and the ribs open. There is a dynamic ever-changing relationship between those forces, which allow breath into the body, and those that cause it to leave. Thus, there is a momentary suspension phase where forces are brought in equilibrium (cf. Høgset 1994:9-11).

Considering the importance of these principles, it is vital for choral conductors to have practical, in-depth knowledge of correct breathing techniques and of the exercises they require, since, as has become clear from the viewpoints cited above, a proper breathing technique may be viewed as one of the gateways to excellent choral tone. Breathing for children must be natural, yet focused on correct physiological discipline. Breathing should be neither too shallow nor too deep, as this may lead to tension and other related faults, for example bad pitch, or bad line (Ransome 1980:14). It must immediately precede the emission of tone: there should not be a gap through which tension may develop, because, as several authors point out, the hard work actually takes place when breathing out (Cook 1999<sup>27</sup> & 2000:4; Ransome 1980:14; Kinoshita<sup>28</sup>).

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<sup>26</sup> Lecture delivered on Voice Building on 9 July 1999 in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, at the Fifth World Symposium on Choral Music.

<sup>27</sup> Lecture delivered on Voice Building on 9 July 1999 in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, at the Fifth World Symposium on Choral Music.

The tone is emitted from the larynx, including the vocal chords that must not be pressed against one another. According to Kinoshita, the perfect onset for the singing tone in children's choirs is the use of the Bernoulli effect.<sup>29</sup> Ingham and Keaton (1983:6) support this viewpoint. They also advocate the use of this technique<sup>30</sup> for the development of vocal health during the warm-up phase. Their proposition is that this effect "can best be experienced by blowing warm air and slowly allowing a sound to begin, for instance, to sing 'hah' so that a breathy 'H' precedes the actual production of sound."

When children learn to breathe together in a choir, they also learn to shape the phrasing uniformly. Contrary to solo singing, the interpretive factors in singing long phrases are not a problem in the choral context because the singers can 'stagger their breaths' without the break in the rhythm being noticeable. Pohjola (1993:102) finds that:

In this regard staggered breathing is an interesting concept and needs to be touched on, since this implicates that the ensemble as a whole does not take a breath at the limits of the line, but that the members do so individually, preferably on a vowel and the result is a single unbroken legato line. This is an important skill, especially in the case of extended phrases. The composer Veljo Tormis actually demands this skill in his choral composition *Karjaan Kotiinkutsu* (Calling Home the Cattle).

Legato singing is a prominent feature of all excellent children's choirs. It is promoted extensively by the famous Swedish conductor Ericson and his followers (cf. Anderson 2001:35ff). Høgset (1994:7) and Van der Sand (2001:4-5) contend that the air is the motor that sets the vibrator in motion. Sound breathing technique thus needs to be taught so well that the procedure becomes almost subconscious.

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<sup>28</sup> Lecture delivered on 28 & 29 July 2005, in Kyoto, Japan at the Seventh World Symposium for Choral Music: Vocal Sound Building – the Development of the Young Singing Voice.

<sup>29</sup> According to Kinoshita (2005), the Bernoulli effect is one of the most important principles one should be aware of when starting to sing; "The Swiss physicist Daniel Bernoulli (1700-1782) described a phenomenon, that if a medium flows fast beside an object, a partial vacuum is created" (Kinoshita 2005). Through this process the vocal chords are enabled to vibrate as freely as possible, and in this manner the singer will know that the delicate and sensitive edge zone of the vocal fold is vibrating correctly, which is essential for a healthy voice. Lecture delivered on 28 & 29 July 2005, in Kyoto, Japan, at the Seventh World Symposium for Choral Music: Vocal Sound Building – the Development of the Young Singing Voice.

<sup>30</sup> "The Bernoulli effect is based on the theorem that causes ... the oboe reed to be drawn together when air flows through it." ["When doing this exercise"] "(t)he constricted space of the vocal folds increases the velocity of the air and in effect causes a vacuum which draws the folds together" (Ingham & Keaton 1983:6).

The informed conductor will be guard against sound that is produced in the throat. This is quite a common fault that can be perceived easily, as there will be evidence of tension in the muscles needed for relaxed singing, for example shoulders that are lifted, tension in the jaw and face muscles, to name but a few. Heffernan (1982:28) is of the opinion that this type of throat singing is very common in children's choirs.

Kinoshita<sup>31</sup> postulates that good posture is important and that one can also develop the voice through body posture and spinal alignment. Conductors of excellent children's choirs in general agree that good posture is a vital aspect, through which the voice can be developed. When correct spinal alignment is present, vocal tone may flow uninhibited from a comfortably positioned larynx (MacDonald 2004:44). Pamela Cook (1999)<sup>32</sup> supports this viewpoint: "Posture is always straight and stretched and aligned". Again, this facet, which has been mentioned already in the previous chapter, is emphasised as equally important in both the general choral context and that of the children's choir. The reason for this is that it is a most important aspect of developing vocal tone.

MacDonald (2004:44), however, warns that the torso should never be subjected to a tilted head or neck, collapsed clavicles or compressed rib cage. Rather, choristers should have an image of a skeleton that is aligned in the following simplified manner: cheekbones parallel to the floor, ears aligned to shoulders, shoulders aligned to elbows and rib cage and rib cage aligned to pelvis, hipbones in line with unlocked knees and unlocked knees to ankles.

Carmina Čilec, well-known conductor of Slovenia, illustrated alignment during a workshop with the Bloemfontein Children's Choir<sup>33</sup> by asking the children to stretch their arms upwards, then letting them bring their arms down to middle of the body, still with stretched arms and hands and fingers. Then they had to revolve their arms around the hip cage, but the hips had to be secured. Consequently she asked the singers to stretch around their spines with their arms: one arm to the front and the other stretched to the

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<sup>31</sup> Lecture delivered at Seventh World Symposium on Choral music in Kyoto, Japan, on 28 July 2005 by Yoshihisa Matthias Kinoshita: Vocal sound Building – the Development of the Young Singing Voice.

<sup>32</sup> Lecture delivered on Voice Building on 9 July 1999 in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, at the Fifth World Symposium on Choral Music.

<sup>33</sup> 30 November 2001.

back. Thus the intercostals, abdominal and back muscles, together with other muscles, were working in coordination and were also strengthened. If the child was able to hook one leg behind the other and keep the above stretched position while balancing, this was a result of deep concentration.

Bodywork methodologies such as Pilates, Feldenkrais and the Alexander Technique stress this strengthening of core muscle groups such as the abdominal wall muscles and back muscles (MacDonald 2004:45ff). In addition Cook (1999)<sup>34</sup> comments on how to establish body alignment with the ribcage up and out: the feet should be comfortably apart and the knees soft. The lower spine should be relaxed, and checking should be done that the pelvis is tucked under and the neck lengthened.

Cook and Bob Chilcott<sup>35</sup> suggest an exercise, which requires of choir members to bend the knees and to go down in this position until a feeling is experienced of the pelvis and the back being 'in alignment'. Cook explains that there should be awareness of a rooted feeling in the legs and feet, and of relaxation in the upper body. The neck should be kept poised with the larynx resting in a relaxed, relatively low position. The head should be kept in position at all times, because the muscles below the larynx make the pitch adjustments.

Robinson and Winold (1976:83) and Choksy (1981:114ff), as well as Garretson (1986:13) advise that choristers must be able to rise from their chairs already in the correct posture for correct breathing. Thus the way of sitting should pre-empt the standing position. Choristers should sit on the front half of their chairs, with the position of the head, shoulders and chest the same as when standing. They should lean forward slightly, with both feet on the floor, one slightly ahead of the other, applying slight pressure on the balls of the feet.

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<sup>34</sup> Lecture delivered on Voice Building on 9 July 1999 in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, at the Fifth World Symposium on Choral Music.

<sup>35</sup> Former member of the King's Singers and composer, also for children's choirs. He delivered a lecture in March 2001 at the First International Choral Symposium for Children's Choirs in Vancouver, Canada. This symposium, The World of Children's Choirs, took place from 18-22 March 2001.

### 3.5.3 Vocal warm-ups

Pohjola (1993:99) suggests that the conductor should begin with 15-20 minutes of relaxation and voice warming-up exercises. It seems as if all conductors agree that any choral group should do vocalises and physical exercises before actual singing. Building on the previous statement, MacDonald (2004:51) for instance finds that is necessary to exercise throughout one's vocal range and registers to avoid the overuse or atrophy of intrinsic vocal musculature. The conductor of young children, in particular, must exercise the entire instrument in order to maintain vocal health on the individual level.

Every rehearsal should start with loosening-up exercises to smooth out the tensions brought in from the classroom or other activities. Pohjola's (1993:101) understanding is that the relaxation process is, already, a "part of the search for the right mood". Warm-up sessions include involvement of the whole body as part of the singing instrument, as well as specific exercises aimed at the vocal instrument, including diaphragm and lungs, vocal cords and the face. The now eminent conductor of the Tapiola Choir, Kari Ala-Pöllänen (1999)<sup>36</sup> explains that his main theories regarding the singing voice are based on the voice production of a newborn baby who uses its voice in a manner called 'the voice reflex'. In his opinion it includes an all-inclusive way of using the body. The argument underpinning this is that the body acts like an instrument, which the voice is playing. The voice reflex combines the organs that usually have a separate function, for example the lungs, diaphragm, larynx, vocal cords, nose hollow, etcetera, to form one encompassing instrument: "While growing, the voice reflex disappears little by little. However, we believe that it is possible to find it again and this creates the basis of our voice building system."

Ingham and Keaton (1983:6) mention the Froeshels/Brodnitz chewing exercise. Children start with chewing an imaginary piece of tough meat. The action must be isometric chewing and the tongue should move in and out and around the mouth. Using this exercise prior to singing helps the delicate laryngeal muscles and surfaces to stretch and condition for their work. Tongue twisters<sup>37</sup> may be particularly pleasurable and may, together with the other exercises described above, be applied before voice warm-ups commence (MacDonald, 2004:45ff).

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<sup>36</sup> Lecture delivered on *Building a choir sound* on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1999, at Fifth World Symposium on Choral Music in Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

<sup>37</sup> For instance "Chester cheetah chewed a chunk of cheap and chunky cheddar cheese/Unique New York", repeated eight times from *andante* to *allegro* (Mack, 2003:42,43).



Other ways of loosening the body are also done by, for example, stamping the feet, or flapping the arms like wings. @ilec did this with the Bloemfontein Children's choir and through the years the researcher has observed that this last exercise is also often common practice amongst solo singers before going on stage.

### **3.5.4 Relaxation and muscle coordination**

At various points in the argument, it was stressed in this study that an over-awareness of the physiological process of singing might endanger the singing itself – a point made also by Ohlin (1976:111). With regard to young children, especially, Rao (1987:7) warns against the danger of analytic explanations of anatomy and physiology, which are all the more inappropriate in the beginning stages of voice development.

Therefore it is the daunting task of conductors to produce choral tone through study and the development of their own knowledge, but without too much analytical explanations. Nevertheless, where it is appropriate and reasonable to do so, experienced conductors will revert to some elementary scientific verbal communications to obtain the desired result. From the perspective of the above-cited materials, however, conductors seem to agree that the establishment of the connection between the body and the voice must be done in an unsophisticated, natural and enthusiastic manner. In this way they can guide the children to the principles of correct yet natural singing.

### **3.5.5 Pitching and intonation**

The literature on this topic indicates that the importance of excellent pitch and intonation is a non-debatable aspect of excellent choral singing. Hypothetically it might be stated that these factors play a critical role in forming a children's choir on the aesthetic level, as discussed by the following authors, some of which are outstanding clinicians and eminent choral conductors: Ohlin (1976:119-125); Robinson and Winold (1976:55; 63-65; 256-261); Ransome (1980:14, 15); Choksy (1981:17, 62-64, 108-110, 112-117); Thurman (1983:23, 24); Alldahl (1990:1-52); Høgset (1994:7-16); Gorbatenko (1999)<sup>38</sup>; Pohjola (1999)<sup>39</sup>; Cook (2000:4-5); Anderson (2001,35-39); Johnson and Klonoski (2003:35-40); Ashworth Bartle (2003:24-29; 47, 79-80;15-17,119); Van der Sandt (2001:4-2;4-18); Van Aswegen (2005:2-18).

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<sup>38</sup> Lecture delivered on 10 July 1999, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

<sup>39</sup> Lecture delivered on 12 July 1999, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

With regard to the ideal of cultivating correct intonation, the views of Kodály on the topic of listening and inner hearing are particularly relevant, since he placed a very high priority on this aspect of singing. The influence of his views is still evident today in the excellent intonation of Hungarian choirs for which they are justly famous (Choksy 1981:108,112). Kodály wrote many published exercises to promote this aspect of vocal acuity. According to Choksy, a significant part of Kodály's creative life was devoted to composing exercises for children to encourage the development of their musicianship, such as *Let us Sing Correctly*, *15 Two-part Singing Exercises*, *333 Elementary Exercises in Sight singing* (Choksy 1981:5).

### **3.5.6 The changing voice**

Because of the in-built protection of the falsetto voice where the vocal cords touch only lightly when boys are singing in falsetto, conductors ought not to hesitate to ask for falsetto singing from boys with changing voices. Wise use of falsetto will reward boys with added vocal colour and flexibility, and when they are singing as men, will bring about an unbelievable ease when singing high notes. The researcher experienced this herself by following, after reading up on this matter, the above method of letting the boys continue with their singing as altos, and asking them to sing only notes they felt comfortable with.

It was interesting to observe how many of them developed amazing abilities as falsetto singers. By singing throughout their entire developmental period through handling their voices carefully, the researcher also experienced their beautiful men's singing voices emerging. Choksy (1981:105) cites a similar case in quoting an experiment by Dr David Woods, a former Professor of Music at Iowa State University. According to Choksy (1981:105), Woods conducted a ten-year experiment with *cambiata* (changing) voices. She notes the following:

The *cambiata* voices were kept singing. When their voices had lowered into areas of voice placement, they naturally took on another part. Their voices had a great deal of musical quality and their understanding of music had increased ... The *cambiata*s were not injured in any way because they were not forced. They were kept singing lower and lower without strain until they experienced their natural singing voices (Choksy 1981:105).

Pohjola (1993:103) explains that he also believes that there is no need to give up singing altogether while the voice is breaking. He believes that the personal feelings of *cambiata* altos will, to a large extent, dictate which notes they can or cannot sing during this period.

Of course there are, as mentioned, notes that cannot be sung at first by the changing voice, but as time passes, the involvement with different styles of music and the building of confidence in using the new, emerging voice as complemented by suitable voice-building exercises, take them into another vocal realm – that of singing freely and musically as altos, using the falsetto voice to get to certain notes, and in the end leaving the choir of young voices with a voice altering into beautiful maturity as tenors, baritones or basses.

### 3.6 REPERTOIRE FOR CHILDREN'S CHOIRS

There is no other option for the choral conductor of children's choirs but to study different kinds of music and to be knowledgeable on as many musical styles as possible. Certain questions, however, arise:

- Should a children's choir sing music composed for women's voices?
- How should a composer go about composing for this genre?
- Is there any value of having pieces commissioned for the children's choir?
- What guidelines can the conductor follow in choosing literature for his/her choir?

The researcher is convinced that a children's choir should rather sing music that is composed with this instrument in mind. For example, the choral works for ladies' voices by Schubert are undeniably wonderful, but has been written for adult female singers, so that Schubert must have envisaged the full, mature sound which they would be able to produce. But as is evident from the following opinion voiced by Eskil Hemberg, prolific choral composer and past President of the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM), the matter is controversial: "Of course they may and they can and they should! I think that a good children's choir could sing, e.g., *Verdi Laudi alla Vergine* [his spelling], even though they do not have the big voices for that ..."; "I think that my approach in writing the composition for your children's choir included a possibility to have it sung by either advanced children's or female choir!"<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Eskil Hemberg, e-mail communication , 12 June 2003.

The composer Ruth Watson Henderson,<sup>41</sup> while apparently supporting Hemberg's viewpoint that some compositions for women's voices can be sung successfully by children's choirs, nevertheless argues that compositions chosen must always be compatible with the size of the choir and its age range.

Addressing the problem of appropriate guidelines with regard to composing for children's choirs, the acclaimed Canadian composer Imant Raminsh made the following statement:<sup>42</sup>

As far as writing for children's choirs is concerned, I do recognise certain limits of range and endurance, but make a point of never patronising, never compromising on selection of text, assuming that children have an uncanny almost intuitive ability to recognise what is genuine and inspired and thought-provoking. In the past a lot of children's works were 'sugar coated' but I know that they can spot sham and superficial sentiment and music that is glib and formulaic. In short, I try to treat them with the same respect that with which I treat (I hope) adults.

In this regard, the viewpoints of Ruth Henderson, a composer who focuses on writing for children's choirs,<sup>43</sup> are of particular relevance. She is of the opinion that composing for children's choirs ought to differ from creating works for adult groups. The maturity of the singers, the text, the *tessitura*, the number of voices and the specific group (beginners, less advanced, more advanced), as well as the availability and combination of different voice groups should be kept in mind.

Regarding the differences in the way I write for children, I would say my first consideration is for colour of the voice ... If the children are quite young and have light voices, I use a range of about E up to G. As they get older and expand into a chest voice, the range expands downwards ... but I still would not write low *divisi* parts the same way I would for adult voices with a prominent melodic line on the bottom (Henderson).

Henderson then considers the texture that must be, in her opinion, lighter than in the case of writing for an adult choir. If the melodic line becomes intense and rhythmic, she would

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<sup>41</sup> Ruth Watson Henderson, e-mail communication, 12 June 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Imant Raminsh, e-mail communication, 2 February 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Ruth Watson Henderson, e-mail communication, 12 June 2003.

then use more unison singing for strength. To prevent a shrill, tight tone, however, she is careful about the placement of vowels on high notes. Furthermore, she prefers to use a composition technique that includes accompaniment, since children are not able to produce as much variety in tonal colour as adults. Therefore she adds as much variety to the accompaniment as possible, and also changes voice registers to depict different moods. The type of instruments used for accompaniment is also important to her. She prefers woodwinds and string instruments to brass, which she normally uses only sparingly between choral phrases.

Henderson stresses that the text must be suitable. "I don't think they should be asked to sing serious songs of love ... Sometimes folk songs about love also don't work with children, especially if they involve weak, awkward translations". To re-write a soprano, alto, tenor and bass (SATB) piece for treble voices is, to her mind, not a good idea, because it is often impossible to retain the original 'feel' of the composition, especially in an *a cappella* piece, since the missing bass line results in a lack of harmonic foundation.

Regarding commissioned choral compositions, the researcher is of the opinion that it is a good strategy to approach a composer to write a choral piece for one's own choir. Without exception, conductors confirm that this initiative promotes the quality of their choir's singing. According to Bob Chilcott,<sup>44</sup> for instance, the King's Singers had many compositions commissioned for them, and the most difficult to master of these were the pieces that enriched them most. In the researcher's own work with a children's choir, it has become evident over the years that compositions written specifically for this choir enhanced the quality of the singing not only by inspiring the choir, but also by extending its musical capabilities.

In listening to the programmes presented by various children's choirs performing during the 8<sup>th</sup> World Symposium in Copenhagen (19-26 July 2008), the researcher noted that almost all children's choirs promoted new compositions of the twentieth and twenty-first century indigenous to their countries, which, in some cases, were the main feature of their concert programmes.

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<sup>44</sup> Former member of the King's Singers and composer, also for children's choirs. He delivered a lecture in March 2001 at the First International Choral Symposium for Children's Choirs in Vancouver, Canada, 18-22 March 2001.

### 3.6.1 General guidelines with regard to choosing literature for children's choirs

Since the 1930s up to the present time, the literature for children's choirs has changed dramatically, and more music has been composed for this instrument than ever before. Especially since the worldwide success of *Aglepta* (1969) by Arne Melnäs, contemporary literature for children's choirs has increasingly been included in the repertoire. One possible explanation for this development is that audiences find some 'modern' pieces to be very attractive. However, avant-garde compositions do not speak to audiences easily because of their unfamiliar structure – especially if the audience is not used to this kind of music, and expect to hear a clearly delineated melodic line set in the context of familiar musical associations.

An individualistic twentieth-century work that might not speak to all audiences is *Past Life Melodies* (SSA) by Sarah Hopkins, originally composed for SATB for St Peter's Lutheran College, a high school in Brisbane, Australia. The work does, however, present specific didactic challenges. For certain choirs, it could serve as an introduction to harmonic overtones. Experiencing overtones while singing the composition could enrich and develop a sense of hearing immensely. Because of the overtones this composition also enriches the perception and production of vowels and resonance. Furthermore, it provides insight into aboriginal singing methods, and thus enlightens a children's choir culturally.

Kodály (as cited by Choksy 1981:123) declared that either authentic folk music or high art composed music should be considered as choices for children's choirs. The implication of this statement is that the conductor must have the ability to critically discern which compositions are suitable, and to make sound, analytically based judgements with regard to the enduring quality of works.

Conductors of children's choirs may also consider the following regarding the selection of appropriate compositions or arrangements. The suitability of texts plays an important part in selecting music for children's choirs. Also, the conductor should be able to judge whether the text has intrinsic quality as good poetry or writing. For instance, the researcher once chose a composition by the well-known composer Knut Nystedt to sing with an amateur children's choir. Although the harmonies and structure of the work were excellent, the text consisted of the repetition of a single word. The choristers could not get

enthusiastic about this piece. In the end the piece was given up because the interaction between musical structure and text did not work for this group.

Knight (2001:75) ponders on similar aspect in writing on music for treble choirs composed by Bob Chilcott:

There is an overriding musicality which shows itself in beautifully shaped melodic lines, vital rhythmic invention and subtle, expressive harmonic construction. The texts ... may be relied on to be suitable for young people in both content and language ... Inevitably, the words are artfully married to the music. Not only are the text themes sensitively set for youth, but the subject matter is stimulating and thoughtful and seems to have real meaning for young people, but also across the generations. Another hallmark of Bob Chilcott's writing for youth is his directness and sincerity of expression ... His writing, and their response to it, seems to demonstrate an affinity for the nature and concerns of young people today.

In choosing music the conductor will have to make decisions regarding various artistic aspects. In this regard, Knight (2001:75) mentions the following: discernible strength of melody, richness of harmony, vitality, coherence of rhythm, general logic and a strong formal structure.

Conductors (and especially the purists among them), consider *a cappella* singing as the icon of choral singing, since this medium best demonstrates the group's intonation skills and natural sound quality. Yet as Henderson<sup>45</sup> explains, because children's choirs have an almost unchangeable, characteristic sound, eventually this may become tiring to the listener in an *a cappella* performance. Therefore, use should be made of compositions requiring musical instruments in order to provide some variation.

From the researcher's own experience, other questions that need to be considered include the following: Is the music written idiomatically for a choir? What are the ranges of the voice parts? Does the *tessitura* fit all the voices or is, for example, one voice part consistently too high/low? Is the accompaniment an artistic addition to the work, and can it stand on its own as an aesthetic piece of music? Is the music a transcription of an

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<sup>45</sup> Ruth Watson Henderson, e-mail communication, 12 June 2003.

instrumental or solo work? If this is so, does it have the necessary artistic integrity? Is the music challenging enough, or will the choir easily get tired of it?

The aspects cited above all imply that the conductor of the children's choir should have a realistic estimate not only of the specific choir's capabilities, but also of his/her own abilities. Concerning the importance of repertoire, Van Lieshout<sup>46</sup> states: "Repertoire is music which, in the hands of the conductor, is able to awaken a response in the children in an interesting and worthwhile way. These responses show the way to specified educational goals in the children's singing education".

The music must, in addition, also speak to the audience. If this is not the case, then the literature, however well chosen, will miss the point of mediating an aesthetic interaction with the audience. It is also relevant that a conductor must be able to form a general opinion of a specific audience, and of its level of sophistication. Therefore music should be chosen with different performance contexts in mind. While musical choices must be varied in order to appeal to specific audiences, this should not deter the conductor to always choose the finest music to sing – be it in lighter or heavier vein. This prerequisite is also valid with regard to the influence of a conductor's own natural preferences with regard to musical taste, which should never interfere with the musical balancing of programming.

For Rao (1988:178) the singing must be an artistic activity related directly to the musical structure itself: "A singer must be able to control the voice, make the necessary changes and improvements in the voice to meet the demands of the music, and judge the results of his/her actions." This can only happen if the musical choices made enable both the choir and the conductor to use their available musical abilities to the best of their knowledge. Last, and most important of all, that the conductor must feel enthusiastic about the choices made, and also feel comfortable to interpret those compositions.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Silvère van Lieshout: lecture on *Exploration* 13 July 1999, Fifth World Symposium on Choral Music, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

<sup>47</sup> It is important to remember that Van Aswegen (2005) has made a valuable input on the South African scene with her doctorate entitled *Repertoire for Children – a South African perspective*.



### 3.7 THE VALUE OF MUSICAL LITERACY

The problem of musical literacy has a long history. Bowers (1998:33ff) is of the opinion that, from the Middle Ages until present times, there has always been a search for the most effective sight-singing system. Bowers (1998:33) emphasises the importance of the skill to learn music quickly and accurately by note rather than by rote – especially in the context of the children's choir. In her view, the unsophisticated singer without facile sight-singing skills is relegated to the slow and tedious process of learning music by imitation. She argues that such a singer can never hope to plumb the depths of fascinating and meaningful choral literature, and to attempt truly challenging literature.

With regard to the learning of this skill, Bowers (1998:38) however also refers to the early influence of the American educationist Lowell Mason, who established “ideas that many of us assume were developed during the twentieth century by educators such as Kodály, Suzuki and Ed Gordon” (Bowers 1998:38). Mason proposed that singing should be taught at first as speaking, that is, by rote. Then, while children continue to learn by imitation, they may gradually learn to read notation. According to Bowers (1998:38), Mason thus believed that “instruction is first addressed to the ear and afterwards to the eye”.

In this regard the pros and cons of the tonic solfa system should be considered, as well as Zoltán Kodály's adaptation of this method, which made it famous internationally. While Kodály considered the system a most effective tool for bridging the gaps between the ear and the ‘mysteries’ of staff notation, Bowers (1998:41) finds that “[r]ote learning of numerous tunes provides students with a vocabulary of patterns on which to build ... Those who devoted entire careers to thinking about this important subject have come to the conclusion that the relativity provided by the movable doh system is critical to success ... Curwens's hand signs teach children all around the world to sight-sing.”<sup>48</sup>

Robinson and Winold (1976:240-254) point out that in approaching the problem of pitch in sight-singing, there are probably as many solutions and methods as there are choral directors, theory teachers, or music educators. They divide pitch discrimination under

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<sup>48</sup> Bowers (1998:42) quotes Rainbow (1980:65), who claims: “A contemporary estimate is that by 1890, more than 39 000 copies of the Tonic Solffa edition of *Messiah* had been sold.”

five headings: Pitch discrimination, pitch location, pitch function, pitch distance and pitch pattern. As they observe, psychological experimentation has tended to establish the fact that is impossible for most people to remember more than about seven different pitches at any given time (Robinson & Winold 1976:244). Robinson and Winold (1976:247) offer a number of techniques that may help to reinforce a sense of pitch function or tonality. In their opinion, of these, one of the most effective is to combine training in pitch memory with training in pitch function. This includes the placement of the tonic and the dominant. In this they agree with Telfer (1992:1-4) who uses the tonic as the most important pitch, and the dominant as the second pivotal pitch.

Robinson and Winold (1976:254) are convinced that children should develop some sense of pitch memory, which will then serve as an aural frame of reference. They contend that pitch function is probably the single most important skill for the singing of music with a tonal basis, because pitch function not only helps the singer in the mechanical task of finding the right notes, but also, ultimately, clarifies the relationship between notes and the way in which they function as part of a tonal hierarchy.

During the research for this study, it became clear that the movable doh system (cf. pp. 60, 62) is still widely used in Africa, Russia, and Estonia, and even in more Westernised countries.<sup>49</sup> Ashworth Bartle (2003:225) indicates that, in addition to formal theory tuition, she still makes use of hand signs to facilitate the development of sight-reading skills.

The task of a children's choir's conductor is much easier if all choristers can read music (Telfer 1992:3-11) – especially since, in the case of amateur choirs, many children join the choir with no musical reading abilities at all. As is already evident from the discussion above, different conductors use different techniques in order to develop sight-reading skills (Decker & Kirk 1988:148,149; Johansson 1993; Lynch 1983:42; Armstrong 2001:21-30). However, it also seems to be the case that some learning principles seem to be universally accepted.

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<sup>49</sup> In Japan at the Songbridge event from 6-10 August 2008 where choirs from four countries took part, all these choirs illustrated exceptional intonation capabilities. The Chinese and Japanese conductors professed that they still make use of the solfa system during intonation practices.

Telfer (1992:5), for instance, proposes that choristers should, at all times, sing from sheet music. Also, a definite time slot should be dedicated to sight-singing exercises, because “a few minutes spent on sight-singing save many minutes in rehearsal”. During these sessions, the notated music, which the choristers see in front of them, should be explained. Telfer (1992:4) discusses the fact that some singers do not develop as fast as others with regard to sight-singing skills. She stresses that this skill develops differently from child to child, and that progress in this regard is related to both the dedication and intellect of the child (see also Carter 1992:50ff; Stanton 1971:95ff).

However, in an interesting interview with an outstanding choral conductor of young voices, ages ten to fourteen,<sup>50</sup> it came to the fore that sight-reading abilities of Western music notation might not be necessary if the conductor has the musical ability to ‘translate’ all musical elements and teach the music by rote. Christa Prinsloo, the conductor of a school choir with Sesotho- and Setswana-speaking children (two of the eleven languages in South Africa) who come from under-privileged circumstances, has won three national prizes with her choir which was known for its musicality, pronunciation, excellent sound production and intonation. Moreover, the competition in which she took part, does not allow for more than one song in the choristers’ home language.

Thus the children, though unable to speak the language of the competition, namely Afrikaans, had to learn to sing three works in Afrikaans. She taught this school choir of equal voices only by rote, without any musical notation, and yet they sang some songs in four voices. This interesting phenomenon demonstrates that, despite the importance of sight-reading skills, within some contexts the importance that a conductor attributes to memorisation may enable choir members to reach unexpected heights.

In the South African context, the researcher has frequently come across the phenomenon of dual notation, that is, the simultaneous use of the system of the movable doh (cf. pp. 60-61), with rhythm and rests indicated, with the ‘Westernised’ notation provided underneath. This practice is still used widely, especially by black choirs in South Africa.

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<sup>50</sup> Christa Prinsloo: Observation and interview, 19 June 2006, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

### 3.8 MUSICAL MEMORISATION

Like all memorisation, musical memorisation is a skill that requires dedication. The aesthetic realisation of a certain work can be far more artistic when there is eye-to-eye communication between the conductor and the singers, without the presence of files to disturb the singers.<sup>51</sup> In this regard, it should be noted that the recollection facilities of children are amazing. They seem to be able to memorise music with ease and confidence, and therefore the memorisation process should be part of practicing procedures. The success of the endeavour is, however, also related to the musical capabilities of the conductor.

### 3.9 CHOREOGRAPHY FOR CHILDREN'S CHOIRS

In an age where audiences have increasingly become used to multimedia presentations, certain conductors tend to advocate the incorporation of choreography in the context of children's choirs. The use of mixed media might also reflect of general tendencies of twentieth and twenty-first century art, moving away from the traditional to the experimental.

Carter (1992:94-95) considers choreography as the art of arranging movement. From her perspective, teaching movement and the coordination of body, mind and voice in a choral programme will make it more interesting and enjoyable to its members. In this regard, she provides diagrams for exercises, which will promote creativity, and even proposes certain positions that might be used, stating that conductors should not be afraid to incorporate movement to make the music more interesting and meaningful.

At the Fifth International Symposium on Choral Music in 1999, Hans Lamers delivered a lecture on choral singing and choreography, pointing out that there is an increasing tendency for children's choirs to pay more attention to visual presentation. He stated: "This is not a simple matter. Acting while singing requires a double command of abilities

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<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, beautiful renderings of music are given with choral members singing from their files, for example the adult choirs of the famous conductor Frieder Bernius, and the English composer-conductor John Rutter.

and technique, and makes great demands on coordination, concentration and communication".<sup>52</sup>

Choral movements<sup>53</sup> as prescribed by composers are an art unto themselves. One recent example (1983) occurs in *Revontulet* (Northern Lights) by the acclaimed Finnish composer, Pekka Kostiainen. At the outset of the piece, the composer indicates specific choreographic movements in the score.<sup>54</sup>

### 3.10 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, aspects that are important to children's choirs as a unique choral instrument were discussed, as well as techniques relevant to this choral context.

As the aim of this study is to focus on those elements that are vital for producing excellence in children's choirs, the materials presented in this chapter provided a foundational investigation into the required capabilities of a conductor of children's choirs, as well as the necessary strategies and techniques needed to produce choirs of international standing. These perspectives form the didactic underpinning for the qualitative investigation presented in Chapter 4.

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<sup>52</sup> Lecture named *Exploration* delivered on 10 July 1999 at the Fifth International Choral Symposium under the auspices of the International Federation for Choral Music in Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

<sup>53</sup> No less than six lectures delivered by clinicians at the the 8<sup>th</sup> World Symposium on Choral Music, 16-26 July 2008 in Copenhagen, Denmark, included choreography or movement with choral music as part of their presentations.

<sup>54</sup> Choreography is not reserved for children's choirs only, but occurs also in adult choral singing. Already in 1976, Ericson (1976: 152) explained examples of choral choreography as being related to developments in modern theatre. These included theatrical experiments, surprise effects, informal choral groupings, and concerts with mixed styles. For example, in Rabe's *Rondes*, one of the basses suddenly leaves the stage, and in Hemberg's *Signposts*, the male chorus is placed thirty feet behind the women's choir to obtain a certain acoustic effect. Sometimes, choir members are interspersed with the audience, a conductor keeps on conducting after the work has ended, or the conductor is carried off stage, etcetera. Karmina Šilec (2000:10-13), the artistic director of Carmina Slovenia, uses choreography imaginatively, and with certain methodological aims in mind.

## **A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION INTO CHORAL TECHNIQUES USED BY LEADING CONDUCTORS OF EXEMPLARY CHILDREN'S CHOIRS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapters provided a literature review of children's choral singing as a vocal choir form, as well as an explication of the fundamental principles that underlie conducting and rehearsal techniques.

This chapter focuses on the methodological procedures of the empirical investigation used in this study and reports the data that emerged from the interviews. The theoretical introspection of the qualitative research method and the reason for using this particular approach will be dealt with first, followed by the data report.

### **4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The aim of this research is primarily to expand the body of knowledge on choral techniques for children's choirs by exploring the practices of internationally recognised conductors (cf. 1.2). The following exposition will provide an overview of how this research has been conducted.

#### **4.2.1 Selecting a research method**

Research contexts within scientific social thought often present the researcher with a choice between quantitative and qualitative methods (Niemann *et al.* 2000:153), both of which may yield particularly productive results. However, it remains the responsibility of the researcher to carefully consider the study context and to select the most constructive research method for approaching the data.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) as cited by Maykut and Morehouse (1994:64), explain that an “emergent research design” means that an initial focus of inquiry is the point of departure, followed by the refining of the focus of inquiry and sampling strategy with which the ongoing processes of data collection and analysis are engaged. With regard to the present study, this process brought to the fore that the qualitative method could be expected to yield the best results in terms of the required information on choral conducting in the context of a children’s choir.

Since this research investigates the phenomenon of the children’s choir it calls for a method that enables the collection of evidence and the reporting of data that acknowledges research as a “phenomenological enterprise” (Miles and Huberman as in Niemann *et al.* 2000:27). Therefore the data recorded and described in this chapter represents findings that investigate conductors’ authentic experiences from the angle of their corresponding or contradictory ideas, beliefs, opinions, and even emotions – getting “under the skin” of each participant (Duff 1992:87), as it were.

Niemann *et al.* (2000:16) contend that among the strongest points of qualitative research are the following: it focuses on interactive processes; it is situationally constructed and constrained; it allows for researcher involvement; values are explicit; and last but not least, “authenticity is key”. All these aspects are of vital importance with regard to the present study.

As already suggested above, qualitative methods allow for flexible research contexts in which individual experiences may be recorded in a detailed manner. In this regard Miles and Huberman (1988:225) assert that qualitative methods are a source of rich description and fruitful explanations of processes occurring in a local context. Qualitative research includes data collection methods such as interviewing, participant observation and visual methods that are particularly valuable in terms of choral work. In the context of the present study it should be noted that where it had been possible to observe conductors at work with their choirs<sup>1</sup> and talk to them personally, the method of qualitative research provided a flexible, iterative style of eliciting responses through the use of semi-structured data selection as well as observations. In this regard the methodological

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<sup>1</sup> To this extent I successfully observed some of the choirs who I will be referring to at their home bases, e.g. the Finnish Tapiola Children’s Choir, the Swedish Adolf Fredrik Girls’ Choir, The Estonian Television Girls’ Choir in Tallinn and the Nidaros Dom Boys’ Choir in Norway.

frameworks of Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2), and Maykut and Morehouse (1994:45), provide the data that has been used with an in-depth dimension.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994:44) quote Belenky (1992) who indicates that she and her associates chose the term *interpretive-descriptive research* to refer to exploratory studies which rely on people's words and meanings to provide data for analysis. In the latter context the objective of the outcomes of this particular investigation is a deeper understanding of choral experiences from the perspective of the participants who were selected for this study.

Therefore, for the purpose of this research, the qualitative research method was selected as it was crucial to establish rapport and credibility with conductors during the data collection process. The researcher needed to reconstruct the data on choral techniques in terms of the meaning the conductors attach to it. Hutchinson (1990:123-124) defines qualitative research as a systematic approach for generating substantive theory that is born in, and helps to explain, the real world. Therefore the notion of discovery includes the discovery of the world as seen through the eyes of the participants, as proposed by Maykut and Morehouse (1994:45); and personal meaning, observation, interviewing and "indwelling" to get to the core of useful examples of data collection in the natural settings of choral circumstances that will give the researcher an understanding of choral directors' experiences in context, as indicated above.

The children's choir emerged as a special choral category during the twentieth century (Lamb 2006:9). Although studies exist on effective conducting and rehearsal techniques by artistic leaders in the field, such as Ashworth Bartle (2003), Pohjola (1993), Rao (1987) and other authors, and though these topics have also been addressed in international workshops and symposia, only limited research results could be found on the achievement of building an excellent children's choir, meeting international standards in this field. Thus the task of the researcher in this study will extend beyond investigation and documentation to include also an analysis of the essence of specific choral processes.

In order to present data that is as authentic and valid as possible the qualitative method utilised in this specific study context necessitated the inclusion of research techniques such as naturalistic inquiry, content analysis and the concept of thick description.



#### **4.2.2 Selecting participants**

The participants were carefully selected for their expertise and knowledge in the field of choral conducting; their overall knowledge of choral excellence; and their expertise in judging children's choirs at international events. For this reason only world-renowned conductors of excellent children's choirs, who are also part of other important choir-related facets, such as clinicians, publishers or adjudicators, were approached for their perspective on the criteria for the establishment of a choir of international standing.

The researcher carefully considered suitable participants while bearing in mind that the objective of all research is the discovery of new facts and their correct interpretation. Research deals with issues having to do with the creation and dissemination of knowledge in particular areas of inquiry (epistemology). Well-known, and in most instances, famous choral conductors with extensive general knowledge of choral techniques, who are conductors renowned for their methods and the superior quality of their choirs, were chosen. The information needed could only be gathered by communicating with specifically chosen, high-profile, knowledgeable participants. Interviews, e-mails, and visual recordings with participants were used for this study.

It was regarded appropriate to obtain inputs from participants not only from South Africa, but also from further afield in order to achieve more expansive reliability.

The participants chosen were the following:

##### **[1] *Hendrik Loock: South Africa***

Founder of the Tygerberg Children's Choir and its conductor since 1972 (Van Aswegen 2005:2-5). The choir participated in numerous overseas competitions and was awarded many first prizes. They performed, among others, for the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM) at the International Choral Symposium for Children's Choirs in Canada in 2001 as part of Songbridge, and by invitation also sang at other important international festivals. In South Africa they have been part of important functions and festivals. Loock continuously acts as clinician and adjudicator nationally and internationally.

**[2] *Acama Fick: South Africa***

This conductor commenced her choral experience as a member of the then famous Stellenbosch University Choir under the baton of Phillip McLachlan. After the completion of her studies she was praised for her outstanding choral work with the Bloemhof Girls' Choir of Stellenbosch from where she proceeded to the University of Stellenbosch as lecturer and conductor of both a female students' choir as well as the University Choir of the University of Stellenbosch, which is situated near Cape Town, South Africa. The University Choir toured widely, mostly in South Africa. Fick furthered her studies under Eric Ericson in Sweden.

**[3] *Petru Gräbe: South Africa***

Petru Gräbe is a conductor, adjudicator and clinician at national and international events. He is currently a part-time lecturer in choral conducting at the University of Pretoria. He conducted the Pretoria Children's Choir from 1966 to 1987 and the University Choir of Pretoria from 1987 to 1998. These two choirs toured extensively and took part in competitions where they reached top positions. Since 2000 Gräbe has been the conductor of the *Cantamus Corde* Chamber Choir. He was Professor of Mathematics at the above university, has many academic publications to his name and made various recordings with his choirs. He has a doctorate in mathematics from the Goethe University of Frankfurt, Germany. Other qualifications include a B. Mus. degree in Musicology, as well as a Performer's Licentiate in Piano from the University of Pretoria (Lazri & Simon 2007:107).

**[4] *Hendrika Johanna van Aswegen: South Africa***

The Jakaranda Children's Choir performs under the auspices of the University of Pretoria, and Van Aswegen, who was the conductor for eleven years until 2007, is also a lecturer in the subject of Choir Conducting at the University of Pretoria. This choir is considered to be among the top children's choirs in South Africa.

**[5] *Aarne Saluveer: Estonia (Conductor of the TV Girls' Choir of Estonia)***

The Music Studio of Estonian Television Children's programme was founded at Estonian Television in 1990 and is conducted by Aarne Saluveer. The singers have evolved into the Estonian Television Girls' Choir, one of the most accomplished and original choirs in the world. There are twenty-five young girls between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one. They all play various musical instruments and are students at music schools. Their repertoire consists of classical and modern choir music, as well as sacred music and folk music accompanied by impressive dance movements and modern pop-jazz music programmes. Besides other prestigious awards they won first prize at the Second Estonian Children's Choir Contest.

Aarne Saluveer (born 1959) graduated from Tallinn Music Academy in 1982 as a music teacher and choir conductor. "For many years Saluveer has been teaching the Orff Music Teaching Class at Tallinn Music Academy. Since 1990 he has been working as Music Editor for Estonian Television Children's programmes and is the conductor and head of Music for Children's Programme Music Studio". He is also chairman of the Estonian Choral Society.

**[6] *Bo Johanssen: Sweden (Conductor of Adolf Fredrik Girls' Choir)***

Bo Johanssen is an enthusiastic and dedicated music director and music teacher. Johansson has been at the Adolf Fredrik Music Classes (Music School) since 1971 and founded the world-famous Adolf Fredrik Flickkör in 1973. He also founded the Bromma Chamber Choir in 1995, which became one of the most prestigious choirs in Sweden within a period of two decades. He has pioneered and developed many contributions to contemporary music. In 1986 Johanssen was awarded the distinction of Choir Leader of the Year. He was also awarded Sweden's prestigious Kristallen den Fina - the Fine Crystal Award (1987), the Johannes Norrby Medal (1985), and the Music Pedagogical Prize of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, and of Axel and Margaret Axson Johnson (1996).

**[7] *Kåre Hanken: Norway***

Hanken is Professor of Music and a well-known choral conductor, and founder and conductor of the Ålesund Chamber Choir, as well as of the *Schola Cantorum* at the

University of Oslo where he lectured from 1987 to 1999. At the time of the interview in 2003 he was Secretary-General of the Norwegian Choral Society, a position he still holds today. In 2007 he was appointed lecturer at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. He has published and recorded different works related to choral music with his choirs and has worked extensively in South Africa with choral conductors and choirs (Lazri & Simon 2007:117).

**[8] *Björn Moe: Norway***

Professor Moe, of the Music Conservatory NTNU in Trondheim, is the conductor of the Nidaros Dom Boys' Choir, and has been the conductor and artistic manager of the choir since 1973.

**[9] *Vadim Afanasiev: Russia*<sup>2</sup>**

Afanasiev is the conductor of the St Petersburg International Male Choir and artistic director and chief conductor of the Concert Orchestra of St Petersburg. In 1993 he created the Male Choir of St Petersburg with its unique style. The choir exemplifies the musical and moral principles of the Russian people and has as its goal the revival of the original basis of Russian Choral Music. After three e-mail messages, two of which were in Russian, no response regarding choral information was received. In the eyes of the researcher, given the standing of the conductor, this was detrimental to the balanced outcomes of this research.

**[10] *Elena Svetoza: Russia***

Dr Svetoza was, at the time of the interview on 4 July 2003, conductor and children's choir consultant in St Petersburg, Russia. As in the case of Afanasiev, communication proved to be a problem and the researcher had only the verbatim transcription of the interview with the conductor, and could not elicit more information regarding her curriculum vitae, which was promised via e-mail communication. No reaction was received although the e-mail address given was used.

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<sup>2</sup> This interview took place in St Paul's Cathedral, St Petersburg during 2003. Even with the help of an interpreter, the language problem presented serious challenges.

[11] *Erkki Pohjola and Kari Ala-Pöllänen: Finland<sup>3</sup> (Conductors of the famous Tapiola Children's Choir)*

**Erkki Pohjola** is the founder and conductor of the Tapiola Children's Choir which he conducted from 1963 to 1994. He is considered to be one of the leading personalities of Finnish music education, an exceptional choral conductor and a pioneering figure in the international children's and youth choir movement. Outside of Finland, Erkki Pohjola is best known as the founder and conductor of the Tapiola Choir, which was developed under his leadership from an ordinary school choir into one of the most highly extolled vocal instruments of our time. At the same time Erkki Pohjola fostered the development of a new idea in music education, because after meeting Zoltán Kodály and Carl Orff in 1964 he developed a liberal approach to teaching based on his and their ideas, with principles taken from chamber music and the natural creativity and musicality of the child as the starting point. In 1971 the Tapiola Choir won the coveted Silver Rose Bowl in the BBC's "Let the People Sing" competition. Under Pohjola's leadership these children have made fifty concert tours abroad, travelling as young Finnish ambassadors all over Europe and to the United States, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Israel, Australia and New Zealand. The choir has made nearly twenty recordings and has worked hand-in-hand with many leading Finnish and foreign composers. He is the founder of Songbridge (1999), a worldwide co-operation of children's and youth choirs with contemporary conductors.

Apart from many other achievements as clinician, jury member, guest conductor and board member of various societies, he has made nearly twenty recordings on various levels: on television, with composers and on CDs. He is also known as the father of Finland's most widely used school music textbook, series MUSICA (Edition: Fazer: 1965-1990) and the artistic director of three major choral festivals in Finland. Pohjola was nominated honorary professor by decree of the President of Finland in 1984.

**Ala-Pöllänen** has acted in Finland as symphony, orchestra and folk music conductor, and jazz musician and conductor, as chorister and ensemble singer, and superintendent of

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<sup>3</sup> Since these two conductors worked closely together for many years, they informed the researcher that they preferred to make their responses available through the mediation of Ala-Pöllänen only after consultation with each other.

music. He is the author of school music text books, writer of music in encyclopaedias, and author of school programmes at the Finnish Broadcasting Company. He was the artistic director of international choral festivals, worked as a jury member for choir competitions and guest conductor and lecturer at numerous festivals in Finland and abroad. As choir conductor he became internationally known in the city of Jyväskylä for his *Vox Aurea* children's choir. The Finnish Broadcasting Company nominated this choir as "The Youth Choir of the Year" in 1992-1993. Kari Ala-Pöllänen's demonstration of "How to train children's voices and how to build a choir sound" has been performed widely in the choral world. In February 1994 Kari Ala-Pöllänen was invited to take over the artistic responsibility of the Tapiola Choir. Since then, they have made successful tours to Canada, the United States, Sweden, France, Germany, Japan, Denmark, Singapore, Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia, Tasmania, the Basque country, Catalonia, Luxembourg, Belgium and The Netherlands.

In February 1995 Kari Ala-Pöllänen was nominated the "The Choir Conductor of the Year" in Finland for his activities as choral director and his contribution as a versatile pedagogue both in Finland and abroad. This was the first time the nomination was given by the Finnish Society of Choral Directors. Under his leadership the Tapiola Choir has recorded several CDs (Lazri & Simon 2007:24).

From the exposition given above it is evident that eleven participants were selected to participate in the study. Valuable information was gleaned from ten participants (counting the Finns as one participant because they conferred beforehand and answered as one through Ala-Pöllänen), although it was difficult to get *curriculum vitae* information on Svetoza and Fick. One participant did not respond, namely Afanasiev of St Petersburg (his biographical information should not be confused with that of his counterpart in Moscow).

#### **4.2.3 Data collection**

In qualitative studies valuable data can be obtained by means of a variety of methods such as interviews, observations, personal visits and e-mail correspondence to illuminate the various perspectives on a topic put forward by participants. This data collection then forms the core of discovering new information. Apart from the considerations stated

under 4.2.1 it should be noted that the researcher decided on the qualitative method of data collection because as a post-modernist research method it is particularly appropriate for investigating children's choirs, enabling the researcher to "crosscut disciplines, fields and subject matter" (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:1&15) and move into the core of choral music as a specialist choral category.

Qualitative research as a valid scientifically recognisable and legitimate way of assembling knowledge and doing research has already been recognised by Miles and Huberman (1984:428), who argue that descriptive accuracy is the cornerstone of validity. This research will therefore attempt to answer the following requisites as set out by Janesick (1994:216,217), and as cited by Patton (1990:39):

- What techniques and methods were used to ensure the integrity, validity, and accuracy of the findings?
- What does the researcher bring to the study in terms of experience and qualifications?
- What assumptions undergird the study?

In order to systematically document the data collected as part of this research it was necessary to make comparisons with the emergent concepts by using a broad range of extant literature. This included a review of both the broader spectrum of the literature on conducting as well as the few existing publications focusing on children's choirs as specifically presented in Chapters 2 and 3. The literature was examined critically to discover conflicting findings because this information would ensure the veracity of the ultimate findings.

After the completion of the literature study and having obtained a clear picture of the general and specific generic data available, the researcher wanted to generate new data by using the qualitative method. Thus an open-ended question was formulated which would be posed to eminent choral conductors, namely: **"How would you, as an esteemed conductor, go about leading a children's choir in search of international standing?"**

#### 4.2.4 Data analysis and interpretation

The data on choral techniques obtained by means of the methodology described above was analysed and interpreted according to the principles that underlie a naturalistic inquiry in an interpretative-descriptive format as formulated below.

Patton (1990:40) and Babbie (2004:284) maintain that naturalistic inquiry contributes to qualitative research. Naturalistic inquiry is inductive, pragmatic and concrete. The researcher generates theory from holistic data gathered through naturalistic inquiry for the purpose of checking on the impacts or consequences of activities. It provides information that can be used to extend the available knowledge on a certain topic. Creswell (2003:14) concurs that in naturalistic inquiry the researcher attempts to derive the theory of an action based on the views of the participants in a study. Two primary characteristics of this type of inquiry are the constant comparison of data with emerging categories and the theoretical sampling of different groups to maximise the similarities and differences in information. For the purpose of this study matrix tables have been compiled (cf. Addendum B).

The naturalistic inquiry seems to be of particular value for developing a theory that is derived inductively and developed from data. The researcher formed theories after each interview. This process enables the identification of tentative themes by specifying the most salient issues from the data collection methods, such as interviews.

In order to transform the raw empirical material, the main form of data analysis used for this study was content analysis. According to Patton (1990:381) content analysis is the process of identifying, coding and categorising the primary patterns of data. In this study the data obtained from the conductors was analysed in order to understand their views and experiences. As the researcher gathered the data, she searched for emerging patterns that later resulted in units of analysis, which were noted and coded. These units were then organised into themes or topics.

The data reporting section also reflects the concept of thick description (cf. Denzin & Lincoln 1994:6 and Geertz 1973:14 as quoted by Schwandt, 1994:123), emphasising the fact that qualitative research involves a rich description of the social world that is valuable to the enterprise, where social events, behaviours and processes can be *thickly* described.



Reinterpreted in terms of the present study context this means that the experiences and insights grounded in the practice of leading conductors of internationally famous choirs of young voices or children's choirs will be analysed. There will be a constant focus on letting the "objects speak for themselves" through their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:15) and where the researcher uses narrative, first person accounts and biographical information<sup>4</sup> are provided. As emphasised above, the qualitative research method is such that it is able to provide reliable, valid and scientific answers through the analysis of data findings that may well differ from viewpoints highlighted in prominent textbooks. Ultimately, the culmination of data analysis will be reached through content analysis until saturation point is reached.

In this study the participants' exact words and feedback were transcribed from the recordings of interviews. The transcriptions were subsequently coded and analysed according to the clusters of meaning that arose from the various choral dimensions (cf. Strauss 1987:55-57).

A two-phase strategy was used for analysing the research data. First, a 'vertical' analysis of the data was done in order to gain insight into the participants' approach to children's choral techniques. In order to do so the data was coded and displayed in matrixes (Miles & Huberman 1988:63) to be able to compare it systematically. The second phase involved the 'horizontal' analysis, which dealt with the comparison of the data to "discover" whether particular trends could be identified (Miles & Huberman 1988:64).

Smaling (1994:17), among others, does not view objectivity as an escape from subjectivity, but rather as the intelligent, acquired use of subjectivity to analyse something. This view is based on the ideas of Heidegger, who refers to the principle of "being in the world" (Huysamen 1994:167), which means that human behaviour cannot be understood or appreciated without considering the context within which it takes place. This viewpoint is also reflected in the data that emerged from this investigation. With regard to the language of the participants, post-structuralism maintains that even language is not a stable system for referents and that it is thus impossible ever to capture completely the meaning of the full "text" (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:15).

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<sup>4</sup> World famous choirs usually have a history that has to be taken into account in all its aspects, as this will be part of the personal world frame of the conductors of such choirs.

To ensure valid data analysis the researcher assumed that validity would depend on the community from which the perspective and the conclusions were drawn. To verify this, the researcher focussed on high profile choral conductors and their choirs, whom the researcher visited individually to establish personal, verbal or e-mail communication, comprising samples as varied as possible. Unfortunately, this was not always possible because language problems encountered with conductors from Russia, Japan and China<sup>5</sup> made the true interpretation of the open-ended question problematic.

The assumptions included in the study were thus based on the literature study, which in itself underlined aspects that were found to be of particular import to the research during the interviews. The repetition of patterns and evidence relevant to the topic could be identified in order to arrive at the relevant conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1984:228-231) call this step “conclusion drawing and verification”.

#### **4.2.5 Reliability and validity**

As in the case of any other qualitative study, as part of the research process described above, it was necessary to ensure reliability by attempting to eliminate as far as possible any causal errors that could influence the results. The following measures were taken to enhance **reliability**:

- Data triangulation as an underlying strategy of validation (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:2), where the participants’ experiences and feelings were recorded and used to obtain data via methods that were in line with the methodological frames of reference presented above;
- Member checks in which contradictory information occurred, were referred back to the participants for further clarification;

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<sup>5</sup> While attending the 7<sup>th</sup> World Symposium on Choral Music in Kyoto, Japan, from 27 July to 3 August 2005, the researcher strove to talk to the conductor of the Tajimi Children’s Choir, Nobuaki Tanaka, and the conductor of The Little Singers of Yokosuka Arts Theater, Masahiro Takeda. Language was a serious problem; almost no communication was possible. At Kyoto the same Guangdong Experimental Middle School Choir of China, under the leadership of Mingjing Xie, performed, as they did at the Songbridge Festival in Japan at Wakayama from 6 to 10 August 2008, mentioned earlier. Again it was not possible to achieve proper comprehension of my question and their answers regarding the subject of this study because a competent interpreter was not available.

- The preservation of all data, e-mails, notes and tapes for auditing purposes (Guba & Lincoln 1989:241-243; Niemann *et al.* 2000:284).

These measures were taken by the researcher in an attempt to limit random errors, and also to obtain a deeper understanding of the research object.

**Validity** is an important dimension of the data analysis process. Validation had to be ensured in an acceptable scientific manner so that the text and the emerging data would bear the characteristics of validity since the conclusions showed a significant correlation. The researcher aimed at enhancing the validity by striving for a representative investigation through the participation of diverse groups (cf 4.2.2). This was achieved by:

- Comparing the data by searching for differences and similarities, while at the same time, searching for theory-driven data by using matrix tabling (cf addendum);
- Data gathering until theoretical saturation had been reached. (Goetz & Le Compte 1984:222-228; Niemann *et al.* 2000:285).

The above measures were applied to eliminate as far as possible personal bias and limitations from the researcher's work. Niemann *et al.* (2000:29) argues that if data is gathered until theoretical saturation is reached, validity can be enhanced. The concept of grounded theory is important for the validity of this study as "grounded theories connect to the multiplicity of perspective with patterns and processes of action/interaction that in turn are linked with carefully specified conditions and consequences" (Strauss & Corbin 1994:280).

### 4.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

For the researcher the limitations of the study have been four-dimensional:

- [1] Firstly, an unstable system of referents, referred to by Denzin and Lincoln (1994:15) as post-structuralist language usage, makes it difficult to fully understand the meaning of the absolute verbal intentions of participants. Thus the interpretation of the data, which might be affected by the researcher's prior understanding and prejudice, could shape the outcomes of the interpretative process. This is due to the

fact that the researcher has been a conductor of an amateur children's choir for almost twenty years. Since it was necessary for the benefit of the choir, she had to gain knowledge from national and international symposia, conferences and literature. Therefore the researcher's personal view is coloured by this prior knowledge, which has formed the researcher's conceptualisation of the building of an excellent choir and is therefore embedded in the subjective world of her mind and opinion.

- [2] Secondly, choirs of outstanding acclaim do not necessarily conform to the personal expectation of the researcher and therefore she considers this to be a limitation as far as objectivity is concerned. Therefore as far as Patton's views are concerned, it could be reasoned that as a children's choir conductor, the researcher has her own experiences in this field and is therefore also inextricably part of this world, bringing to the research certain knowledge of her own. Nevertheless, Denzin and Lincoln (1994:12) point out that observations can never be truly objective, but are always "socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed". This implies that this study is characterised by naturalistic inquiry that focuses on subjectivity as a valuable instrument. Denzin (1988) states that there is no such thing as absolute objectivity, which he refers to as the "fallacy of objectivism", as no human being is without any prejudices or personal viewpoints.
- [3] Thirdly, language posed a serious problem since the researcher wished to include as many viewpoints on this research subject by acclaimed conductors from various parts of the world as possible. For instance, after the initial visit to St Petersburg in 2003 it was not possible to communicate with the two Russian conductors. Vadim Afanasiev's manager had promised to clarify the conductor's views, but various e-mails the researcher had sent to him and Dr. Elena Svetoza remained unanswered. The same communication problem applied to the Asian choirs. The communication between two acclaimed Chinese and Japanese conductors was also problematic and no results were received, because the facts gained via the interpreters were not helpful for the research.

[4] Fourthly, in retrospect, the researcher realises the hiatus that no eminent North-American conductors were asked to participate in the study. The reasoning at the time was that there was a strong danger of the researcher's subjectiveness as much information, and thus her personal views about children's choral conducting, was under North-American influence. This included workshops at which Doreen Rao, who is one of the researcher's role models, worked with the Bloemfontein Children's Choir as orchestral conductor and presented lectures attended by the researcher, both in South Africa and at world symposia. The researcher has been a member of the American Choral Directors' Association for many years and receives their official journal, *The Choral Journal*. She also attended a National Choral Convention of this organisation in New York City in 2003. The researcher made use of much information based on American principles in the literature investigation (cf. bibliography), while at times focusing more on the American influence on choral singing than on that of other countries. Therefore the researcher was of the opinion that a better balance would be obtained by shifting the focus to other countries in the qualitative section. The researcher might have been mistaken in this respect, but the "multiple methods"/triangulation remains a sound mechanism to still secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:2).

Nevertheless, the author strove to be "as objective as possible" by obtaining inputs from various acclaimed living conductors. The emerging theory from such an investigation will hopefully contribute to gaining insight into the question of when a children's choir may be regarded as being of international stature. Stake (1994:242) says "place the best brains available into the thick of what is going on" and it is along these lines that the researcher endeavoured to find reliable and valid guidelines by applying scientific data collection and analysis methods.

Qualitative researchers are predominantly interested in understanding people's experience in context. The natural setting is the place where the researcher is most likely to discover knowledge about the phenomenon of interest. This characteristic of qualitative research indicates that personal meaning is tied to context (Maykut & Morehouse 1994:45). Since the researcher visited the majority of the choirs mentioned in the data collection, she was able to observe them in their natural settings, defined by Maykut and

Morehouse (1994:45) as a process of indwelling. The development of both explicit and tacit knowledge due to these visits was valuable in the final stages of the research.

Huberman and Miles (2002:37ff) indicate that the valid assessment of the criteria findings at the end of the study needs to be parsimonious, testable and logically coherent. In order to obtain that ideal it was necessary to establish whether participants supported some of the theoretical data, which might also “fit in” with the researched data.

The strength of the data-collection result would be novelty, testability and empirical validity arising from an intimate linkage with empirical evidence.

#### **4.4 REPORTING OF DATA**

According to the phases of qualitative research as described by Denzin and Lincoln (1994:15), the researcher first created the field text consisting of field notes and documents from various interviews, e-mails and discussions with the participants, and broad themes were identified. The researcher then proceeded from this text in recreating a working interpretative document which had to make sense of what was learned from the different subjects. The authors cited above emphasise that there is no single interpretive truth (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:15); a viewpoint that also underlies the flexible research context presented here.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:501) also assert that there is no impersonal method in making sense of experiences: it is “always personal”, stressing further that the process the researcher enters is a complex, reflexive process; that in the personal understanding of what has been said by other conductors the researcher recreates the sense of what has been heard. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:501) describe this process as “experiencing experience”. Before reporting the researcher had to reflect on what had been said and had to compare the different aspects of each subject as it touched on the personal importance in the field of reference regarding children’s choral singing.

The different themes that emerged from the interviews with the ten participants were tabulated as presented below. These themes will serve as the point of departure for the report to follow.

Themes
<p>The conductor</p> <p>Sound of the international children's choir</p> <p>Auditions</p> <p>The child's voice as vocal instrument</p> <p>Technical work</p> <p>Intonation</p> <p>Repertoire, texts, performances, tours, choreography, acoustics</p> <p>Rehearsals</p> <p>Structures of choirs in terms of system and age</p> <p>Time-span – many stretching over decades – of one conductor working with an internationally famous children's choir</p> <p>Psychological aspects</p> <p>Threats to the internationally acclaimed children's choirs in years to come</p>

Before the data retrieved from the interviews is presented it is necessary to investigate the concept “choir of international standard”. True to the method sketched above, this is done by way of citing the viewpoints of participants in the study:

- Hanken set out from the question: *“What is really ‘world standard?’ We can’t take it for granted that ‘European music’ and the interpretation of ‘European music’ is the world standard ... I will be very humble, and I think we all have to respect different qualities, traditions and interpretations. If we try to find ‘the right standard’ and this standard becomes the answer/key, I am afraid we have lost the value of choral music and of music in general.”*
- Van Aswegen contributes as follows: *“Who will decide if a choir is excellent? In my opinion it will be audiences, adjudicators, choral experts, critics, parents of the choral singers, the conductor and colleagues, culminating in concerts and recordings produced by the choir.”*
- Fick is definite in her opinion: *“I think that a select children's choir from a music or choir school ought to have a very high standard of choral singing, and definitely a higher standard than that of an amateur children's choir.”* She further believes that, in the case of an outstanding choir, *“they can do with their voices what they want and their intonation should be excellent.”*
- Gräbe contends: *“An excellent children's choir sings music with a strong a cappella base; the implication is thus that most of the literature presented to the audience is a cappella. Therefore, the development of the inner hearing of the singers is very important.”*

- For Johansson, *“the sense of belonging to a group where everyone has the same interests is indescribable and the joint result can often be astounding. There are many prominent choirs that cannot claim a single soloist among their ranks – but the interaction in the choir means that the choir succeeds better than most. As a choir conductor, you have to create the right team spirit”*. He continues: *“There is solidarity in an outstanding choir: they are a family striving for the same aim. There is loyalty and respect for one another’s differences.”*
- Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen, on the other hand, believe that *“an excellent children’s choir also has a unique profile and a personality, with roots deep in their own tradition and culture, spreading out the branches and leaves to build bridges with other cultures of the world”*.

From the opinions cited above, a broad conceptualisation of a children’s choir of outstanding abilities emerged. The discussion will now focus on a more detailed exploration of the viewpoints of participants, focussing on a broader array of topics.

As has already become evident from the foregoing, according to the participants, European music is not necessarily the one and only foundation for building an excellent children’s choir. Furthermore, they seem to agree on the fact that expert knowledge is required in order to work with a choir, and that a talented conductor with knowledge of many aspects of choral conducting and a well-defined artistic vision will be the guiding force behind this choir. The judgement and definition of excellence should emerge from the high standard of choral singing where the singers have control over their voices. Outstanding intonation will be present at all times and that will also be clear in the a cappella singing.

The participants seem to agree that a choir building on these principles will have its own solidarity and a strong bond will exist among its members. They will have a unique profile and a personality with roots steeped in their own tradition and culture. Furthermore, they will be able to build bridges with other cultures of the world through contact and with their singing.

To verify the above, the viewpoints of the participants with whom the interviews were conducted, will be presented.



#### 4.4.1 The conductor

As already stated, it is evident from the reactions of the participants cited above that the most important person in an excellent children's choir is the conductor. The viewpoints of Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen, Moe, Looock, Van Aswegen and Johansson testify to the fact that they consider the conductor as the 'alpha and omega' in the choral context; the leader of the group who is demanding yet supportive, as well as creative. Since the participants also mention the conductor's ability to nurture and motivate children, it follows that this person should also demonstrate the necessary psychological insight. Thus the conductor of the children's choir fulfils a vital role on which the participants elaborate as follows:

*"This conductor must have a good basic musical education"... ".and high artistic leadership, as well as a high persistence and organisational abilities." "A good basic vocal system"... [and be] "a teacher and a musician of many different styles and (have) contact with many aspects of music making [and have] ... musical abilities" say Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen. These eminent conductors further extend their comments by providing the following explanation: "The conductor makes the choir, particularly a children's choir. She/he has to have a combination of educational abilities."*

In terms of the above, Looock concurs with the Finns when he says: *"I believe that all musical experiences are connected to, and depend on and originate from the conductor."* In this regard Van Aswegen also stresses that *"all facets in an excellent choir refer back to the conductor. The conductor will be the most important person because he is responsible for all that must happen in the choir, and the choir is his instrument. The whole spectrum of musical experience originates from the initiative of the conductor."*

Johansson comments that the conductor is *"a leader who functions best of all at the centre of the process; a demanding process that needs a professional in order to keep up. For me, it is a question of leadership. The job of a conductor is demanding, creative and artistic."*

From the above it has become clear that the conductor is synonymous with the choir and that his/her role is of paramount importance.

Since the voice is the musical instrument with which conductors work, it seems to be necessary to understand the influence of and the interrelationship between the conductor

and the children in his/her choir. What is important is that the singers should enjoy the singing experience and want to come back for the next rehearsal. Moe, for example, thinks that the process starts when the conductor can do *“the most incredible things with”* the children, and the children have confidence in the value of the choir.

Participants concur that the whole musical experience stems from the relationship between the conductor and the children as a group and individually. If this interaction is positive the choral singers experience the kind of enthusiasm which is a prerequisite for building an outstanding choir. Furthermore, the singers should possess loyalty, because Moe, Johansson and Hanken maintain that in an outstanding choir there should be only responsible singers. A sense of responsibility towards the choir thus needs to be fostered. Hanken also declares that singers need to have *“self-motivation”*. He continues that the singers in the choir *“must be musicians, be independent with a strong focus on ensemble work as a whole. The singers must take responsibility, be independent but with a strong focus on ensemble work, and they must be flexible as a performing group; therefore each singer must have that characteristic element.”*

At the same time children should have the feeling that as individuals they are safe and valued. In this regard, Moe is of the opinion that even the best singer can be disappointed about his/her achievements, and therefore needs the conductor's nurturing and attention. This can only happen, contend Johanssen and Loock, if the conductor can relate to their sphere of life and experience.

For Loock it is important that the psychological perspective should always be present. *“This person (a conductor) ought to try to look through the eyes of a child.”* Within this context Gräbe defines the tremendous influence of the conductor on the children as follows: *“I think that a choral conductor with all the knowledge in the world, without an affinity for children, will not reach excellence. I often thought that the children sang for me rather than for an unknown audience.”*

Johansson talks about the relationship with the children as one of leadership; of setting a good example, of trust, and an honest interest in the individual; where children are taken seriously and where every child feels that he/she in his/her own right has a contribution to make to the group. The singers should know that the conductor relies on their loyalty and sense of responsibility towards the main aim: to perform the chosen music. *“It is a*

question of leadership both ordinary and musical. It is up to me as conductor of the choir to interest myself in the individual. Interest in the individual has to be the most fundamental driving force for anyone with a management position. Put your prestige away – step down from the podium. Let yourself be influenced and be affected; it is only when we take our choir singing seriously that we can ask to be taken seriously. [...] Everyone is needed: it is a question of building up self-confidence. The choir leader must let all children feel that their worth is equal. The choir singers must know I rely on their loyalty and sense of responsibility towards the whole – the concert.” Johansson proceeds: “By setting a good example, I obtain respect. When I trust, I am trusted in return. ... Creating the desire to make music is entirely dependent on the matter of leadership – musical leadership. He further explains: “Absence through sickness is low. I am needed – I am someone. I take responsibility for my place in the choir! Training in loyalty is important for the choir to work. This strengthens self-esteem and reinforces every individual’s self-image. I don’t need to lean on anyone else in the choir. It is up to me as conductor of the choir to interest myself in the individual. Interest in the individual has to be the most fundamental driving force. If it is the desire for power that makes you want to be in charge of a group you will probably be a very bad leader of the group that forms your area of responsibility. It is only when we take our choirs’ singing seriously that we can ask to be taken seriously.”

Moe also stresses that the conductor must keep the whole intricate machine of an excellent children’s choir lubricated by having certain characteristics: personality, pedagogic skills, the ability and expertise to make responsible musical choices, and through these, become the role model for the group. He opines that because of being such an influential role model, the conductor should strive to be a model human being and never descend to the plane of becoming “an authoritarian.” He further asserts: “It is the conductor with his personality, his choice of music, his pedagogic skills and his knowledge, who must lubricate the complicated choir machine. At the top of the ladder is the ‘Godfather,’ the conductor. To the children, we therefore become big authorities. The children can often put too much weight on what we say and what we do. It is very easy for a child to misunderstand a joke, a comment or a remark meant in a friendly way. We therefore have to be both strong and soft at the same time when dealing with children. We must therefore work on ourselves in the role of ‘human’ authority. We must never descend into becoming ‘an authoritarian authority’”.

Moe indicates in his response that he is often asked how he manages to lead such a good choir. *“And my answer is: what is most important is that the singers come back for the next rehearsal. As long as they come back for the next rehearsal, and that they really want to, you can do the most incredible things with them!”* He proceeds: *“Who can honestly say they can handle the art of making children sing with joy? Here is the main question: What creates a desire to sing, so that every boy will sing with real joy, and not with a feeling of being forced? ...the answer is pretty complex and ... it has many connections; I will try to touch on some of the connections. There must be confidence in the choir and the choosing of good music.”* He further adds: *“Even the best singer can be disappointed about his/her own achievements, and needs attention. If you forget this, you can lose your best singers.”*

From the data presented in this section it can be concluded that the internationally acclaimed conductors interviewed are unanimous in their view that the success of a children’s choir is greatly dependent on the conductor who not only has to possess musical qualities, but also has to exhibit specific personal and professional abilities as outlined above.

#### **4.4.2 The sound of the musical instrument**

Taking the transcribed results into consideration it has become clear that there was an expected plurality of views on the topics posed to participants. However, one topic in particular elicited strong views from participants, namely the quality of the sound production associated with an excellent children’s choir.

Fick, for instance, contributed as follows: *“To achieve a beautiful tone is the realisation for choral members of what a beautiful tone is and they should experience the dissection of the elements of the sound; for example the different vowels, certain exercises, the colour of vowels and how the colour of vowels can be changed. The building of a beautiful sound is a long process. Breathing correctly is of the utmost importance regarding the building of sound.”*

Saluveer commented on the subject of listening to the sound from a different angle: *“I think it is also very cool to record children ... your own voice that you hear and to analyse lots of types ... changes ... that your friends have sung... uhm ... to teach children to take a change”.* He further explained that his choir makes use of an experienced vocal teacher to help with the improvement of sound. In this regard he is supported by Ala-Pöllänen, who reacted

as follows: *“Uhm ... we also have different songs where we have tried to find out what kind of sound the piece exactly needs; and ... uhm ... looking for sound quality, to the best of our knowledge for the piece.”*

Loock, as a successful internationally acclaimed conductor of many years, describes his ideal and how to reach it: *“A children’s choir has a unique sound which is very important. To get a beautiful sound, children should be taught to sing with a smile. This smile opens the sound and the result is a sound that is amplified, therefore choristers need not sing louder, because the sound is amplified by itself, so to speak. The specialised highlighting of each voice is also important, because every voice group is not doing musically the same all the time while singing.”*

Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen claim that the singing voice should be versatile and argue that the voice should be able to produce correctly the geographical, traditional, linguistic or other associations when needed. Furthermore, they train their choral singers to have the ability to transform their voices according to the expectations of the music to be performed.

The participants, specifically Hanken, Svetoza, and Johansson were clear in their opinion that language influences sound. Moreover, Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen are convinced that the Finnish language is undoubtedly one of the main pillars in building the Tapiola Sound. The Finnish participants of the Tapiola choir compare the ideal sound for their famous choir to the warm and flexible sound of a violin as a close ideal. In this they support Hanken and Gräbe in their belief that there is not one perfect choir sound and that this ideal differs throughout the world: *“The ideal of a beautiful singing voice varies a lot according to culture, language, tradition etc”.*

Svetoza, in particular, tried to clarify the situation regarding Russia: *“The Russian text and language influence the sound and the way of singing in our country.”* In the case of the Adolf Fredrik Girls’ Choir, it consists of that which is by tradition Swedish and which *“we are good at or best at. In my case we rely on a long Swedish tradition of choir singing. Experience has added to experience year by year, which has meant that Swedish choirs have created a very typical sound for themselves”*, according to Johansson. Fick adds to this: *“A beautiful sound is an understanding of communication with choir and audience.”*

Although the ideal of a beautiful choral sound varies much according to culture, language and tradition, the conductors of the Tapiola Children's Choir feel strongly that there should be a homogeneous choir sound, which is supported by Johansson. Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen discuss the influence of the children in the choir regarding their concept of the correct, homogeneous sound and the essential common sound-wave, as well as a whole range of other related facts on how to reach the goal of a homogeneous choir sound. *"The children can learn much from one another; this is important particularly when developing the choral sound."* The vocal education system in the Tapiola Choir is planned to feed itself; it produces singers who can teach others. The transfer effect within the choir is thus strong and the children learn a lot from one another's way of singing. *"Our main theories are based on the voice production of a newborn baby."*

These participants then explain the principle of voice reflex, which is the cornerstone in their search for the correct sound that consists of an all-inclusive way of using the body. It can be said that the body acts like an instrument, which the voice is playing to form one complete instrument. When children grow older they tend to lose the voice reflex, but these conductors believe that *"it is possible to find it again and this creates the basis of our voice-building system; we are trying to find our personal voice reflexes."* They explain that they cannot teach the voice reflex. As stated above, only when the reflex has been found can that homogeneous sound exist and a common sound-wave be born. This wave helps a singer to find his/her own voice reflex.

When the choir works to regain the reflex, a homogeneous sound can be found and a *common sound-wave* born. This wave helps a singer to find his/her own voice reflex and the singers of the whole choir may be surprised to notice how strong their voices actually are. The voices appear weaker when singing alone or in other groups, but by being surrounded by one another their voices become more powerful due to this common sound wave. The result of one vocal system, according to Pohjola and Pöllänen, is that it *"guarantees the continuity of the choral education using the transfer between the singers. Some theories refer to the effect of climate. Perhaps the thousands of Finnish lakes, light summer nights and great forests have in their own way contributed the creation of the Tapiola Sound."*

Hanken, Gräbe, Loock and Svetoza and the Finns stated that the sound of an excellent choir should demonstrate brightness and clarity. The singers should also be able to produce a natural sound at the limits of the voice range. Hanken maintains: *“The singers should have a natural and focused sound which is a problem to answer because a natural sound and what is nice, beautiful and expressive is perceived differently in different parts of the world.”* Svetoza wants children to sing *“with good breath control and good articulation”*, while Gräbe emphasises that resonance is needed to let the sound carry.

Johansson places a high premium on creativity and unreserved joy, which can be found in singing, stating that the children should listen to one another. *“They should respect the freedom of each child and acknowledge others’ differences regarding the voice, because voices with different identities make the beautiful harmonious sound”*, says Johansson. He proceeds by stating that it is the blend of individual voices that gives a choir its unique choir-sound. Everyone is needed for the harmony to be perfect. *“You can hear the girls sing in different timbres – that is their identity. It is because they sing in differing timbres that I can create timbre and a sound that is typical for the Adolf Fredrik’s Girls’ Choir.”* Johansson’s view is that this diversity in voices also breeds self-confidence in the individual. Through this technique the Swedish conductor is convinced that he liberates an enormous musical force in which everyone understands his/her individual importance and that this results in a blend of voices, which gives the choir its unique sound.

The comments offered above represent the main views of participants cited here; the statements provided below serve as a further clarification and extrapolation.

In the following paragraphs Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen discuss the influence of choristers themselves regarding their concept of the correct sound, as well as related considerations: *“They can learn much from one another and this is important particularly when developing the choral sound. The vocal education system in the Tapiola Choir is planned to feed itself; it produces singers who can teach others. The transfer effect within the choir is strong and the children learn a lot from each other’s way of singing. Our main theories are based on the voice production of a newborn baby. We call this particular use of voice organs the voice reflex. It includes an all-inclusive way of using the body. It can be said that the body acts as an instrument, which the voice is playing.*

*The voice reflex combines the organs that usually have separate functions; for example the lungs, diaphragm, larynx, vocal cords and nose form one complete instrument. When children mature they tend to lose the voice reflex, but we believe that it is possible to find it again and this creates the basis of our voice building system: we are trying to find our personal voice reflexes. We cannot teach the voice reflex. When the choir works to find again the reflex, that homogeneous sound can be found and a common sound wave is born. This wave helps a singer to find her/his own voice reflex. Consequently, the singers in the whole choir may be surprised to notice how strong their voices actually are! In the Tapiola choir, however, the warm and flexible sound of a violin would be the closest to our ideal. The singers have a natural sound also at the limits of the voice range with the ability to transform it according to the music performed. We strive to produce a versatile singing voice according to geographical, traditional, linguistic and other connections. When needed, there should be a homogeneous choir sound and the Finnish language is undoubtedly one of the main pillars in building the Tapiola sound."*

Johansson further opines that *"when the singers in my choir are accepted, I make a point of saying that it is because you sound the way you do that your voice fits in with the choir. I tell him/her 'We need your voice so that the harmony will be the typical, world-famous sound.'* If a child is forced to miss a rehearsal an important link is missing. I emphasise that each child is unique and needed. Choir members all sing in different ways – that is right – every individual has something special in his or her voice, in his or her talent that is unique. It would be just tedious if everyone sang with the same voice, with the same timbre. That is why every individual is an important member of our choir, even if he/she sings with, say, a weak voice. Everyone is needed! It is a question of building up self-confidence. Demanding equally as much from everyone, means stimulation for each individual. Each child takes responsibility for his/her place and sound in the choir and does not need to lean on anyone else for support.

*To work with an excellent choir requires hard work. Set creativity free and give yourself the chance to be amazed by the unreserved joy, which can only be found in children when they have complete freedom. The choir as phenomenon has great potential for training us to listen to one another. Choir members should respect one another's differences. If I have them sing together, it's not unusual for an attractive harmony to result. This is due to the identities of the various voices. The blend of voices gives the choir its unique choir-sound. Without the individual's voice, an*



*important link is missing; everyone is needed for the harmony to be perfect. You can hear the girls sing in different timbres – that is their identity. It is because they sing in differing timbres that I can create timbre and a sound that is typical of the Adolf Fredrik's Girls' Choir. If everyone sang with the same timbre it would not sound as interesting and this creates confidence within each of us. I am unique – there is only one person in the whole world that sings as I do. Using this attitude I liberate an enormous musical force in which everyone understands that they are important.*

*It is not only those with loud voices and who are dominant that count. Anyone can hear that the singers sing with different voices. In our case, it consists of that which, by tradition, is Swedish and which we are best at. In my case, we rely on a long Swedish tradition of choir singing. Experience has added to experience year by year, which has meant that Swedish choirs have created a very typical sound for themselves."*

The researcher views the latter statement as a particularly valid comment, for when one listens to the choral music of a Swedish choir a marked difference in choral sound, which is different from other countries, can be detected. It should also be noted from the viewpoints cited above that the sound of a well-trained, world-renowned choir becomes its trademark and the conductor plays a vital role in creating this harmonised sound that is unique and recognisable all over the world.

#### **4.4.3 The building of the instrument**

When constituting a choir, auditions are a necessary step of the process during which the conductor evaluates both the voice and the musical abilities of prospective choir members. Thereafter the conductor has to optimise those vocal and musical abilities by polishing the technical dimensions of children's choral singing.

##### **4.4.3.1 Auditioning**

The Russian conductor, Svetozar, told the researcher: *"I believe all children can sing; therefore, children sing for two years and only then are they evaluated. We find that most of them can sing after that period. Of course, if a child shows musical promise, he/she is trained to sing in second and third vocal voice parts."* These comments were strongly opposed by the other

participants who countered that *"... auditions are the responsibility of the conductor"* (Van Aswegen). Gräbe, for instance, is convinced that to achieve the goal of an internationally excellent choir *"meaningful and well constructed auditions play an important role"*. He also believes that *"I am of the opinion that musical talent is more important than a beautiful voice and I think that the ability to discern different pitches is most important with children. Personally, I am much in favour of the views of Arnold Bentley, who wrote a book about musically gifted children. I would like a child, during an audition, to be able to distinguish a pitch difference of up to a tenth of a semitone"*. He further suggests that *"melodic and rhythmic memory are very important abilities; therefore, discerning chords and the number of notes in a harmony I also consider important."*

For Van Aswegen, sight-singing does play a role in an audition. She states that *"an audition should test the ability of the applicant to sing a certain part from a musical score. I also like to test the range of the applicant at this stage as the highest and lowest notes the candidate can sing are important."*

She further suggests, *"when singing a song, the vocal ability of the singer performing can be judged. Working on resonance is another aspect of importance because the resonance spaces of children are small. For instance, if one is thinking about the nasal, mouth and palate cavities, the thing to do is to try to enlarge those inside spaces. When the palate is lifted, the result will be a clear sound with enough resonance. Because children have a natural, clear projection, only resonance is needed to allow the sound to carry."*

The only other participant, apart from Van Aswegen and Gräbe, who offered a detailed explanation of principles concerning auditions was Johansson. He briefly sketched the circumstances at the Adolf Fredrik Music School from which it can be gleaned that he, as chief conductor of the selected international Adolf Fredrik Girls' Choir, does the auditions himself, and that these take place towards the end of their studies. He told the researcher that *"children are ten years old when they apply to attend Adolf Fredrik Music Classes and we know nothing of their study results or anything else about them. Only the music test determines whether a child is accepted at the school. Each year, of the approximately 1000 ten-year-olds who audition to gain a place at Adolf Fredrik, only 180 are selected. For many years the test was conducted in October but we have moved the test period as far forward as possible because girls are so much more developed and mature than boys of the same age. When we discussed test methods*

*with experts, we found that the biological age in a group of ten-year-olds often differs by as much as eight years between those who are furthest developed and those who are least developed. The test is divided into two days; the first day the children learn the individual test and practise their mandatory songs in groups. The intention is to create a stimulating situation in which the children find it fun to sing. During the introduction, I talk a lot about attitudes: happy, unhappy, playing a part and acting snooty, all with the voice. Such consciousness can make a note come out high or low, strong or soft. This is a new discovery for many children!"*

He prefers to listen to applicants singing without any instrumental assistance and states that *"when students apply to us now they sing two songs. The student can choose one song from three proposed obligatory songs which are all well-known children's songs. The songs are to be sung a cappella. In addition, several different tests are conducted regarding singing by ear. I run through this very carefully. After 60 minutes, every child is expected to understand what is going to happen on day two, when the individual tests are conducted. The ear tests are divided into testing the children's capabilities regarding rhythm, melody and chords. Boys and girls practise separately so that the boys feel more secure, confident and stimulated."*

Johansson also shared the fact that he has made some alarming findings regarding range and note memory: *"I find during auditions that the range of voices today is more limited than it used to be, and voices are far lower. The voice is frequently based in the chest position and the head voice has never been trained and developed. Moreover, note memory is shorter today than it was 15 years ago; when I play a melody with more than five notes, the student often wants to hear the sequence one more time. Previously, I could play up to eight notes and the student would grasp the melody - these are frightening observations and I know the same problems are occurring the world over."*

There seems to be certain limitations when the conductor has to constitute a choir, particularly with regard to note memory and the sound and gender composition of the choir. Because the standard of a choir is greatly dependent on the abilities of the members, good auditioning remains a challenge.

#### 4.4.3.2 The handling of the instrument: the voice

The child's voice is the instrument of performance and thus needs to be nurtured and developed. Gräbe feels that *"if a conductor does not appreciate the limitations of the child's voice potential he/she can harm the voice by expecting too much or too little from the voice". "He/she should know that mutation occurs in boys' and girls' voices and how it should be handled. The abilities of these precious voices should also be understood regarding range and dynamic capacities."*

Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen are of the opinion that *"if children sing only simple children's songs in a very limited voice range, then there is no need for special voice training. But if we demand some sort of artistic level and an artistically challenging repertoire from a children's choir, we also have to take care of the instrument, the voice, otherwise it may fail"*.

Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen want *"the instruments consisting of voices to have a wide range. Some senior singers have specialised in voice training. During a normal choir rehearsal all the singers, in turn, visit the 'Voice Service Station' where they get personal voice training given by a professional teacher"*.

Johansson confirms that *"at the Adolf Fredrik Music School music teachers are skilled in certain areas of singing and together they develop the aesthetics and skills of music in their students so that they may achieve beautiful choral singing"*. He further maintains that, in order to teach a healthy individual vocal technique, *"each lesson of 40 minutes begins with 15 minutes of tone formation. Interestingly, most of the students go on to sing in amateur choirs in Stockholm and throughout Sweden, using their acquired skills in all kinds of choral situations."*

With regard to voice production, Fick offered the following insights: *"After all these years I am very conscious of the hygiene of the voice and the fact that you are working with voices that must still function when they are 80 years old. That voice must not be harmed in a choir due to a conductor who does not let the singing voice rest enough during practices. Some choral conductors can go on and on for literally hours; no, not that much, but they let the children practise in the same tessitura for too long. While practising the registers must be changed so as not to hurt the voice. The voice must not be hoarse after a practice. For myself, I prefer practising for 20 minutes, then giving directions or using the time to rest the voice. To be musically effective, for example we massage each other's shoulders to relax the voice, as in the case of opera singers who do not sing for*

*hours. I also keep my eye on posture; I do this, because the body is the musical instrument. I also want the choir to let the whole range of their voices develop through vocal exercises. For me, the above is part of my rehearsal technique for the voice apparatus."*

These guidelines on the handling of the voice contain some fundamental truths in terms of tessitura, posture, voices and their handling. There are various ways of developing children's voices and the conductor has to explore the most appropriate ways of doing so.

#### **4.4.3.3 Technical work with children's choirs of stature**

Technical exercises seem necessary to all the participants, but they differed slightly from one another according to their individual fields of reference.

##### **[1] *A training programme***

Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen have a specific training programme consisting of the following:  
*"Relaxing, breathing, resonance, voice range and articulation."*

##### **[2] *The voice reflex***

*"Only voice exercises can help to find the synchronised cooperation of the different organs, which together build up the voice reflex"* is the experience of the Finnish conductors.

##### **[3] *The role of technical exercises***

Van Aswegen's opinion is that *"the conductor will use exercises of his/her preference to reach his/her goal."* Johansson opened his discussion by explaining the structure of the Music School in the following way: *"Adolf Fredrik's Music Classes is a choir school. Each class forms a choir and as we have 36 classes this means we have 36 choirs with 1000 students from age 11 to 16. Instruction covers musical theory and certain lessons are devoted entirely to sight-singing in Solfeggio. Singing by ear instruction is also taught. Each one of the 13 music teachers is a specialist in various fields and their job is to convey the aesthetics and skills of music to develop their students. We aim to teach a healthy individual vocal technique. Each lesson of 40 minutes begins with 15 minutes of tone formation and reading notes."*

On the importance of sight-singing in this regard (meaning note-reading) Johansson is supported by Fick who said *“one might do sight-singing with easy pieces.”* Johansson further remarked that it is important to imbue the students with a sound knowledge of choral repertoire, adding that *“ear training is also done, in which case, a class of 30 can be divided into two groups. As might be expected in such a large school, the methods of teaching vary greatly.”*

Fick is convinced that *“every good conductor has to read literature on choral leadership. I have read many books, but in recent years it seems that I cannot remember looking at a single book on the subject! However, one can get wonderful hints for amateur choirs. In each book that one reads there is something usable. I have written books for myself on rehearsal techniques for each problem that I have encountered.”* She also commented on information available and opportunities for developing more knowledge which were not accessible in the past by saying: *“I worked in the years of apartheid with my choirs. We could not go overseas and no choirs visited us. As conductors and musician we lived in isolation. That was terrible!”*

#### **[4] *The influence of isolation on conductors***

It was interesting to hear what the participants had to say about the literature on technical development in Russia and Estonia regarding their political history. *“In Russia the Phonopedic Method of Voice Development is very popular; a book written by Jemeljanov Victor”* explained Svetoz, strongly recommending the publication. Unfortunately the researcher could not peruse the publication but via the translator she learnt that the book was published in the previous century and was ‘quite old’. No information on the publisher or date of publication was available. By implication, Saluveer said in regard to the training of choirs that in Estonia older books are in use with basic ideas that are still useful. *“I think that today there is not one particular book that is in use. We have collected books from all around the world at different workshops. Some of our Estonian conductors from the past have written interesting books on choir music which have helped choirs over the centuries. Many ideas in these books are still helpful today especially the basic ones.”*

#### **[5] *Breathing***

Svetoz is in favour of the practice that *“children should sing with good breath control”* and prescribes that *“there should be no tension, because self-taught and taught movements do influence the sound. I do many exercises; for example, developing the diaphragm.”*

Fick expresses her opinion on the subject in clear terms: *“There are certain technical aspects that are needed to build a beautiful sound and striving towards that ideal, is a long process. Breathing correctly is of the utmost importance in the building of sound – in fact, singing is breathing; a most important concept. The whole body of the child should experience the breathing mechanism. What is lower breathing and how does your body feel? How does it feel to connect the breath with sound? The reason for this is that a head-sound is not the bigger sound with resonance; therefore for me, it is important that the child should sing with acute consciousness of the role that the body plays in this process. The correct use of breath in different circumstances is of the utmost importance.”*

## **[6] Vowels**

*“The correct forming of vowels is very important. I prefer to put other sounds in front of the vowels, for example (j)a, (r)a, etc.”*, Svetozar said during the interview. She explains the reasoning behind the use of the ‘r’: *“It is very important to roll an ‘r’ and then connect the vowel to this sound. This makes the mechanism of singing vowels correctly much easier.”*

Fick contributes to this idea by stating *“to have a beautiful tone is the realisation for choral members of what beautiful tone is and they must experience the dissection of this into the elements of the sound; for example the different vowels, certain exercises, the colour of vowels and how the colour of vowels can be changed.”*

## **[7] Legato singing**

Loock is in agreement with many of his colleagues when he states that *“the technical ability of the choir can never be neglected, especially legato singing.”* This is supported by Fick who maintains that *“the technical ability of a world class children’s choir also includes many technical abilities; for example, careful control over legato singing.”* *“Some pieces have very long phrases which are in one line.”* As Saluveer commented, *“this is often difficult for the first and second sopranos – the latter group find this particularly hard.”*

## **[8] Phrasing**

Johansson puts a technical perspective on legato singing when he says: *“A musical phrase can never be pressured into existence. It needs its own organic time in order to be performed in such a way that it involves the listener.”*

### **[9] Pronunciation and articulation**

*"I believe in natural, clear pronunciation without any unnaturalness", is the opinion of Gräbe and Ala-Pöllänen, who add that "a singer should aim for clear articulation." They motivate this with the following aspects: "The Finnish language is phonetic and with regard to intonation not a demanding language. We can speak our language and make ourselves understood with a 'lazy face'. Unfortunately, many people do so in their everyday speech. That causes every Finnish choir conductor problems and he/she has to work increasing the efficiency of articulation. Moreover, our language is pronounced in the back of the mouth and that is why we have to do a lot of work to get the voice placed further in front of the mouth. Many other languages are better in this respect such as Swedish, French and Italian."*

### **[10] Agility**

*"Agility in quick singing without increasing the tempo is important. In this instance, dynamic signs can be of great help", advises Looek.*

### **[11] Difficult techniques**

Fick maintains that *"there are many difficult techniques, for instance the 'let go' principle of a second note which it can be practised technically."*

### **[12] Frequency of vocal exercises during rehearsals**

An interesting point of view was expressed by Saluveer from Estonia who indicated that he does not use vocal exercises overmuch and does not even always start a rehearsal with technical work. *"We do not always start with vocal exercises – it depends on how much time there is."* The South African conductor Acama Fick supports Saluveer in this matter, contending that she *"does not necessarily put aside a definite time for technical work."*

### **[13] Wide singing range**

*"We aim to produce a wide range in the voice, so as to increase the quality and range of sound"* says Saluveer, in agreement with the Finnish conductors and Gräbe.



#### [14] *Wide dynamic scale*

The development of a dynamic scale is a totally different concept and the importance of this is stressed by the Finnish conductors: *“The singer should aim for a wide dynamic scale.”*

#### [15] *Rhythm*

*“Being able to manage different rhythms is very important”* is the view of Saluveer. Fick, Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen concur that the singers in an outstanding choir should *“sing with rhythmical exactness, ease and lightness.”*

In terms of the above-mentioned statements it seems necessary to also reflect on the repertoire and its use in technical work as it appears sensible to use technical exercises based on the material that the choir is singing. Fick in particular expresses a very convincing opinion on technical work: *“Every good conductor should read literature on choral leadership. There are 1 000 exercises to do, but I believe that one should not do exercises on a loose basis. One must have a certain set of exercises to promote the sound of your choir to blend and to get uniformity whereby the singers can experience your goal.”* However, as an afterthought Fick states: *“That perfect sound can also be boring, you know.”*

#### 4.4.3.4 Intonation

As regards intonation it seems that conductors of internationally famous choirs do not even consider that a choir of stature should have intonation problems, though in the first section of the study, intonation and the abilities of pitch were discussed in the literature as one of the most important facets in excellent choral singing. Likewise, participants cited in the qualitative section, emphasised the importance of intonation. Looock and Svetozar both agree on the topic: *“Excellent intonation is of paramount importance”* says Looock to which the Russian conductor adds that *“intonation is very important”*. Svetozar also believes that a conductor should work systematically on intonation, explaining that *“when I work on this development, I use the movable doh-system<sup>6</sup>; all children must know it. I*

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<sup>6</sup> As mentioned before in this study, the researcher observed that it was notable at the Songbridge Festival in Wakayama, Japan from 6 to 10 August 2008 that the Asian conductors still use the solfa method to a large extent when focusing on exercises for intonation. The intonations of these choirs are perfect as far as this researcher could judge.

*consider exercises to develop intonation as important. The use of canons is also an important tool."* In describing an alternative method for developing the concept of 'inner hearing', Gräbe supports her viewpoint when he says: *"Try not to use the piano while working on intonation."*

Hanken firmly believes that *"intonation must be in the style and tradition of the work."* He further explains that *"music from Latin America, Russia and Scandinavia is different, so also is music from one century and one country to another."*

Saluveer impressed on the researcher the following thought: *"I think there's different intonation when you sing a cappella music. It's different when you sing music with some kind of accompaniment or keyboard as micro tuning is necessary which often does not produce very good results especially with children's choirs. Nevertheless, we are working on different harmonies and exploring the effects of special intonation."* By this he implies that instruments are tuned on a different basis than the tuning of the voice. Afterwards, when reviewing his comments, the researcher asked him whether he strives towards better intonation through the use of exercises and his answer was in the affirmative (this was not notated).

Saluveer also explained that in some pieces correct intonation is more difficult: *"A special piece with difficult intonation in more than eight voices with clusters, is very hard work."*

Gräbe offered additional advice on this topic, namely that *"children will achieve better intonation if they have musical insight into what is happening harmonically in the piece. The notes in sheet music can either have harmonic or melodic implication. Melodic problems may be rectified with the piano, but harmonic problems imply vertical thinking."*

He also comments on musical knowledge regarding excellent intonation: *"If a child has a musical substructure or background, this can be very helpful concerning intonation"*. In other words, if he/she is taking an instrument this child will probably be more skilled in the development of intonation than another without a musical background. This idea is supported by Saluveer when he says: *"Some of the students are good at intonation and some not, and we usually suggest that singers learn a musical instrument or attend a music school"*. He adds that a musical background and the ability to read notes are particularly helpful when singing contemporary music. For Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen there is no argument that an excellent children's choir has members who have had access to *"a good instrumental education."*

Fick also does not compromise when she states that *“excellent intonation is naturally part of the bigger picture: and convincing interpretation is always accompanied by excellent intonation.”* This conductor also commented on overtones and intonation when she made this remark: *“Do you know where that ‘verbysterende’ (Afrikaans for astonishingly [own translation]) beautiful sound comes from that you hear in the choirs of Eric Ericson? That is the area where an ordinary conductor spends 90% of his time working with an excellent choir. But not them; their intonation is 100%. Thus, it follows that all the overtones are there automatically.”*

#### **4.4.4 Repertoire**

On the subject of repertoire all participants provided answers.<sup>7</sup> This aspect seems to be a pivotal facet and, according to the responses received, particularly the areas mentioned below need to be addressed.

##### **4.4.4.1 Choices of music to be sung by an excellent choir**

###### **[1] Aims in choosing repertoire**

Ala-Pöllänen explains that his choir sings *“a repertoire of high artistic and pedagogic quality, for example Kodály, because my choice of repertoire is connected to my aims for the choir. The repertoire is the basic thing; I carry out my pedagogical aim via repertoire. It is one of my most important tools, but not the only one.”* He further states that his criteria for a good repertoire are *“musical quality, pedagogical usefulness and versatility.”* Johansson adds: *“My mission in life at secondary school is to provide a counterbalance for commercial music; to provide an alternative to the ‘here today, gone tomorrow’ musical trash. When my students sing the music for example of J. S. Bach, the music enters their bodies and never leaves. As a pedagogue I am securely and utterly convinced of this. We pedagogues have a very great responsibility when making our choices of music and in exercising with our students; it is a responsibility to select music of lasting value. When I believe in the music, the students believe in the music too, irrespective of difficulty and genre.”*

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<sup>7</sup> It must be remembered throughout that the views expressed by Ala-Pöllänen were given only after consultation on some important facets, and in conjunction with the former conductor of the Tapiola Choir, Erkki Pohjola, who was its founder in 1963 and under whose direction the choir became famous.

Johansson continues: *"Creating the desire to make music is entirely dependent on the matter of leadership – musical leadership."* Svetozar, on the other hand, is convinced that making excellent musical choices for the choir has one outstanding asset: *"Good music motivates."*

*"I think the music and the text are equally important; a good text complements its musical aspects"* contends Saluveer regarding musical choices. Van Aswegen maintains that the choice of music *"is solely the responsibility of the conductor and these choices are the basis of the success of the choir."* In terms of compositions to be chosen, she prefers especially *"those from one's own country"*.

Van Aswegen believes that *"the choice of music, which is the basis of the success of the choir, includes the best quality of music to be found and I am referring for instance to the composer Kodály and the fact that Jean Ashworth Bartle also stresses the importance of excellent quality when choosing music for children's choirs."* As an educationalist, Moe stresses the importance of a knowledgeable musician and an inspiring conductor moulded into one personality when it comes to the choice of an enduring repertoire. *"Children don't necessarily want the simple and the easy. There are so many educationalists that say that it is important to stay on the child's level, but what actually is the child's level? I think that many educators define the child's learning capacity on a shaky basis. This often originates in the educator's low performance level. If the teacher is a bad musician, he or she also inhibits the child's development; therefore, the choice of good music is of paramount importance in an excellent children's choir."*

Moe continues as follows: *"A while ago, I asked the boys what music they would prefer to sing; 50% voted for Schubert and the other half wanted to sing Bach. I asked: 'What about gospel music? It is fun to sing!' but they replied that Bach and Schubert give them much more and of course, I believe their music is more demanding. My experience is that boys like challenges and that they love tackling them. And when they overcome the challenge, they also love the music and convey its joy and delight. As 'visible adults' and conductors, we must learn to understand and appreciate this human learning process, so we can direct the process with encouragement and inspiration. You cannot escape hard work; everyone who has learned a Bach motet is sure of that."*

## **[2] Compositions**

*"I choose a repertoire with which children can associate, especially our own composers"* commented Svetozar, as she explained that *"Russian music is special and melodically*

*interesting.” Gräbe, agreeing with Svetozar, comments: “I give preference to composed music, rather than arrangements. A choir should include as many pieces as possible from the composers of their own country.”*

Ala-Pöllänen also expresses an individualistic view: *“I try to use all my abilities, when selecting a repertoire for children. I prefer originally composed music for my type of choir.”*

Saluveer explains his views concerning the choice of repertoire by saying that he always tries to include compositions of his own country. During the interview, the researcher mentioned that there were seven pieces by Tormis, and Saluveer affirmed this: *“Yes. His name is Veljo Tormis, which he takes from nature...like spring, wind, cold, rain...and so on. We, as a children’s choir have also sung a lot of Thomas Merick; this is important for us, really important because the source of his music is 5000 to 6000 years old and Thomas’s arrangements are musically very interesting to us. He also presents us with a very, very different view of how he has made his music.”*

Saluveer continued to say that they also sing a lot of music from scores; they modify songs and include international choir music. Their repertoire is quite extensive in that they have recorded music ranging as widely as Gregorian chants and contemporary choir music.

### **[3] Arrangements and transcriptions**

Gräbe argues that *“arrangements often have compositional problems and shortcomings.”* Ala-Pöllänen supports his view strongly: *“I do not like transcriptions of some instrumental works and bad arrangements”*. Van Aswegen also contends that children’s choirs *“due to their composition, must sometimes as choices, revert to arrangements, but they should always be excellent. The choice of music must have variety and good quality arrangements may be included.”*

### **[4] Classical music**

*“Classical music is good music. I find the chorales of Bach excellent music to start with”* is the opinion of Svetozar.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Note that, with regard to this statement, the language barrier should be taken into account; Svetozar probably meant ‘Western art music’ instead of ‘Classical’ music.

## **[5] *The repertoire for a children's choir***

Svetoza feels strongly that *“the choice of music is important and must speak to the children; therefore, I choose a repertoire with which children can associate.”*

Gräbe is in agreement with this viewpoint when he illustrates his viewpoint: *“Music to be sung should always be in the children’s field of experience. For younger children it would be advisable to make sober choices regarding classical music. For instance, the well-known song in four voices by Schubert, ‘Gott in der Natur’, op. post. 133 D757 (1822), with its dramatic text, needs, in my opinion, the fuller, mature sound of a women’s choir. Thus, it should be carefully considered as a choice for a young children’s choir, even if those children are able to sing the notes and perform the piece quite musically. The interpretation stays immature because the sound and depth of interpretation can never, in my opinion, be fulfilled.”*

Gräbe continues to say: *“I would consider stressing the above point; the Brahms folk songs are good musical choices for a children’s choir”*. He proceeds to argue that the Brahms folk songs are an excellent choice for a girls’ choir and that Baroque music is a better option for a boys’ choir because *“I would like to mention that in 1978 when three of my choirs were awarded cum laude (above 90%) at the international competition at Neerpelt, Belgium, the boys excelled in Baroque singing, while the girls, because they were more mature than the boys, were more at home with arrangements from folk songs by Brahms.”*

Saluveer explains that he chooses music from many different genres for his choir. Bearing in mind that his choir also performs as the National Youth TV Choir in Estonia, he probably needs that scope: *“Apart from Gregorian chant and contemporary choir music, we have experimented with, and recorded pop, jazz and folk music.”* He goes on to say that both the conductor and the choir should be satisfied with the emotional and artistic content of the music chosen, in whatever style it may be. *“Sometimes I look for many types of music for our singers. I think it’s important for the singers to be happy with the music ... it’s about music for us as conductors and for the singers ... it’s the best way. I think children should be able to express themselves emotionally freely and we should motivate them to do so, but at the same time, show them what kind of emotion the music is expressing and help them towards interpreting the piece. Ultimately, the music should be interesting for all – the conductor, the singers and of course, the audience.”*

He also takes into consideration that older children in a children's choir are more emotional and therefore the repertoire should reflect this.

#### **[6] *Choices of repertoire from other countries***

On this topic, Johansson offered the following viewpoint: *"When I have been on tour with my Adolf Fredrik Girls' Choir and taken part in many of Europe's biggest competitions and achieved better than second place in certainly more than 15 competitions, it has always been interesting to listen to the folk music of the various choirs; to hear the unique sound and the individual national profile. In our own folk music we have a great national asset that is not affected by changes in government, runs on the stock exchange or by inflation".*

With his experience of many world-wide tours with his choir, Ala-Pöllänen comments: *"I consider the choice of traditional music from other countries to be very important – of course, taking into consideration what I said of good or bad musical choices."*

Saluveer, as mentioned above, also includes folk music in his choice of repertoire, which is in line with Ala-Pöllänen, Van Aswegen and other participants. *"The most interesting thing for me is to listen to choirs with a different way of singing, especially when they sing their own folk music"* says Johansson, adding that *"choirs have great potential for building bridges between countries, religions, races, etc."*

#### **[7] *Choices from other sources, such as popular music and musicals***

Gräbe warns that *"the rendition of a work with a particular sound-character, for example an arrangement of 'Summertime' by Bernstein, will have its own way of producing sound. This should be carefully considered by the conductor, since this sound may rub off and influence the sound rendition of the group in performing other music."*

As mentioned previously, Saluveer explains that he experiments with all kinds of music. *"Sometimes it's not good to include a piece in your repertoire that children find initially difficult, but then some of your singers may be motivated to tackle something which is very hard and, if they are interested in what they're doing, they will manage it."*

## **[8] *Choices from music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries***

Johansson indicated that he is very much in favour of choosing repertoire from more recent composers, and explains his pedagogical and musically motivated reasons as follows: *"My interest in modern music has provided pedagogic assistance in many instances. Many people are afraid of the musical interpretation and sing only to 50% of their capacity, due to their fear of singing incorrectly. New (modern) music provides a unique opportunity to loosen these confining knots! I have had favourable experiences in that when a student has been asked to improvise, sing clusters etc., she/he is then unafraid when reading traditional music. The old music is assisted by the new music and the new music cannot manage without the traditional music. In a cluster, where everyone sings his/her own part, self-confidence can be built up. It is similar to having the human right to look as you do; you have a right to sound as you do."*

### **4.4.4.2 The conductor and the study of repertoire**

*"It is important that the conductor should know the music so well that he is able to sing the vocal lines of each part. Otherwise, the conductor will be unsure of himself if he does not know the vocal line",* says Loock.

Fick explains her point of view regarding the studying of repertoire as follows: *"To keep the interest of the singers, it is important to have a definite work-schedule where certain works are being polished and new music is taught. The moment boredom sets in, a new piece of music must be handed out. Actually, there are various aspects to a balanced rehearsal; for instance exercises and new music to enrich the choir's scope, even if the pieces are not meant for performance etc. The task of the conductor is to make sure that the singers know exactly the architecture of the music: the structure, the texture or musical concepts used in the composition itself."*

### **4.4.4.3 Text**

For Loock the *"text of the music to be sung is of significant importance"* and supports Fick by saying that *"the singers must comprehend the text"*. She proposes that *"to get an understanding of the text and the interpretation thereof, singers have to read, present and dramatise those words. The more time I spend on that, the easier the musical interpretation becomes. Again, there are many techniques to acquire this."*



Svetoza again emphasises the importance of the text in compositions: *“The Russian text and language influence the sound and the way of singing of our country.”* She further states that *“church music is in old dialects and must be explained to the children. In other instances, I find it necessary that in order to understand the text, the historical background of the composition should be explained to the children.”*

She is also of the opinion that the children should understand the meaning of the text in another context because *“as far as the text is concerned, Russian music is always accompanied by beautiful poetry; therefore, the recital of the music flows from the text to the music.”*

Indirectly Saluveer stresses the understanding of the structure of the music, as well as an understanding of the text by saying *“as well as understanding the music that you are performing, the texture, the lyrics and the background contribute to the message of the song.”* *“The text of a chosen piece should be child-friendly”* adds Van Aswegen.

### **[1] Text and language**

Gräbe argues for singing in the original language of a chosen piece of music as *“singing not in the original language of a piece may pose certain problems; there may be the possibility of wrong accents, for one. I think translation is all right when it is not a folk-song arrangement; when it is originally composed music. The same can be said for texting a song in modern language.”*

*“It is possible to translate into English, but there are also some folk-song arrangements that you try to translate, but in so doing, you lose some of the original sound; the sound of ancient words, as in later Estonian music,”* is Saluveer’s view on this matter. Sometimes he is in favour of translations and in other instances in old folk music where the originality of the sound is altered, because of a changed text, a viewpoint shared also by Gräbe.

### **[2] Text and pronunciation**

*“I believe in natural, clear pronunciation without any unnaturalness”* says Gräbe, with Hanken adding *“and the pronunciation must be excellent.”*

Fick concurs with their statements when she says: *“In an excellent choir, diction is very important. It gives character and personality to the specific song. I am of the opinion that diction often works in conjunction with the style, as one cannot with all styles use the same kind of*

*diction. An over-emphasis of consonants is detrimental to the style and to the legato line. I find that if choir members can write aspects around 'timing' of where the place of a specific sound must be; on which consonant; on which part of the pulse and so on, this forms part of the overall technique of presenting the text."*

*"An excellent children's choir must be able to sing with perfect pronunciation in any language"* is the conviction of Van Aswegen. This idea is extended to the views of Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen, who feel that *"the text of a musical work can build bridges with other countries"*.

An investigation of the views presented above confirms that, in the context of the children's choir, the choice of repertoire is of utmost importance – particularly in terms of its suitability for children's voices.

#### **4.4.4.4 The choir, their interpretation of the repertoire in performance and their relationship with the audience**

The motivation for Johansson that choirs should perform their repertoire is the following: *"Singing in a choir and training to appear before an audience creates self-confidence and stage experience."* Hanken is convinced that *"the choir must speak to the audience; the interpretation must be able to move the souls of the listeners."*

Loock mentions, in his opinion, two of the most important vehicles: *"In the interpretation of a piece, musicality and phrasing are of the utmost significance."* *"Motivation, contact between choir and conductor and contact with the audience influence our choice of repertoire"* are the parameters for Ala-Pöllänen and Pohjola. Their opinion is that an excellent children's choir *"is able to express different emotions in singing."* Saluveer also feels very strongly that a chosen piece should also have audience appeal. *"The piece should be interesting for the singers, the conductor, as well as the audience"*.

As mentioned previously, Ala-Pöllänen comments that although he *"prefers originally composed music for my type of choir, it depends on the type of concert. I must always have the most suitable repertoire for every kind of performance."*

The rendering of songs should be in the correct styles according to Fick and Van Aswegen: *"The singers must have a balance between naturalness, dynamic sparkle and focused discipline with regard to the music and while performing on stage."* Fick says that all musical

experiences are connected with, depend on, and originate from the conductor. *“It is very important how well the choir communicates with the audience and whether the audience and the music that the choir makes ‘connect’. It is obviously the conductor who must take responsibility for this. He/she must know what he/she wants, what he/she wants to hear and must have a sound-ideal that is realised in the rendering of the composition.”*

Johansson emphasises that his choice of repertoire is very important when establishing a musical communication between the performer and the listener. Furthermore, he states that children sing *“obviously because it’s fun, but also so that the audience will appreciate what the singers are doing. That is why the musical communication between choir and audience is very important! Sing by heart! It’s for the audience that we are singing”*. He thus states two important aspects that other participants did not touch on: singing, for the joy of singing, and the fact that, in his view, all music should be memorised.

Regarding the interpretation of a composition, both Fick and Ala-Pöllänen in conjunction with Pohjola have this to say: *“There comes a time when the conductor must let go and believe in what he has taught his choristers. For instance, being on stage is more difficult with children but something that a conductor has to cope with, so as not to interfere with the path of the expression of the composition.”*

Johansson elaborates on another point in connection with taking cognisance of the young people’s opinions: *“It is a pity that it is the adult world that decides exclusively how the music is to be performed. The adult world can limit the development of music and does not listen with serious interest to the rising generation and their ideas.”*

Children are very expressive, which implies that the repertoire should reflect that asset in view of the interpretation of the music. The implication is that the repertoire should be composed of music that will be “child-friendly” and which will reveal their talents in that regard.

#### **4.4.4.5 The role of performance**

*“The choir singers must know that I rely on their loyalty and sense of responsibility towards the whole – the concert”* says Johansson. *“During the course of one year, a class will normally participate in several different types of performances: individual and joint concerts with two or three*

*other choir groups or in a large scale performance in which several choir groups participate. In fact, in conjunction with the school's annual Lucia concert in the Stockholm Globe Arena which seats 10,000, the entire student body and all faculties participate. Interestingly enough, this concert is sold out to capacity audiences three times each year. The faculty attempts to 'mix' concerts whenever possible; in other words, to let younger classes share concerts with older classes. The type of repertoire varies, as well. Students master a cappella repertoire from various historical periods and national styles. During their younger years, they sing an almost exclusive repertoire for equal voices, 2- and 4-part. By the time they are in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, they are beginning to perform an SATB (soprano-alto-tenor-bass) repertoire. They regularly perform with instrumental ensembles of varying size, including a symphony orchestra."*

Adolf Fredrik, together with Stockholm's Musikgymnasium, is one of Stockholm's largest concert institutions, organising and performing at least fifty choral concerts every year. When Stockholm's Opera is in need of children's choirs in such productions as *Carmen*, *La Bohème* and *Tosca*, students from Adolf Fredrik participate. Larger choral productions such as Britten's *War Requiem*, Verdi's *Requiem* and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* are regularly performed by students from Adolf Fredrik/Stockholm's Musikgymnasium. There are three select groups outside the normal music curriculum of the school for which students may audition: the Adolf Fredrik's Boys' Choir, the Adolf Fredrik's Girls' choir and the Stockholm Musikgymnasium's Chamber Choir. These have all met with great success both nationally and internationally.

*"Singing in a choir and training to appear before an audience creates self-confidence and stage experience" Johansson claims. "When the Royal Opera puts on productions the children come from Adolf Fredrik. And the school has worked closely with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra of Stockholm for many years."* It is clear from the above that children's choirs should be exposed to a variety of opportunities to perform, and thereby expose them to different milieus and settings that will contribute to the choir's maturity.

Exposure to public performances inevitably implies that choir tours will take place. All participants stated either informally or in reaction to the open-ended question, that excellent choirs have to tour for various reasons. Most views choir tours as a most positive incentive, and regards the attitude of the conductor to tours as one of the means to keep

the singers motivated. *"In addition, it is important to have an inspiring conductor with an inspiring future goal, for example, a tour. It is unnecessary to force a child to sing when you can lead the child to produce a lot more with happiness. We undertake regular tours where responsible adults support the boys. The boys find long trips exciting ... at the top of the ladder is the 'Godfather', the conductor."* Tours should be viewed as 'natural events' in the existence of a choir, and, states Moe *"good choirs have tours because these tours are also responsible for the development of the singers and for nurturing the broader perspective."*

*"The choir (Adolf Fredrik Girls' Choir) performs frequently in Sweden, touring the entire country and often taking part in official ceremonies"* Johansson informed the researcher. Van Aswegen agrees with the importance of touring when she says *"tours and international comparison are relevant to the growth of an excellent choir. These factors encourage further growth of an excellent choir and conductor."*

In the *curricula vitae* of the different choir conductors, international and national tours and performances and participation in highly acclaimed national or international events such as the National Congress of the American Choral Director's Association (ACDA) were mentioned, and also performances at the triennial event of the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM); and taking part in the Songbridge event held since 1999. In addition, participation in competitions and festivals and bigger events as illustrated by the words of Johansson in the foregoing, were mentioned. All these have to do with motivational aspects and broadening the musical perspective of the singers, as well as sensitising them to and equipping them with knowledge regarding other cultures and environments.

#### **4.4.4.6 Choreography**

*"Because children are emotional people, I find choreography a necessary element"* opines Svetozar. Saluveer supports her, mentioning that he often includes movements where applicable, especially in folk songs and lighter music of more popular origin.

#### 4.4.4.7 Acoustics

Loock, the only participant who responded with regard to this aspect, declares: *“I have to say this about acoustics: I prefer a dry acoustic because an excellent choir can sing in such an acoustic because it enhances transparency and the balance of the voices. In these circumstances, there must be balance between the voices; and the sound can even be more sonorous when the sound is darkened with care, so that it should not sound unnatural.”*

#### 4.4.4.8 Rehearsals

Generally speaking, outstanding work is not possible in any dimension of choral singing where team work is necessary if people do not strive diligently towards the all-important common goal of the rehearsal. Understandably, few participants commented on matters concerning the rehearsal routine of the outstanding children’s choir, because this seems to be such an obvious facet of excellent choral singing. However, some participants did contribute by way of their descriptions of individual strategies with regard to rehearsal schedules and practices.

Loock ventured to say: *“We practise on average six hours per week; four hours on a Saturday and two hours on a Tuesday night. Breaks are included in these time frames.”* Saluveer’s information is not as clear because he stated that his choir practised *“1,5 hours”*. To the researcher it seems that he was implying the length of one rehearsal and not necessarily the hours per week.

*“To work with an excellent choir requires hard work”* says Johansson and proceeds to explain their routine and his viewpoint regarding practices: *“The Adolf Fredrik Girls’ Choir rehearses twice a week, in the late afternoon after the normal school day. No matter whether I am rehearsing with the Swedish Radio Choir or with the Adolf Fredrik Girls’ Choir, I conduct a rehearsal the same way. The end results, if we can talk about such a thing in the artistic process, take differing lengths of time to reach, but the method of getting there is the same. It is a matter of taking seriously the people who are rehearsing; of creating a feeling, irrespective of age, that this is something important.”*

Moe stressed both the necessity of practices and the fact that they should be structured. He states: *“As conductors, we must learn to understand and appreciate the human learning process, so we can direct this process with encouragement and inspiration. You cannot escape hard work!”*

Although the time spent on rehearsals varies, these conductors seem to agree that it is crucial to spend sufficient time on it – especially if choral singing of international quality is envisaged.

#### **4.4.5 The structure of some choirs regarding system and age**

Some participants shared valuable new information with the researcher regarding the structure and age of the choir. Saluveer has a “feeding” system by means of which younger children from choirs with degrees of different developmental stages: *“We started with young groups of children and we started to sing easy songs; later, we began to use more difficult things such as canons and two- and three-voice pieces and eventually Estonian and international choir music.”*

Loock explains that *“the age of my children’s group is up to 14, though I know that some children’s choir have members that are 16 years of age. There are 100 singers in my group and from them, a smaller concert group is chosen for tours.”* Svetozar has one big choir and states *“my choir consists of about 100 singers. From them I choose 35 singers when we go on tour.”*

Some choirs consist of a number of “feeding” choirs. Moe’s choir, for instance, has a training choir from which the concert choir is selected. Johansson is part of a music school of a thousand members from which his forty members are selected to ultimately form the famous Girls’ Choir.

#### **4.4.6 The time-span needed by one conductor to build an international children's choir**

It may be possible that one able conductor, who has been working for a prolonged period with groups of singers, has the capability of building up an outstanding, international choir that can perform worldwide. If one scrutinises the history of the various

participants and their choirs, as well as other famous choirs, this pattern seems to be the norm. Moe, for instance, explains that *“my background is one of thirty years’ experience in 2002 as the conductor of the Nidaros Cathedral Boys’ Choir,”* while Johansson describes his situation regarding the famous Adolf Fredrik Girls’ Choir as: *“In 2004 I had been a music teacher at Adolf Fredrik Music Classes for 33 years. I founded the Adolf Fredrik Girls’ choir 31 years ago.”* He was still conducting the choir in 2008 when the researcher heard them perform in Copenhagen. Looock from South Africa said in 2008 that he had *“founded the Tygerberg Children’s Choir more than 30 years ago.”* Pohjola had conducted the Tapiola choir from 1963 to 1994 when Ala-Pöllänen took over. Saluveer explained that he had founded his TV Girls’ Choir in 1990 because he had become involved with a TV programme where a choir was able to play a prominent role.

The above information is also reflected in the *curricula vitae* of the different choir conductors, which can be considered a valuable reference with regard to this study.

#### **4.4.7 Psychological aspects**

It was clear that in the eyes of the participants psychological aspects are an important factor in the establishment of an outstanding choir. In this instance it must be borne in mind that this research was conducted without asking specific questions. The participants reacted to an open-ended question. Therefore the following reactions were of particular interest to the researcher.

##### **4.4.7.1 Discipline**

The only participant whose approach leaned towards strict discipline was Svetozha. She expressed herself thus: *“Children are not stupid - they know when they are not singing well; therefore, criticism is part of the physiological process in my choir.”*

##### **4.4.7.2 Emotions**

Gräbe is convinced that *“a child cannot sing if he/she is ill or sad and if the adult chooses to ignore the child’s emotions and health in critical situations, the negative consequences will reveal themselves later.”* This insight is shared by Svetozha who remarked earlier in the study, while discussing the necessity of choreography, that a child is an emotional being.



#### 4.4.7.3 Self-confidence

Johansson says: *“Everyone is needed in a choir; choir members sing in different ways – that is their right. Every individual has something special in his or her voice, in his or her talent which is unique. It would be just tedious if everyone sang with the same voice, with the same timbre. That’s why it’s important that you, as an individual are a member of our choir, even if you sing with, say, a weak voice. Everyone is needed! It is a question of building up self-confidence! Demanding just as much of everyone means the stimulation of every individual. The choir leader must let all children feel that they are of equal worth. I am something; I am needed! Using this attitude, I liberate an enormous musical force in which everyone understands that he/she is important. It is not only those with loud voices and who are of a dominant nature that counts.”*

Moe spoke from the perspective of the conductor as the focal point of positive energy and commented that it is the task of the conductor to show positive caring and to build up the self-confidence of the singers. *“As adults, I’m sure we have all sometimes recognised how insecurity can reduce our performing capability, or spoil the fun of finishing a task. Children feel the same and probably more so. Think about the very first rehearsal in the ‘Concert Choir’ for a boy who has just been transferred from the training choir. The first months for him are a never-ending journey through new material, difficult scores, foreign languages, new surroundings, new friends and a new conductor. No matter how talented this boy is, he will meet with a mixture of success and failure. Through these first months, the foundation of a good and secure singer is formed. This reveals how important it is that the conductor and his singers take care of this little person, who might be only eight or nine years old.*

In academic literature, the American social psychologist Abraham H Maslow described the importance of satisfying the need for confidence in order to perform on a high level. If one ruins self-confidence, one also ruins the singer; even the best singer can be disappointed about his/her own achievements and therefore needs the conductor’s attention and support. If a conductor forgets about the building of confidence, the best singers in a choir may be lost. Regarding this important aspect, Moe contributes the following: *“In comparison with other choir members, one can hear the difference in the sound of a child who sings with self-confidence. Therefore it is so important that children’s achievements be valued in a positive way.”*

#### **4.4.7.4 Respect**

Johansson focuses on the importance of respect that people must have for one another and for their differences: *“Irrespective of age and education, all people want to be taken seriously – everyone is aware of his or her intrinsic value. The choir leader should nurture everyone’s worth. This attitude trains us to respect differences ...”*

#### **4.4.7.5 Power of the positive**

For Johansson *“it is important that the children’s achievements be valued in a positive way. As directors, we must learn to emphasise the positive when we want to improve the negative. Repeated negative comments spoil the singer’s satisfaction and self-confidence, and do not create joyful singing; not only the conductor, but also the singers must learn to behave in an encouraging way to one another.”*

*“It is so important that the children’s achievements be valued in a positive way; this leads to the desired sound and intonation”* comments Moe on two of the most vital aspects of an excellent choir.

#### **4.4.7.6 Sense of solidarity and loyalty**

Johansson explains: *“Anyone can hear that the singers sing with different voices. If I have them sing together, it’s not unusual for an attractive harmony to result and this is due to the identities of the various voices. The blend of voices gives the choir its unique choir-sound. Without the individual voice, an important link is missing; everyone is needed for the harmony to be perfect. That is why it is not a private matter for a choir member to miss a rehearsal – the others need you. Choral members should do their best in the choir. Training in loyalty is important in order for a choir to work. This strengthens self-esteem and reinforces every individual’s self-image. There is solidarity in an outstanding choir; they are a family striving for the same aim. There is loyalty and respect for one another’s differences.”*

On this topic Moe contributes that *“to sing in an outstanding choir satisfies the need for confidence in order to achieve on a high level”*.

#### 4.4.8 Threats to today's outstanding children's choirs

Johansson warns repeatedly against the influence of new technology such as television and much of the new technology revolving around computers and their 'offspring' on children. This involves their social skills and promotes a new way of thinking for children. *"In my opinion the mass media work against serious young people's music by almost never drawing any attention to it. Our licence funds are being used to create a platform for the kind of music that will not outlast the day."*

#### 4.5 EMERGING TRENDS

In respect of the requirements for an excellent children's choir, the data analysis presented above brought to the fore a number of important differences in the opinions of the participants. The data that emerged from the interviews was indicated above. In the following section, the researcher will briefly highlight emerging trends concerning choral techniques in internationally acclaimed children's choirs as culminating in the collected data:

- Conductors play a pivotal role in the excellence of a choir.
- The psychological dimension of the relationship between the conductor and the children may not be ignored as it has a tremendous influence on the singers.
- A beautiful homogeneous tone is a necessity for a choir of stature.
- A specific sound image or sound 'ideal' is traditionally part of the characteristic sound of an internationally acclaimed choir.
- The versatility and individuality of voices in the choir, and the influence of language, affect the sound produced by the choir.
- Effective auditioning is of the utmost importance as it provides the conductor with the instrument with which appropriate choral techniques can be exercised, resulting in an internationally acclaimed choir. Vocal ability, musical talent including excellent inner hearing, tonal memory, the natural promise of resonance of the voice, ability of sight-singing and personality have to be considered by the conductor who must conduct the auditions him/herself.

- Technical exercises are of paramount importance. The choral voice has to be handled carefully and special attention has to be given to its development as a whole instrument. Knowledge and a healthy training programme are necessary for the development of both the body and the voice.
- Approved techniques regarding breathing, forming of vowels, legato singing and phrasing, as well as the development of a wide singing range and wide dynamic scale are necessary for good choral singing. Technical exercises on pronunciation and articulation and practising exact rhythm must be included in rehearsals.
- The development of excellent intonation is considered to be of the highest importance. The movable doh-system, mastering of solfège in some instances, development of inner hearing is necessary to promote excellent intonation.
- The development of a faultless intonation is paramount for building a choir of international standard.
- The repertoire and the choice of music are crucial as they have to be 'child-friendly'.
- A variety of performances, exposure to different audiences, tours, choreography and knowledge about acoustics are necessary for the development of a good choir.
- Regarding the importance of performances, all participants were in agreement that an exemplary choir needs very hard work and that rehearsals are part of that scenario.
- The policies of internationally famous choirs differ with regard to the ideal entrance age for new members, but most of these choirs have a feeding system of younger members striving to become part of the top choir in the system.
- It is not possible to have an excellent children's choir without discipline, and thus the power of positive emotional health of the members, self-confidence, respect for differences and a sense of solidarity and loyalty towards the choir are of the utmost importance.
- In a more negative vein, the opinion was voiced that the possibility may exist that the advanced all-pervasive presence of technology in our modern society might have a negative impact on choral singing in years to come.

## 4.6 SUMMARY

In summary, the researcher will strive to provide a thick description of the research findings by contextualising the outcomes of the data in terms of an experiential process from which certain results emerged. As stated in chapter 1 and in the introduction to the present chapter, the grounded theory perspective with its method of open-ended interviewing was followed, which according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994:508), is the most widely used qualitative interpretative framework operative in the social sciences today. Since it is the researcher's task to act as analyst and interpreter, the report on the data should exhibit a firm intellectual grip on the outcomes of the analysis, which involved a structuring and interpretation of the data.

In this regard, the researcher processed the data via the following three stages, namely:

- Open coding where the text is read through to identify key aspects.
- Axial coding (see addendum) where definite 'categories' were identified ('refined, developed and related or interconnected').
- The final stage of selective coding where the 'core category' was identified.

The data of this research was transcribed and formulated according to themes systematised in a matrix table. Trends were identified, allowing the researcher to identify key aspects of leading conductors' opinions on the forming of an international children's choir. It was further ascertained what they as individuals considered most important in this process, and thus their personalised understanding of the elements required for a children's choir to be classified as being of international standard could be captured.

The participant's reactions can be summed as follows:

As far as the success of choral techniques and the building of an outstanding children's choir are concerned, they were all convinced that the conductor "makes the choir, particularly in a children's choir." This person should also have specific gifts: he/she should be an outstanding educator and musician, together with espousing an excellent musical system as his/her goal. A healthy relationship between the children and the conductor is necessary for the singers to enjoy the activity and have confidence in it. The

participants were convinced that when children are involved in the choir experience with their whole being, the choir can achieve untold heights in their singing under the guidance of the conductor. From this bonding between the child and the conductor the musical experience is born.

It also became clear that self-motivated singers, who are loyal and responsible, are essential for an internationally outstanding choir. Though these children are individuals with independent personalities, by focusing on the choir, they will always prioritise the choir and its demands. Coveted as singers, the children will understand that every member is important to the whole. A conductor who promotes individuals of this calibre will have to understand the world of the child.

The sound of the instrument is considered to be of extreme importance and the techniques attached to, for instance correct breathing, were stressed as the secret of the essence of a good sound. The Finnish conductors emphasise the common sound wave that should exist in a choir and further stress the homogeneity of the sound.

On the whole, however, participants underlined the fact that there is no ideal 'perfect' choir sound because this sound ideal varies from culture to culture. It was clear that creativity, joy and freedom in the blend of the individual voices must be present.

The building of the instrument by way of effective auditions was viewed to be of prime importance. The researcher found it interesting that remarks were made regarding a disparity between the development of boys and girls. In general it was found that auditioned voices seem to be lower than in previous times. The voices tend to be based in the chest. Note memory is shorter than fifteen years ago. These observations are interpreted by the researcher as being potentially detrimental to the children's choir.

The idea that the musical instrument of a child, the voice, should be handled carefully is clearly a consideration stressed by all participants. They agreed that range and dynamic capacity differ from an adult voice. Therefore these leading authorities are of the opinion that each child should know how to use his/her voice correctly by encouraging all children to receive individual singing attention from a specialist. The hygiene of the voice and the many pitfalls that exist for the conductor in this regard were important to the

participants. It was argued that no voice should be allowed to work for more than a certain amount of time, for example preferably twenty minutes consecutively and definitely not in one *tessitura*. Because the musical instrument is part of the body a close watch on posture should be maintained, and the equal development of the whole range of the voice should be striven for.

The participants evidently harbour different views technical work with outstanding children's choirs. However, the importance of vocal techniques was mentioned, as well as the importance of keeping abreast of the latest developments in this field. Participants from Russia, Estonia and South Africa briefly referred to the negative effects that result from isolation due to the political circumstances of a particular country.

All participants indicated in their goals the sight-reading of notes, proficiency in *solfeggio* and solfa-singing, as well as singing by rote, knowledge of repertoire and a good choral technique. Apart from the emphasis on the technique of developing agility as an essential characteristic of the voice, it was stressed that a wide singing range of the voice should be developed, and that each singer should develop a wide dynamic scale for the voice.

The building of self-confidence in a singer was considered to be very important, as well as establishing respect towards one another. The participants focused on the importance of the conductor's positive attitude and the influence of such an attitude upon the singers.

## CLOSING PERSPECTIVE

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

*"A voice is one of the greatest of all gifts, and those with perception use it to add to the beauty of this earth of ours."*

Woodgate (1994:1)

As a documentation of choral techniques and their application in the context of the children's choir, this study focused on the various contributing factors for developing excellence in this instrument – a specialist choral category presenting unique didactic, technical and musical challenges.

The rationale for the study as set out in Chapter 1 stated that children's choirs of mixed and same gender groups emerged in the late 1930s, establishing themselves as a distinguished category of choral singing. This new phenomenon gained momentum through competitions and festivals, and later generated a body of scholarly knowledge via articles in educational periodicals and symposia. Exposure on television further contributed to a widespread international coverage of this instrument. Today the children's choir is internationally recognised as a choral form in its own right.

The data presented in this study brought two aspects to the fore. First, it became clear that certain techniques were necessary to acquire outstanding artistic results in the field of children's choral singing. Second, it was evident that certain strategies were needed to construct a milieu within which the above-mentioned techniques could be applied productively. The findings based on these guiding principles are summed up in the ensuing sections.



## 5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRESSION OF THE STUDY

Although some literature exist which focus on choral techniques for developing excellent children's choirs, it was indicated in the introduction of the study that the aim of this study is to expand the body of knowledge on choral techniques by investigating the specific and exclusive techniques and practices of internationally recognised choral conductors (cf. p. 1-2) on how to develop a children's choir of international standing. In order to further research the issues at stake, it was necessary to select an approach by means of which the topic could be thoroughly investigated to allow the emergence of academically sound findings.

A literature review comprising two separate chapters preceded the empirical investigation. The first of these investigated the general principles of conducting where the basic aspects of choral singing were examined according to the perspectives of a selection of respected authors. The aim of this review was to outline the aspects that were considered to be of special import in developing choral singing. The second review chapter focused more specifically on those aspects of choral singing that were of particular relevance to the development of the children's choir. Although not much literature was available on the children's choir as such, valuable information was gained from authors who showed a special interest in this field.

After the documentation of important approaches and strategies in the literature chapters, the data emerging from the literature review had to be verified empirically. The researcher was convinced that the information obtained from the literature study would be refined if compared to or contrasted with the inputs from outstanding conductors operating in the milieu of the children's choir. If this approach were to discover a disparity and/or consistency regarding choral techniques for children's choirs, the outcomes of this research could make a valuable contribution to the field of choral music.

The researcher was inspired by the methodological possibilities and philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research. Since this was an investigation of a musical phenomenon the study called for a method that would acknowledge research as a phenomenological enterprise (Miles & Huberman as in Niemann, 2007:27). Furthermore, a qualitative approach would allow the utilisation of processes whose values are explicit, and where authenticity is a key consideration.

A number of conductors of internationally renowned choirs were selected for participation in the study because the researcher was convinced that beyond their personal fields of experience they would all share a common understanding of the subject. Keeping in mind that all research deals with the (relative) question of the nature of reality, the researcher set out to search for the relative truth with regard to the study topic. An **open-ended question** seemed to be appropriate for allowing experienced conductors to document their beliefs originating from their personal spheres of aesthetic experience – a set of beliefs that guides their methods when working with an outstanding children's choir.

The participants had therefore deliberately been selected on the basis of their expertise and knowledge in the field of choral techniques for children's choirs and their overall knowledge of choral excellence, as well as for their expertise in judging children's choirs at international events. The participants had to be well-choral conductors renowned for their methods and the superior quality of their choirs in order to enhance the credibility of the data for this study.

Abiding by the guidelines for the collection of qualitative data, individual interviews were recorded on audio-tapes or via e-mail correspondence in the case of conductors who wished to reflect on the questions before responding.

The researcher continued to collect data until theoretical saturation had been reached and no new evidence emerged. The fact that there was saturation enhanced the validity and reliability of the data.

### **5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Although the limited availability of practical, qualitative research on children's choirs was one of the driving forces behind this research, it was also one of the limitations of the study. Most of the material cited in the literature chapters relate to choral work in the United States of America, Canada and the Scandinavian countries, which does not provide a balanced picture of the international arena. It is against this background that the researcher purposively included a number of participants from other countries, namely Estonia and Russia, in an attempt to reflect a more universal approach.

The search for an international medium of communication was also a hampering factor. Participants from Russia and Asian countries found it problematic to communicate in English, which made it difficult for the researcher to conduct member checks as part of the qualitative search for validity and reliability as previously obtained data could not be verified. Further research in this regard could address this limitation in order to overcome these gaps in information.

## **5.4 SYNTHESIS OF THE DATA**

The significant findings contained in the literature study in Chapters 2 and 3 have been compared with the qualitative data in Chapter 4. The data of the various sub-themes has been placed in a matrix table (Addendum B) as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1984). Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the coding and axial coding procedures were compared on a horizontal and vertical level: horizontally between the participants and vertically between the data obtained from the literature and the data from the qualitative investigation. The researcher strove to discover as many similarities or dissimilarities as possible within the findings of Chapters 2, 3 and 4. The data that emerged from the literature review and the qualitative investigation are summarised in Addendum A (with cross-references) to provide a basis for discussion. These findings will hence be reviewed.

### **5.4.1 The conductor**

The development of a choir, which would qualify as an international choir of standing, can be attributed to an outstanding conductor with exceptional abilities. Both the literature (2.2.1, 3.2) and the qualitative data (4.4.1) identified the conductor as the key-person in the choir who has the gift of developing musical talent, and possesses foundational musical knowledge. Such a person has to have qualities of leadership, psychological insight into children, and a disposition to work with children (2.2.2, 3.4, 4.4.1).

#### **5.4.1.1 Handling of the young voice**

Because the musical instrument of the young child is delicate and in a changing phase, the conductor should strive to handle the young voice with the utmost professional care. The participants agreed that one of the prominent factors that place a children's choir in

the highest category of excellence is the choir's homogeneous sound which at the same time exhibits evidence of naturalness (3.5.1, 4.4.2). This 'naturalness' (3.5.1) should also be present in the individual voice, which is derived from a healthy singing technique, as was evident from both the literature review (2.2.3, 3.5) and the qualitative data (4.4.2). While the ideals of a beautiful sound vary from culture to culture, it became evident that a common 'sound-ideology' exists which is part of the conductor's view of a desired, characteristic sound that stays constant over the years, and is carried over from one group to the next (4.4.2).

Technical work (3.5.2, 3.5.3, 4.4.3.3) forms an integral part of the choral techniques of an outstanding children's choir. Again, exercises must be chosen with care, keeping the requirements of the young instrument in mind. Findings taken from the literature and participant's views were in agreement that a well-planned training programme is of the utmost importance. This programme should include sight-singing based on different systems (e.g. from notes, in solfa and/or solfeggio) to develop a sharpening of aural capacities. Singing by rote and by heart were two aspects that were also discussed in this regard.

An aspect of the technical work which was deemed to be very important was that of breathing correctly (3.5.2, 3.5.3, 4.4.4.3), which contributes to improved intonation (2.2.6, 3.5.5). This aspect in turn was connected with the correct forming of vowels (2.2.5, 3.5.1). Since vowels are the carriers of the sound it was found that they could be changed according to the goals of cultures or repertoires to be sung. The technical ability of good legato singing was also an imperative (3.5.2). Phrasing should also never be forced, but rather left to develop over time. In this context conductors also stressed clear articulation and pronunciation as they are the carriers of the text (4.4.5.3), although time spent on this technical aspect seemed to vary from language to language. The data brought to the fore that Swedish is a notable example as the language is text- and vowel-friendly, and consequently needs less work from singers and conductors.

It can also be deduced from the qualitative data that agility (4.4.4.3) in the choral voice should be developed as it is imperative for enabling a choir to sing a wide and dynamic range when interpreting difficult music. It is also essential that the conductor stimulates

rhythmic acuity as this is an essential part of the musical 'outfit' of the singer. Therefore it was noted that a singer's rhythmic ability should be tested during auditions (3.3.2, 4.4.3.1).

#### **5.4.1.2 Auditioning**

Both the literature and the data indicate that the conductor auditions prospective choir members from the perspective of a well-formed conception of an ideal choral sound. It also became clear that auditions (2.2.1, 3.3.2, 4.4.3.1) are a non-debatable prerequisite for the development of excellent children's choirs. The participants emphasised, however, that musical talent is more important than a beautiful voice. From this followed that singers' musical intelligence needs to be supported by their musical memory. Therefore already at the time of auditions the conductor needs to assess the candidate's musical memory and his/her discernment of different pitches as well as a good rhythmical sense.

The participants emphasised the assessment of vocal control, diction, good pronunciation, vowel formation and level of sight-reading. It was recommended that the natural range of the voice should be notated, and that the conductor should use an a cappella rendering of a song which would provide special insight into intonation abilities.

The participants also pointed out certain declining tendencies within the domain of children's choirs, such as the fact that children's vocal range is now more limited than it was two or three decades ago. Furthermore, their voices tend to be based in the chest and the head voice is usually not developed sufficiently. Another challenge that emerged is the decline of musical memory in young singers.

From these observations it can be deduced that the role of the conductor is becoming more and more challenging as children's choirs increasingly enter the competitive global arena, and specific problems are encountered. Conductors therefore need to apply effective techniques in order to optimise the requirements for excellent choral singing. Those requirements will be discussed in the ensuing sections.

#### **5.4.1.3 Intonation**

According to the literature and the data obtained from the qualitative interviews, intonation is a core element of good singing (2.2.6, 3.5.5, 4.4.4.4). The ability of choir

members to pitch was regarded as the most important, non-negotiable facet of outstanding singing by a children's choir. It was argued that this skill could be improved by developing sight-singing skills through exercises that focus on changing chords during warm-up sessions. The use of hand-signs can assist the conductor to develop intonation abilities.

The research also revealed certain discrepancies between a cappella singing and singing with a tuned instrument (2.2.6, 4.4.3.4). The participants indicated that children's intonation can be improved if both the harmonic and melodic structures of the repertoire are viewed and practised separately.

#### **5.4.1.4 Sound**

Both literature and qualitative findings regarded the sound (2.2.3, 3.5, 3.5.1, 4.4.2) of an excellent choir as its most important facet. The building of quality sound was, however, seen as a time-consuming and continuing process. When a conductor incorporates his/her technical concepts, the tone quality of a choir develops and settles over time as a consistent, unique sound of that particular group. This sound becomes the trademark of the choir which is recognisable all over the world. In order to achieve this ideal the choir members need to share the sound-image unique to the choir, and impart it to new members (4.4.2, 3.5.1.3).

To be classified as excellent, this unique sound – although the perception of a unique sound varies according to cultures, languages and traditions – should become a homogeneous choir sound. This is achieved by members listening to each other, and by singers approaching vowels and consonants in a uniform way resulting in tonal homogeneity (3.5, 4.4.2). A good sound reflects brightness, clarity, and a sense of being natural (3.5.1), free and relaxed. This requires good breath control and articulation. Sound is produced through the control of air pressure: the diaphragm is the breath-controlling muscle and the abdomen can be considered as the generator of 'power' within this physiological structure. It is therefore imperative for the conductor to know how to optimise this function.

Sound was emphasised by many participants because it can be regarded as the main medium of expression of the choir. Resonance (2.2.5, 3.5, 3.5.1.4, 4.4.2) needs to be present for cultivating a rich sound. When working with children, the conductor needs to stimulate a sound produced with unreserved joy, optimising the identity of each voice. Conductors also have to work on the overtones (4.4.3.4) that should be present in the forming of vowels, which are the sound carriers and the pivotal points of vocal technique. The development of these technical aspects requires an ongoing effort on the part of the conductor. Another challenge is that of timbre changes which reflect the adjustments in the size of resonating cavities (3.5.1) because it is audible when the quality of the voice changes, for instance when children are singing a descending series of notes. Arpeggios and descending scales on different vowels can give the desired result of the equalisation of registers.

Tone was also considered to be an integral part of sound production, and it was pointed out that for the production of a beautiful tone, the child's body, mind and emotion have to be in harmony. In order to achieve this ideal conductors need to start with the warm-up of the voice (4.4.3.3), followed by voice exercises pursuing different technical and artistic goals (2.2.3, 3.5.1, 4.4.3.3). Exercises focussing on technical aspects, breathing and posture need to form part of every rehearsal (2.2.3, 3.5.2, 3.5.3, 4.4.3.3). When correct spinal alignment is present, vocal tone can flow uninhibited from a comfortably positioned larynx. There must be an understanding of the synergistic relationship between the skeleton, which forms the structure of the body, and the muscles, which provide shape and mobility. There needs to be correct alignment through the lengthening of the spine from its juncture with the skull right down to the lowest part of the lumbar spine. Precise neurological messages are sent from the brain to the body through this flexible spine. In sound production the lungs, breath, larynx, resonating cavities and the mouth play the most important role because breathing is the basis of singing. The breathing apparatus (3.5.2, 3.5.3) is of the utmost importance in the formation of vocal tone.

Because tone is created by the vocal chords, it has to be reinforced in order to become beautiful, colourful and strong. This reinforcement takes place in the cavities of the

mouth, nose and in the throat, and vocal exercises such as humming on the consonant **m**, **n**, **ng**, are an acclaimed method to explore different resonance cavities (2.2.5). When tone is produced correctly it will naturally resonate in all available areas resulting in a good legato (3.5.2).

However, the development of the choral sound (2.2.3) does not only rely on the projection of a particular sonic ideal, but also on the development of the children's vocal abilities. Sensible vocalises are indispensable for the development of an individual vocal technique and as such, the relaxation of the body, a well-aligned posture, and correct breathing to optimally utilise the vocal instrument, need to be practised (2.2.3, 3.5.2, 3.5.3, 4.4.3.3).

#### **5.4.1.5 Repertoire**

The music selected for singing (3.6, 3.6.1) is an important facet of good choral singing. The choice of the repertoire is directly related to the aims of the choir and therefore all choices should be musically and pedagogically justifiable. Moreover, repertoire should be useful yet versatile in particular contexts. It was considered the responsibility of the conductor to have an in-depth knowledge of the topic (2.1.1, 2.2.9, 3.6.1, 4.4.4.2).

It was also pointed out that the conductor is responsible for selecting music of lasting value, including classical music (3.6.1). The statement was made that good music motivates (3.6) and that real artistic talent brought about its composition (2.2.8), which requires a conductor who is in command of the selected repertoire and who has the enthusiasm and capability to handle demanding interpretations. Some participants considered repertoire choices so important by that they were regarded as being directly related to the success of a choir. It was also believed that repertoire should be chosen for its propensity to create a relationship between the music and the children, while simultaneously using the children's voices correctly (3.6). All music should preferably be memorised (3.8, 4.4.4.4).

The repertoire for a children's choir should preferably include commissioned pieces (3.6) and original music from the choir's home country, but folk music from other countries, performed in the correct idiom, can also be suitable. The information from the literature and the participants confirmed that children love challenges (3.6), implying that difficult



music of lasting value can be included, but that it requires hard work. The participants preferred composed music to arranged music and transcriptions (3.6), although some defended the value of good-quality arrangements (4.4.4.4).

It was argued that twentieth and twenty-first century music could offer special pedagogic possibilities (2.1, 2.2.9, 3.6.1). Participants said that children are sometimes afraid of interpreting certain pieces because of their fear of singing demanding music incorrectly (4.4.4.4). New (modern) music provides a unique opportunity to let children improvise and sing clusters through which their ability to interpret more traditional music could also improve.

It was also found that early music and folk music could fulfil specific didactic functions as these form part of the precious cultural heritage of a specific nation. Gregorian chant and contemporary choir music seem to be well received as choices, but the participants warn that the choice of music must always be within the child's field of understanding. If necessary, one can experiment with jazz and popular music, but both the conductor and the choir should be satisfied with the emotional and artistic content of the music chosen, whatever the style (3.6, 3.6.1).

The participants pointed out that it should be taken into consideration that older children in a children's choir are more emotional and therefore a repertoire should be selected to accommodate their needs as well (3.6.1). Ultimately the music should be interesting to all – the conductor, the singers and the audience (2.2.8). It was found that choirs have a great potential for building bridges between countries, religions and races.

The entire repertoire chosen by the conductor must be thoroughly studied by him/her. Literature and participants alike stressed the importance of the conductor's preparation (2.2.9), emphasising that he/she should have the music at his/her fingertips enabling him/her to sing all vocal lines personally.

Because conductors have to communicate with the chosen repertoire on such a personal and intimate level, it was felt that their communication with the music should be well grounded to enable them to lead the singers to understand the formal aspects of the music, and explain texture and other musical concepts used in the composition (2.2.9).

It has been mentioned that the melody should have the qualities of excellence and richness of harmony (3.6.1). It was felt that the rhythm should form a natural part of the composition, and logic and a strong compositional structure should be evident (3.6, 3.6.1). Using different instruments (3.6) for variation was seen as commendable because this could add colour to the characteristic sound of a children's choir.

The participants also noted that text and language correlate (2.2.8, 3.6.1, 4.4.4.1) in a unique way, as they are associated with the particular singing sound of a children's choir from a specific country. Where applicable, texts should be explained to the children. Almost all texts are based on poetry and the performance of the music flows from the text to the music. Therefore the participants felt that a deeper understanding of the work's compositional texture and its lyrics contributes powerfully to conveying the message of the song.

Although some conductors differed on this point, it was generally advocated that the text of a chosen piece should have an affinity for the nature and concerns of young people today.

The interrelatedness between the text and the language (2.2.8, 3.6.1, 4.4.4.1) often seems to be a bone of contention going as far back as Kodály. In this regard most conductors indicated that they are in favour of singing in the original language, because wrong accents may not only result in the loss of the original sound, but also in the meaning of words. If possible folk music should be sung in the original language, but some leeway should be allowed for originally composed music, as well as music of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It was found that translations seldom strictly adhere to the original versions of compositions.

Natural, clear and excellent diction and pronunciation in any language was deemed to be very important. The participants were of the opinion that the choir gives personality and character to the song (4.4.4.2), and that diction therefore often works in conjunction with the style. There was a definite agreement that an overemphasis of consonants could be detrimental to both the style and the legato line.

It was felt that the choir should speak to the audience through the musicality of their interpretation and stylistically correct phrasing (4.4.4.4). The different emotions they express in their singing and interpretation ought to move the souls of the audience (2.2.8). Because children are expressive human beings, the implication is that the repertoire should reflect that asset in view of the interpretation of the music.

The view was expressed that the conductor should not obstruct the expression of the composition (2.1). However, this should not keep the conductor from realising a specific sound ideal.

The choice of different repertoires was considered to be of utmost importance (4.4.4.1) when a musical communication between the performer and the listener is established (2.2.8). In this regard a cappella choices from various historical periods and national styles were viewed as appropriate choices for the advanced children's choir (4.4.4.1). Musical choices should be interesting for the singers, the conductor, and for the audience, because it was felt that a choir must always produce the most suitable repertoire for every kind of performance (2.2.8, 4.4.4.1). The view was also expressed that young choir members could contribute to the interpretation of music performed by expressing their ideas on the interpretation, which the conductor could then evaluate (4.4.4.1).

It was pointed out that factors positively influencing a performance were self-confidence and stage experience (4.4.4.1), as well as a balance between naturalness, dynamic sparkle and focused discipline.

Because children experience choral singing as fun, each performance should be a joyous experience. An appreciative audience brings out the best in their performance, but participants argued that this can only happen if children sing from memory (4.4.4.1), optimally promoting the communication between them and their audience. In addition it was felt that the conductor should 'stand aside' as it were and let the music 'speak for itself' (4.4.4.1).

Practising long hours to develop the musical instrument should be motivated by performances, and a sense of responsibility towards this specific goal should be striven for, but should also focus on other choral-related activities. One of the conductors

mentioned that their choir school gives an annual Lucia concert in the Stockholm Globe Arena, which seats 10 000 people. This concert is sold out to capacity audiences three times each year. Excellent children's choirs take part in opera productions, and large choral productions such as Britten's War Requiem. They are elite groups who go on tours and make recordings. It can be deduced from this that children's choirs should be exposed to a variety of performance opportunities, and to different milieus and settings, which will contribute to the choir's maturity.

Taking part in official ceremonies where applicable was also seen as a positive experience. Exposure to public performances inevitably implies that choir tours will follow. Excellent choirs tour for various reasons, but generally it was considered to be a most positive incentive to singers. Tours should be viewed as 'natural events' in the existence of a choir. They do not only further the development of the singers, but they also give groups more exposure, and may also nurture broader social perspectives while developing responsibility levels and a group sense.

## **5.4.2 Choral performances**

### **5.4.2.1 Choreography**

The literature as well as the participants indicated that nowadays the choral community must compete with the visual side of technology. One of the ways in which this can be done is by including multimedia presentations and choreography in performances (3.9).

Some recently composed works for children's choirs contain the explicit use of choreography (3.9). Conductors voiced the opinion that because children are emotional (4.4.4.6), choreography may be regarded as a crucial element of good choral singing, especially in the case of folk music and music of popular origin (3.9). Both choreography and multimedia presentations already seemed to be part of the current children's choir scene (3.9).

#### **5.4.2.2 Acoustics**

It is a necessity for informed choral conductors to be knowledgeable about this vast topic, but because of the scientific elements coupled with this dimension of choral singing, both the participants and the literature indicated that it is a specialised topic. The researcher does not want to omit this aspect, but because very few participants commented on it, and because the projected sound of a choir during performances under different acoustics also depends on a number of external factors, it is regarded as not falling within the domain of this study.

#### **5.4.2.3 Rehearsals**

Evidence of outstanding work in any dimension of choral singing only exists if tangible results are present. The results emanate from hard work as well as the constant rehearsing of particular techniques, and the application of this knowledge to the outcomes envisaged for each chosen piece of music (2.2.9, 4.4.4.8).

While time frames were seldom indicated in the literature, the participants gave some indications in the qualitative research as to the time allocated for choir practices: some as many as six hours per week. The general view was that the artistic process of getting ready for the performance of a chosen piece of music involved different periods for each piece of music, although the method of achieving this always stayed the same. It was unanimously agreed that conducting an excellent choir is hard work, and that rehearsals remain very important. It was also felt that the learning process had to be understood and appreciated by the conductor.

Though the time spent on rehearsals may vary, conductors seemed to agree that it remains crucial that sufficient time is spent on them – especially if choral singing of world-class quality is envisaged.

### **5.4.3 Operational structures**

#### **5.4.3.1 System and age**

It has become clear from the literature and the qualitative investigation that in most cases internationally acclaimed choirs have a feeding source of younger choirs in training from which the ultimate concert choir is chosen (4.4.5). In the younger choirs children commence with developing aspects such as sight-reading, aural capacities, theoretical and musical knowledge, as well as the singing of easier repertoires of quality.

#### **5.4.3.2 Time-span of preparation**

It seems that some conductors, who have been working with groups of singers for a prolonged period, possess the special ability of building an excellent international choir. If the history of the participants and their choirs, as well as other famous choirs in literature is scrutinised, vast experience and years of dedication pointed to the achievement of excellence. Therefore excellent international choirs follow a disciplined time schedule of practising to achieve goals.

### **5.4.4 Psychological aspects**

In the literature section of this study (2.2, 3.4) the leadership of the conductor was briefly discussed as well as the need to follow a positive approach when dealing with children during rehearsals and subsequent performances. In the qualitative research participants, in their reaction to an open-ended question, completed this picture with interesting artistic shades (4.4.7).

All of them found psychological aspects to be of the utmost importance for building an outstanding choir. One participant's response was that since children know immediately when they are not singing well, criticism should be part of the musical process. It was also stressed that conductors should not ignore the child's ideas since the consequences of such an approach would have a negative effect at a later stage (4.4.7.1). It was pointed out that the fact that the child is an emotional human being (4.4.7.2) should never be forgotten, and that therefore the building of self-confidence is essential in all its facets as

children are not necessarily always confident about their abilities. The participants felt that conductors who ruin the self-confidence of one singer run the risk of ruining the confidence of the whole choir.

The participants spoke from their perspective as conductors as a focal point of positive energy, and commented that it is the task of the conductor to show positive caring and to build the self-confidence of the singers (4.4.7.3). Singers showed a marked preference for a conductor who views choristers positively as individuals, and approaches them individually according to their special abilities. They felt that under these circumstances positive forces could be released and individual contributions could be optimally realised. Most of the participants felt that the difference in the sound of a child who sings with self-confidence is clearly audible (4.4.7.3).

The children should also be taught to respect differences (4.4.7.4) by following the example set by the conductor. A positive approach is a power of unbelievable strength if nurtured. The participants pointed out that this promotes joyful singing and overrides any negative feelings, and that trust is built when singers behave in an encouraging way towards one another (4.4.7.5).

A sense of solidarity and loyalty (4.4.7.6) seems to be of paramount importance for a good choir as it is directly related to the members' presence at every rehearsal. Without the presence of every individual voice, an important link is missing and harmony cannot be created. Members constantly need to strive to do their best and to be loyal to the choir. It was pointed out that a feeling of coherence is very important, as there must be a feeling that they are one 'family' striving towards the same end product.

## **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

In retrospect this study aimed at documenting the opinions of renowned conductors of children's choirs with a view to making a didactic contribution to the field of choral studies. The major trends that emerged from this study will form the basis of the following framework for working with children's choirs:

- Meaningful and well-constructed auditions are a necessity.
- Musical talent is more important than a beautiful voice and the ability to discern different pitches, musical memory, a sense of rhythm, as well as sight-singing and the ability to sing a song a cappella need to be assessed.
- Good pronunciation, intonation, and positive personality traits should be considered during the auditioning process.
- Conductors need to strive towards the sound of a natural voice, which should be bright, clear, free and relaxed.
- A joyous production of sound should be stimulated among children.
- The child's voice is the instrument of performance and thus needs to be nurtured and developed by focussing on the breathing anatomy of the child.
- The limitations of the child's voice must be respected. This is of particular importance in the young child where resonance cavities are smaller.
- Mutation occurs in both sexes and a conductor must understand the range and dynamic capacities of children's voices. The changing voice must not stop choristers from singing during this phase.
- The ideal is to let the singers do individual training in voice techniques with a specialised singing tutor.
- Vocal warm-up sessions are imperative during rehearsals. The registers must also be changed to avoid hurting the voice, and an eye must be kept on posture. Exercises for correct breathing and the development of resonance must always be part of the warm-up sessions.
- A general rule would be that voices must not be hoarse after a practice.
- Technical work, including the face, posture, and spinal alignment and a relaxed body need to be a constant focus.



- The young voice should be exercised through its whole range to keep it healthy. A child must first gain the use of the singing voice before for instance intonation problems can be evaluated.
- Practising articulation via a variety of easily accessed literature is necessary when dealing with text interpretations in repertoire.
- Knowledge of music theory is important for reading scores as well as sight-singing from notation. In some instances the solfeggio system is used.
- Singing by ear is a necessary developmental exercise for musical memory.
- Conductors must keep up to date by attending high-profile symposia and workshops, and reading new literature in hard copy as well as on the internet.
- The choices of music sung by internationally competing choirs are more difficult and thus often differ from that of ordinary children's choirs.
- Conductors need to compile an appropriate repertoire. The performance of the repertoire will commence with the studying of such a work by the conductor and his/her knowledge of the compositions before the works are presented to the children. The conductor should know the music so well that he/she is able to sing the vocal lines of each part.
- When selecting music for the repertoire, dimensions such as pedagogical usefulness should be considered, and compositions from one's own country, as well as versatile 'classical' pieces should be included.
- Because music of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries has new techniques, for example, whispering, speaking and other effects, notice should be taken of a whole new musical world.
- All repertoire choices should be of excellent artistic and musical quality.
- All repertoire choices should serve as a counterbalance to commercial music. It can be put forward that good music of lasting value stays part of the child forever as good music motivates and creates the desire in children to sing music of value.

- Compositions should be chosen which children can relate to. Because children love challenges, conductors should understand and appreciate the human learning process.
- The chorister should be guided to the kind of emotion expressed in the selected repertoire and assisted in interpreting the piece.
- The text of the music can inspire musical expression and establish communication with the audience. Singers can become powerful instruments in conveying meaning through the text of songs.
- Children should not be asked to sing serious love songs. Therefore no patronising or compromising texts should be considered.
- Weak translations should not be allowed; excellent poetry should rather be chosen.
- Techniques such as reading and dramatising texts of selected repertoires will facilitate the musical interpretation. It is important that the sound of the original language in a text is stressed, but there should also be sensitivity towards different performance possibilities based on historical or cultural considerations.
- Argumentation for singing in the original language of the repertoire chosen is very strong, because the explicit meaning may be lost in translations.
- Because diction related to music often works in conjunction with the style, the same kind of diction cannot be used when other styles are tackled.
- An excellent children's choir should be able to sing with perfect pronunciation in any language.
- A well-prepared rehearsal inspires and enriches choral members through the knowledge about achieving an artistic result from the music studied. The process can only be successful if all the choristers attend and the conductor is fully conversant with the new work in all its facets.
- The conductor also needs to have a time schedule in order to deliver the mature end product to audiences during performances.

- Excellent choirs may spend at least five to six hours per week on rehearsals as choral members understand that practising in a high-profile choir needs dedication and hard work.
- A balanced concert programme should include a variety of emotions and experiences with an educative, entertaining and inspiring purpose, regardless of the theme. Coherence should, however, be present in the programme.
- Musicality and phrasing must be clear to the audience, as also the expressing of emotion by the choir. When the children are on stage they should have a natural, dynamic sparkle and focussed discipline with regard to the music and their own appearance on stage. If a choir wants to win over the audience through the rendering of the music and by means of their personalities, all music should be memorised to allow the communication of an element of joy present in the singing to the audience.
- All choirs should have the goals to perform, to tour and be exposed to new experiences, and to meet other groups with the same interest, namely choral singing.
- The conductor has to foster loyalty and a sense of responsibility towards the choir.
- Apart from ordinary concert situations, excellent choirs should also take part in musical productions on a large scale including operas and orchestral presentations.
- Because children are emotional beings, movement must be considered a necessary element of choral singing, and it has now become general practice to include movements in singing, both in serious and popular music, as well as indigenous performances.
- Choreography has increasingly become part of the choral scene, together with the use of more technical and visual media as evident during the 8<sup>th</sup> World Symposium on Choral Music from 19 to 26 July 2008 in Copenhagen, Denmark, and conductors should take note of this development.
- The age of incoming choir members may vary from choir to choir, but it is a generally accepted fact that very young children also ought to, and should be included in choirs, especially feeding choirs.

- Feeding choir(s) or choir schools from which the concert choir is chosen have become a general practice for excellent children's choirs.
- The conductor needs to possess qualities of deep understanding, involvement and emotional conception of his/her choristers.
- Self-confidence is a valuable asset which has to be nurtured because all children need it to be able to perform at a higher level. Thus conductors need to concentrate on promoting this physiological facet.
- Negative comments should be avoided, as they do not produce joyful singing and self-confidence in the child. If achievements are valued in a positive way, it contributes towards achieving the desired sound and intonation.
- There must be a sense of solidarity, nurtured by the conductor, among all members of the choir – a 'family' striving towards the same goal, while simultaneously respecting one another's differences.

In view of the emerging importance of children's choirs as choral category, it is recommended that academics and conductors, alike, embark on continuous research on effective techniques and that researchers publish valuable findings in this regard.

## 5.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The research presented in this study was based on the point of view that the rise of children's choirs as one of the recognised categories in Western choral music has evolved so dynamically during the past decades that there is now ample opportunity for scholarly investigation.

By means of exploring a range of theoretical, practical and artistic issues it was the aim of this project to document and describe as fully as possible the music-technical foundations of choral singing within this context as recorded in the literature, and practised by leading conductors in the field. It became evident that to date there is no detailed qualitative investigation of those elements needed to develop children's choirs as a highly specialised type of vocal instrument. It was this deficiency that the researcher wished to address.

The strength of the data recorded in this study lies in its dense description of 'consistent' factors regarding choral techniques for children's choirs, simultaneously highlighting idiosyncratic approaches and views of eminent conductors within this field. The objectives of the study were realised through a literature survey and a qualitative investigation based on methodologically sound principles.

The research presented here thus provides an academically substantiated and professionally authenticated reference work to all involved in the training of children's choirs. Gained from the vantage point of qualitative research and a methodical conceptualisation of all parameters involved in choral singing, the ultimate findings of the study might benefit both practical and theoretical concerns. It is envisaged that the outcome of this project will interest both local and international scholars and conductors, and that this study will serve as a starting point for further research on the topic.

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## **CHORAL TECHNIQUES FOR CHILDREN'S CHOIRS: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH**

Children's choirs gained recognition during the twentieth century as an acclaimed category in Western choral music. This choral category's subsequent dynamic evolvement has brought to the fore the need to broaden the knowledge of specialised rehearsal and conducting techniques, especially in view of its internationally competitive nature.

As part of the growing body of knowledge in the field, conductors have contributed to the development of the instrument through the design of didactic methods generating specific artistic results. The evidence of studies on the topic, and in particular, the lack of qualitative data, highlighted the need to systematically investigate and document all music-technical foundations of children's choral singing as practised by leading conductors in the field.

It is the aim of this study to explore a range of theoretical, practical and didactic issues by way of a qualitative investigation. In order to contribute to the body of knowledge on the development of the vocal instrument of children, and to provide a substantive framework for conducting methods generating specific artistic results, this study documents the responses of a number of world-renowned conductors of children's choirs.

The study is introduced by a brief overview of the historical background to the evolvement of the children's choir. In this regard it has been found that the remarkable development of this choral category during the course of the last century was stimulated in particular by various inputs from the educational and compositional field, from which a unique choral pedagogy for children that included both voice skills and voice health training was realised during the 1980s. It also became clear that conductors contributed considerably to the evolvement of this choral category by means of their active engagement with the field, and by disseminating experience and knowledge through publications, symposia and workshops.

A literature study first examined general aspects of choral directing, which were then particularised in terms of the children's choir. A qualitative study followed that documented the views of various renowned conductors, which amplified the preceding literature findings on certain techniques the conductor should apply to build the child's voice expertly as an instrument of musical excellence.

The data chapter not only reiterated the important role of the conductor, but confirmed that the conductor's role extends beyond the musical director's function to that of nurturer and educationalist, which also includes a strong psychological dimension. It was made clear that the role of the conductor is vital already during the auditioning and

repertoire selection processes, where the potential success of the choir originates. The musical ability of children carries more weight than the quality of an individual voice, and therefore has to be assessed in a variety of effective ways. It was also stressed that the repertoire for this choral category has to be suitable for children, taking into account aspects such as level of performance, language and cultural background, as well as musical variety.

The findings showed a strong correlation between the literature and the qualitative data, although the latter provided a rich individualistic account. It was clear that choral techniques for this instrument should be holistic in approach, starting with the body posture and working towards the creation of a desired homogeneous choral sound through touching on numerous physical and psychological aspects. As part of this process, the conductor needs to focus on elements of choral sound such as relaxation, breathing, registers, vowels, phrasing, legato singing, pronunciation, articulation and agility, resonance, pitching and intonation.

Finally the study offered recommendations for present and future conductors of children's choirs to enhance this art form, and extend the excellence of this type of choral singing at national and international level.

**Key words/concepts:**

CHILDREN'S CHOIR / QUALITATIVE RESEARCH / CONDUCTOR / CHORAL  
TECHNIQUES / SOUND / REPERTOIRE / INTONATION / AUDITIONS / VOCAL  
INSTRUMENT

## **KOORTEGNIEKE VIR KINDERKORE: 'N KWALITATIEWE BENADERING**

Gedurende die twintigste eeu het kinderkore erkenning begin geniet as 'n erkende kategorie in Westerse koormusiek. Dit het sedertdien só dinamies ontwikkel dat die noodsaak om kennis rakende gespesialiseerde repetisie- en dirigeertegniese uit te brei, toenemend op die voorgrond getree het, veral in die lig van die internasionaal-kompeterende aard van kinderkoorsang.

As deel van die steeds toenemende kennisgeheel op hierdie gebied, het dirigente bygedra tot die ontwikkeling van die instrument deur die ontwikkeling van didaktiese metodes wat spesifieke artistieke resultate oplewer. Navorsing oor die onderwerp, en in die besonder die gebrek aan kwalitatiewe data, het die behoefte laat ontstaan om alle musikaal-tegniese grondbeginsels met betrekking tot kinderkoorsang, soos deur leidende dirigente op die gebied toegepas word, sistematies te ondersoek en te dokumenteer.

Dit is die oogmerk van hierdie studie om 'n verskeidenheid teoretiese, praktiese en didaktiese kwessies aan die hand van 'n kwalitatiewe ondersoek na te vors. Hierdie studie dokumenteer die response van 'n aantal wêreldberoemde dirigente van kinderkore ten einde by te dra tot 'n kennisgeheel oor die ontwikkeling van die vokale instrument van kinders, asook om 'n wesenlike raamwerk te verskaf vir dirigeermetodes wat spesifieke artistieke resultate teweegbring.

Die studie word ingelei deur 'n bondige oorsig van die historiese agtergrond tot die ontwikkeling van kinderkore. In hierdie verband is dit bevind dat die merkwaardige ontwikkeling van hierdie koorkategorie in die loop van die vorige eeu veral gestimuleer is deur verskeie insette vanuit die opvoedkundige en kompositoriese gebied, wat in die 1980's 'n unieke koorpedagogiek vir kinders daargestel het wat sowel stemvaardighede as gesonde stemopleiding ingesluit het. Dit het ook duidelik geword dat dirigente heelwat bydra tot die ontwikkeling van hierdie koorkategorie by wyse van 'n aktiewe betrokkenheid in die veld, asook deur die verspreiding van kennis en ervaring deur middel van publikasies, simposiums en werksinkels.

'n Literatuurstudie het eerstens algemene aspekte van koorleiding ondersoek, waarna dit spesifiek in terme van die kinderkoor afgebaken is. Hierop het die kwalitatiewe studie gevolg waarin die standpunte van verskeie vermaarde dirigente gedokumenteer is wat die voorafgaande literatuurbevindinge ondersteun oor hoe die dirigent sekere tegniese behoort toe te pas om die kind se stem op vaardige wyse uit te bou tot 'n instrument van musikale uitnemendheid.

Die datahoofstuk beklemtoon nie slegs die belangrike rol van die dirigent nie, maar bevestig ook die feit dat die rol van die dirigent verby die funksie van musikale direksie strek tot by dié van opvoeder en versorger, met 'n sterk sielkundige dimensie. Dit word duidelik dat die rol van die dirigent reeds van deurslaggewende belang is tydens die oudisie en by die keuse van repertorium, wat die grondslag van die potensiële sukses van die koor vorm. Die musikale vermoë van kinders dra meer gewig as die gehalte van 'n individuele stem, en moet dus gevolglik op 'n verskeidenheid doeltreffende wyses geassesseer word. Dit word ook beklemtoon dat die repertorium vir hierdie koorkategorie geskik moet wees vir kinders, met inagneming van aspekte soos vlak van voordrag, taal en kulturele agtergrond, asook musikale verskeidenheid.

Die bevindings toon 'n sterk korrelasie tussen die literatuur en die kwalitatiewe data, alhoewel laasgenoemde 'n ryk, individualistiese verslag bied. Dit is duidelik dat koortegniese vir hierdie instrument holisties benader behoort te word, wat begin met liggaamshouding en voortgesit word in die skep van 'n verlangde homogene koorklank deur gebruik te maak van verskeie fisiese en psigologiese aspekte. As deel van hierdie proses moet die dirigent fokus op elemente van koorklank soos ontspanning, asemhaling, register, vokale, frasing, legato-sang, uitspraak, artikulasie en vaardigheid, resonansie, toonplasing en intonasie.

Ten slotte bied die studie aanbevelings vir huidige en toekomstige dirigente van kinderkore ten einde hierdie kunsvorm te verbeter en die uitnemend van hierdie tipe koorsang op nasionale en internasionale vlak uit te bou.

### **Sleutelbegrippe**

KINDERKOOR / KWALITATIEWE NAVORSING / DIRIGENT / KOORTEGNIEKE /  
KLANK / REPERTORIUM / INTONASIE / OUDISIES / VOKALE INSTRUMENT

## *Addendum B*

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# MATRIX TABLES

## *Addendum A*

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# **DATA FROM LITERATURE REVIEW AND QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION**

<b>FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW</b>  <b>Chapters 2 &amp; 3</b>	<b>QUALITATIVE FINDINGS</b>  <b>Chapter 4</b>
<b>THE CONDUCTOR</b>	
<p>It seems that there is agreement on the general fact that from the conductor (2.2.1) comes all artistic leadership and that he/she must be in command of certain capabilities regarding musicianship, personality and knowledge on conducting. As far as the children's choir is concerned (3.2) authors similarly stressed the artistic and musical abilities needed by an excellent conductor, since all facets of musical growth depend on his/her insight.</p> <p>The conductor should, apart from having exemplary musical knowledge, provide musical leadership as well as personal guidance. The balancing of cognitive and psychological dimensions in the relationship of the conductor to the children was emphasised in the literature (3.4), pointing out that the conductor should be involved with the positive development of each child.</p>	<p>With regard to the conductor (4.4.1) the participants agreed upon definite artistic abilities that are part of the conductor of an excellent children's choir.</p> <p>In their view excellent musicianship, as well as demonstrating sound educational abilities, are of paramount importance.</p> <p>The conductor also has a psychologically important function. The eminent conductors Pohjola and Ala-Pöllänen are of the opinion that <i>"The conductor makes the choir, particularly a children's choir"</i>.</p>
<b>SOUND OF THE MUSICAL INSTRUMENT</b>	
<p>The literature provided overwhelming evidence as to the importance and uniqueness of sound production of an excellent choir in general and the children's choir in particular (2.2.3; 3.5. 3.5.1).</p> <p>It was argued (3.5.1) that when a conductor incorporates his/her own concept of choral techniques, the tonal quality develops and settles in time as a consistent and unique sound of that particular group.</p> <p>Various writers emphasised that the group should have a common understanding of the desired sound.</p> <p>It was also indicated that the group as a whole must have one ideology and one understanding of the desired quality of the sound, and that the stability of 'choral memory' leads to the establishment of a characteristic sound for a particular choir.</p> <p>The view was also expressed that a child should gain proficient use of the singing voice before other problems can be touched on.</p>	<p>The sound of the choir (4.4.2) was to all participants of the utmost importance. Its development was seen as a time-consuming, ongoing process.</p> <p>The participants were also of the opinion that the sound of a choir becomes its trademark and that the conductor should create a unique, characteristic sound that would be recognisable all over the world.</p> <p>Choir members should impart this sound-image to new choir members.</p> <p>The participants also stated that the ideal of a beautiful singing sound varies a lot according to culture, language, and tradition. Though the ideal of a beautiful choral sound may vary, participants agreed that there should be a homogeneous choir sound.</p> <p>The versatility of voices should be developed so that members can perform music from different contexts and transform their voices according to the performance conventions of the music to be performed.</p>



<p>The development of the singing voice may also be approached from a cultural perspective.</p> <p>Writers stress the homogeneity of voices for an excellent sound (2.2.3; 3.5).</p> <p>Literature research (3.5.1) indicated that authors are in favour of the principle that the natural voice, as emerging from the sounds of a baby, is an excellent point of departure. 'Natural' abilities (3.5.1) should therefore be developed: the natural functions of the voice should serve the artistic needs for good singing.</p> <p>In the production of excellent sound, children should listen to each other (3.5.1).</p> <p>To reach this goal, various technical exercises, for instance those focussing on breathing and posture, were discussed.</p> <p>Resonance (2.2.5) was emphasised by many authors as being of great import, leading to the overtones that should be present in the forming of vowels, which, in turn, are the carriers of the sound, and may thus be seen as a pivotal point of vocal technique.</p> <p>Sound production and the young voice (3.5) have many facets. With regard to this aspect, it became evident that the prolonged work of one conductor is often of decisive import. Beautiful tone, according to the sources, involves body, mind and emotion. The end product should be a homogeneous sound, where singers approach the vowels and consonants in a uniform way leading to tonal homogenisation.</p> <p>The handling of registers, the importance of resonance in the young voice, and its relationship to vowels, were also underlined (3.5.1).</p> <p>The connection between language and sound production was discussed.</p> <p>Singing customs (3.5.1) do influence sound and may also in some instances negatively affect the availability of soprano voices. Sound should be of sustained and intense quality and in this connection legato singing is very important as well as the intense work relating to phrasing that realises only after a certain period of time.</p>	<p>It was stressed that the desired sound should be as natural as that of a newborn baby, and that the natural sound-reflex which children lose as they grow older, should be found again: in this older choir members had to help new members in finding that voice-reflex.</p> <p>An ideal sound, according to the participants, should have brightness, clarity, be natural, and be produced with good breath control and articulation. Resonance should be present and the sound should be produced with unreserved joy.</p> <p>Language was also indicated as having a strong influence on choral tone and on the character of the piece chosen. The period, from which the repertoire dates, was also found to be an important influence.</p>
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<b>AUDITIONING</b>	
<p>Auditions are an important facet of choral excellence (2.2.1) and the possible criteria indicated in the sources included the testing of intonation, range, tone quality, vocal control, diction, sight-reading and musicality.</p> <p>Regarding the approach to children's choirs some writers discuss the process of auditioning (3.3.2). Aural ability and musical intelligence supporting musical memory were considered to be important. Rhythmic ability and sight-reading skills should be evaluated as well as voice range and the natural use of the voice. Good pronunciation that will assist with a uniformity of vowels and intonation, and positive personality traits were viewed favourably with regard to the auditioning process.</p>	<p>In the building of a choir of international standard, according to participants, auditions (4.4.3.1) are not only necessary but have to be meaningful and well-constructed.</p> <p>The participants indicated that this is the responsibility of the conductor because he/she must evaluate all voices according to a certain sound ideal.</p> <p>Musical talent was thought to be more important than a beautiful voice, and the ability to discern different pitches as most important. Musical memory and a sense of rhythm were also to be tested.</p> <p>The participants expressed the view that an audition should test the ability of the applicant to sing a certain part from a musical score.</p> <p>Commencing the audition by the singing of a song was considered an easy way to judge the vocal ability and singing range of the singer. The indication was that this song should be preferably sung a cappella, as this would also give an indication of the capabilities of the child regarding intonation.</p> <p>Negative findings included the observation that the range of voices is more limited than it used to be.</p> <p>The voice is also frequently based in the chest position and the head voice is rarely trained and developed. Moreover, note memory is shorter today than it was 15 years ago. Previously, a conductor could play up to eight notes and the student would grasp the melody. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century five notes were found to be the norm.</p>
<b>HANDLING OF THE INSTRUMENT</b>	
<p>The two themes of 'handling the child's voice' and 'technical exercises' became intertwined in the findings in literature, therefore the researcher handles these themes in an overlapping manner.</p> <p>In all choral singing (2.2.3) development of the anatomy of the vocal mechanism is believed to be important. As far as the child is concerned literature does focus on the development of the child's voice and its relevance and importance in vocal warm-ups leading to sound formation (3.5.3).</p>	<p>The handling of the child's voice was of paramount importance (4.4.3.2, 4.4.3.3) to the participants who indicated that the instrument has to be built by working on technical exercises as a group. They reasoned that the child's voice is the instrument of performance and thus needs to be nurtured and developed. The participants argued that the limitations of the child's voice should be respected. This is of import regarding the physical development of the musical instrument at various ages. The resonance cavities are smaller in the young child.</p>

<p>In this same section (3.5.3) it is explained that young children have shorter vocal cords than adults when using a 'head tone'. The result is that their ranges and purity of tone can be amazing.</p> <p>With puberty the lengthening of the vocal cords in both genders must be kept in mind by the conductor.</p> <p>The changing voice must be kept singing (3.5.6) during this phase.</p> <p>It was mentioned that an excellent children's choir member should be able to handle his/her voice according to geographical, traditional, linguistic or other considerations.</p> <p>The literature (2.2.3) indicated that the choral sound also relies on the developments of the singer's vocal abilities; therefore, the training of an individual voice and the development of a good choral sound are not contradictory endeavours. In each case the goal is to develop and improve the ability of singing.</p> <p>It was also evident that sensible vocalises are important for the development of a sound individual vocal technique (2.2.3).</p> <p>It was advised that informed choral conductors could assist choir members by attending the development of sound singing skills (3.5.1).</p> <p>The young voice should be exercised through its whole range to keep it healthy. There was also an indication in literature (3.5.1) that a child must gain the use of the singing voice first before intonation problems, for instance, can be evaluated.</p>	<p>They also refer to mutation, which occurs in both sexes and how it should be handled. It was indicated that the abilities of these voices should be understood regarding range and dynamic capacities.</p> <p>Because demands are made in terms of the artistic level and artistically challenging repertoire for the children's choir, it was argued that it is necessary to take care of the voice as instrument. Therefore it is the norm with some conductors of excellent children's choirs to let the singers do individual training in voice techniques with a specialised singing teacher. The conclusion is that a healthy singing technique is necessary for the use and development of a child's voice in a children's choir of international standard.</p> <p>Therefore it is necessary that vocal warm-up sessions through the whole range of the voice should be done for at least 15 minutes before actual singing commences in the choir.</p> <p>A number of themes were suggested to participants, comprised relevant topics such as the importance of the conductor, sound production, the role of auditions, the child's voice, technical work, intonation, repertoire, rehearsals, etc (for a full list see under 4.4 below). These themes were used to structure interviews only minimally.</p> <p>The registers must also be changed so as not to hurt the voice and an eye must be kept on posture.</p> <p>A general rule would be that voices should not be hoarse after a practice.</p> <p>It is the function of the conductor to explore the most appropriate ways of developing the children's voices with care.</p>
<b>TECHNICAL WORK</b>	
<p>Technical work should lead up to the actual forming of the sound in a children's choir (3.5.2; 3.5.3).</p> <p>Techniques on how to work with the musical instrument, that is the body (including the face), posture and spinal alignment, as well as exercises for relaxation, were discussed. Breathing and posture were seen as being interconnected.</p> <p>The use of technical exercises was pointed out as irrevocably tied to the goal of the development of sound production (2.2.3.) Sound production is thus the sum total of warm-ups of the voice, followed by voice exercises pursuing different technical and</p>	<p>The theme of technical work (4.4.3.3) came spontaneously to the fore as it was interwoven with the building of sound.</p> <p>On the open-ended question, the following responses were made: technical work is essential and should be done on the planes of relaxation, breathing, resonance, voice range and articulation.</p> <p>The conductor was seen as a leader that will use exercises of his/her preference to reach his/her goal to further the singing in a correct manner.</p> <p>Knowledge of musical theory is important (even though it may be very elementary, just relating to what the child needs to read the score) and sight-</p>

<p>artistic goals. To this end exercises to build resonance and the correct concept of placing sound were discussed and it was stressed that sound, if produced in the correct manner, would result in the obtaining of resonance (2.2.5). The importance of exercises for vowel forming and thus the correct concept and implementation of vowels as the carriers of sound was discussed extensively. Legato singing (3.5.2) as a goal via technical exercises and other methods was also stressed.</p> <p>Literature (3.5.2) pointed out that until 1980 the education of choral educators and choirs regarding vocal skill and voice health training did not exist. It is of note to understand the importance that literature after that period places a premium on correct breathing. Technical exercises must be done with a children's choir of excellence. Physical exercises involving the muscles of the face and the structures relating to sound in the face, and posture are important. The literature, however, indicates that technical knowledge must be imparted without overly difficult explanations.</p>	<p>singing in solfège as well as the method of singing from notes was indicated. Singing by aural instruction was also thought to be important.</p> <p>There was general agreement that conductors should be informed on all aspects of technical approaches by attending symposia as well as workshops, and by reading literature. There were also suggestions that a good conductor can/will make up his/ her own technical exercises.</p>
<p><b>INTONATION</b></p>	
<p>In 2.2.6 intonation is introduced as the discrimination of individual pitches to be realised in the correct relation to others as an important aspect in the development of intonation.</p> <p>Perceptive listening, inward hearing and reproducing the accurate sound form the basis of intonation skill.</p> <p>Many sources (3.5.5) commented on the correct value of pitching and intonation, and all place a high premium on this ability for children where listening and inner hearing are particularly relevant.</p> <p>One goal of ear training is the development of relative pitch. To this end the movable-doh system and thus the solmisation system can be quite helpful (2.2.6) because intonation requires individual pitches to be realised in the correct relation to others.</p> <p>The singing of pitches with the correct intonation presents a formidable challenge to both singers and conductor in a children's choir.</p>	<p>Regarding intonation (4.4.3.4) conductors of internationally famous choirs emphasised the importance of intonation.</p> <p>They stated that excellent intonation is part of the 'bigger picture' and that convincing interpretation is always accompanied by excellent intonation.</p> <p>Excellent intonation does not exist as a given, and conductors should work on this aspect systematically.</p> <p>For this purpose some participants indicated the use of the movable doh-system and this seems to be quite popular as a means for building a sense of relative pitch.</p> <p>Exercises to develop intonation are considered important. and the use of repertoire choices with inherent abilities to promote intonation, for example canons, are mentioned.</p> <p>In describing an alternative method for developing the concept of 'inner hearing', conductors felt that it would be advisable not to use the piano while working on intonation.</p> <p>They also commented on musical knowledge regarding excellent intonation, coupling it to the existence of a musical substructure or background,</p>

<p>The use of the movable doh-solmisation system is indicated as being helpful to get an understanding and grasp of relative pitch.</p> <p>Many sources (3.5.5) commented on the correct value of pitching and intonation, and all place a high premium on this ability for children where listening and inner hearing are particularly relevant.</p> <p>Sources indicate that the piano is tuned to an equal-tempered scale, but the voices of an excellent children's choir singing a cappella may sound a little bit higher, because they might follow unconsciously the natural, unaccompanied voice pitch according to the Pythagorean interval principles which are based on overtone systems (2.2.6).</p>	<p>as in their opinion this is of positive assistance concerning intonation. If a child is receiving instrumental tuition this child will in all probability be more skilled in the development of intonation than another without a musical background. Musical background and the ability to read notes are particularly helpful when singing contemporary music. Conductors were definite in their opinion: members who have/had a good instrumental education are an asset to the choir.</p> <p>The attendance of a music school was also evaluated highly in this regard.</p> <p>The view was also expressed that intonation should follow the style and tradition of the work. The explanation offered was that music differs according to geographical and historical origin.</p> <p>The micro-tuning difference in a cappella music and music sung with accompanying instruments or keyboard, as well as chorister's capabilities in this regard, were also discussed.</p> <p>There was general agreement that micro-tuning does not always produce very good results in children's choirs.</p> <p>The use of intonation exercises was viewed positively.</p> <p>In difficult repertoire, for example music written for eight voices and with clustering, intonation becomes more difficult.</p> <p>Musical insight into what is happening harmonically in the piece promotes intonation. It was noted that the notes in sheet music can either have harmonic or melodic implication. Participants explained their reasoning: melodic problems may be rectified with the use of the piano, but harmonic problems imply vertical thinking.</p> <p>One participant from South Africa commented on the relationship between overtones, intonation and the astonishingly beautiful sound of the Swedish choirs under the leadership of Eric Ericson. She commented that this is the area where an ordinary conductor spends 90% of his time working with an excellent choir. But to them intonation is 100%. Thus, it follows that all the overtones are there automatically.</p>
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## REPERTOIRE

Repertoire is the pivotal point of a choir's existence and in the literature (2.2.8) it was pointed out that real compositional craftsmanship is of significant importance.

The literature supplied a variety of opinions (3.6) on the topic of suitable repertoire choices for children's choirs of excellence. The necessity for the conductor to study all works to be chosen was emphasised (2.1.2), as well as the preparation thereof before presenting it to the children. It was also pointed out that all music must first mature before it could be presented to audiences. There were differences of opinion whether children should sing songs composed for women's voices. Composers gave specific guidelines on how to compose for children's choirs of excellence and the value of commissioned pieces was highly praised.

In 3.6.1 general guidelines in choosing literature for children's choirs were discussed. Discernible strength of melody, richness of harmony, vitality, coherence of rhythm, general logic, a strong formal structure, comfortable tessitura, and the mediating of an aesthetic interaction with the audience were mentioned. The change in the nature of repertoire through the years was discussed, especially with regard to the music of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was deemed important that texts should be of a high poetic standard.

On the subject of repertoire (4.4.4) all participants provided answers.<sup>1</sup> This aspect seems to be a pivotal facet and, according to the responses that were received, it is in particular the areas below that need to be addressed.

It seems that the choices of music to be sung by the excellent choir will be more difficult and sometimes different from that of other children's choirs (4.4.4.1).

The following aims were found to play a role in the selection of repertoire: pedagogical usefulness, the inclusion of compositions from one's own country, and versatility, also with regard to 'classical music'.

For younger children it would be advisable to make sober choices regarding classical music. The song in four voices by Schubert, 'Gott in der Natur', opus post. 133 D757 (1822), with its dramatic text, is not advised as a choice by participants because of various reasons given under 4.4.4.1.

Brahms' folk songs (4.4.4.1) are an excellent choice for a girls' choir and according to the qualitative research Baroque music is a better option for boys' choirs. Music from the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries must not be neglected, since clustering and other effects offer a new scope to children which may also impact positively on other repertoire to be sung (4.4.4.1).

All choices must be of excellent artistic and musical quality (4.4.4.1).

Choices must serve as a counterbalance to commercial music. Traditional music from various countries as well as music from one's own country should be chosen for broadening a choir's cultural frame of reference (4.4.4.1).

Conductors were convinced that good music of lasting value forms part of the child forever. As devoted pedagogues, all conductors of high-profile choirs viewed this as a special responsibility.

Participants also emphasised the motivational value of good music. It was even claimed that these choices are the basis of the success of a choir of excellence. Children should be able to express

<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered throughout that the views expressed by Ala-Pöllänen were given only after consultation on some important facets, and in conjunction with the former conductor of the Tapiola Choir, Erkki Pohjola, who was its founder in 1963 and under whose direction the choir became famous.

<p>Authors were unanimous in their agreement that a conductor should be well acquainted with a piece and its separate voices, as well as its harmonic structure and other essential formal elements, for example rhythm and dynamics before presenting it to the choir (2.2.9). Pieces of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century pose special challenges, but should not be avoided.</p>	<p>themselves emotionally freely, and should be motivated to do so. They should be shown what kind of emotion the music is expressing, and assisted in their interpretation of the piece. Ultimately, the music should be interesting for all – the conductor, the singers, and the audience (4.4.4.1).</p> <p>Although it was argued that the choice of music should be on the child’s level, participants were convinced that children should not be underestimated. It was pointed out that children love challenges, and that conductors should understand and appreciate this. Thus, compositions should be chosen with which children can associate (4.4.4.1).</p> <p>Arrangements of a doubtful quality should be avoided. Repertoire for outstanding children’s choirs can be extensive in that it can include music ranging from Gregorian chants to contemporary choir music and even popular music (4.4.4.1).</p> <p>It must be taken into consideration that older children in a children’s choir are more emotional and therefore the repertoire should accommodate this.</p> <p>Participants also pointed out that choirs have a great potential for building bridges between countries, religions, and races (4.4.4.1).</p> <p>Participants indicated that it is important that the conductor should know the music so well that all vocal lines of each part can be sung (4.4.4.2).</p> <p>The task of the conductor is to make sure that the singers know exactly the formal architecture of the music: its compositional structure, texture and all other formal musical concepts used in the composition, and therefore it is necessary that these elements are carefully studied by the conductor beforehand.</p>
<p><b>TEXT</b></p>	
<p>The literature indicated that the interpretation of a text is an artistic ability delving into the concept of knowledge whereby the singers can bridge the gap between the word and his or her own understanding thereof (2.2.7). The interpretation of a text can assist singers with their musical expression, as well as relating it to their own experience and to their audience. Thus the singer can become a powerful instrument of conveying the meaning of the composer and/or the poet through the text (2.2.7). Texts (3.6) in the repertoire</p>	<p>Participants found that the text is of paramount importance, and that the singers should always comprehend the meaning of the texts, even when these are from different historical periods, or in an unknown dialect (4.4.4.3). The structure of the music and text are interwoven to ‘translate’ the message of the music. They proposed techniques such as reading and dramatising texts of chosen repertoire that will mediate its musical interpretation.</p>

<p>for children's choirs are abundantly discussed in the literature.</p> <p>Many choral publications provide lists of suitable literature for singing where text is involved. A few relevant remarks can be made. Eminent writers feel that children should not be asked to sing serious love songs. In most cases, such texts are unsuitable for a children's choir. Texts selected should always be of the highest quality, and no patronising or compromising texts should be considered (3.6). Weak translations are unacceptable.</p>	<p>The sound of the original language in text is stressed and its different variations regarding the period in time in the same country and also texts in a global context (4.4.4.3).</p> <p>The poetry involved in some texts should be emphasized because the participants were of the opinion that the recital of the music flows from the text to the music (4.4.4.3).</p> <p>There is again argumentation for singing in the original language of the repertoire chosen, because in translations the explicit meaning may be lost (4.4.4.3).</p> <p>Even in folk music the originality of the sound may alter if a translation is used (4.4.4.3).</p> <p>Because diction related to early music often works in conjunction with the style, the same kind of diction cannot be used for all styles (4.4.4.1, (4.4.4.3)).</p> <p>In general, participants warned that an over-emphasis on consonants is detrimental to the legato line. It was suggested that choir members could make notes with regard to the 'timing' of a specific sound, consonant, and so on.</p> <p>It was also noted that an excellent children's choir should be able to sing with perfect pronunciation in any language (4.4.4.3).</p> <p>The singing of songs from other countries in their original language, may contribute to the building of cultural bridges (4.4.4.3).</p>
<b>REPERTOIRE IN PERFORMANCE AND RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AUDIENCE</b>	
<p>The compilation of repertoire (2.2.8) has nowadays become a relatively easy endeavour owing to the progression of technology. However, it is still necessary for the conductor to enrich himself/herself with an adequate knowledge of repertoire (2.2.9). In this regard, the most important consideration is that real artistry (3.6.1) should be demonstrated by the music/repertoire that is chosen. Authors differed on the matter of using original language texts versus translations. The argument presented in this regard was that audiences will understand the performed music better in a translated form. With regard to programming, many opinions were presented, but a carefully thought-out programme that includes a variety of emotions and experiences, with an educative, entertaining and inspiring purpose,</p>	<p>Participants indicated that repertoire might also be utilised to develop self-confidence and stage experience (4.4.4.4). Yet artistic considerations are always paramount, since ultimately the interpretation should speak to and move the souls of the audience. Musicality and phrasing should be clear to the audience, as well as the expressing of emotional content.</p> <p>A piece should have 'audience appeal' and should be interesting for all parties: involved: the singers, conductor and the audience. In this regard, the implication was that the chosen repertoire should be suitable in all circumstances, and for every kind of performance. Participants required the following abilities from singers: naturalness, dynamic sparkle and focussed discipline (4.4.4.4).</p>



<p>regardless of theme, was considered to be most appropriate.</p> <p>The literature focusing on the exemplary children's choir (3.6.1) mentioned the fact that repertoire should speak to the audience during concerts. Even well-chosen pieces can fail to mediate an aesthetic interaction with the audience. It is also relevant that the conductor forms a general opinion of any specific audience and its level of sophistication. Music should also be chosen with different performance contexts in mind. Musical repertoire should be varied to appeal to specific audiences. This should, however, not deter the conductor to always choose the finest music to present to the audience, whether it is serious music or in lighter vein. A musical programme should also be well balanced. Musical choices should always optimally draw on the artistic strength of the singers and preferably, memorised (3.8).</p> <p>The conductor should feel positive and confident about repertoire choices and the interpretation thereof.</p>	<p>The choir should win over the audience both through their rendering of the music and the projection of their personalities (4.4.4.4).</p> <p>Preferably, all music should be memorised and a certain sound-ideal should guide all performances (4.4.4.4).</p> <p>An element of joy should be present in the singing and the conductor should not obstruct the interpretation in any way (4.4.4.4).</p>
<b>PERFORMANCES</b>	
<p>The literature indicated that all choirs should have performances of varying nature and difficulty (2.2.1).</p>	<p>The role of performances (4.4.4.5) was very strongly motivated by participants/conductors.</p> <p>The choral singers should know that the conductor relies on their loyalty and sense of responsibility towards the choral enterprise, culminating in the concert. Various high-profile performance situations were explained to the researcher in which not one member could be absent. Apart from ordinary concert situations, these excellent choirs also take part in large-scale musical productions including operas. Such endeavours require input of an international standing (4.4.4.5).</p> <p>From the above it is clear that children's choirs should be exposed to a variety of opportunities to perform, involving different milieus and settings, which will all contribute to the choir's maturity (4.4.4.5).</p> <p>Exposure to public performances inevitably implies that choir tours will take place. All participants stated either informally or in reaction to the open-ended question, that excellent choirs have to tour for various reasons. The conductors view choir tours as a most positive incentive, and consider them as an important means to keep the</p>

	<p>singers motivated (4.4.4.5).</p> <p>Only by touring can adequate exposure be gained. Touring is also responsible for the development of the singers. Some choirs take part in official ceremonies that should give choir tours an added dimension of importance (4.4.4.5).</p> <p>Tours are, according to the participants, necessary for the growth of both the choir and conductor. From the <i>curricula vitae</i> of eminent conductors it became evident that international tours, performances in general or competitions are an important part of the make-up of the excellent children's choir. These events expose choir members to different perspectives as well as cultivate sensitivity towards other cultures and environments (4.4.4.5).</p>
<b>CHOREOGRAPHY</b>	
<p>Choreography might be described as the art of arranging movement. It is evident from the literature that choreography forms part of the repertoire for adults as well that for children's choirs (3.9). New technology has opened up a vista for composers as well as conductors to experiment and use this new addition to enrich the art of choral singing. Not all choral works lend themselves towards this trend (e.g. classical Western art music).</p> <p>With regard to both children's and adult choirs, choreography is sometimes coupled with the use of other technical and visual media, as seen during the 8<sup>th</sup> World Symposium on Choral Music from 19 to 26 July 2008 in Copenhagen, Denmark.</p>	<p>Almost all exceptional children's choirs make use of choreography (4.4.4.6); however, only a few of the participants mentioned this aspect. Because participants see children as emotional beings, choreography was seen as a necessary element, and it has become a generally accepted practice to add movements to performances of popular music and indigenous music.</p>
<b>ACOUSTICS</b>	
<p>Being such a vast field, the researcher did not focus on the topics of acoustics as such; however, literature covers this topic exhaustively.</p>	<p>Acoustics was not discussed in detail by any of the participants (4.4.4.7).</p> <p>There were, however, some thoughts on dry acoustics which seemed preferable because an excellent choir can sing well within such an acoustic space. Such an acoustic milieu enhances transparency and the balance of voices. Under these circumstances, the sound can even be more sonorous when it is carefully 'darkened' to prevent it from sounding unnatural (4.4.4.7).</p>

<b>REHEARSALS</b>	
<p>In able to bring the end product to maturation, the conductor must be well-prepared for all rehearsals (2.2.9). Generally speaking, all dimensions of choral singing require diligent striving towards the all-important common goal of the rehearsal, culminating in performances.</p> <p>Eminent conductors (2.2.9) claim that a conductor should be well prepared for each rehearsal and with a clear musical concept of the new pieces to be studied. In avant-garde compositions this is even more important because the conductor should structure these pieces according to personal insight.</p> <p>The conductor will also have a time schedule according to which works are studied and performed.</p>	<p>Understandably, in the qualitative section, few participants commented on matters concerning the rehearsal routine of the outstanding children's choir (4.4.4.8), because this seems to be such an obvious aspect of excellent choral singing. However, some participants did contribute by way of their descriptions of individual strategies with regard to rehearsal schedules and practices. Participants indicated that reaching the goal of excellent children's choral singing is hard work, some of them indicated that they spend as much as six hours per week on rehearsals.</p> <p>Participants stressed that choral members should understand that practising in a high profile choir needs dedication and hard work, and that it must be taken seriously by both the conductor and choir members alike. In all instances, the end-product was given the utmost priority, and rehearsal strategies to achieve this seemed to have similar traits. Conductors with a more scientific approach took cognisance of the learning process and arranged rehearsals accordingly.</p> <p>The conductor's encouragement and inspirations were stressed as being of the utmost importance.</p> <p>Although the time spent on rehearsals varies, participants agreed that it remains crucial that sufficient time is spent on this aspect – especially if choral singing of a world-class standard is envisaged.</p>
<b>STRUCTURE OF CHOIRS REGARDING SYSTEM AND AGE</b>	
<p>From the literature it was evident that the age of incoming members is of particular importance (3.3.1). Very young members (six to eight years old) first sing in feeding choirs from which the concert choir is later chosen. This is the case in the choirs of Jean Ashworth Bartle (Ashworth Bartle (2003), Bo Johansson (Adolf Fredrik Music Classes/Choir School) children are admitted at the age of ten years.</p> <p>Kodály wanted children to start singing as early as possible. This standpoint is shared by Pohjola (1993) who advocates that children should be between seven and ten years of age when they apply for auditions in his programme (3.3.1).</p> <p>It seems safe to assume that the younger a child</p>	<p>Participants (4.4/5) shared valuable information with the researcher regarding the age of prospective members. Some participants have access to a feeding system whereby younger children form part of choirs representing different developmental stages, and very young members sing only easy songs. Later, they study more difficult music such as canons and two- and three-part pieces, and eventually indigenous music as well as pieces from the international choir repertoire.</p> <p>The participant from Russia indicated that children up to fourteen years of age are included in his group. There are 100 singers in the group and from them a smaller concert group is chosen for tours. Another participant stated: "My choir</p>

joins a choir, the better it will be for his/her musical development, and that the choir will also have the eventual benefit of that young voice when it has become more developed.	<p>consists of about 100 singers. From them I choose 35 singers when we go on tour."</p> <p>A training choir from which the concert choir is selected is part of another system and a music school of 1000 members from which 40 members are selected to ultimately form a famous girls' choir were among other examples that were mentioned.</p>
<b>TIME-SPAN NEEDED TO BUILD AN INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S CHOIR</b>	
Literature mostly did not indicate the time-span necessary for one conductor of a children's choir to build an instrument of excellence (2, 3).	<p>It may be that a certain time-span is needed by a conductor to build a choir with all the characteristics demonstrated by an international children's choir (4.4.6).</p> <p>In this regard, time frames indicated by some of the participants, included the following (4.4.6):</p> <p>Moe, for instance, explains that <i>"My background is one of thirty years' experience in 2002 as the conductor of the Nidaros Cathedral Boys' Choir,"</i> while Johansson describes his situation regarding the famous Adolf Fredrik Girls' Choir as follows: <i>"In 2004 I had been a music teacher at Adolf Fredrik Music Classes for 33 years. I founded the Adolf Fredrik Girls' choir 31 years ago."</i> He was still conducting the choir in 2008 when the researcher heard them perform in Copenhagen (2008).</p> <p>Loock from South Africa said in 2008 that he had <i>"founded the Tygerberg Children's Choir more than 30 years ago."</i></p> <p>Pohjola had conducted the Tapiola choir from 1963 to 1994 when Ala-Pöllänen took over. Saluveer explained that he had founded his TV Girls' Choir in 1990 because he had become involved with a TV programme where a choir was able to play a prominent role.</p> <p>The above information is also reflected in the <i>curricula vitae</i> of the different choir conductors, which could be considered as a valuable reference with regard to this qualitative study.</p>
<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS</b>	
Findings from the literature made clear that notable conductors are positive educators (2.2.2, 3.4). In this regard, the development of the child's self-confidence and the educational profits were stressed. Criticism and sarcasm voiced by a director are hurtful and influence the child's performance in the choir negatively. A conductor	<p>It was clear that aspects (4.4.7) were considered to be an important factor in the establishment of an outstanding choir. In this instance, it should continually be borne in mind that this research was conducted without asking specific questions. While participants reacted to an open-ended question, the points surfaced:</p>

<p>should have a deep understanding, involvement and emotional conception of people and especially of choristers (2.2, 2.3.4).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discipline, voicing criticism when members are not singing ‘correctly/well’ (4.4.7.1).</li> <li>• Emotions should be taken into consideration when children are ill or in difficult family situations such as divorce. Participants agreed that the consequences of negative treatment would be revealed only later on in the chorister’s life (4.4.7.2).</li> <li>• Self-confidence (4.4.7.3) is a valuable asset and needs to be nurtured in all children as it may enable them to perform on a higher level. Confidence may never be ruined by the conductor, since choir members may be lost this way.</li> <li>• Respect (4.4.7.4) is important between people of all ages especially in a high profile choir. The conductor should nurture every child’s self-worth. This attitude teaches choristers to respect differences between people.</li> <li>• It is a much better policy to avoid negative comments if one wants to improve faults, because repeated negative comments harm the person and the singer’s self-confidence, and do not create joyful singing (4.4.7.5).</li> <li>• One participant pointed out that the singers must also learn to behave in an encouraging way to one another (4.4.7.5).</li> <li>• If achievements are valued in a positive way, this leads to the desired sound and intonation (4.4.7.6).</li> <li>• A sense of solidarity and loyalty is very necessary. Without this basis, it is impossible to achieve a sense of musical harmony (4.4.7.6).</li> <li>• There is solidarity in an outstanding choir; they are a family striving for the same aim. There is loyalty and respect for each other’s differences (4.4.7.6).</li> </ul>
<p><b>THREATS TO TODAY’S OUTSTANDING CHOIRS</b></p>	
<p>In the literature, mostly articles (cf. bibliography), sentences and short remarks warn about dangers opposing interest in choral singing.</p>	<p>One conductor/participant repeatedly warned against the influence of technology, such as television and much of the new technology evolving around computers (4.4.8).</p>

He also warned that the development of children's social skills is endangered by the all-pervasive presence of technology, and that it promotes a new way of thinking for children, which is not necessarily beneficial. He feels strongly that little attention is paid to serious art and serious choral work in the media, and that, therefore, the media work against serious music for young people. He was also very critical of the kind of commercialised music played constantly over the radio and television "that will not outlast the day."

PARTICIPANTS					
	A – Hendrik Loock: South Africa	B – Acama Fick: South Africa	C – Petru Gräbe: South Africa	D – Hendrika Johanna van Aswegen: South Africa	E – Arne Saluveer: Estonia
	(Everything that Loock says has been translated from Afrikaans by the researcher)	(translated from Afrikaans)	(exact words)	(translated from Afrikaans)	
THEMES					
World standard in Children’s Choral Singing		“There is a definite difference between the sound of a professional choir versus an amateur choir and I can hear it immediately, because a professional singer do not need to be a Mimi Coertse sound wise, but they can do with their voices what they want and their intonation is so excellent. Therefore I think that a selected children’s choir from a music or choir school ought to be able to have a very high standard of choral singing. And definitely a higher standard than an amateur children’s choir.”	“An excellent children’s choir sing music with a strong a cappella base. The implication is thus that most of the literature presented to the audience is a cappella. Therefore the development of inner hearing of the singers is very important.”	“I am asking who will decide if a choir is excellent? In my opinion it will be audiences, adjudicators, choral experts, the children themselves, critics"	
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONDUCTOR					
The conductor		“There comes a time when the conductor must let go and believe in what he has taught his choristers. For instance on stage. It is more difficult with children but something that a conductor must do so as not to come in the path of the expression of the composition.” (This concurs with what Pohjola has said once to me in an informal discussion in Linz in 2000.)" “To keep the interest of the singers it is important to have a definite work-schedule where certain works are being polished, and new music are taught. The moment boredom sets in; a new piece of music must be handed out. Actually there are various aspects in a balanced repetition for instance exercises, new music to enrich with a definite goal even if it is not meant as a concert piece, etc. I (Acama Fick) worked in the years of apartheid with my choirs. We could not go overseas and no choirs visited us. As conductors and musicians we were in isolation. That was terrible."		“All facets in an excellent choir refer back to the conductor.”	

PARTICIPANTS					
	F – Bo Johanssen: Sweden	G – Kåre Hanken: Norway	H – Björn Moe: Norway	I – Dr Elena Svetoza: Russia	J – Combined views: Erkki Pohjola & Kari Ala-Pöllänen: Finland
	(Has been also asked from him to quote of his views from the pamphlet “Sing together” compiled by Bo Johansson personally.)	(exact words)			(As expressed by Pöllänen after consultation with Pohjola)
THEMES					
World standard in Children’s Choral Singing	<p>“When the singers in my choir are accepted I make a point of saying that it is because you sound the way you do that your voice fits in with the choir.</p> <p>We need your voice so that the harmony will be the typical, world-famous sound."</p>	<p>"...and what is really 'World Standard'? If we/you should use this in an article or theses we must first discuss and clear the conception 'World Standard'. We can't take it for granted that the 'European music' and the interpretation of 'European music' is the world standard."</p> <p>"...it is so many aspects related to your question that it is really impossible to give an answer to the qualities of a (children's) choir of world standard! I will be very humble, and I think we all have to respect different qualities, traditions and interpretations. If we try to find 'the right standard' this standard becomes the answer/ key – I am afraid we have lost the value of the choral music, ja, of music in general."</p>	<p>“I am often asked how I manage to get such a good choir. And my answer is: what is most important is that the singers come back for the next rehearsal, As long as they come back for the next rehearsal, and that they really want to, you can do the most incredible things with them!”</p>		
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONDUCTOR					
The conductor	<p>“Put your prestige away – step down from the podium. Let yourself be influenced and be affected, it is only when we take our choir-singing seriously that we can ask to be taken seriously.”</p>				



	A – Hendrik Loock: South Africa	B – Acama Fick: South Africa	C – Petru Gräbe: South Africa	D – Hendrika Johanna van Aswegen: South Africa	E – Arne Saluveer: Estonia
All musical experiences are connected to, depend on, originate from conductor		“It is very important how well the choir communicate with the audience and whether the audience and the music that the choir makes ‘connect’. That is obviously the conductor who must take that responsibility. He must know what he want, what he want to hear and must have a sound-ideal that realizes in the rendering of the composition.”		“...the whole spectrum of musical experiences originates from the initiative of the conductor”	
Choice of Music/ Repertoire				“That is solely the responsibility of the conductor and these choices are the basis of the success of the choir. ”	

	<b>F – Bo Johanssen: Sweden</b>	<b>G – Kåre Hanken: Norway</b>	<b>H – Björn Moe: Norway</b>	<b>I – Dr Elena Svetoza: Russia</b>	<b>J – Combined views: Erkki Pohjola &amp; Kari Ala-Pöllänen: Finland</b>
<b>All musical experiences are connected to, depend on, originate from conductor</b>	<p>“Creating the desire to make music ...it entirely dependent on the matter of leadership – musical leadership. My mission in life at secondary school is to provide a counterbalance for commercial music, To provide an alternative to the here today gone tomorrow musical trash. When my students sing the music of for example J. S. Bach, the music enters their bodies and never leaves. As a pedagogue I am securely and utterly convinced of this.”</p> <p>Johansson also arguments another point. (it is a pity that) “it is the adult world that decides how the music is to be performed.” (In my opinion read Johansson) “The adult world limits the development of music and does not listen with serious interest to the rising generation and their ideas.”</p> <p>“When I believe in the music, the students believe in the music. Irrespective of difficulty and genre.”</p>		<p>“If the teacher is a bad musician, he or she ...inhibits the child’s development. As ...conductors, we must learn to understand and appreciate (the) this human learning process, so we can direct the process with encouragement and inspiration. You cannot escape hard work...In addition, it is important to have an inspiring conductor with an inspiring future goal, for example, a tour. It is unnecessary to force a child to sing when you can lead the child to produce a lot more with happiness.”</p>		<p>“... high artistic leadership.”</p>
<b>Choice of Music/ Repertoire</b>	<p>“My interest in modern music has provided pedagogic assistance in many ...incidences. ...Many people are afraid of the music interpretation and only sing to 50% of their capacity due to their fear of ‘singing incorrectly’. The new (modern) music provides a unique opportunity to loosen these confining knots!</p> <p>I have favourable experience in that when a student has been asked for improvise, sing clusters etc., she is unafraid when reading the traditional music. The old music is assisted by the new music and the new music cannot manage without the traditional music.”</p> <p>“In a cluster (where everyone sings their own part) self-confidence can be built up. Similarly to having a human right to look as you do, you have a right to sound as you do.“</p> <p>Bo Johansson says that he has a preference for modern music.</p>				<p>“I try to use all my abilities, when selecting repertoire for children. My criteria for good choir or repertoire are musical quality, pedagogical usefulness and versatility” “I prefer originally composed music for the type of my choir, otherwise it is depending on the type of the concert.” ”I must always have proper repertoire for every kind of performances.”</p> <p>“Motivation, contact between choir and conductor and contact with the audience influence my choice of repertoire.”</p> <p>(I do not like) “transcriptions of some instrumental works (and) bad arrangements.”</p> <p>(My choice of repertoire is connected to my aim for the choir because) “The repertoire is the basic thing, I carry out my pedagogical aim via repertoire, It is one of my most important tools- but not the only”</p> <p>“I think (the choice of music of traditional music) from other countries to be very important – of course taking in consideration what I said of good or bad.”</p>

	A – Hendrik Loock: South Africa	B – Acama Fick: South Africa	C – Petru Gräbe: South Africa	D – Hendrika Johanna van Aswegen: South Africa	E – Arne Saluveer: Estonia
<b>Conductor determines the sound</b>		<p>“The first thing that I hear is the sound of the choir. A beautiful sound is an understanding of communication with choir and audience. For certain music the sound varies and is not ‘clean’, but that is correct.”</p> <p>"The production of sound is the task of the conductor and for that he needs technique.”</p> <p>“Some conductors have the ‘magic’ to let a choir produce the sound that gets people emotionally involved because it touches their souls. It is however not only the talent of the conductor but a symbiosis with his choir.”</p> <p>“The sound of an excellent choir must be free, supple, and it must have shine. The sound will be very rich in overtones. In closure I should say that it must not only shine like gold and silver but there must be depth and roundness. In conclusion, combinations of a round sound with depth and horizontal shine with as many overtones as possible. If sound is at the right place vocally, then the overtones will be there.”</p>		<p>“..the conductor must be able to let the children produce a sweet, clear, childlike sound.”</p> <p>“Sound produced will be as the conductor visualizes it.”</p>	
<b>Conductor is Alpha and Omega of the process</b>	<p>“I believe that all musical experiences are connected to, and depends and originates from the conductor.”</p>			<p>“The conductor will be the most important person because he is responsible for all that must happen in the choir. The choir is his instrument.”</p>	

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Conductor determines the sound	(I) “succeeds in bringing forth .... the specific wondrous tones (sound) which distinguish Adolf Fredrik’s Girl’s Choir.”				
Conductor is Alpha and Omega of the process	<p>“For me it is a question of leadership. It is up to me as conductor of the choir to interest myself in the individual. Interest in the individual has to be the most fundamental driving force for anyone with a management position. A teacher, a headmaster, a music teacher. If it is the desire for power that makes you want to be in charge of a group you will probably be a very bad leader of the group that forms your area of responsibility.”</p> <p>(This)” job is demanding, creative and artistic.”</p>		<p>“Whether we like it or not, the conductor is the Alpha and Omega. It is the conductor, with his personality, his choice of music, his pedagogic skills and his knowledge, who must lubricate the complicated choir machine, To the children, we therefore become big authorities. Too big, sometimes, The children can often put too much weight in what we say and what we do. It is very easy for a child to misunderstand a joke, a comment, a remark meant in a friendly way. We therefore have to be both strong and soft at the same time when dealing with children. We must therefore work on ourselves in the role of ‘human authority’ We must never descent into becoming ‘an authoritarian authority.’</p>		<p>“The conductor makes the choir, particularly in children’s choir.”</p>

	A – Hendrik Loock: South Africa	B – Acama Fick: South Africa	C – Petru Gräbe: South Africa	D – Hendrika Johanna van Aswegen: South Africa	E – Arne Saluveer: Estonia
Conductor's view on individuals					
Excellent musicality		“The task of the conductor is to make sure that the singers know exactly the architecture of the music: the structure and texture and to have comprehension of the text or of the composition itself.”			
High quality of artistic leadership				"The conductor must be an artistic leader regarding the music that is being sung.”	
Knowledge of music	“It is important that the conductor should know the music so well that he will be able to sing the vocal lines of each part, because the conductor will be unsure of himself if he does not know the vocal line”				

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<b>Conductor's view on individuals</b>	<p>“In the choir, ...individualists often have a negative effect on the result! ...the dominant individuals often stifle the creative process that exist in the group.” “Everyone is needed”. (Choir members) “sing in different ways – that is (their) right.” “... every individual has something special in his of her voice, in his of her talent, that is unique. .... It would be just tedious if everyone sang with the same voice, with the same timbre. That's why it's important that you, as an individual are a member of our choir, even if you sing with, say, a weak voice. Everyone is needed! It is a question of building up the self-confidence!”</p> <p>“Demanding just as much of everyone mean stimulation for the individual.” “The choir leader must let all children feel that their worth are equal.” “Irrespective of age and education, all people want to be taken seriously – everyone is aware of his of her intrinsic value, and that the choir leader thinks they are all worth just as much.” “This attitude trains us to respect differences...”</p> <p>“The choir singers must know I rely on their loyalty and sense of responsibility towards the whole – the concert.”</p>				
<b>Excellent musicality</b>			“If the teacher is a bad musician, he or she also inhibits the child's development.”		
<b>High quality of artistic leadership</b>	<p>“When I believe in the music, then the students believe in the music. Irrespective of degree of difficulty and genre” “Creating the desire to make music ...is entirely dependent on the matter of leadership – musical leadership. My mission in life at secondary school is to provide a counterbalance for commercial music, To provide an alternative to the here today gone tomorrow musical trash. When my students sing the music of for example J. S. Bach, the music enters their bodies and never leaves. As a pedagogue I am securely and utterly convinced of this.”</p>			“..high artistic leadership.” “To be a teacher and a musician of many different styles has offered me interest in and contact with many sides of music making .”	
<b>Knowledge of music</b>					“..musical (abilities)”

	A – Hendrik Loock: South Africa	B – Acama Fick: South Africa	C – Petru Gräbe: South Africa	D – Hendrika Johanna van Aswegen: South Africa	E – Arne Saluveer: Estonia
<b>Knowledge of the child's voice</b>		<p>“After all these years I am very conscious of the hygiene of the voice and the fact that you are working with voices that must function still when they are 80 years old. That voice must not be harmed in a choir due to a conductor who does not let the singing voice rest enough during practices. Some choral conductors can go on and on for literally hours: no, not that much, but they let the children practice in the same tessitura for too long. While practising the registers must be changed so as not to hurt the voice. The voice must not be hoarse after a practice. For myself I prefer practising for 20 minutes and then tell something or use the time to rest the voice musically effective, for instance doing massaging of each other's shoulders to relax the voice. In this a conductor can reflect on the way opera singers do not sing for hours. I also keep my eye on posture. That I do because the body is the musical instrument. I also want the whole choir to let the whole range of their voices develop through vocal exercises. For me the above is part of my repetition technique for the voice apparatus.”</p>	<p>“If a conductor does not appreciate the limitations of the child's voice potential he can harm the voice by expecting too much or too little of the abilities.”</p> <p>“He must know that mutation occurs with boys and girl's voices and how it should be handled. He should also understand range and dynamic capacities of these voices.” (E-mail 17/07/07)</p>		
<b>Knowledge of the sound he expects</b>		<p>"Do you know where that extraordinarily beautiful sound comes from in the choirs of Eric Ericson? That is the area where an ordinary conductor spends 90% of his time while working with an excellent choir. But not them: their intonation is 100%; thus it follows that all the overtones are there automatically."</p>		<p>“The conductor must take responsibility to build a sound which/that can compare with other excellent choirs, also SATB ensembles.”</p>	
<b>Pedagogic Skills</b>					

	F – Bo Johanssen: Sweden	G – Kåre Hanken: Norway	H – Björn Moe: Norway	I – Dr Elena Svetoza: Russia	J – Combined views: Erkki Pohjola & Kari Ala-Pöllänen: Finland
Knowledge of the child's voice					
Knowledge of the sound he expects	cf sound of the Adolf Fredrik's Girls Choir				
Pedagogic Skills	<p>"In my choir we often sing in three parts. As everyone takes the same responsibility, I could take one singer from each part and listen to three-part harmony.</p> <p>When I carry out this exercise it is my experience that the singers rise to the occasion when it comes. The feeling of managing to 'maintain one's part' without any help is a very strong one."</p> <p>"You feel better when you count!"</p> <p>"Absence through sickness is low. I am needed – I am someone"</p> <p>"I take responsibility for my place in the choir! I don't need to lean on anyone else in the choir."</p>		<p>"Children don't necessarily want the simple and easy. There are so many educationalists who say that it is important to stay on the child's level, but what is actually the child's level? I think that many educators define the child's learning capacity on a shaky basis. This often originates in the educator's low performance level. If the teacher is a bad musician, he or she also inhibits the child's development."</p>		<p>"She/he has to have a combination of educational...abilities"</p>



	A – Hendrik Loock: South Africa	B – Acama Fick: South Africa	C – Petru Gräbe: South Africa	D – Hendrika Johanna van Aswegen: South Africa	E – Arne Saluveer: Estonia
Perception of different cultures					
Personality					
Preference: literature		“Every good conductor has read literature on choral leadership. I have read many books but in later years it seems that I cannot remember that I have looked at one book on the subject! However, one can get wonderful hints for amateur choirs. In each book that one reads there is something usable. I myself did write books for myself on repetition techniques for each problem that I encountered.”			“I think that is today not some special one book that is uhm...we have collected books all around the world at different workshops... We have quite some interesting Estonian conductors so, and some of them have books about choir music and helping the choir in centuries. (Ya) Many things in this books are still helpful in our days (ya, ya) some kind of basic, basic ideas...”
How long is the conductor with the choir. When comes success?					
<b>THE CHILD AND THE CONDUCTOR</b>					
Human aspects/ General personality aspects of conductor					

	F – Bo Johanssen: Sweden	G – Kåre Hanken: Norway	H – Björn Moe: Norway	I – Dr Elena Svetoza: Russia	J – Combined views: Erkki Pohjola & Kari Ala-Pöllänen: Finland
Perception of different cultures	<p>“When I have been on tour with my Adolf Fredriks Girls Choir and taken part in many of Europe’s biggest competitions and achieved better than second place in certainly more than 15 competitions, it has always been interesting to listen to the folk music of the various choirs. To hear the unique sound, the individual national profile. In our own folk music we have a great national asset that is not affected by changes in government runs on the stock exchange or inflation.”</p>				
Personality	<p>The conductor is ...”A leader who functions best of all at the centre of the process. A demanding process that needs a professional in order to keep it up.”</p> <p>“By setting a good example I obtain respect.”</p> <p>“When I trust, I am trusted in return.”</p> <p>“I am of course, proud of my own good sense in having chosen to spend my time with the upcoming generation. Rife with curiosity and where spontaneity and unfettered music enthusiasm abound.”</p> <p>“Such a situation can never be taught. It is intrinsic to inspiring and frequently unexpected moments. When it is the job of the leader to capture this moment and build upon it. I believe this is what is called making music.”</p>				
Preference: literature				<p>“In Russia the Phonopedic Method of Voice Development is very popular, a book written by Jemeljanov Victor”</p>	
How long is the conductor with the choir. When comes success?	<p>“In 2004 I have been a music teacher at Adolf Fredrik’s Music Classes for 33 years. I founded the Adolf Fredriks Girls choir 31 years ago.”</p>		<p>“My background (as conductor) is thirty years (2002) experience as the conductor of the Nidaros Cathedral Boys’ Choir.”</p>		
THE CHILD AND THE CONDUCTOR					
Human aspects/ General personality aspects of conductor					

	A – Hendrik Loock: South Africa	B – Acama Fick: South Africa	C – Petru Gräbe: South Africa	D – Hendrika Johanna van Aswegen: South Africa	E – Arne Saluveer: Estonia
Achievements of children must be valued positively					
Building of team spirit					
Criticism					
Criticism part of psychological process					
Human authority					
Look through eyes of child	“This person ought to try to look through the eyes of a child.”				
Love for children			“I think that a choral conductor with all the knowledge of the world, without an affinity for children, will not reach excellence. I often thought that the children sang for me rather as for an unknown audience.” (e-mail)		
Motivate, create desire for singers to sing in choir/Inspiring				“The conductor will use technical exercises of his preference to reach his goal.”	

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<b>Achievements of children must be valued positively</b>			“..it is ....important that the children’s achievements be valued in a positive way... As directors, we must learn to emphasize the positive when we want to improve the negative, Constant (negative ) comments spoil the singer’s satisfaction and self-confidence, and do not create joyful singing, ....Not only the conductor, but also the singers must learn to behave in an encouraging way to each other.”		
<b>Building of team spirit</b>	“The sense of belonging to a group where everyone has the same interests is indescribable and the joint result can often be astounding. There are many prominent choirs that cannot claim a single soloist among their ranks – but the interaction in the choir means that the choir succeeds better than most. As a choir conductor .... you have to create the right team spirit.”		“We undertake regular tours where responsible adults are supporting the boys. The boys find long trips exiting...” “... at the top of the ladder if the ‘Godfather’, the conductor.”		
<b>Criticism</b>			“Criticism is never the answer, only encouragement. In addition, it is important to have an inspiring conductor ... It is unnecessary to force a child to sing when you can lead the child to produce a lot more with happiness.”		
<b>Criticism part of psychological process</b>				“Children are not stupid: they know when they are not singing well; therefore criticism is part of the psychological process in my choir.”	
<b>Human authority</b>			“..at the top of the ladder is the ‘Godfather’, the conductor.”		
<b>Look through eyes of child</b>					
<b>Love for children</b>					
<b>Motivate, create desire for singers to sing in choir/Inspiring</b>			“My experience is that boys like challenges, and that they love tackling them. And when they overcome the challenge, they also love the music, and they spread the music of joy and delight. As ‘visible adults’ and conductors, we must learn to understand and appreciate this human learning process, so we can direct the process with encouragement and inspiration. You cannot escape hard work. Everyone who has learned a Bach motet is sure of that. In addition, it is important to have an inspiring conductor. ”		

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Never be authoritarian authority but be: "human authority"					
Organizational qualities					
Persistence					
Psychological characteristic of the conductor: positive caring and building self-confidence of the singers					
Psychological Understanding			“A child cannot sing if he is ill or sad, because the adult’s deletion of emotions and health in situations where it is necessary comes later.” (e-mail)		
Understanding the child					

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Never be authoritarian authority but be: "human authority"			“We must therefore work on ourselves in the role of ‘human authority’. We must never descent into becoming ‘an authoritarian authority’.”		
Organizational qualities					“....and organizational abilities.”
Persistence	“To work with an excellent choir requires hard work.”				“....and high persistence”
Psychological characteristic of the conductor: positive caring and building self-confidence of the singers	<p>Johansson feels very strong about this aspect and did mention repeatedly that the conductor must be a caring person regarding the positive influence of the conductor on the self-image of the children.</p> <p>“As a conductor, it is my task to make good use of the dynamics within my group. Everyone has ideas and more ideas than I have. .... Getting everyone to feel a joint sense of responsibility for the result. We have to practise looking up to the children – not down to them!”</p> <p>“..get the choir members to believe in themselves and thereby sing with the right attitude. 50% sing with only half their voices because they are frightened of interpreting music and all the academic tradition that has been built up by despotic choir leaders through the ages, There are too many choir leaders who upset people instead of helping them.”</p> <p>“The best way to prepare for life from the time you are born is to sing together with others and develop these properties. (i.e. working together with others, having respect for each other’s differences and showing solidarity and loyalty...if we are to live in peace with each other).”</p> <p>“Set creativity free and give yourself the chance to be amazed by the unreserved joy which can only be found in singing children when they have complete freedom.”</p>		<p>“As adults, I’m sure we all have sometimes recognized how insecurity can reduce our performing capability, or spoil the fun of finishing a task. Children feel the same, and probably more so. Think about the very first rehearsal in the ‘Concert Choir’ for a boy who has just been transferred from the training choir. The first months for him are a never-ending journey through new material, difficult scores, foreign languages, new surroundings, new friends, new conductor. No matter how talented this boy, he will meet with a mixture of success and failure. Through these first months, the foundation of a good and secure singer is formed. This reveals how important it is that the conductor and his singers take care of this little person, who might be only 8 or 9 years old.”</p> <p>“We undertake regular tours where responsible adults are supporting the boys.”</p> <p>“In academic literature, the American social psychologist Abraham H Maslow described the importance of satisfying the need for confidence in order to achieve on a high level.....If we ruin self-confidence, we also ruin the singer” “Even the absolute best singer can be disappointed over his own achievements, and needs attention. If you forget this, you can lose your best singers.”</p>		
Psychological Understanding					
Understanding the child			“...who can honestly say that they can handle the art of making children sing with joy?”		

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THE SOUND OF AN INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S CHOIR					
Sound		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “To have a beautiful tone is the realization for the choral members of what beautiful tone is and they must experience the dissection of the elements of the sound, for example the different vowels</li><li>• Certain exercises</li><li>• The colour of vowels</li><li>• And how the colour of vowels can be changed.</li><li>• The building of a beautiful sound is a long process.</li><li>• Breathing correctly is of the utmost importance regarding the building of sound.”</li></ul> <p>“Singing is breathing. This is a most important concept. The whole body of the child must feel/experience the breathing mechanism. What is lower breathing and how does your body feel? How does it feel to connect the breath with sound? The reason for this is that a head-sound is not the bigger sound with resonance, therefore for me it is important that the member should sing with acute consciousness of the role that the body plays in this process.”</p>			<p>“..as well as choir sound building...”</p> <p>“..the quality of the sound which is important.. means a lot of work...”</p>

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THE SOUND OF AN INTERNATIO!					
Sound	<p>“You can hear the girls sing in different timbres – that is their identity. It is because they sing in differing timbres that I can create a timbre and a sound that is typical for the Adolf Fredriks Girls choir.” “If everyone sang in the same timbre it would not sound as interesting.” “And this creates confidence within each one of us. I am unique – there is only one person who sings like me in the whole world. This inescapable fact brings with it an increased raison d'être. I am something! I am needed!” “Using this attitude I liberate an enormous musical force in which everyone understands they are important. That it is not only those with loud voices and who are of dominant nature that count.”</p> <p>“Anyone can hear that the singers sing with different voices. If I have them sing together, it's not unusual for an attractive harmony to result. This is due to the identities of the various voices. The blend of voices give the choir is unique choir-sound.”</p> <p>“In our case, it consists of that which by tradition is Swedish and which we are good at or best at. In my case we rely on a long Swedish tradition of choir-singing. Experience has been added to experience, year by year, which has meant that Swedish choirs have created a very typical Swedish sound for themselves.”</p> <p>“A musical phrase can never be pressured into existence. It needs its own organic time in order to be performed in such a way that it involves the listener.”</p>		<p>One can hear “ difference in the in the sound ...of a child who sings with....self-confidence. Therefore it is so important that the children's achievements be valued in a positive way.”</p>		<p>“They can learn much from each other. This is important particularly when developing the choral sound.” “The vocal education system in Tapiola Choir is planned to feed itself. It produces singers who can teach others. The transfer effect with in the choir is strong and the children learn a lot from each other's way of singing. Also, the voice training session is always taken care of by a present or a former member of the choir..... Some of the senior singers have specialised in voice training.” “Our main theories are based on the voice production of a newborn baby. A baby cries out a voice in a very special manner, which differs totally from the way an adult uses the voice. We call this particular use of voice organs the voice reflex. It includes an all-inclusive way of using the body. It can be said that the body acts like an instrument, which the voice is playing. The voice reflex combines the organs that usually have a separate function, e.g. lungs, diaphragm, larynx, vocal cords, nose hollow etc, to form one big instrument, When this reflex works the stress is divided evenly to different parts of the function. This is why a little baby can sometimes cry for hours without losing he the voice, if the reflex doesn't work the voice production will overstrain some of the organs which may fail – usually the vocal cords. While growing the voice reflex disappears little by little. However, we believe that it is possible to find it again and this creates the basis of our voice building system: we are trying to find our personal voice reflexes. How can we teach the voice reflex? We can't. We don't know special tricks to create it, we can only try to help the singers to find it by themselves. Separate exercises like breathing or relaxing do not make us find the reflex. However, they can help to create the basis for it. Only voice exercises can help to find the synchronized cooperation of the different organs which together build up the voice reflex. When the choir is working to find again the reflex the homogeneous sound can be found and a common sound wave can be born. This wave helps a singer to find his own voice reflex and the singers of the whole choir may be surprised to notice how strong their voices actually are, I think this is the case in Tapiola Choir. Singing alone or in other groups the voices are weakened by being surrounded by each other. Their voices get more power from this common sound wave.”</p>



	A – Hendrik Loock: South Africa	B – Acama Fick: South Africa	C – Petru Gräbe: South Africa	D – Hendrika Johanna van Aswegen: South Africa	E – Arne Saluveer: Estonia
Beautiful	“To get a beautiful sound, children should be taught to sing with a smile. This smile opens the sound and the result is a sound that is amplified, therefore choristers need not sing louder, because the sound is amplified by itself, so to speak.”				
Bright			“brightness...”		
Building of the Vocal System					
Clarity			“and clarity”		
Clear			“Sound wise I am of the opinion the sound of a good children’s choir will have clarity...”		
Climate					
Each voice group	“Specialised highlighting of each voice is also important, because every voice group is not doing musically the same all the time while singing.”				
Individual training					“...using a vocal teacher...”
Natural					
Perceptions of different cultures			“In my opinion there is not one perfect choir sound: this ideal differs through the world.”		
Results of (one) vocal system					
Technical work					

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Beautiful					
Bright					
Building of the Vocal System					“has a good basic ...vocal.... system...”
Clarity					
Clear					
Climate					“Some theories refer to the effect of climate. Perhaps the thousands of Finnish lakes, light summer nights and great forests have in their own way contributed to the creation of the Tapiola Sound.”
Each voice group					“..if needed, homogeneous choir sound...” “Homogeneity (his wording), when needed”
Individual training					“During a normal choir rehearsal all the singers visit in turns the ‘Voice Service Station’ whereby they get personal voice training given by a professional teacher.”
Natural		“The singers must have a natural and focused sound (again problem to answer because natural sound and what is nice, beautiful and expressive perceives different from different part of the world. This can be a thesis in it selves!!) ” (the exact words of Hånen)		“I believe that children should sing naturally, with good breath control and good articulation.”	“..has a natural..sound” “..also at the limits of the voice range.”
Perceptions of different cultures		“The ideal of the perfect sound differs through the world.”		“The Russian text and language influences the sound and the way of singing of our country.”	“The ideal of a beautiful singing voice varies a lot according to cultures, languages, tradition etc.”
Results of (one) vocal system					“guarantees the continuity of the choral education using the transfer between the singers.”
Technical work	“Each lesson (40 minutes) begins with 15 minutes of tone formation.”				

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Type					
Unique	“A children’s choir has a unique sound which is very important.”				“Uhm... we have also different songs that we have tried to, tried to find out what kind of sound the piece exactly needs. (Ya!) And uhm... looking for, for uhm... sound quality, the best by our knowledge..... for the piece.”
Vocal exercises		“There are 1 000 exercises to do, but I believe that one should not do exercises in an unstructured way. One must have a certain set of exercises to promote the sound of your choir to blend and to get uniformity whereby the singers can experience your goal. But that perfect sound can also be boring, you know.”			“Ya, sometimes able to make some vocal exercises, (Ya)” but not so much. Uhm... we... are not always starting ... depends on how much time we have and mainly we think of... to make uhm... a higher range of voices uhm... higher and lower to make the quality of the sound... different rhythm... (Yes, yes...) that is very important.”
Voice training					

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Type					"The choral tradition in Finland is rather young. The first choir, which is still singing today, was founded in 1838. The majority of Finnish choirs have been founded in the 20th century. The ideal way of singing has changed strongly in the last 50 years. Until 1950's e.g. in children's choirs strong forte singing was typical but after that the sound has softened and become more nuanced. In this process Erkki Pohjola and Tapiola Choir have been real pioneers. To use a symbolic expression: the sound used to be like a trumpet and moved towards to the sound of flute. In Tapiola choir, however, the warm and flexible sound of violin would be closer to our ideal."
Unique					"..with the ability to transform it according to the music performed." "Versatile ways to produce the singing voice according to geographical, traditional, linguistic or other connections."
Vocal exercises					"The main components of Tapiola Choir voice training exercises are: 1. Relaxing 2. Breathing 3. Resonance 4. Voice range 5. Articulation."
Voice training					"Our principle is that if children only sing simple children's songs in very limited voice range there is not need for special voice training. But is we demand from a children's choir some artistic level and artistically challenging repertoire, we also have to take care of the instrument, the voice. Otherwise it may fail."  (The children's choir) "has a wide voice range"

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AUDITIONS					
Auditions				“Auditions is the responsibility of the conductor.”	

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AUDITIONS					
Auditions	“Children are ten years when they apply to attend Adolf Fredriks Music Classes. ... When Children apply to attend Adolf Fredrik Music Classes we know nothing of their study results or anything else about them..” “It is important to point out that Adolf Fredriks Music classes is not a private school, but a regular secondary school offering extra facilities for music study. We are not a fee-paying school! This is a very important principle, AND ONLY THE MUSIC TEST DETERMINES WHETHER A CHILD IS ACCEPTED IN THE SCHOOL.”				

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	<p>“Each year , of the approximately 1000 ten year olds which audition to Adolf Fredrik, only 180 are selected.” “When the singers in my choir are accepted I make a point of saying that it is because you sound the way you do that your voice fits in with the choir. We need your voice so that the harmony will be the typical, world-famous sound. Everyone is equally important. If you are forced to miss a rehearsal, an important link will be missing. YOU ARE UNIQUE! WE NEED YOU!” “For many years the test was conducted in October. Now the test is held in January because we must inform the schools in the home district which children in their area will be attending Adolf Fredrik. The students will be leaving their ‘natural ‘school and previous classmates behind.”</p> <p>“We have moved the test period so far forward as possible (meaning ten years of age: researcher’s explanation) because girls are so much more developed and mature than boys of the same age. When we discussed test methods with experts, we found that the biological age in a group of ten year olds often differs by as much as eight years between those who are furthest developed and those who are least developed. Each year, 1000 children apply to attend the school from the greater Stockholm area.” “The test is divided into two days, the first day the children learn the individual test and practice their mandatory songs in groups. The intention is to create a stimulating situation in which the children find it fun to sing. During the introduction I talk a lot about attitudes: happy, unhappy, playing a part and acting snooty, all with the voice. Such consciousness can make a note come out high or low. Strong or soft! A new discovery for many children!” “When students apply to us now they sing two songs. The student can choose one song from three proposed obligatory songs (the obligatory songs are all well known children’s songs). The songs to be sung a cappella.” “In addition several different test are made regarding singing by ear. I run through this very carefully. After 60 minutes every child is expected to understand what is going to happen on day two, when the individual test are conducted.” “The singing by ear tests are divided as follows: • Rhythm • Melody • Chords” “Boys and girls practice separately so that the boys can feel secure and confident and stimulated.”</p>				



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Melodic and rhythmic memory			“Melodic and rhythmic memory is very important abilities therefore the discerning of chords and the amount of notes in a harmony I also considers important”		
Musical talent versus voice			“To achieve this aim meaningful constructed auditions will play an important role: I am of the opinion that musical talent is more important than a beautiful voice”.		
No first auditions					
Notes able to sing			"the highest and lowest notes the candidate can sing is important”		
Pitches			“I think that the ability to discern different pitches is most important with children.”“Personally, I am much in favour of the views of Arnold Bentley, who wrote a book about musical gifted children. I would like a child, during an audition, to be able to distinguish a pitch difference of up to a tenth of a semitone.”		
Singing from a score			“an audition should test the ability of the applicant to sing a certain part from a musical score.”		
Vocal ability			"When singing a song, the voice (vocal ability) of the singer performing can be judged”		

	<b>F – Bo Johanssen: Sweden</b>	<b>G – Kåre Hanken: Norway</b>	<b>H – Björn Moe: Norway</b>	<b>I – Dr Elena Svetoza: Russia</b>	<b>J – Combined views: Erkki Pohjola &amp; Kari Ala-Pöllänen: Finland</b>
	<p>“I find during auditions that the range of voices today is more limited than it used to be, and voices are far lower..... The voice is frequently based in the chest position and the head voice is (was) never trained and developed.” “Note memory is shorter today than 15 years ago.... When I play a melody with more than five notes the student often wants to hear the sequence on more time. (Fifteen years ago)” “Before I could play up to eight notes and the student would understand the melody.” “These are frightening observations and I know the same problems are occurring the world over.”</p>				
<b>Melodic and rhythmic memory</b>					
<b>Musical talent versus voice</b>					
<b>No first auditions</b>				<p>“I do not do any auditions. I believe that all children can sing, therefore children can sing two years and only then they are being evaluated. Most of them can sing after such duration. Of course, if a child shows musical promise, he/she is trained to sing in second and third vocal voice parts.”</p>	
<b>Notes able to sing</b>					
<b>Pitches</b>					
<b>Singing from a score</b>					
<b>Vocal ability</b>					

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<b>HANDLING OF THE VOCAL INSTRUMENT: THE CHILD'S VOICE</b>					
<b>Characteristics of the child's singing voice</b>			<p>The transparency of the children's choir sound, specifically discussing two soprano and two alto groups (SSAA) has the implication that the conductor must have an excellent ear regarding intonation.” (E-mail 17/07/07)</p> <p>I would like to mention that in 1978 when three of my choirs were awarded cum laude (above 90%) at the international competition at Neerpelt, Belgium, the boy's excelled in Baroque singing, while the girls were more at home with arrangements from folksong by Brahms.</p>		
<b>TECHNICAL WORK WITH THE OUTSTANDING CHILDREN'S CHOIR</b>					
<b>Emotional scale</b>					
<b>Interpretation</b>	“Music should always move in phrases – the conductor must not think about tempo changes in this regard.” “In the interpretation of a piece, musicality and phrasing is of the utmost significance.”	“Interpretation that is convincing is always accompanied by excellent intonation.”	“The interpretation of any music must be credible/reliable”		“I think children should be able to express themselves emotionally free and to motivate them... and to put on type of emotion on them and know why we do it.”
<b>Musicality</b>					
<b>Resonance</b>			“Working on resonance will be very important, because the resonance spaces of children are small. For instance, if one is thinking about the nasal, mouth and palate cavities, the only thing to do will be to try and to enlarge those inside spaces. When the palate is lifted, the result will be a clear sound, with enough resonance, Because children, have this natural, clear projection, only resonance is needed to let the sound carries.”		
<b>Rhythm</b>		“Rhythm is also very important.”			

	F – Bo Johanssen: Sweden	G – Kåre Hanken: Norway	H – Björn Moe: Norway	I – Dr Elena Svetoza: Russia	J – Combined views: Erkki Pohjola & Kari Ala-Pöllänen: Finland
HANDLING OF THE VOCAL INSTI					
Characteristics of the child's singing voice					
TECHNICAL WORK WITH THE OI					
Emotional scale					“Wide emotional scale (in children’s choirs this is often forgotten).”
Interpretation		The interpretation “must be able to move the soul of the listeners.”			
Musicality	Phrasing: “A musical phrase can never be pressured into existence. It needs its own organic time in order to be performed in such a way that it involves the listener.”				
Resonance					
Rhythm					“sings with rhythmical exactness.” “Rhythmical exactness, easiness and lightness”

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Style/period		“For instance Baroque music is grammar. This grammar is based on dance patterns. Most Baroque music is dances, All the different Baroque dances is intrinsic in even Bach Cantatas. If you as conductor does not have that feeling and if you know nothing about the style, I do not know how you are going to sing that music. I am convinced that there are definite techniques to get the final, desired, correct result. For instance, this style is a speciality. Children loves Baroque music.”			
Technical ability	“The technical ability of the choir can never be neglected, especially <u>legato singing</u> .” “Agility in quick singing without increasing the tempo is important. In this instance, dynamic signs can be of great help”	“The technical ability of a world class children’s choir also include many technical abilities, • For example control over legato singing • The ‘let go’ principle of a second note (one of the most difficult techniques of all) • The correct use of breath in different circumstances • And I often used exercises based on the material that we are singing. • One might do sight singing in easier pieces. • I do not necessarily put aside a definite time (duration) on technical work.”			“....some pieces have very long phrases which are (in one line?) Yes, in one line. First and second sopranos also...for seconds...it’s very hard. (Yes, yes)”
The Role of breath control					
EXCELLENT INTONATION OF THE OUTSTANDING CHILDREN'S CHOIR					
Intonation	“Excellent intonation is of paramount importance.”	"Excellent intonation is part of the bigger picture: it is a given."	“Try not to use the piano while working on intonation.”		
a cappella					I think there’s different intonation when you sing a cappella music it’s different when you sing music with some kind of accompanist or some keyboard or...uh... its some kind of micro tuning which you kind of except intonation... its not uhm... very good, not very very good results, but uhm... we are making especially with children choirs...more...different harmonies looking for special intonation, you know? (Ya)"
Canons					

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Style/period					
Technical ability				“The correct forming of vowels is very important. I prefer to put other sounds in front of the vowels, e.g.(j)a, (r)a, etc.” “It is very important to roll an “r” and then connect the vowel to this sound. This makes the mechanism of singing vowels correctly much easier.”	
The Role of breath control				“...children should sing with good breath control and... I do many exercises, e.g. for developing the diaphragm, etcetera.”	
EXCELLENT INTONATION OF TH					
Intonation	“Singing in a choir and training to appear before an audience creates self-confidence and stage experience.”		“If we ruin self-confidence, we also ruin the singer. Just think about the difference in the ...intonation of a child who sings with of without self-confidence!”	“Intonation is very important...”	“has an exact intonation”
a cappella					
Canons				“Canons are also important tools.”	

	A – Hendrik Loock: South Africa	B – Acama Fick: South Africa	C – Petru Gräbe: South Africa	D – Hendrika Johanna van Aswegen: South Africa	E – Arne Saluveer: Estonia
Harmonic understanding			<p>“Children will have better intonation if they have</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• musical insight into what is harmonically happening in the musical piece. Notes in sheet music can either have harmonic or melodic implication.</li> <li>• Melodically problems might be rectified with the piano, but harmonic problems imply vertical thinking.”</li> </ul>		
Role of the movable do-system					
Style					
Work systematically					
Difficult pieces versus intonation					"A special piece for example a song with hard intonation with more than 8 voices and all kinds of things like clusters... its...it has been very hard work..."
<b>REPERTOIRE, TEXTS, PERFORMANCES, TOURS, CHOREOGRAPHY, ACOUSTICS</b>					
Acoustics	<p>“I have to say this about acoustics: I prefer a dry acoustic because an excellent choir can sing in such an acoustic because it enhances transparency and balance of voices. In this circumstances there must be balance between the voices and the sound can even be more sonorous when the sound is darkened with care, so that it should not sound unnatural.”</p> <p>“When a choir is singing in complementary acoustics, e.g. a cathedral, the conductor should remember a few things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not sing slower</li> <li>• Rather do a cappella music, because a piano and drums for instance, leads to a mixing of sounds not clearly distinguishable.</li> <li>• Excellent diction is in these circumstances very important.”</li> </ul>				
Choreography					

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Harmonic understanding					
Role of the movable do-system				“For this development I use the movable d-system. All children must know it. I consider exercises to develop this important.”	
Style		“ Intonation must be in style and tradition” (Music for Latin America, Russia, Scandinavia are different, so also music from different century and country.)”			
Work systematically				“...and I work on that systematically.”	
Difficult pieces versus intonation					
REPERTOIRE, TEXTS, PERFORM/					
Acoustics					
Choreography				“Because children are emotional people, I find choreography a necessary element.”	



	A – Hendrik Loock: South Africa	B – Acama Fick: South Africa	C – Petru Gräbe: South Africa	D – Hendrika Johanna van Aswegen: South Africa	E – Arne Saluveer: Estonia
Performances in choir school					
Recording of Choir					“I think it is also very cool to record children...your own voice that you hear and to analyze lots of types...changes...that your friends has sung...uhm... to teach children to help to take a chance...(Ya)”
Repertoire					

	<b>F – Bo Johanssen: Sweden</b>	<b>G – Kåre Hanken: Norway</b>	<b>H – Björn Moe: Norway</b>	<b>I – Dr Elena Svetoza: Russia</b>	<b>J – Combined views: Erkki Pohjola &amp; Kari Ala-Pöllänen: Finland</b>
<b>Performances in choir school</b>	<p>“During the course of one year, a class will normally participate in several different types of performances: joint concerts with 2 or 3 other choir groups, larger scale performances in which several choir groups participate, and in fact, in conjunction with the school’s annual Lucia concert in the Stockholm Globe Arena (seats 10,000), the entire student body and all faculty participate. Interestingly enough, this concert is sold out to capacity audiences three times each year.) The faculty attempt to “mix” concerts whenever possible, i.e. to let younger classes share concerts with older classes. The type of repertoire varies, as well. Students master a cappella repertoire form various historical periods and national styles. During their younger years, they sing almost exclusively repertoire for equal voices (2-4- part) by the time they are in the 7th and 8th grades, they are beginning to perform SATB repertoire. They regularly perform with instrumental ensembles of varying size, including symphony orchestra.”</p> <p>Adolf Fredrik together with Stockholm’s Musikgymnasium is one of Stockholm’s largest concert institutions, organizing and performing at least 50 choral concerts every year. When Stockholm’s Opera is in need of children’s choirs in such productions as Carmen, La Bohème and Tosca, it is students from Adolf Fredrik which participate. Larger choral productions such as Britten’s War requiem, Verdi’s Requiem and Stravinsky’s Psalm Symphony are regularly performed by students from Adolf Fredrik/Stockholm’s Musikgymnasium.. There are three select groups, above and beyond the normal music curriculum of the school to which students may audition. The Adolf Fredrik’s Boy’s Choir, The Adolf Fredrik’s Girls’ choir and The Stockholm’s Musikgymnasium's Chamber Choir have all met with great success both nationally and internationally.</p>				
<b>Recording of Choir</b>					
<b>Repertoire</b>					

	A – Hendrik Loock: South Africa	B – Acama Fick: South Africa	C – Petru Gräbe: South Africa	D – Hendrika Johanna van Aswegen: South Africa	E – Arne Saluveer: Estonia
<b>Choices in repertoire/ music</b>			<p>“Music choices to be sung, should always be in the children’s field of experience. For younger children it would be advisable to make sober choices regarding classical music. For instance, the well-known composed song in four voices by Schubert, Gott in der Natur, opus 133, D757 (1822), with it dramatic text, needs, in my opinion, the fuller, mature sound of a women’s choir. Thus it should be carefully considered as a choice for a young children’s choir, even if those children are able to sing the notes and perform the piece quite musically. The interpretation stays immature because the sound and depth of interpretation can never be, in my opinion, be fulfilled”</p> <p>“I would consider, stressing the above point, the Brahms folksongs as good musical choices for a children’s choir. The rendition of a work with another sound-character, e.g. an arrangement of Summertime by Bernstein, which will have another character and thus another way of producing the sound production must be carefully considered by the conductor, since this sound may rub off and influence the sound rendering of the group in performing other music.”</p> <p>“I would like to mention that in 1978 when three of my choirs were awarded cum laude (above 90%) at the international competition at Neerpelt, Belgium, the boy’s excelled in Baroque singing, while the girls because they were more mature than the boys were more at home with arrangements from folksongs by Brahms.” (E-mail 17/07/07)</p>	<p>“I am of the opinion that the repertoire choices form the basis of the success of a choir. The choice of music must have variety, it can be original music, good quality arrangements, folk music of their own and other countries.” “...should always be excellent...”</p> <p>“The rendering of songs should be stylistically correct.”</p>	<p>“Well, today, it seems to me, we sing a lot of music also from scores, modify songs...”</p> <p>“international choir music.. Our repertoire is quite, today is quite large, we, we singing old music. Gregorian until contemporary choir music also uhm....we have recorded and made experiment of music as well as pop and jazz and also folk music, ...”</p> <p>“I think its uhm... both as music and text as important and... good pieces... looking at musical aspects, which is very important.”</p> <p>“Uhm. I think its many types of music... Sometimes you look for uhm... for our singers. I think it’s important to uhm,...the singers... it’s...about music for us as conductors to yourself, I think it’s the best way....If the piece it’s interesting for singers, for conductors as well as the audience. (Ya)”</p> <p>I think children should be able to express themselves emotionally free and to motivate them... and to put on type of emotion on them and know why we do it.”</p> <p>“Sometimes uhm...its, its not good to take some piece in your repertoire ...but children are also very different so uhm... some of your singers could be motivated to do something very hard to do...but if they are interested in what their doing they can manage it.(Ya,ya)”</p>
<b>Classical music</b>					
<b>Compositions of own country</b>			<p>“A choir should also include as many as possible of the composed music of his own country.”</p>	<p>“..especially compositions from one’s own country...”</p>	<p>...later Estonian ..music...”</p> <p>(So there are seven pieces by...)</p> <p>“Yes. His name is Veljo Tormis, different part, name of his... like he takes it from nature...like spring, wind, cold, rain...and so on”.</p> <p>We, as a children’s choir has also sung a lot of Thomas Merick and uhm... this is important for us...really, because uhm... its music that is 5000/6000 years old and Thomas has a very different arrangement which is musically uhm...very uhm... interesting for us. (Ya, ya) Uhm...also very, very different view for how he has made his music.”</p>

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Choices in repertoire/ music				“The choice of music is important and must speak to the children.” “I choose repertoire with which children can associate.”	“sings repertoire of high artistic and pedagogic quality" (e.g. Kodály)
Classical music				“Classical music is good music.” “ I find the chorales of Bach excellent music to start with..”	
Compositions of own country				“Russian music is special and melodically interesting.” “I choose repertoire with which children can associate, especially our own composers.”	

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Compositions versus arrangements			“Give preference to composed music rather than arrangements. Arrangements often have compositional problems/shortcomings.”	"... rather compositions, but children's choirs, due to their composition, must sometimes revert to sing excellent arrangements."	“I think this translation form is OK, because uhm... it is not folk song arrangement uhm... it is originally composed music. (Ya) And texting a song is also today modern language... (yes) and it is possible to translate to English, but there is also some folk song arrangements that you try to translate, but uhm... in this music you loose some type of original sound...sound of ancient words.”
Good music				“The choice of music, which is the basis of the success of the choir, include the best quality of music to be found, referring for instance to the composer Kodály and the fact that Jean Ashworth- Bartle also stresses the importance of excellent quality when choosing music for children's choirs.”	
Language			“Singing not in the original language of a piece may pose certain problems: there may be the possibility of wrong accents, for one.”	“An excellent children choir must be able to sing in any language with perfect pronunciation.”	
Text				“The text of a chosen piece must be child-friendly.”	
Articulation			“I believe in natural, clear pronunciation without any unnaturalness.”		
Characteristics: Language / country					
Contact with audience		“A beautiful sound is an understanding of communication with choir and audience.”			

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Compositions versus arrangements					
Good music				“Good music motivates”	
Language				“The Russian text and language influences the sound and the way of singing of our country.”	
Text					
Articulation					(A good choir) “has a clear articulation” “The Finnish language is phonetically and intonation wise not a demanding language. We can speak our language and get ourselves understood with a ‘lazy face’ and unfortunately many people do so in their every day talk. That causes every Finnish choir conductor a strong need to increase the efficiency of articulation. Out language is also pronounced in the back of the mouth hollow. That is why we have to do a lot of work to get the voice place more in front of the mouth. Many other languages are better in this respect: Swedish, French, Italian etc. Nevertheless, the Finnish language is undoubtedly one of the main pillars in building the Tapiola Sound.”
Characteristics: Language / country				“As far as text is concerned, Russian music is always accompanied with beautiful poetry: therefore the recital of the music is flowing from the text to the music.”	
Contact with audience	“That is why the musical communication between choir and audience is very important! Sing by heart! It’s for the audience we are singing.”	“ The choir must speak to the audience and must be able to move the souls of the listeners.”			

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<b>Importance of the text</b>	“Text of the music to be sung is significant in importance.”	“In an excellent choir, diction is very important. It gives character, personality to the specific song and I am of the opinion that it often moves in conjunction with the style as one cannot in all styles use the same character of diction. An over emphasis of consonants is detrimental to the style and the legato line. I find that if members can write aspects around ‘timing’ of where the place of a specific sound must be, on which consonant, on which part of the pulse, etcetera, this is also part of the overall technique of presenting the text.”			“...as well as how to understand the music that you are performing... the texture, the lyrics and the background and to know... what is the message of the song (Yes)”
<b>Knowledge of poem/text</b>		“To get an understanding of the text and for interpretation they had to read, present, dramatize those words. The more time I spend on that, the more easy it went with interpretation in singing. Again, there are many techniques to acquire this.”			
<b>Presentation of text to audience</b>					
<b>Text can build bridges with other countries</b>					
<b>Tours</b>				“Tours and International comparison is relevant to the growth of an excellent choir. These factors are supporting the further growth of an excellent choir and conductor.”	
<b>Use in the community of an outstanding choir.</b>					

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<b>Importance of the text</b>		“have a strong realization to/understanding of the text, and the pronunciation must be excellent.”			
<b>Knowledge of poem/text</b>		“... have a strong realization to/understanding of the text, ...”		“Church music is in old dialects and must be explained to the children. In other instances I find it necessary to explain the historical background of the composition to the children to give understanding of the text”	
<b>Presentation of text to audience</b>					“is able to express different emotions in singing”
<b>Text can build bridges with other countries</b>	“The most interesting thing for me ....is to listen to choirs with a different way of sing when they are singing their own folk-music.”				“Text can build bridges with other countries”
<b>Tours</b>	“The choir (Adolf Fredrik’s Girls Choir) performs frequently in Sweden, touring the entire country and often taking part in official ceremonies.”		“Good choirs have tours because these tours are also responsible for the development of the singers and broader perspectives.” “...it is important to have inspiring conductor with an inspiring future goal, for example a tour.” (Tours can be handled in a certain manner {Moe} but are natural events in the existence of a choir.)		
<b>Use in the community of an outstanding choir.</b>	“When the Royal Opera puts on productions the children come from Adolf Fredrik. And the school has worked closely with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra of Stockholm for many years.”		The Nidaros Cathedral Boys’ Choir performs regularly at the Nidaros Cathedral.		



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REHEARSALS					
Duration of Practices/ Rehearsals	“We practice on average, six hours per week. Four hours on a Saturday and for two hours on a Tuesday night. Breaks are included in this time frame.”				“...1,5 hours...”
STRUCTURES OF CHOIRS REGARDING SYSTEM AND AGE					
Accompanist	“If there is an accompanist, this person should always follow the conductor.”				
Afterwards					

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REHEARSALS					
Duration of Practices/ Rehearsals	“The Adolf Fredrik’s Girls Choir rehears, twice a week, in the late afternoon after the ordinary school day.” “No matter whether I am rehearsing with the Swedish Radio Choir or with the Adolf Fredrik’s Girls Choir, I would conduct rehearsal the same way. The end results (if we can talk about such a thing in the artistic process) take differing lengths of time to reach, but the method of getting there is the same. It is a matter of taking the people who are rehearsing seriously. Of creating a feeling, irrespective of age, that this is something important(the musical phrase hold not be frittered away).”		“...people who meet voluntarily for rehearsals three times a week.”		
STRUCTURES OF CHOIRS REGARDING					
Accompanist					
Afterwards	“Interestingly enough...most of the students go on to sing in amateur choirs in Stockholm and throughout Sweden, using their acquitted skills in all kinds of choral situations.”				

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Characteristics of choir school					
Characteristics of singers				“The singers must have a balance between a naturalness and energetic spark and focussed discipline regarding the music and while performing the music on stage.”	(need) “.....self-motivation..”
Musical educational system					

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<b>Characteristics of choir school</b>	<p>“Adolf Fredriks Music Classes is a choir school. Each class forms a choir and as we have 36 classes this means we have 36 choirs. 1000 students, age from 11 to 16 years.”</p> <p>“Instruction covers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• musical theory</li> <li>• solfeggio Certain lessons are devoted entirely to sight-singing.</li> <li>• Singing by ear instruction.</li> </ul> <p>Each one of the 13 music teachers are devoted to certain guiding principles in there work to impact the aesthetics and skills of music, to develop in their students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• beautiful choral singing.</li> <li>• to teach a healthy individual vocal technique. Each lesson (40 minutes) begins with 15 minutes of tone formation. (Each teacher) ...</li> <li>• and reading notes</li> <li>• and to imbue a good knowledge of choral repertoire.</li> <li>• and ear training, in which case a class of 30 can be divided into two groups.” <p>“As might be expected in such a large school, the methods of teaching vary greatly.”</p> <p>“During the lessons we prepare for the most important hour of the week, the choir hour at which two classes join together to form a 'concert choir'.”</p> </li></ul>		<p>“We have a training choir and from them the concert choir is selected.”</p>		
<b>Characteristics of singers</b>	<p>“The choir as phenomenon has a great potential for training us to listen to each other in a dual sense.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teaching us to respect each other’s differences.</li> <li>2. Reinforcing our sense of solidarity and loyalty.” <p>“Anyone can hear that the singers sing with different voices. If I have them sing together, it’s not unusual for an attractive harmony to result. This is due to the identities of the various voices. The blend of voices give the choir is unique choir-sound. Without (the individual’s) voice an important link is missing. Everyone is needed for the harmony to be perfect. That is why it is not a private matter for (a choir member) to miss a rehearsal – the other(s) need you.”</p> <p>“Choral members should do their best in the choir. Training in loyalty is important in order for a choir to work. This strengthen self-esteem and reinforces every individual’s self-image.”</p> </li></ol>	<p>“The singers /choir must be musicians</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The singers must take responsibility, be independent</li> <li>• but with strong focused on ensemble as a whole</li> <li>• The singers/choir must be flexible” (exact English words of K Hanken)</li> </ul>	<p>“In an outstanding choir we want ‘responsible singers.’ “that is just what we want: responsible singers.”</p>		
<b>Musical educational system</b>					<p>“has a good basic musical education system...”</p>

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Role of tuition in musical instruments			“If a child has musical substructure/background this will be very helpful towards intonation, meaning: if he/she is taking an instrument this child will probably be more skilled in the development of intonation than those without musical background.”		“Some of them are and some of them not, but uhm...many parents suggest they play and sing. It would be great for them if they can play everything...but uhm...we suggest for many singers to take some instrumental lesson or visit some music school...” “I think it could be really different for a children’s choir also, if you sing contemporary music. Yes, I think instrumental play is something which help to work on things...”
Size of choir					
PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS					
Choirs can build bridges with other countries					
Self-confidence					

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Role of tuition in musical instruments					"...has a good instrumental education system."
Size of choir				"My choir consists of plus minus 100 singers. From them I choose 35 singers when on tour."	
<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS</b>					
Choirs can build bridges with other countries	"...Choirs have great potential for building bridges between countries, religions, races, etc."				"An excellent children's choir also has a unique profile and a personality with roots deep in the own tradition and culture, spreading out the branches and leaves to build bridges with other cultures of the world."
Self-confidence	<p>"The voice is as much a part of the individual's identity as appearance. I have the right to my appearance and the same self-evident right to my voice. For this reason there is nothing that builds up the self-confidence of the individual better than singing and choir singing. Consequently, choir singing is of great special significance, And choir singing is needed more than ever today. Too many people in our society lack self-confidence."</p> <p>"Choral members should do their best in the choir. Training in loyalty is important in order for a choir to work. This strengthen self-esteem and reinforces every individual's self-image."</p>		<p>"Think about the very first rehearsal in the 'concert choir'; for a boy who has just been transferred from the training choir. The first months for him are a never-ending journey through new material, difficult scores, foreign languages, new surroundings, new friends, new conductor. No matter how talented this boy, he will meet with a mixture of success and failure. Through these first months, the foundation of a good and secure singer is formed. This reveals how important it is that the conductor and his singers take care of this little person, who might be only eight or 9 years old."</p> <p>"...it is so important that the children's achievements to valued in a positive way..."</p> <p>"This lead to the desired sound and intonation."</p> <p>"To sing in an outstanding choir satisfies the need for confidence in order to achieve on a high level."</p>		

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Why do children sing in an outstanding choir?/ Psychological value of choral singing in an outstanding choir					
DANGER FOR THE INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED CHILDREN'S CHOIR IN YEARS TO COME					
Dangers for excellent choirs in the world of today					

	F – Bo Johanssen: Sweden	G – Kåre Hanken: Norway	H – Björn Moe: Norway	I – Dr Elena Svetoza: Russia	J – Combined views: Erkki Pohjola & Kari Ala-Pöllänen: Finland
<b>Why do children sing in an outstanding choir?/ Psychological value of choral singing in an outstanding choir</b>	<p>(Children sing) “Obviously because it’s fun. But also so that the audience will appreciate what we (they) do. That is why the musical communication between choir and audience is very important! Sing by heart! It’s for the audience we are singing.”</p> <p>“There is solidarity in an outstanding choir: they are a family striving for the same aim. The is loyalty and respect for each other’s differences.”</p>		<p>“Here is the main question: 'What creates a desire to sing, so that every boy will sing with real joy, and not with a feeling of being forced?'...the answer is pretty complex and ...its has many connections.””I will try to touch on some of the connections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence in the choir.</li> <li>• The (choosing of ) good music. A while ago, I asked the boys what music they would prefer to sing. ....50% voted for Schubert, and the other half wanted to sing Bach. I asked: what about the gospel music? ...It is fun to sing, but Bach And Schubert give us much more, and their music is more demanding.... There are so many educationalists who say that it is important to stay on the child’s level, but what is actually the child’s level? I think that many educators define the child’s learning capacity on a shaky basis. This often originates in the educator’s low performance level. If the teachers is a bad musician, he or she also inhibits the child’s development. My experience is that boys like challenges, and that they love tackling them. and when they overcome the challenge, they also love the music, and they spread the music of joy and delight.”</li> <li>• “Natural variations among boys. Even in the best choirs, there will be singers who don’t always succeed, or some who will need more time to succeed.”</li> <li>• “It is the conductor, with his personality, his choice of music, his pedagogic skills and his knowledge, who must lubricate the complicated choir machine.” “To sing in an outstanding choir satisfies the need for confidence in order to achieve on a high level."</li> </ul>		
<b>DANGER FOR THE INTERNATION</b>					
<b>Dangers for excellent choirs in the world of today</b>	<p>Johansson is warning repeatedly about the influence of new technology (Televisions and all new technology evolving around computers and their relevant ‘offspring’ on children). This involves their social skills and promotes a new way of thinking for children. “In my opinion: Mass media works against serious young people’s music by almost never drawing any attention for it.” “Our licensing funds are being used to create a platform for the kind of music that will not outlast the day.”</p>				