

TUNING OUR HEARTS AND VOICES

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This month we eagerly anticipate a somewhat normal choral season in which we are finally permitted to sing in groups in person. As with all the other post-pandemic "firsts," our feelings about actually doing this may be complicated. We have waited so long for this particular green light, and we look forward to rejoining our colleagues. But we may have concerns about how vocal fatigue and personal anxiety may slow us down as we resume our choral activities. How can we take control of our situation and rebuild the stamina we will need for rehearsals and services?

First, this is an excellent time to create a daily regimen for singing if you don't already follow one. I suggest beginning with simple breathing and humming, just to remind yourself of the basics of sound production. From there sing five-note scales, first with closed lips and then opening up to the various vowels. After a few days of that, move on to full octave scales. All of these exercises should begin in the middle of your range and move outward as you become more comfortable. If singing with too much weight is an issue for you, though, consider beginning in the upper middle of your range and work with descending scales.

The most important thing: do what works for you. We all use different vocalises and vocabulary for singing, and there are many ways to reacquaint your body with the vocal technique you have learned. Pay attention to how your body feels when

you finish practicing each day. Does your throat hurt in any way? If so, you should move back to basic exercises and a shorter practice time. "Flash practice sessions" (limited to fifteen minutes on a very specific issue) can be more beneficial than randomly running through a number of exercises. You may want to push yourself to do too much at first, but try to be patient and to ease in slowly. No one prepares for the Boston Marathon by running 26.2 miles on Day One.

After vocalizing, move on to some repertoire: each day's regimen should eventually include something with text. If you don't currently have solo repertoire on your music stand at home, open your hymnal (or use an online resource) and sing through at least one favorite hymn each day to build endurance. If you are a soprano, consider throwing in a descant once or twice a week. And don't forget to

all endured, it is normal to find yourself tearing up at the thought of singing together. Don't be surprised, on your first day back at rehearsal, if you find unexpected emotions welling up. Richard Robinson's beloved 1758 hymn text offers a prayer for our return to communal singing:

*Come, thou Fount of every blessing,
tune my heart to sing thy grace.
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of modest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet
sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
mount of God's undying love.*

"It will get easier as we become accustomed to our seasonal rhythms. Ask God to tune your heart."

It will get easier as we become accustomed to our seasonal rhythms. Ask God to tune your heart. And as the rehearsal schedule picks up speed, remember the words of the incomparable Ella Fitzgerald: "The only thing better than singing is more singing." •

practice holding a folder full of music with a mindful eye on correct body alignment.

When we return to rehearsal, we will also need to respond to conductors, collaborative pianists, and our fellow section members in real time again, without the protection of the Zoom screen. This is good news: it will be infinitely easier to collaborate when we have the benefit of the visual cues in three dimensions as well as the overtones of sound produced in a common acoustic space.

Finally, you may want to take a few moments along the way to prepare yourself emotionally. After what we have

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