Prof. Robert Göstl

Sibelius-Akademie 29.2. – 2.3.16

**Working with children’s and youth choirs**

29.2.16

**Introduction**

About me and my work – connecting the base and the top

Why thinking about children’s choirs is important for professional choral conductors

**Voice training with children**

Example of a vocal exercise for little children: throwing the ball

* “Shooting in the film”
* Wide breath
* Throwing with glissando (“uuuuu-ui-iup”)
* Gathering children on one note (men: one octave higher!)
* Game with reaction

About the voice registers – two videos (Anna and DVD of “Chorleitfaden” <http://www.conbrio.de/autoren/robert-gostl> ):

* Head voice: produced by the soft edge of the vocal cords – to tend with “u”, lower volume, higher pitch
* Chest voice: produced by the full muscle of the vocal cords – to tend with “a”, higher volume, lower pitch
* “normal” range of children’s voices

To find “the way” to the head voice is the most important thing in vocal training for children and young people.

Select exercises depending on what the voices need, on what you need for the repertoire and on the age of the children/young people. The younger the children are, the more you can play and pack it in a story – the older the children or adolescent become, the more you work with ambition like in sports.

Voice training by musical expression

Example Josef Gabriel Rheinberger “Kyrie” from “Missa puerorum”

**Basics of psychology**

* Praise as often as possible!
* Do not reprove (“tadeln”), but help!
* Do both concretely!

**Group dynamics**

* Example: students are invited to sing alone – what happens? ☺
* Two things important for a choir: to develop the single personality and the ability of being part of the group

**To build a repertoire**

Example: Valentin Rathgeber “Laudate pueri”

* What could children love on that piece?
* Finding gestures for coloraturas
* Offer what you love yourself
* Be ambitious but know the borders of the group (and of yourself)

**Singing in one – two – many parts**

* Wolfratshauser Kinderchor/Yoshihisa Kinoshita: children change soprano 1, 2 and even alto
* How to motivate to sing the second voice/the alto (Rathgeber)

**Conducting for children**

* Relax your face ☺
* Help to breathe – in the beginning and between the phrases
* Be with the children but stay who you are
* Passive beat before starting
* Importance of facial expression
* Change between beating and giving gestures

Example Leonard Bernstein “America”

* Play with your voice!

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**Structure of a rehearsal**

* Welcome and focus
* Warm up (see below)
* Continue warm up with a well known piece (short but with at least one new aspect)
* Choir is ready for the most difficult task
* Change position … relax and recreate … one well known piece again
* Sight-singing – Solmisation (see below!)
* … change of new things and things to repeat – but important: change!
* Find a motivating conclusion (children have to be sad that rehearsal is over)

Total time of a rehearsal: depending on the age of the children and also in what the teacher can fill without stress. Better 45 min. and children say “Oh, what a pitty, why do we have to go?” then 60 min. with last 5 min. fighting the teacher for discipline.

Example “focus” following the finger not to be catched of eyes ☺

**Structure of a warm up**

* Focus: rhythm “vor/nach”
* Easing: shaking sounds
* Opening the mouth – “Silent night”
* Shaking “b-b-b-b-b”
* Humming
* “du” (classical and pop/jazz voice): 3-2-1…6-5-4…4-2-5…4-3-2-1
* “wom-bom-bom-bom-bom” 1-3-5-3-1
* „jo-hai-jo-ho-ho“ 5-8-5-3-1
* Example of a piece to repeat and to easy America

Always take exercises belonging to the pieces. You have to warm up, what you need later, and you have to train, what the group has to learn most.

Always important: focus – relaxing and easing – opening the mouth – touch all of the range beginning in the middle, going to the deep and then to the high – use the body as the complete instrument of voice

**Mutation – “breaking the voice” – voice change**

* 3 periods (we talked about)
* Starting girls ca. 12 (11-13) – starting boys ca. 13 (11/12-14)
* Very different span, between 6 months and 1,5 years
* Be careful in period 2: not forcing the high, not forcing loudness
* Possible: voce cambiata (we talked about)

**Sight-singing versus relative solmization I**

* German system “Singen nach Noten” (Kolneder/Schmitt, Schott Musik <http://www.schott-music.com/shop/products/search/quick/result.html?searchtype=product&Quick=singen+nach+noten+koleder&searchMode=SM_QUICK> )

Example „Hashivenu“

* Sing standing in a circle
* Dynamics
* „K-adesh“

Example „Banaha“

* Bodypercussion – game with different conductors/leaders
* “You have 30 seconds to know it by heart”

Example “Vinden drar”

* Example of improvisation
* How to lead the improvisation to a good sounding result (game “listen meanwhile singing and note two people starting before you and to afterwards”, do the same with eyes closed)

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**Another warm up**

* Bodypercussion “Juba”
* Opening mouth with two fingers
* Humming 5-3-1-1 6-4-2-2 4-2-7-7 5-3-1-1 (minor) m/n/u/o/a
* “ja-a-a” 5-3-1
* “die so-, die So-, die So-o-on-ne” (the sun) 5-8…5-8…5-8-5-3-1
* „riva del sol“

Example “Al lado de mi cabana”

**Building a repertoire**

What is important?

The kids should like it (at least after a short time) – you should like it!!!

Different “energy”

Different styles

Different languages

Traditional music – tradition of my country, tradition in my family

Pieces to contact your body – even in concerts

Think about performance: dancing, moving, bodypercussion, “musical”, dress up…

Structure of voice training

Not only one part singing

**Sight-singing versus relative solmization II**

* Ward-Methode: Justine Bayard Ward – „Kölner Chorschule“

Video John Rutter

Example “Nativity carol” (John Rutter)

Example “Ce matin”

Example “Puer natus in Bethlehem” (J.G. Rheinberger)

Example “Hevenu shalom aleichem”

Example “Come, let us sing”

Example “Laugh, Kookaburra!” (Bob Chilcott)

Thank you very much!

[www.robert-goestl.de](http://www.robert-goestl.de)