

What Makes Warm-Ups **so** Important

By Keturah Moller • Preface By Betty Clipman

Chorus rehearsal is ideally a night of joy and accomplishment. The common thread that motivates members to join Sweet Adelines is that they love to sing. As a chorus director, it's a privilege to train women who really want to be at rehearsal and who have a zest for knowledge and musical growth. The time when the member can thoroughly check in to her vocal technique is during warm-ups. A lot of education can be packed into a quality warm-up session and the resultant improved skills give the singer a sense of fulfillment. It IS fun to sing, and it's even more fun to sing extremely well.

The Woodlands Show Chorus (TWSC) was very fortunate when Keturah Moller moved to Texas and joined TWSC. Once I became aware of Keturah's talent, I asked her to do vocal warm-ups at one of our rehearsals. Since that first night, she's been doing part of the warm-ups each week, and warm-ups have become one of the highlights of the night. We're enjoying the vocal journey.

Is there value in a vocal warm-up? There are some ensembles who jump into their rehearsal without a warm-up, singing completely cold, while others use a short warm-up session as a filler to the actual start of rehearsal. Some spend time on warm-ups, but the exercises feel unproductive. Can't we skip the warm-up altogether? No! An efficient warm-up session prepares the voice for singing properly, includes skill-building exercises and assists us in singing as an ensemble. Do we really have to do it? Yes! Even if we don't really know any vocal warm-ups offhand, or we don't feel qualified to warm up our own or others' voices, warm-ups are still the single most effective way to get the most out of rehearsal.

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If warm-ups are such a good thing, why are there still singers going without one? Perhaps they don't realize we are vocal athletes. An athlete warms up her muscles to prepare herself to get the most out of her work-out, practice or performance, and

a singer uses a vocal warm-up to enhance her performance during rehearsal. For a sports athlete, a traditional warm-up session typically includes a brief period of low-intensity aerobic exercise, followed by stretching and then some sports-specific exercise. As a vocal athlete, our warm-ups should also begin with a brief period of low-intensity physical activity, which includes movement geared toward choreography and good posture. Optimally, low-intensity singing comes next, which includes breathing and short, midrange scales. This is then followed by stretching our ranges, singing higher and lower. Using arpeggios is a great way to get higher or lower quickly. Incorporating warm-ups dealing with space and placement provide singers practice in singing in an unstrained manner which can be sustained throughout the entire rehearsal. We finish with skill-specific exercises to shift into rehearsal mode, such as ear-training exercises or singing barbershop chords. By warming up in this way, we mirror the sports athletes to reach our highest potential.

Individually, we want to be singing our best during rehearsal, but warm-ups can also be educational. Valuable warm-ups include exercises where singers quickly use a particular skill or technique well. When singers are successful, these skills can be more easily transferred into the music of the rehearsal. For example: Has your chorus or quartet been working on sustaining energy through



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phrases? Try adding a breathing exercise like silently exhaling as if you are blowing out a candle. This simple and easy-to-understand exercise uses the same skill set that is needed for keeping your level of energy constant. When vocal exercises are coordinated with the skills required in the music, the warm-up session becomes a time of building and implementing the skills you are working on to achieve your goals.

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Why is singing at our highest level important? Because we are Sweet Adelines, and we are competitors! We need an efficient warm-up session because it helps us quickly get our minds and voices into thinking and singing together as an ensemble, instead of individual singers. Although we must have a keen awareness of our individual voices, barbershop requires a unit sound. Blend, balance, color matching, vibrato control, singing in sync and group dynamics are all part of attaining this sound. Therefore, the

goal of a chorus or quartet warm-up is not meant to only develop the individual voice. We have our warm-up session at the beginning of our rehearsals, so we can focus on improving the overall sound of the group.

Now that we understand how valuable a vocal warm-up can be, using this tool successfully moves us to the next level. It is best to have more than a basic knowledge of the voice when planning out an effective warm-up session. Also, keep in mind that there is no single warm-up session that will work every single week. Voices change, they get older, stronger, more skilled and our rehearsal focus changes. Warm-up time is meant to be ever-changing based on the development of our voices and singing skills. If your chorus has been using the same old warm-ups, perhaps it is time to freshen them up. Ideas for vocal exercises can be found on **SWEET ADELINES INTERNATIONAL's** website or by reading choral literature. You can also ask your coaches and directors for ideas.

All in all, the value of a well-thought-out warm-up session is invaluable to each singer in the group. It starts the rehearsal with energized movement, high-level singing, skill-building and a mental shift towards the goals of the ensemble. What director wouldn't want that? We are vocal athletes preparing each rehearsal for the contest stage. So let's do it right! 🎵