

**Master Project Matthias Held
Royal Academy of Music, Aalborg
Innovative Vocal/Choir Leadership
„The 4 elements of choir singing“**

Annex:

Methodological influences

1. EVTS (Estill Voice Training System)	2
2. CVT (Complete Vocal Technique)	6
3. Group dynamics	9

Researches

4. EARTH WISDOM – T.Damsholt	13
5. Fire, Water, Air and Earth – H.Woudenbergh	16
6. „Vocal River“ / Rhiannon	19
7. Practice/Exercises based on „The 4 elements of choir singing“	20
8. Processing through a song in 5 stages	34
9. Possible elemental approach to a choir song	47
10. Extra working material (Loop Songs see PDF file)	

Methodological influences over the years

1. EVTS (Estill Voice Training System)¹

I experienced this system at the Conservatory Arnhem/Enschede during my first studies, where it was essential part of my singing and technique lessons. It was developed by the US-American singer Jo Estill and has become quite common in other countries, too, especially in the Netherlands.

Since the 1970s, Jo Estill has explored several voice qualities used in professional singing and speaking and (up to 2005) established **13 components (or Basic Figures)** with **37 sub-components** of the human voice, which offer „recipes“ for **6 voice qualities**. That was the basis for a training catalogue for each quality.

To give an overview; „Level 1“ (so-called) of EVTS presents the exercises for all components, „Level 2“ describes the voice qualities in detail. „Level 3“, according to Jo Estill, will offer uncountable varieties for the voice, if a singer manages all qualities and components. Not all of them notable as changes, not all of them sound „nice“ or may be „good“ for the singer - yet possible.

(This is gonna prove a difference to CVT, which claims to have the „healthiest singer’s interests at heart“.)

1.1 Components

Jo Estill divides the components in three groups:

Group	Definition	Component
POWER	Breathing	Onset
SOURCE	Tone generator	- contraction/retraction (false vocal folds) - vocal cord position - vocal cord mass - larynx tilt (thyroid/cricoid)
FILTER	Resonance & Articulation	- ari-epiglottic sphincter (Twanger) - pharynx width - onset tube length - tongue position - soft palate control - anchoring head and torso - jaw - lips

One may find this list purely technical, with focus on producing sounds. Indeed, Estill also speaks of „Voice craft“; aiming at controlling the single factors of the voice, each one individually, without other „structures“ interfering. The whole physiology mentioned is pharynx, larynx, vocal cords and surrounding muscles, partially also torso muscles who influence the „upper structures“.

A closer look at the Basic Figures reveals:

ONSET - There are three:

- **glottal** (hard glottal stop, sound pops out, airstream follows – more strenuous in higher range)
- **simultaneous** (soft onset, airstream and vocal cord tension in balance)
- **aspirated** (audible airstream first, then sound, typical for falsetto, intensive use of air)

FALSE VOCAL FOLDS

Like muscles usually, they can be neutral, contracted or retracted.

Contraction means inward tension, in their case putting a Louis Armstrong effect on the voice (in CVT referred to as „Growl“. It's inadvisable in the long term. **Retraction** means *extend* by the feel of laughing, extreme smile or whimpering = gives more space to the real vocal cords.

VOCAL CORD POSITION

Can be neutral or tilted = lifted rear by the arytenoid cartilages and thus stiffened → applies only to Falsetto

VOCAL CORD MASS

Can be **neutral** (just breathing out), **thick**, **thin** (stretched) or **stiff and open**.

Thick vocal cords refer to low frequency vibration, as used in „**speech quality**“. The higher the voice does sing, the more the **singing quality** occurs with higher frequency vibration. Vocal cords stiffen and allow more airstream with **Falsetto** (in the highest range).

THYROID TILT

Tilting helps stretch the vocal cords for singing quality. Non-tilting applies to speech quality.

CRICOID TILT

Tilting the cricoid applies to Belting or energetic shouting (in CVT this is the sensation of Overdrive or Edge)

ARI-EPIGLOTTIC SPHINCTER

The „**Twang**“ muscle will produce exactly that sound on contraction. In EVTS, it's just „on“ or „off“, but nasality can be added as well.

PHARYNX WIDTH

This can be neutral/relaxed or extended. You can feel the latter by retraction, sobbing or yawning.

ONSET TUBE

Neutral, shortened or lengthened. This depends on the position of the larynx. (Of course, you will have experienced a high larynx with a mock „ieh“ and a low larynx with Opera sound.)

TONGUE POSITION

The tongue can, of course, be neutral (if nothing happens), **high**, **low** or **compressed**. The latter means compression to the back, while „high“ refers to the tongue back reaching the upper molars with the tip of the tongue reaching the front teeth - a most familiar position.

SOFT PALATE

Leave it closed, you'll get all vowels you want. Closed is needed for „ng“ (Sirening), „m“ or „n“. Half-open does nasalize existing sounds.

ANCHORING

Active anchoring is the only reference to the torso you'll find here. You use „big“ muscles around the diaphragm to control small muscles inside your head and relieve their tension - or a neck musculature surrounding to relieve all intrinsic muscles.

JAW

Can be fronted („bite“ for upper jaw), neutral, reared or open

LIPS

Can be pursed, neutral or open.

To all these parts, according to Estill, there is measurable **Vocal Effort**, recommended in a scale from 1 to 10. You can isolate the energy in each part and apply „relaxation manoeuvres“. (This is for consciousness as well.)

1.2 Sound qualities

As mentioned, you can mix **6 sound qualities** (in CVT, you will basically have 4), each using a certain possibility of every component.

For each, there is a 7-point Compulsory Figure to exercise it, as well as tips for proper use.

In short, these are:

SPEECH QUALITY

„Speaks“ for itself in the lower voice range. Most ingredients are neutral, (- mind reference to Neutral in CVT!), the tongue as well. No twang or anchoring are necessary, glottal onset is applicable.

FALSETTO

The other extreme. The tongue will be low, most significant are the open (and tilted) vocal cords, together with aspirated onset. A softer sound with more use of air, which can be switched to from Speech by a „vocal break“ (see 2.1)

TWANG (ORAL OR NASAL)

Most important: The AES is closed. The soft palate position changes if you want a nasal sound. More stretched vocal cords, high tongue, false vocal folds widened and cricoid tilted. All onsets are applicable.

BELT

Most important: Cricoid tilt (=more space to the Thyroid) and a certain amount of Twang. You'll need head anchoring, a wide pharynx and a high tongue, as well as retraction. A „powerful“ sound.

SOB/CRY

A definite Thyroid tilt with head anchoring, wide pharynx, a high tongue, thin vocal cords and no massive Twang. (see reference to „Curbing“ in CVT which allows a bit of Twang.) The onset tube is lengthened if you want Sob or shortened if you want the Cry sound.

OPERA

Specialty is **Vibrato** and the „**squillo**“ or „singers' formant“, a high ringing overtone. According to Estill, Opera is a variable mixture of Sob, Twang and Speech, depending on mood, text, placement of the quality in one's own range and surrounding. (Do you have to audibly fill as theatre, as known for Opera?) Characteristic are a compressed tongue, a tilted Thyroid and a variable grade of AES.

1.3 Energy scale and own range

Jo Estill does recommend to put up a personal „energy scale“ from 1 to 10. Each time a tone is sung with a certain intensity and dynamics, it gets a mark on that scale.

Estill's hint to exploring this is:

- „Siren“ (see „**Sirening**“) up and down to estimate your range and write it on a piano keyboard chart, draw 3 lines underneath
- Estimate on which degree maximum you can sing a tone
- What degree is the most comfortable? → second line
- What is the highest possible? → top line
- What is the lowest possible? → bottom line

1.4 Practice

MOST INSPIRING EXERCISES

Jo Estill recommends certain exercises for practising each onset and voice quality, but also for „mixing the recipe“ for each voice quality.

I would like to name a few exercises here which I found helpful.

Speech Quality: Count from 1 to 5 (in English) on each tone of a scale, go higher step by step, listen and check your voice on when it gets „thinner“ - means: your vocal folds reach another stage
Sing up and down a scale on different vowels, with glottal onset

Falsetto:

Sing an „ee“ with aspirated onset and retraction (= smile feeling) or an „ooh“ with your thumb at the lower lip, as if blown over a bottleneck.

AES/Twang:

- Test the Twang by laughing like a witch, miaowing, imitating a bagpipe or a distorted guitar.
- Say „niet“ (Russian = no) and enjoy every sound, „n“, nasal „eeh“, „eh“ and „ae“.
- Sing „ee“ and then other vowels first straight, then try to pull up the back of your tongue to make it more nasal.
- Try on every tone up and down the scale.

Sob/Cry:

- sing „ee“ with simultaneous onset and Retraction,
- imagine sobbing or moaning on an energy level you choose, hold the tension, sing a tone and relax
- Go up and down a scale the same way

Belt:

- wake it up by shouting exstatically like in a soccer stadium („ey“!)
- sing an „ee“ with glottal onset in lower range, cricoid tilted and add Retraction on top of it
- imagine crying or shouting silently before a new onset

Retraction

- laugh or whimper silently – or loudly with preparation – to feel it
-

Register change:

Sing a vowel open and clear, then try to „hide“ the vowel on the same tone. The sound will be more soft, thinner and maybe airy. Listen to what happens the higher you sing.

Soft palate control:

- Sing a tone on „n“ or „ng“ → transform to „j“ → transform to „ee“, „eh“, „ah“, „o“, „oo“
- Start „ng“ → open the sound with „g“ + vowel and feel the soft palate closing
- Try even harder with „hng-gie“

Anchoring:

- suck on the tip of your finger as hard as you can
- bite into an apple and imagine you can´t pull your upper jaw loose (yet)
- try to pull something heavy towards your body with both hands

Vocal range and vocal fold mass:

- Sing up a scale on „ee“, diminuendo towards the top
- Sing the scale down on „ee“ and diminuendo
- Do the same - up and down - on a slide/glissando over one octave

Sirening/Mirening:

- „Sirening“ means: sing on „ng“ up and down without defined tone
- then add defined tones and heights, sing bows, larger intervals (4ths, 5ths, 8ths or above) and arpeggios
- add a defined melody, even a song
- „Mirening“ = „Mouthing plus sirening“ - sing the melody on „ng“ and form the lyrics with your lips (! advanced)

Preparing a melody:

- Siren it
- Onset just the vowel of each syllable with „ng“
- Sing the vowels of each syllable alone

And a general advice: Discover the boundaries of your voice. You can't give each tone the same volume, intensity and tension, one healthy thing you can do is keep the same energy on every level. (We'll mention later what energy means.)

1.5. Conclusion

I found it very helpful to have the larynx position, the function of the AES and each articulator explained separately. This would all, of course, stir the „technical side“ of singing. If you shine a light on this during the choir rehearsal, it would be an individual appeal to each singer: *Check this-and-that, give me more of this and less of that.* You have some sound examples, but you would a lot to *think* about.

Only to a certain degree, EVTS aspects are about „experiencing“ a sound, a sensation to which you can relate to and which you can distinguish if you don't just want a certain „style“, like Belting or Opera.

And even to a lesser degree it is about embodying and feeling things. Not to mention a group experience.

I would then, as a next step, open view to another method which looks more at the „sound experiencing“ factor.²

- - - -

2. CVT (Complete Vocal Technique)

Complete Vocal Technique was set up by Cathrine Sadolin from Copenhagen over more than 20 years of studies with all kinds of singers, analysing and categorizing classical and non-classical voice techniques. The standard book of the CVT method was published 1998 in Danish, with several translations and new editions.³

This is a method for voice and singing I discovered after my first diploma. I found it very useful, and still do, for categorizing the sounds and vowels a singer uses „every day“. Which means; also for lessons' practice, singing students and beginners. If you wanted to specialize more on Belting, Opera, Speech Quality or Falsetto, you could dig deeper into the technical aspects and check through each articulator separately. The imagery of CVT shortens the way – a bit at least - to feeling and experiencing adjustable sounds you can produce right on the spot.

What *are* the sounds you can produce according to CVT?

2.1. Main principles

First of all, CVT is based on three main principles, to produce „healthy“ sounds all along. The „health“ topic is essential, because many examples of singers with voice problems are inflicted throughout the book, describing how Cathrine Sadolin worked with them to solve the problems.

- **Support** - that is what EVTS calls „Power“: Breathing and using muscles in a controlled way, giving the necessary energy for every tone over the whole time you sing it, balancing volume with support energy.
- **Necessary Twang** - Twang gets a different definition here than EVTS. Twang is produced by reducing the distance from epiglottis to the arytenoid cartilages, which narrows the „funnel“ in between, making the sound sharper. A certain degree of twang is always necessary for singing relaxed. *The distinct Twang* is more intense. (see 2.2.)
- **Avoiding lip tension and forwarded lower jaw** - consonants are partly formed by lips, vowels by the tongue. The tongue position is essential, the mouth position does not need to change that much. Some modes (see 2.2.) require a loose jaw or a forward sensation in the upper jaw, which would else be blocked.

Referring to these principles happens throughout the book; just like many instructions are repeated over and over again, even in the same chapter.

Some other issues are mentioned, related to support.

Pronunciation - the tongue position is essential; some vowels require a high tongue back position, touching the molars (the German vowels sounds are: „ih“, „ee“, „æ“, „ä“ and „ö“, Scandinavian „œ“ and „ø“ would be included); some vowels require a tongue tip touching the lower incisors. („u“, „oo“, „oh“ and „aah“)

Intonation – it is recommended to intonate a tone a little to high or too low before „tuning“ in and meeting the exact pitch. Mostly tenseness would be to blame

Dynamics - each Vocal mode (see 2.2.) has its own dynamic range, generally you should put up a dynamic scale from 1 to 10, and train growing louder or softer with a balance of support energy.

Register - sections of the vocal range, divided into very low, low, middle, high and very high. Each at at different scope for men (C-2 to C3) and women (C-1 to C4), each is estimated one octave. Low, middle and high would be about „Speech“, „Singing“ and „Falsetto“ level in EVTS.

Onsets - in CVT they would be glottal (here named: metallic), soft (here named: half-metallic) and non-metallic with aspiration or without.

2.2. Main sounds/Vocal modes

A Vocal mode is a setting of articulators and position of a vowel sound, not to be confused with „colour of sound“, which is mentioned later.

There are four basic vocal modes. It is mentioned that you **could** try every vowel in every mode; but in a higher range, there are distinctive vowels for each mode, to which all others assimilate.

NEUTRAL - non-metallic * can be used over the whole range * is rather soft but can be sung louder in high range * requires a loose jaw * character: just sing * Distinctive vowels: „aah“, „u“ * ! only Neutral can be sung with or without breathiness

CURBING - half-metallic * can be used over the whole range * rather medium volume * character: held-back-sensation in the oral cavity, like moaning or crying * Distinctive vowels: „ee“, „ih“, „œ“, „oo“

OVERDRIVE - metallic * can be used up to C2 (men) or D2 (women) * can be loud or very loud * requires a biting sensation in upper jaw * character: shouting * Distinctive vowels: „oh“, „ey“, „æ“

EDGE - metallic * can be used over the whole range * can be up to very loud and shrill * requires distinct Twang * character: scream, witch laughter * Distinctive vowels: „ä“, „ee“, „æ“, „ö“.

Each mode has a „centre“ = most comfortable way to sing it; drifting away from it requires more support and energy.

2.3. Colour of sound

Every mode can be varied in colour of sound, turned lighter or darker. (It works best with NEUTRAL.) A lighter sound colour is produced e.g. by compressing the tongue, adding Twang or smiling, pulling the corners of the mouth upward.

A darker sound colour is produced e.g. by broadening the tongue, loosening the lips and lowering the larynx.

NEUTRAL can be added with aspiration.

CVT includes detailed description how you can switch from one mode to another, by changing vowels or programming different sensations on the same vowel, in high, middle or low range.

It also describes which vowels function best in high range, and which vowels change into the more suitable ones. (e.g. „ih“ nears „ee“).

There is a chapter on Speech technique – most frequent in use for Speech (and nearest to EVTS Speech Quality) is Neutral, for more energetic or higher Speech it is Overdrive.

Here, the **articulators** which EVTS lists in detail are described **as tools** to turn the sound lighter or darker.

We have: **Laryngeal funnel - Extension Tube – Larynx** (must be lower for darker sound and vice versa) - **Tongue position** (has to be compressed for lighter sound and vice versa) – **Mouth/Lips position – Soft Palate – Nasal Passage - Necessary or Distinct Twang**

General advice to singers: Find your own colour of sound.

2.4. Effects

On top of each Vocal Mode, you can place Vocal Effects, carefully to be prepared by support and exploration. CVT names „Creak“, (a sound like opening a rusted door into a vowel) „Grunt“, „Growl“, „Distortion“, „Rattle“, „Scream“ or „Fry“ (toneless), „Vocal break“ (a very fast switch between registers), „Vibrato“ and „Ornaments“ (like trilling and trembling).

Some effects are linked to the vocal folds, like Creak, Vibrato or Aspiration,

some include use of the false vocal folds, like Distortion,

some are defined by the cartilages, like Rattle and Growl,

some use a combination of all these, like Grunt, Scream, Vocal Break and Laryngeal Vibrato.

Most effects are linked to a Vocal Mode.

The right level of energy and emotion (!!) are essential for producing effects.

2.5. Extra chapters and features

After explaining the method, the book on CVT contains a chapter about health issues, „incorrect“ use of the voice, influence of diseases, malfunctions – and what to do against it. (The main solution being the absolute correct use of CVT over a time).

Then there are chapters about – each – hearing, live situations, improvisation AND performance. Finally, there are some body exercises for relaxing and training muscles.

Every sound, scale exercise and vowel variation has an own sound example, 417 in total, which can be downloaded as a library.

2.6. Conclusion

What I appreciated about CVT was the glimpse of „wholeness“ that relaxing the muscles is necessary, using them for support, there are understandable and perceptible sound qualities, a sense of energy and dynamics; and interpretation, emotion and performance were included at least, to round the method up.

It was also logical transferring sounds over images and exercises, delivering sound examples and using links to every-day-use of sounds. This has a flavor of experiencing them and encouraging singers to do so. As well as the „health“ factor.

What I do not appreciate is the consequential setting: Use this method right, all voice problems will vanish. Meaning there is just one way in any case?

The same with intonation and posture: Tenseness is to blame, so – just let go?

It may be tested and tried out and evaluated, yet the believe in ultimacy strikes me with scepticism.

Reading the whole book, I find the instructions repeated too often, like mantras.

A solo voice can try all this, and this nurtures an individual voice character. How do you get along in a group beyond the technical stuff? So, let's watch this from another angle, too.

- - - -

3. Notes on Group Dynamics

The **organic structure** of a choir open to groove, dynamics shifts, melodic and harmonic exploration, playing with lyrics, expression and performance, even improvising and developing itself **not** following a leader or a tight concept or a tight score from top to bottom - which seems to perfectly sketch a target group for my concept – made me think of **group dynamics**. What literature and sources did I read over the past years at RAMA to underline how groups work?

Here are my notes to those aspects that struck me most, and which I found logical essence to choir work.

3.1. Group dynamics:

Assuming that a group is a number of people who share goals, people see themselves as a member and there is an interaction between the members,

what makes the dynamics of a group?

Composition - not only in musical sense - *size, status, roles, cohesiveness, norms and leadership*.

What happens in a group? Compared to an iceberg, the „it“ = goal, concept, tasks and plan is above the surface, but below there's the „I“ and „We“, the individual and group processes = fear, differences, sympathies, intimacy, status, desires etc.

The clarity of the goal „it“, the confidence in oneself „I“ and the confidence in others „We“ have to be balanced.

3.2. Donelson R. Forsyth

„The nature of Group dynamics“

- in choir communication we don't need to communicate with each member all the same all the time, because then we would do nothing else. Let alone, 12 members would need 66 individual links to communicate with each other.⁴ Yet we need interaction, face-to-face, sensomotorical and more or less influential, to listen to each other, sense each other, collectify and unify gestures, movements and – if necessary – mimics.

A choir is an interdependent group, to use a Forsyth term⁵ working together to share an agreed-upon activity or call it goal: To sing, in most cases to perform.

A choir leader thus should manage the individual contributions of the singers to that goal; help them do better with it, steer creative processes, steer and initialize interaction, give energy, keep time and level the most needed parameters for the music - in the necessary degree, means: To the degree that the singers are yet unable to level things by themselves.

Mutual influence = the capacity of each group member to influence and be influenced by others

A choir usually is a „planned group“,⁶

depending on it being founded from internal origins (choir members) or external origins (leader, employer, conductor).⁷

And it is a **social group**, according to its level of interaction and duration and size.

According to this, there maybe „emergent choir groups“ as well, rather spontaneously organized, like flashmobs, singalong choirs – in German referred to as „Rudelkaraoke“ - or short-lived choir projects, an audience may also form a spontaneous choir – and be encouraged in that, like Bobby McFerrin does on stage.

What is **interaction** in group dynamic terms?⁸ Doing things to and with each other. Group members upset each other, give one another help and support, and take advantage of each other's weaknesses. They rally together to accomplish difficult tasks. Group members teach one another new things; they communicate with one another verbally and nonverbally, and they touch each other literally and emotionally.

An interaction focussed on group achievement, e.g. a task or plan, is called **task interaction**. In case of a choir this could mean a song, performance or gig.

Interdependence: Most groups create a **state of interdependence**, known from the famous song by „Jon&Vangelis“. Members influence each other, members' outcomes, thoughts, feelings, actions and experiences are determined in part by other members of the group. There are several forms; **unilateral** (one leading person influences the rest), **sequential** (A influences B, B influences C and-so-on, chain reaction), **mutual** (all members influence each other) and **multilateral** (A influences a smaller number of members, who carry it on to other small groups). In the two latter cases, the leader is influenced as well (= reciprocity)

Group structure combines roles, norms and intermember relations that organize the group.

The higher the level of identification with the group is, there more members will regard the group's goals and achievement as their own.⁹

A **group mind** (or collective consciousness) is called a hypothetical – since it is not undoubted – unifying mental force linking group members together; the fusion of individual consciousness or mind into a transcendent consciousness.

The question would be if it rises with level of the group's intelligence and identification. Clearly, it is driven by high cohesiveness and powerful feelings of unity.

One of the major topics in the field of Group Dynamics is named „**Performance**“.¹⁰

Do people perform tasks more effectively in group or when they are alone? Why do people sometimes expend so little effort when they are in groups? When does group outperform in individual? Are groups creative?

3.3. Group development (Bruce Tuckman)¹¹

There are 5 stages of group development:

- Forming - unclear purpose, needs guidance and direction
- Storming - conflict, increased clarity of purpose, power struggles, → coaching
- Norming - agreement and consensus, clear roles and responsibility, facilitation
- **Performing – clear vision and purpose, focus and goal achievement, delegation**
- Adjourning – task completion, good feeling about achievements, recognition

3.4. Kurt Lewin: Group Dynamics (1951)

According to Kurt Lewin, a group is more than the sum of its individual members. The behaviour of group members is a function of the interaction of their personal characteristics with the environment. If the latter is positive and the first is driven by „group mind“ at a high level, this could prove right.

Planned social action usually emerges from a more or less vague „idea“, or call it a wish or scheme. To be able to steer action, some kind of „plan“ has to be developed. The objective has to be clarified, the path to the goal has to be determined and a strategy of action follows, altogether a „general plan.“¹²

To be effective, plans should be flexible. Means; after a first action you should only make a final decision on that one, evaluate if the plan has to be changed, take the second step, make a decision, evaluate and so on.¹³

Evaluation and „fact-finding“ is necessary because: A group with no clear standards of achievement, meanwhile, will remain uncertain, not knowing whether they made progress, not knowing what they achieved, and will not be able to learn. Steering the process (question: on what level and frequency?) will create effectiveness.

An analysis of the situation before and after a workshop is needed to define the change created by the workshop.¹⁴ The workshop situation itself then has to be described as carefully as possible.

Description of the form of leadership – see Donelson R. Forsyth – has to take into account the amount of initiative by groups and subgroups.

3.5. Peder Karlsson - Introduction to leadership in choirs and vocal groups (in terms of Organic choirs)

Communication is verbal or non-verbal,
in choirs this means: Instructions, tones on the keyboard, sung phrases, keywords, body language, sign language, dancing around, vocal percussion...

Everything you communicate is picked up by others.

There are 3 types of constructive feedback: YES, HELP and STOP

YES - positive feedback, point out what went well, encourage the singers, provide a frame of mind to build upon

HELP – improve special musical and social items, in a matter-of-fact, neutral tone

STOP - at a specific point in the score and let the singers to it again, continue until significant improvement has been made, then give positive response

A problem - see STOP mode – must offer a solution. There can be a momentary mistake („shit happens“) or a mistake due to lack of preparation or a repeating error due to muscular malfunction or negative automatism.

Body awareness - mention in a place preparing the rehearsal or warm-up¹⁵

Preparation of the voice as an instrument:

- Intention - I will make sound
- Imagination - Imagine the note or rhythm from inside of you
- Specification - Which vowel, which rhythm, which sound?
- Activation - connect with the voice instrument (and necessary parts of the body)
- Action - Sing!

Rehearsing a score:

Mention the part it's about – say from where – give a current item of focus – give pitch – count off or give cue - sing - stop – give of three types of feedback mentioned – give extra info (optional) - move to next item¹⁶

Four main areas of focus: Pitch/Intonation - Sound/Blend – Rhythm/Groove – Expression

Balance theoretical analysis with just letting the music come out as a natural organic flow. (Delve into the „sea of music“.) Encourage joy, happiness and inspiration that comes from the inside – expressions that follow naturally from a sense of physical grounding. Sing and dance at the same time!

For full assimilation of knowledge, any kind of mental activity should be balanced with feeling, a sense of fun (and meaning) and physical expression.

Feelings to respect in the rehearsal room:

- Happiness, inspiration, motivation, fun, laughter
- sadness, tears
- curiosity
- need for concentration
- un-motivation

Long-term and short-term goals:

Harmony and rhythm - musically and socially

Respect – for the uniqueness of individuals and the needs of the group

Acceptance – non-dualistic attitude to people, situations and change

Balance of: Willpower - feelings - body and thinking

How to reach those goals?

Sing – Feel- Communicate – Dance – Have fun!

Floor-to-roof Games/Guide Singer Games/Musical parameters:

Loud vs. Soft

Sharp vs. Flat

Bright vs. Dark

Fast vs. Slow

- - - -

RESEARCHES

4. EARTH WISDOM

The term „Earth wisdom“ sounds not only very grounded, but very ancient and traditional, like something connected with the planet earth and its billions of years of existence.

In fact, it reaches back thousands of years – some say 30.000 – since ancient (e.g. indigenous) cultures pass on this bundle of knowledge in oral tradition from generation to generation, something of which most European people have lost track.

According to Native American Earth Wisdom, the wisdom lies in the 4 daughters of beauty, which is a poetic expression for the 4 elements; Earth, Air/Wind, Water and Fire/Sun.

I have been enlightened on this matter by **Terese Damsholt**, from Copenhagen. She is an actress, and singing teacher at the Royal Danish academy of Music, with 45 active years under her belt, and has been learning and teaching Earth Wisdom and Voice Embodiment for 18 years.

Her teachers were Native Americans Rainbow Hawk and Windeagle.

Asked how strong her connection to the 4 elements of nature was and what it be about, she answered that there definitely IS an energy in nature, which you can call God or Higher Spirit and which you can find in all human beings, living organisms and organic materia. According to Earth Wisdom, we all are composed of the Four Daughters of Beauty and should be respectful to our origin.

Consciousness of nature develops us from simply two-legged beings to human beings. Spending time in nature, opening our senses and listening will help if we pose our questions to nature.

The result: Thinking conciously will lead to thoughts of love, hope, willingness to change, willingness to open to genius ideas, it's all gonna be life-growing.¹⁷

Terese Damsholts view, over a long experience of life, on *what a good teacher needs* is:

- Respect, respect of the student's integrity, leaving him freedom of thought, never binding his thinking
- humor, light-heartedness
- enforcing female power (which I interpret as: Not only emphasizing the male side of a human being, including activity, force, cognitivity, thinking, doing, suppressing; but also the female side: Passivity, receiving, listening, feeling, openness, letting go, embracing gifts....)
- beauty (= inner beauty and beautiful surrounding)
- living the way they teach

What is the most important to the human voice?

According to Terese Damsholt, it is the most beautiful carrier of human energy. The energy lies in the purpose or intention to use it, e.g. to sing. A choir singer should ask him- or herself: With what intention do I sing? What is the most beautiful thing I can transport with this piece of music? It is very natural, though not many singers do not ask themselves the question at first. Your voice will carry that intention and express something to people. Actors learn that. (This is what T.D. teaches to choirs) Not all audiences will understand.

What then would be some important impulses for choir work on this basis?

- At the beginning/introduction of a rehearsal: Bind the energy of a choir as a team by using a „**talking stick**“.¹⁸ Pass the stick around, let everybody have the focus of the attention, maybe with just one word, („What energy are you bringing today?“) one expression of feeling, let everyone else say „Ho“.
„Sometimes it's fun, sometimes it's very good and profound.“ T.D. says. Take the time for it because you choose to.
- It all starts with an **intention**: What do you want to do? What do you want to give the audience? This is the spark which starts it all.

- Implement a **3 status game** - walk around and embody the status - Power position (imagine you have maximum self-confidence and power), low status (low self-esteem), straight status (openness and respect, e.g. greeting people) - switch statuses on sign
- Take the time to **explain the topic** and image of the song to the choir. (Think: What is the intention? What does this song mean to you? What will be most life-giving about it?)
- Protocol about rehearsing: Be focussed. Demand focus because of the joy and respect of the working process → it gives space for people to use their creativity, have ideas. It changes the sound to work with an intention.
- Implement the „talking stick“ musically: Improvise small phrases in a row, picking up from the last singer’s last note
- Sing a song in several different ways and let inspiration come
- Emphasis on clarity of words (be as precise as you can, vary the tempo of a song etc.)
- Special task for singers: Don’t give your self-authority away.

And how do the 4 elements of Earth Wisdom connect to that?

First of all, they are structured like this: Imagine a circle, each element has its own cardinal point and its meaning.

Element	Cardinal Point	Content	Meaning
Fire	East	Spirit	Sun rising, ranging from candle to forest fire
Water	South	Emotion	Flow, ranging from quiet lake to Tsunami – it is important to harness emotions
Earth	West	Balance, Structure	Bringing things to life
Air	North	Connection of Heart and Mind	Sending out emotions - no life without breath

In the centre of the circle there is a diamond

The circle is also known as the „Native American Medicine Wheel“.

How then do you find your connection to the elements?

According to Terese Damsholt, the logical way to connect is to re-establish your connection to nature. Not only by being outside, on the rims of civilization, in a step, by the sea, on a volcano etc., but by memorizing, even back to your childhood.

A simple exercise on this:

* Lie on the ground and imagine lying outside, somewhere you like * Ground yourself. * What was the most positive feeling of lying in the grass, sand, snow etc. you can recall? * Feel the earth again this way.

Alternative: Feel yourself as a tree * Ground yourself in standing upright from roots to crown * Have you had a feeling of absolute groundedness, solidity and safety in your life you can recall? * Feel it again!

As very useful to structure choir work, from „the spark of energy“ to letting out emotions singing, Terese Damsholt named this 5-point-tool:

M-I-C-E-R - to activate a state of energy, and to use as a creative tool to merge with the emotional content of a text, important tool for expression

- **MEMORY** - recall a situation with a pretty strong emotional content
- **IMAGE** - imagine the situation, catch every detail, describe how the surroundings were
- **CONNECT** - with the situation so that you stand in the middle of the image.
Use all your senses, be there, feel the energy. Observe energy changes.
- **EMOTION/ENERGY** - fill yourself up with the emotion and the energy it activates in you - do it again with a quicker connection
- **REPEAT/REPORT** - repeat the exercise and report to yourself how the shift took place energywise.

This encourages to put the elements in an order following the circle:

Enforce and activate - let it flow, fill up - check again the connection to your body, root yourself - Take it out! (on your airstream)

- - - -

Thinking about the positions of the 4 elements in a circle, I noticed some disagreements there.

First of all, there are several versions of the Element Wisdom circle. In a, perhaps, more European-influenced version¹⁹, the Air is located in the East and connected to the mind (= knowledge) alone. Fire is represented by the South and willpower, Water by the West and the heart, meaning courage. Earth, finally, is located in the North and means silence (= rest, introspection, inner vision).

Other versions – in some ways related to witchcraft - do divide the circle into quarters, not in cardinal points. Earth symbolizes grounding and physical matters, Water symbolizes emotions, Fire stands for vision, spirituality and inspiration, while Air stands for the mind (mental matters), communication and action. Some parallels are obvious to the Native American Earth Wisdom. However, there is a fifth element in the middle of the circle, namely „the soul“. Yet other illustrations of the element circle name a fifth element „ether“. (Used in Ancient Greek science and philosophy as well as in Ayurveda. It covers „universal“, so-to-say, extra-terrestrial matters.)

I personally would agree that mind, spirit, emotion and physical matters (thus body) are substantial to singing and each attached to elements. Independent of cardinal points, they have to do with certain directions and positions. Connecting to nature as well as to memories is essential, too. Intention and focus are not to be neglected. And the order of elements spurring and inspiring each other *is* existent.

I also would agree that there *is* a fifth element to the human voice and also to choir work, to *round the circle*.

- - - -

5. Fire, Water, Air and Earth - Helmert Woudenberg

Terese Damsholts view on what actors learn in terms of the human voice, carrying intention and expression made me think of a methodological mindset I researched during my Singing Diploma. It is entitled „Fire, Water, Air and Earth“ by a Dutch actor and drama/theatre teacher named Helmert Woudenberg. He started working with the theatre/stage collective „Werktheater“ in Amsterdam back in 1969, who developed performances out of improvisation, thus a kind of free-form theatre. Next to several plays, he wrote the book on his method „Vuur, Water, Lucht en Aarde“, first released in 1999.

Woudenberg approaches the 4 elements partly from a philosophical view, partly from a psychological one (dream interpretation), partly from everyday situations. The process the 4 elements are running through is less evolutionary, but more one of creativity - or call it **creation**.

The **creational process starts** with **fire**²⁰ – in form of the founder, initiator, cook (! everyday situation) or actor. Here is a line to spirit, inspiration and the „spark of energy“.

The **water** is the **source** to scoop from; be it the script, the ingredients – or the body, in which a baby is growing.

Air is the result; a role, a dish, the childbirth etc.

Finally, **earth** takes care of the **development and growth process** – just like a baby has to grow up. (Easy to imagine, since plants grow out of the earth.

How does that influence acting, according to Helmert Woudenberg?

There is no acting as such, but:

Earth - look (receive, sense and perceive things)

Air – speak (express yourself)

Water - listen (receive things on an emotional level)

Fire - urge to do the things you do (the spark to action)

Man is not just one personality but can be four, according to the 4 elements, like a „quadrinity“. And every actor can use the 4 elements as his/her instruments.

Parts of the body, sensory organs and internal organs supply the energy and characteristics for each element.

Element	Body	Internal organ	Sensory Organ	Function/Meaning
Fire	breast, thighs, jaw	heart, stomach	smell	Burning energy instinct, sense anger or danger → kindle, inflame, catch fire
Water	belly, navel, balls of the foot, butt, pelvis, chin, lips	abdomen	hearing	Everything that's round and flows
Air	neck, heels, shoulders, clavicula, calves	throat, larynx	taste and touching	Tactileness and passing things through, spinning like a wheel, driving the role, driving emotions
Earth	Buttocks, wrist, knees, shoulder blade a.o.	metabolism		All between front and back, rest, avoid extremes, balance, become aware of your feet

What happens on stage, in acting situations, with the 4 elements?

Helmert Woudenberg describes several conflict situations, all possible to happen while actors play, and how the element personalities act in conflicts and contest.

The element of **fire goes out of itself** - inflaming and extrovert. It is driven, taking on one issue or „opponent“ at once, constantly seeking for opponents and opposition, attacking.

Water is diving into the acting process and the conflict. It is open for complications, misunderstandings, criticism and negotiations, for the other persons – that how it is in the play; rather stepping back and even showing vulnerability.

Earth is going onto the conflict, standing a bit apart, but taking in everything. Earth recognizes on issue at a time, calmly and accepting the facts. It stands in the middle, balanced, waiting where things will be going to.

Air is going through the situation; restless, organizing, arguing, weighing. Disadvantages are to be turned around, there is a constant analysis of situations and conflicts. The focus is always on several aspects and open options.

How does a human being deal with its „quadrinity“?

There is a balance of the elements in the human character. Helmert Woudenberg describes when and how elements have a dominant influences on the human character. Each man or woman has an element which its charakter presents openly „in public“ and one which is balancing and supportive. Woudenberg names them „**shop window**“ and „**co-driver**“.

I need to mention here that astrology pays a great deal to the interstellar constellations influencing the human character.²¹ Born under a certain sign, with a certain ascendent, a character be like this-and-that. Since the 12 zodiacs were fixed, the elements played their part. So were **3 zodiacs each connected to one element**. Capricorn, Taurus and Virgo to earth, Aquarius, Gemini and Libra to Air, Pisces, Cancer and Scorpio to Water, Aries, Leo and Sagittarius to Fire.

You might think of astrological influence in Woudenbergs concept, like zodiac sign and ascendent. For example, a Libra-born, Taurus-ascendent human would have a „shop window“ full of air with earth as his/her „co-driver“. To assume that one person’s „shop window“ was his/her zodiac sign with a „co-driver“ = ascendent, you would have to analyse the characters of lots of people. Still, it can’t be the same in all cases, since a person can have zodiac and ascendent of the same element (like Taurus and Virgo) or even both the same sign - it depends on the constellation.

Which goes to show that Woudenbergs concept is much more „down to earth“.

Next to „shop window“ and „co-driver“, there is also a **private element**, which one does live, but not necessarily in public. And there is a **secret element**, which only oneself does know, if at all. When all other three elements work together on the facade or surface of one’s character, element number four bubbles, boils, rests or breezes below and very rarely breaks out. Otherwise there would be explosions, and at least these would unsettle our environment.

So, theoretically, inside each man and woman, each element could take every position;

public, supportive, private, or secret,

which amounts to 24 constellations, due to Woudenberg. And there are even more variations.

To sum up the character of Woudenbergs 4 elements:

FIRE is the **drivenness**, the burning energy and the spark to action

Keywords: inflame, act, unwind, go outside

AIR is the **suppleness** of thought, difficult but creative, stimulation a situation

Keywords: cleverness, weigh, divide and combine, drive, movement, go through

WATER is the **openness** for others and external influences

Keywords: flow, flowing, round, soft, vulnerable, retraction, go inside

EARTH is the **rest** within oneself and the surrounding, accepting the facts, growing and letting things grow
Keywords: reason, objectivity, relaxation, centeredness, one-by-one, stand

Critical points on Woudenberg:

The classification of the body parts according to Woudenberg is not complete and not very accurate. Certainly some most important parts are mentioned, which serve the processes Woudenberg is dealing with. But muscular work, for example, is rarely mentioned, as if the body, except for key functional bones, worked by itself. Also e.g. the awareness of one's feet (earth) does not go along with the feet as such categorized to some other elements, just because balls of the foot are round (water). Some terms, in this light, seem to abstract (like „action“.), though you can imagine what it means in theatre.

I totally agree with the aspects of water = **flow, openness, inwardness**; earth = **standing, groundedness, balance and growth**; air = **stimulation, drive, movement, suppleness**; fire = **driveness, spark, burning, action**.

All these aspects are needed in performing music. Neither neglecting the body connection, which for itself requires grounding, openness, movement and action. Nor the cognitive, mind-related things to consider, nor the spirit and relation to the heart. So we would have all earth-wisdom categories back in the fold.

It is an interesting thought, by the way, that each person should have visible, supporting and private elements.

Since everyone is an individual, it would be necessary to train acting to put a different element forward than usual. Or, presenting him/herself, one makes the best of one of 24+ constellation.

This means as well that there's a lot of different approaches to interpreting music. Imagine a non-extrovert singer (= no fire in the „shop window“) sing a wild rock tune, or an earthy performer do a scat solo the likes of Maria Joaõ, respectively Al Jarreau. Every singer should at least which element he carries in front.

Now; since a choir consists of a bundle of individuals, who need to act more or less on stage, a choir leader - if not the choir itself - would need to find a way to present a corporate performance. That means: „Singers, release that-and-that element on time.“ „Focus this-and-that at at time.“

And the first step would be to understand what a song is about.

Let's see how far the acting aspect is gonna take us.

- - - -

This is where I was about to lead over to my concept. Yet, I had to separate researches from the actual concept. Assuming that the ground structure was finished, I was keen to get some expertise and inspiration. Especially about the approach of relating singing to nature, including improvisation and „living“ music, sometimes letting go of structure.

6. Vocal River & The nature of improvisation – Interview with Rhiannon

I had the chance to interview the world famous US-American born, Hawaiian-resident singer and improviser Rhiannon in April 2019 to ask her about her view on improvisation, choir music, but also on the 4 elements in nature in relation to music.

Here is the interview:

What do you think of my concept?

Well thought. :-) Everything that starts with the 4 elements seems like a good idea, because the idea of improvisation is very natural; a very natural desire to change your mind, to invent things, to explore each one's possibilities.

How is your connection to Nature in music/singing?

I live on a farm. We have studio with big doors, we can keep open most of the time. Of course I sing out in Nature, too, and I would absolutely recommend it. Over the years I studied in lots of different places with my students, such as in rafts down a river, high desert mountains....

I feel so strongly that nature changes the music and has a huge power to affect it.

Rafting: It was a lot of rain, the river was high, and we were mostly holding on for dear life. So nature was so strong; it overcame our plans and taught us the lesson to stay alive. Later we tried to sing in our camp, but we were still shaken by the experience. Respect the power of nature! Another time we tried to sing where a live volcano spills his lava into the ocean. But there was so much sound, it was impossible to sing.

How is your connection to the Four Elements?

I'm alive. :-) Well, it's a constant growing, very powerful. I grew up on a farm, with lot of nature around all the time, and not many other children. So I spent a lot of time by myself in nature. Though I later lived in cities, as a musician, my childhood in nature made a very big impression to me, as to feel where the **real** power is. Now I am living on a farm again, with nature around. For example, on a very rainy day, you can skip all plans and obey to the element of water. Human beings are not nearly as powerful as the elements. We have to pay attention to where we are and where the **real** power is. Even as an artist who imagines that he/her can create things.

I try to get people (singers) to understand that they are **standing on the earth, above them is the air, around them is the water, inside them there is fire. Respect** all those before you even start to sing.

How much then are we able to control our „elementary sources“ while we sing?

Why should we want to do that? I spent years in studying, rhythmical concepts, scales, Music Cultures and so on; yet, for me the idea of improvisation is to **let go**. And then see what comes. And then there's the balance of technique, means: skills come in. But I'm not controlling it. What you would want is: Let the spirits guide the elements. You're in a big beautiful realm while improvising.

*Please explain **Vocal River** in your own words to me*

I am very related to water. River, ocean, whatever. I am a swimmer. While we were talking during one of my classes about how to put things together, it naturally came to me.

At the beginning of my book, I quote a Native American woman Shaman saying: In these times we must pay a lot of attention to the river and how it's flowing, we must not stand on the shore but get in the river, keep our head above water and let the river take us.

I loved this. We talked about being in this river together; which starts small, gets bigger, and bigger - it's very strong, you got to know what you do by the time you get into the river → until it flows into the ocean. So, I thought that was concept enough. It's about the flow of music, flowing together, being together, going with the river – you can't fight it – listening to each other and taking care of each other

Groove, Intonation, Breathing, Sound, Melody, Expression, Performance - what do you associate with those keywords?

- Rhythm
- Smooth
- Better = You'd better breathe. ;-)
- Worldly = sound is international in terms of scales, special sounds (overtones e.g.) etc.
World music is a good teacher. It can really open your ears.
- Traditional = traditional melodies are what we grow up with, like in my case. Great American Songbook e.g. was a childhood experience
- Vibrant
- Improvisation = not automatically the same as performance

Performance comes from years of studying.

How do you approach a piece of music? Do you sing songs at all?

First of all; I would just want improvisation to stay it open, so the ideas are not surrounded by too many walls.

I really love song form improvisation (like Bobby Mc Ferrin did). If it's free and open, it does less allow people to get into it. Song form impros helps people to respond to it.

On stage, It makes me utilize all my studies, all the songs I ever sang and ever heard. The bigger that package of songs is, the more musical ideas I will have. When I improvise on stage, I feel like I am exploring all that. It depends on what comes forward.

Composition works towards the feeling of immediacy – it feels like I'm exploring everything for the first time. On the other hand: Improvisation at its peak achieves the feeling of destiny → all learned up to this point works towards doing this, it's me and my spirit and the elements who does it; everything that makes me who I am.

What is the most important to you in terms of choir music?

It depends on if it's a „repertoire choir“ or an improvised choir.

Generally; when we're singing together we got to be **generous**. Offer each other your best. If you start competing or start to withhold your music, it does not sound as well. When you harmonize and listen to each other, you will have a nice blending. In choirs where people get to know each other and like each other more, there's something empathic happening. Vibrations, you know. It might take some time.

When I listen to choir music, I find most important: their connection. If it's good, their blending makes more sense, the vibration and effectiveness in the room will be stronger. You can say: Blending in the sense of personality.

What could I do to improve my concept?

Keep your idea really open so the elements can have all the power for inspiration.

Keep your mind open, to miracles. To the spirit of music that is all around.

Let the concept be flexible, sometimes choose not to use it. (Throw it away!)

7. Practice/Exercises

Of course there are lots of exercises for the human voice. Some put emphasis on breathing, some on tone onset, some on clarity, melody, tone colour a.s.o.

The different parts of the body used differ associated to what the intention is.

Breathing requires muscular work from „front“ to „back“; from diaphragm to backbone.

Onset requires control of vocal folds, epiglottis and arytenoids;

tone colour requires control of the different sensations (such as high tongue position, „bite“, openness of larynx or Twang control);

melodicity requires control of the vocal fold position and the jaw/lips connection, as well as teeth and tongue, depending on what sound you use, just vowels or consonants as well

Intonation requires facial muscles, the overall larynx position check and control of „top-of-the-pitch“ feeling,

just to name a few examples and ingredients.

What adds to the physical phenomenon of singing is the body work from balance and standing (Earth) to looseness and movability and the expression on top of all technical issues (Fire).

I have tried to put up 10 exercises, inspired by several teachers I got to know „along the way“, not at least Peder Karlsson and Malene Rigrup (book: „Modern Vocal Music – Handbook for Choir Leaders“) whom I felt were most „connective“ in their use of the elements.

4 exercises highlight only one element, 6 of them combine two.

For an intro, there is a pre-exercise for body warm-up, at the end there are two which „sum things up“ and contain bits of performance.

I introduced all those in a test phase of 4 months, during a preparation phase for concerts and workshops.

To get feedback from the choir was elementary to that. I tried to mainly catch feedback from 3 or 4 persons per choir, but others had useful things to say as well. So there hopefully is a „red thread“, yet always a variety of opinions.

One string a feedback is from my choir „Witches of Pitches“, the other from „TonArt“, plus some spontaneous feedback from coachings. All male feedbackers, except otherwise noted, sing in „TonArt“.

I have marked feedbacks at first try, and those who came to me after a period of time, getting used to the exercise set. (see **Master Project – Reception** for more.)

Next to the exercise set, there is two of a bunch of Loop Songs I invented as a warm-up, and practical examples from song snippets. (see **Annex Collection Loop Songs Matthias Held**)

BODY Pre-Exercise Practice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qs0qmrW9FWY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O59ma-eYDgM>

Tension, Release and Balance²² (5 minutes)

- **Stand solid** – width of shoulders –
- and „**grow into the ground**“ **with your feet**,
first toes and front (feel the connection, feel the heaviness, the gravity)
then with the middle foot
then with your heels,
- do it again a little faster and keep your balance in every position
- **lift up one leg** with bended knee, stand balanced, stretch your foot and roll it the same way you did before → imagine all your gravity is in the lifted leg, feel the weight
- do the other leg and then repeat both if you like
- **bob swiftly up and down with your knees**
- **go into a skiing starter position** (imagine the sticks as well) and feel all the gravity in your knees
- take them as a basis for **jumping up** or **jumping forward** with preparation²³
- **feel your left arm grow heavy** - fingers stretching and growing into the ground - swiftly swing it back up and release → the same with your right arm
- **pull down your left shoulder** (side-stretching effect) and pull it up as high as possible → release → same with right shoulder
- stretch up one arm up to the fingers totally, stretch your whole side, even lift the foot a bit - make the fingers feel like the crown of a tree - feel the tension but still feel balanced
→ pull down your arm and let it fall, energetically, with sounds: „Uh - ah!“
→ stretch every side twice like this

Feedback of singers at first try:

„Positive – you can leave the day behind by conscious tension and release.“ NICOLA

„It feels good after sitting all day.“ ALBRECHT

„You really arrive at the rehearsal/in the setting.“ ANDREA R.

„Progressive muscle relaxation in a different way.“ SANDRA K.

„My body feels warmer after the exercise.“ ANDREA H.

„You come to yourself.“ NICOLE S.

Exercise 1 - EARTH - Body & Groove - 3 layers practice²⁴

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAo9zqNDnjw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpNuReNNOV8>

- **Establish Basic step 1 or - easier – 0**
- **Energize like this: „Doo doo doo doo doo doo doo. 8 16-16 16r- 8-16 8-8 4r“**
- **Clap on off-beats, between the steps**
(mind tension and preparation of arms and hands!)
- **Go on without stopping the groove, switch „layers“ off and on**

Intention:

- Wake up hands, feet, body and rhythmical voice
- Be in the flow (without thinking very much)
- Grow aware of subdivisions
- Balance lifters (feet) and stamps, as well as open and clapping hands
- Just move and enjoy

Feedback of singers at first try:

„Clapping is most difficult“ RALF

„Switching steps off and on is most difficult. But it arouses attention and could be very useful before gigs.“ ANDREA R.

„The combination is difficult is in the beginning. A hard time for rhythm-dyslexic people.“ SEVERAL

„More of that!“ BÄRBEL

„It's absolutely energizing.“

„You mustn't think, you mustn't be cognitive.“ LUISE (AND OTHERS)

„Easier if you do it more often.“ SANDRA K.

Exercise 2 - AIR - 8-steps breath activation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=od5kwCU-5d8>

- **Step 1: Just breathe out „from where you are“**
- **Step 2: Breathe in consciously (belly/diaphragm/abdominal), hold a short while and breathe out**
- **Step 3: Breathe in consciously, hold a short while and breathe out slowly and consciously**
- **Step 4: Breathe in by slurping 4 times (activate flanks and spine muscles), hold and breathe out slowly**
- **Step 5: Breathe in by slurping 4 times, hold and breathe out 4 times with the same energy as breathing in, plus one rest-air-exhale**
- **Step 6: 4 slurps, hold, breathe out 8 times plus one rest-air-exhale**
- **Step 7: 4 slurps, hold, breathe out 16 times or in a groove (best with 16th feel) plus one rest-air-exhale**
- **Step 8: One big slurp only, hold, breathe out groovin´**

Intention:

- Activate muscles that support breathing – right and practical support, no overpowering or tension in the wrong place
- Growing conscious of your breath and your capacity

Feedback of singers at first try:

„Nice“ THOMAS

„I used to fill in air automatically, it was somewhat new to do it on purpose“. LUISE

„The longer we do it, the more capacity for breathing out we have.“ ROSWITHA

„I had to think about what my muscles really do when slurping.“ GABY

„You can do it in your car when the lights are red.“ NICOLA

- - - -

Exercise 3 - AIR AND EARTH - Breathe the rhythm of a song

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puXz85Btf7E>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZGVRfhrNUw>

- Choose a song you know
- Pick a phrase we all can sing; tutti or melody
- Breathe the rhythm of this phrase together
- Remember the lyrics and energize - try to energize in the range you would sing it, with similar energy
- Split into two groups if you like; one breathes, one energizes, supporting each other
- Groups switch roles
- Blow the rhythm („www“-sound) on one tone, preferably the root, with lyrics and energy in mind

Possible extensions:

- sing the lyrics on the same tone - same mindset
- sing the melody together – feel free to harmonize (or do a 2nd round with harmonies)
- split in three groups along the way; one energizes, one breathes, one blows
- Extend this on each voice breathing their rhythm at the same time

Intention:

- Togetherness, getting into the rhythm via breath and muscular control, adding tonal basis and intonation control, remembering the lyrics → and putting it all together
- Keeping a straight line of energy (not unlike a washing line which needs to be tight)
- Refresh songs the choir already knows

Feedback of singers at first try:

„Super“. NICOLA

„It really had some kind of dynamic, it really pulled forward“ THOMAS

„At first I didn't know what the breathing was about, but then it came to me.“ ALBRECHT

„It grew from difficult to easy along the way“ RALF

„There was a constant level of energy, it helped us not to get flat.“ ANDREA R.

„Weird. At first I did not know where to go because I did not know the lyrics.“ ROSI

„I had difficulties with my breath, because I breathed more out than in.“ HANNELORE

„To get the lyrics back from brainstem to cerebrum ... oh my gosh.“ ELKE

„You really focus more on the rhythm.“ ROSWITHA

Experience:

It can be more difficult to let a whole choir sing the melody of a polyphonic passage, if each voice is conditioned to do their part, even if the choir is fit and elaborated.

This exercise made me think of the element constellation of Helmert Woudenberg; one „public“ element, one supporting, one private and one secret. Blowing the rhythm of a song on one note, will focus the rhythm audibly, with the intonation supporting it, with energy being the secret element and the lyrics „privately“ in mind. And you might carry this mindset into other stages of this exercise.

In the end you get the rhythm/groove (Earth), lyrics (Water), linear intonation and breath control (Air) as well as energy (Fire) together in one mindset - if it works out.

Notations: Once you know the lyrics - don't think too much. If the chosen part is not yours, let yourself fall into the rhythm with the others.

Exercise 4 - WATER - From tone to scale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7okfSB6Frpg>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvdM_l4d31k

- **SING A TONE, hold it, try to vibrate,**
 - **Make this tone your root, find the 5th**
 - **Sing root and 5th a few times and „mark the space“ (Pre-exercise)**
- Now:**
- **sing down scale in steps**
5 - 3 - 4 - 2 - 3 - 1 - 2 - 7 - 1 _____ →
 - **choose vowel**
 - **choose to vary the tempo or general loudness**
 - **choose Major or Minor**

Possible extensions:

- Hold first tone (plus vibrato) and keep tension until one person (leader?) gives the sign to go on (melody = release)
- Modulation (of course)
- add sound colours (air, Twang, classical larynx tilt, retraction)
- go through CVT-based Vocal Modes like Neutral, Curbing, Edge and Overdrive
- add other scales like Minor 7th below, #11 (Lydian), b9 (Phrygian)

Intention:

- Prepare singers for Major Scale and Minor Scale (as well as others)
- Keep awake and prepare for „the sign“
- Enjoy, clear and blend the different vowels
- Grow more defined melodically and tempo-wise
- Listen to how vowels work in what part of the range, and where they should be modified; use another mode etc. to make them comfortable

Feedback (at first try):

„Exhausting for bass singers if you start too high“

„We need to be very distinctive between Major and Minor.“ BEATE

„Call and Response is easier than sign language on this“. DAGMAR

„Major is easy, Major is more difficult.“ SEVERAL SINGERS

„Minor opens the sound more, once you're in it“ ANDREA R.

„It was difficult to feel vibration“ ALBRECHT

- - - - -

Exercise 5 - EARTH AND WATER - Call&Response with subdivision + body groove²⁵

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cm-mnA7FXds>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crjyMZ93GI0>

- **Start rather slow body percussion groove - preferably with steps and subdivisions on top (Reference to Exercise 1)**
- **Leader sings a melody, just scat phrases and syllables at first - Listen and copy as exact as you can**
- **Focus on the tones if it does not work out the first time**
- **Focus on the rhythm if it does not work out the first time**
- **Do it again and enjoy**
- **Do a few more melodies with the same challenge**

Possible extensions:

- Take a melodic phrase from a song you are learning right now or refreshing
- Change sounds (if you use syllables only)
- Change tempo
- Change dynamics
- Focus on the lyrics (3rd level of consciousness)
- Split groups into body percussionists and singers

Intention:

Emphasize and detailize melodic phrases of songs we are practising - or refreshing

Train melodic hearing and rhythmic hearing

Establish groove base at the same time, so we don't memorize a melody just „for the brain“/cognitively, but body-related

Play with parameters

Fun of singing together and the Call & Response Game

Pay attention

Long-term: Enable and encourage singers to „Create melodic lines“²⁶

Feedback of singers at first try:

„Horrible. I cannot drum and sing at the same time.“ ANDREA R.

„A third element is too hard to coordinate.“ THOMAS

„Easier with more repetitions.“ SEVERAL SINGERS

Experiences:

When making a special task on improvised, unknown melodies, there was a difficulty in first making the singers listen, **then** asking them to focus on the rhythm, **then** repeating the melody exactly. It may have been the general order, but a lot of singers wanted to go for responding the „whole package“ at once. Some told me that it would be easier to refer to the „melodic brain“. Maybe I should have focussed on tones first. Yet, if you involve more body work and the singers know the exercise better, there might be a chance to focus the rhythm first. We could improvise together by first energizing something Call & Response, later adding a melody on top of it.

A second round of this exercise proved the latter order (Energizing – Adding Melody) successful.²⁷

EXERCISE 6 - AIR AND WATER - Explore your dynamic range

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FcyDHdpXv0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXzepXeoZXA>

- **Imagine a dynamic scale from 1 to 10²⁸**
- **Choose a comfortable vowel**
- **Sing a drone in a comfortable octave for each singer - best start with a low one**
- **Start singing and estimate your level *at the moment* with hand signs**
- **Compare with choir leader's estimation - if we agree, go down or up the scale collectively**
- **If we have yet to find our scale: Use VOPA dynamic control, estimate again where we are, check and proceed**
- **Later: Change dynamic level on sign of one leading person (like „go to 8 now!“)**

Possible extensions:

- Change to another octave, preferably in higher levels
- Add 5ths or 3rds to sing on, instead of unison drone
- Change vowels - good idea: From close to open, as level gets higher
- Choose to add Twang or Aspiration (deliberately, to test the sound)

Intention:

- Enjoy dynamics
- Feel the choir sound
- Activate your muscles and capacities of breath
- Practise carrying tones and sounds over a longer period
- Listen to each other, practise blending
- ! Carry the sound over the threshold to performance - this exercise always includes a bit of FIRE, as pure FIRE is freakin' rare.

Feedback of singers at first try:

„Nice.“ LUISE

„Hard to go below level 2.“ GABY

„Creates space.“ THOMAS

„Releases the voice.“ ANDREA R.

„Mentally challenging, in terms of concentration.“ SEVERAL SINGERS

„Strenuous but it's fun.“ LISA

„Level 10 blasts you off your feet.“ ELKE

Experience: Once a choir has gotten used to „dynamic control“ via VOPA²⁹ it's much easier to define where the top and bottom limits are, though the choir defines the actual possible volume. Singers may find it exhausting to drone over a longer time on a high level, run out of air etc., but the sound takes them away.

Be aware that this is about collective dynamics and your place „in the crowd“.

While the choir develops, agreement on what level the choir is *at the moment* should improve.

EXERCISE 7 - FIRE - EMOTION CHART – CONFRONT THE AUDIENCE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6Us8xovCTM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ys7jdOEoVc>

- **Place yourself in front of an (imaginary) audience, with a few meters of space to the stage front**
- **Pick from a chart of 16 (or more) emotions - most likely:** ANGRY – EUPHORIC – THREATENING - SAD – HAPPY – SLUGGISH - SILLY - VICIOUS – BORED - LOVING - ANXIOUS - RUSHED – SHY – ASTONISHED/WONDERING – STRAINED - !INDIFFERENT
- **Leader names one emotion → concentrate 5 seconds**
- **Walk towards the stage front *on sign*, expressing and performing that emotion *silently and non-verbal***
- **Stop at the front and freeze**
- **Walk back to first position and do the same with another emotion**

Possible extensions:

- Decide if you point out the facial expression or the posture of an emotion
- Decide on to what extent you're gonna perform
- Decide on the walking pace
- Split into two groups - one of performers, one as audience
- Sing or energize a song which fits to one of these emotions

Intention:

- Focus on a certain emotion and expression you normally only use unconsciously
- Practise using your body language in service of this emotion
- Practise facing the audience
- Communicate with your „opposite“ - if two groups perform for each other
- „Take the stage“, use front space

Feedback of singers at first try:

„Funny.“ GABY

„Challenging if you don't know an emotion.“ LISA

„Don't care what others think.“ ANDREA R.

„We should have a mirror for that one.“ NICOLE

„Or else have one group face the other. Performers vs. audience.“ SEVERAL SINGERS

„Good that we moved to the expressions.“ SANDRA K.

„Dynamic of the exercise multiplies with the multitude.“ LUISE

- - - - -

EXERCISE 8 - FIRE AND EARTH - OVEREXTEND RHYTHMIC PART

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8V8_5LRrDI

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiE-19T7mJ4>

- **Choose one or two lines from a song you know**
- **Establish a basic step which fits**
- **Add subdivisions by clapping, on thighs or chest (like 8ths)**
- **Imitate a shaker (or similar) for 16ths - at least let one group do it**
- **Energize the lines on top of this**

Possible extensions:

- Externalize
- Stretch it out on a whole passage, Verse, Chorus etc. of a song
- Turn the phrase into a loop, finetuning certain aspects „along the way“
- Focus on one „layer“ - see Exercises 1 and 5
- Vary the tempo
- Turn on or off extra elements of expression (e.g. more facial)
- Take it to a „tribal feel“, stamp, exaggerate body percussion, bang your imaginary drum

Intention:

- Integrating body work, steps, balance, gravity and subdivisions into a song, part by part
- Give the song the rhythmical feel it needs and which carries it
- Extend it into singing

Feedback of singers at first try:

„It's fun, though first not obvious what it's for.“ ANDREA H.

„Singing is easier than speaking.“ CLAUDIA

„One layer of body percussion is okay, more make it difficult.“ SEVERAL SINGERS

„All it all – it's high grade work.“ THOMAS

„I felt that everyone did different subdivisions.“ RALF

„Holds the tension and gives new impulses.“ ANDREA R. and NICOLA

„Once the feet work on their own, it's easier.“ ANNETTE

Experience:

Singers give more and more differentiated feedback, the further we move up the exercises. They tend more to explore their boundaries, as the exercises seemingly get „more difficult.“ Yet, if there are two or more „layers“ to combine there is a struggle between cognition and intuition, means: Between just walking, clapping etc. = doing something and thinking about how to do it.

I referred to step + clap as „felt mathematics“. 8 beats over 4 and maybe 16ths above 8, a certain groove in any case.

Though I would not recommend singers to spend more time on counting than necessary.

- - - - -

EXERCISE 9 - FIRE AND WATER - OPEN FOR HARMONY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3R9DQgBUxfk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bEL5rfeiiM>

- **Sing a root together on a vowel like „ooh“**
- **Now process like this:**

Sop	1 high	5	3	5	4	4
Alto	1 high	3	2	7	1	1
Ten	1 low	8	7	5	6	6
Bass	1 low	1	1	3	4	5
	H	W	Q	Q	W	W

- **and slide back to root if you like**

(H = Half note, W = Whole note, Q = Quarter Note; rather slow tempo to enjoy each chord.)

- **Exercise each melodic line apart, mind the linearity, enjoy the sound**
- **Build up part by part and sing together**

Possible extensions:

- Use different vowels, some more closed, some more open
- Maybe use two vowels, e.g. go from „ooh“ to „aah“ on the last two chords
- Use different chords, best to start with Major
- Shift/Modulate up or down
- Vary the rhythm
- Place the choir in 4 corners of the room and sing to each other in the middle

Intention:

- Improve the choir harmonies
- Be aware of each voice's function in the chord
- Enjoy chords, sounds and blending - once you've got it
- Learn to varyate this exercise
- ! Carry the sound over the threshold to performance

Feedback of singers at first try:

„Sounds nice.“ GABY

„It's harmonic.“ ANDREA O.

„It's nice to fill the room with harmony.“ GABY

„No need to sing to loud, energy comes with openness.“ LUISE

„Nice blending of vowels.“ SEVERAL SINGERS

- - - -

EXERCISE 10 - AIR AND FIRE - WALK THE LINE, NO MATTER HOW

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akz3qB_BTT8

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzRCS_mKL9o

- **Take a line (or passage) from a song**
- **Imagine the necessary emotion you need to express (from the chart of 16 maybe, see Exc. 7)**
- **Choose the dynamic level you think it needs (maybe from 1 to 10, see Exc. 6)**
- **Try to sing take it down (5 – 4 – 3 – 2 - 1) or up (6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10) with the same energy and expression**

Possible extensions:

- Adjust to the singer with the most notifiable expression,
- or with the slightest (minimalistic)
- or with one dynamic extreme → follow the loudest if it needs to be loud,
- follow the softest if it needs to be soft
- add movements already fixed and reduce or extend them on the same level
- Combine with exercise 8

Intention:

- Dig into the message and the emotion
- Hold the energy
- Challenge the singers with dynamics
- Broaden the possibilities of expression and performing
- Make the singers aware of lead passages/voices stepping out

Feedback of singers at first try:

„Good method to adjust the dynamics if needed on a gig.“ SANDRA K:

„Facially it was a strain with dynamics low and energy high.“ ANDREA H.

„It's very important to mind the energy.“ BÄRBEL

„You need to keep up so the rhythm doesn't get lost.“ ELKE

- - - -

BODY PRE-EXERCISE EXTENDED VERSION

- Whole body stretch to a solid standing;
 - stretch or kick or shake one leg at a time,
 - keep sure you remain balanced,
 - bend your knees, „stick to a trampoline“,
 - loosen and stretch your fingers,
 - swing your arms,
 - go down/bend down with one at a time from a top point downward
-
- If you take this as a loosening exercise: Form pairs and beat your own drum in drumming on your partner's muscles from top to bottom (thighs), enjoy it, turn and switch roles.

EXERCISE „TREE IMAGINATION“

- Stand fixed and balanced,
 - imagine roots growing through your feet to the ground, extending to thighs, legs and bum,
 - imagine your torso grow rigid like the trunk,
 - imagine your fingers growing into roots, arms getting heavy and following, up to the shoulders,
 - still stand upright, feel the rigidity,
 - feel your chin become heavy and connect to the ground like magnetism.
 - Close your eyes.
-
- On clapping signal - **open your eyes and start to dance** to the beat you hear. Free-style! (Might be piano, Cajon or vocal percussion or music played by the choir leader)

Intention:

- Call back focus on certain parts of the body if you need them on stage (e.g. focussed chin, not too high, for daring, threatening or frightened expression)
- Warm up a group which needs focus on coming to rest one time and „getting loose“ as well;
- maybe a group that just met for the first time, need „something for a change“ or need to experience clearly the difference between tension and release.

EXERCISE „WAKE UP YOUR ELEMENTS“ (Combination)

- Stand in a circle - or two, depending on the size of the group
 - You have four movements, each combined with one tone:
-
- D - sung on „aaah“ - start with open arms and close them slowly towards your breast/your heart
→ that is going inward = WATER
 - A above D (fifth) - sung on a soft, airy „ooh“ - raise your arms slowly toward the ceiling or the sky
→ that is going upward = AIR
 - A below D (low fifth) - sung on a darker „ooh“ - lower your arms towards the ground, maybe bow slightly or bend your knees → that is going downward = EARTH
 - E - sung on „eh“ - open your arms slowly like embracing, maybe take a step forward
→ that is going forward = FIRE
-
- Switch from one movement to another deliberately, take your time, enjoy the sounds

8. Processing through a song in 5 steps

General idea for rehearsals

With this part of the process, I began to balance out the elements per song within a rehearsal. Next to exercises like the 10-12 mentioned before, how can a song be scheduled into all the elements it needs? My first stages were pieces that already had the melody, rhythm and structure settled and could be cleared in details or refreshed on the basics during a rehearsal.

I sketched possible choir rehearsals (see How to build a rehearsal, main presentation paper) on this premise: At least a lot of exercises and elemental aspects should be included. Means: Not all but 5 or 6 or 7. The more a choir is used to the „element“ setting, the more we can consider. Do not build the exercises brick by brick, minute by minute, but give the general flow some space.

If no set of exercises does fit for a song then pass some and distribute focus points per song to the choir and name the elements. (Like: „We'll first give some earth to this song by learning the rhythm. Basses, listen up, we begin with you.“)

The intention this that singers get a balance of elements during the rehearsal. The goal of wholeness should not go away. No one-eyed fixation, no boredom.

Since there are supposed to be 4 elements per song „in the wings“, eager to be developed into a fifth, and influencing sub-elements we just listed, there are a lot of focus points in a song to think about.

Or, let's not say „think“. That is too cognitive. „Keep in mind“ is better, but not enough. „Keep in mind, body and soul.“ is a good overall term. „Make use of“ sounds a bit arbitrary. You might also say „live“.

Let's present some examples of a manageable number of focusses at a time in certain parts of a song. Not only because the particular song fits to use those focus point at this-and-that stage in its development, but because keeping the same focus on the whole song would give us a lot to evaluate.

To make it sure: You CAN keep a focus the whole song through. A lot of singers will say „That's difficult“ or „That's exhausting“. It's all subject to the process. The longer you sing a song, the more you will „live“ it. Especially if you enjoy the groove, the harmonies, the message and the melodic and sonic possibilities to play with. The greater the chance you won't grow tired of it as a singer.

I chose **three songs** of a different kind to experiment with working on the elements.

This is how I imagined the elements could be important in the process at the **beginning**:

	Front	Support	Spirit	Secret
POG AON OIDCHE EARRAICH	L Sphere	F Message	W Sounds	E Drone
VINDO	E Groove	W Interpretation	F Attack	L Dynamics
FEUER GEMACHT	F Message	E Groove	L Sphere	W Articulation

Then I turned to a different structure, because all elements are important. A „front“ by name might diminish attention on the others, and „secret“ or „spirit“ would be harder to relate to but have to be perceived by the audience just as well:

	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
POG AON OIDCHE EARRAICH	Drone	Sphere	Sounds	Message
VINDO	Groove	Dynamics	Interpretation	Attack
FEUER GEMACHT	Groove	Sphere	Articulation	Message

We will see how the assignment developed in the process.

FEUER GEMACHT

Song number one is the German Rock/Pop tune „**Feuer gemacht**“ by Purple Schulz (arr.: Matthias Held). The English title would be „I lit a fire“. The song is about children just starting their life, and the appeal to let them try their strenghts, not reglement them or indoctrinate them to a „mainstream“, so they can let their fantasy and creativity grow free to give the world what they got to give – instead of being „normal“.

You can image a castaway on an island in the sea of normality, using all his creativity to light a fire under the circumstances and the joy he/she feels if it works.

As the rhythm becomes more intense, the song has room for movement and especially Kucheza near the end, according to the „African Feel“ of the G-Part.

We divide the tune into 5 sections. It has 8 parts. A & B form the first section, C the second, E & D the third, F the fourth, G and H the fifth.

Process week 1 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEU9SA5mU08>

Part A & B

	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
Main Focus			Harmony & harmonic functions	
Sub Focus	Basic groove	Breathing		Message
What´s going?	Feel the 2/2 pulse and sway with it, → develop to 4/4 pulse, more up-down-choralle feeling, near to starting basic steps	Keep lines in flow, clear decision when to breathe, tutti or	Spot each voices´ tone and its function in the chords (e.g. going from 3 to 1 to 3 to 1 / Soprano) - on which function does the melody begin and end?	Relate the message to the pulse and the melody → soft and tender message, create image → turn on your imagination and appeal („Let them grow“)
Evaluation	Bass needs to settle subdivisions in part B below the pulse, gives the others a good basis Triplets go well especially with 2/2 feel	Soprano and Alto running okay, since lines are not too long or too loud, yet intense balance of dynamics and energy is good, only soft crescendo	Each one remembers their functions and carries the chords, in spite of more openness and sound changes	Bass and Tenor carry melody very well, not too fragile and not too rushed, though they can take a little more time on last two lines, yet need more self-confidence

Practising the first part made me realize that:

The SPHERE is, to a great deal, created by onsets, breathing, phrasing and dynamics. I will have to split the general focus point SPHERE (AIR) into components.

The ARTICULATION focus is important, but more for solo voices. Harmony and interpolation of melodic lines is just as important.

The MESSAGE focus should be clear from the start; we´ll have to check out where the energy comes from; also from colour of sound, movement, dancing....

So: I did not fix on ONE focus point per element per song any longer and let the first stage set some marks for the second.

The same with the other two songs.

Process week 2 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2O0iMwlahl>

Part C

	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
Main Focus	Rhythmical sharpness		Melodic lines	
Sub Focus	Bass: Steps and exact tones	Sounds	Bass: Steps and exact tones	Instrumentalism
What's going?	Set basses on their feet; pulse plus syllables, put Sopranos on top, check rhythm with altos (in relation to Sopranos), check Tenor	Make clear who is the leading voice; Tenor first, Bass second, Ladies support, Supporters only grow louder when melody rests (pass the ball)	On which function do we begin, what intervals do we take in the supporting voices? Sing through, carry tones and keep tension	Don't forget to extend your appeal when you sing through, be the instruments the sounds suggest (Soprano = Guitar)
Evaluation	Soprano does good on rhythm precision, Bass too, Tenors can take a little more time here and there Basses: remember which tone is which step (SOLFA)	Bass: Good, not too pompous, Soprano: Nice tones, not too little twang, yet sometimes a little softer Altos: Sidekick Soprano when necessary	Melodic lines okay, Tenors mind the top and lowest notes Basses hit the notes, yet need more self-confidence	Alto: Nice, easy and supportive Soprano: digging into being instruments Tenor: point out the message!

Process week 3 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4VZxw8Sff4>

Part D and E

	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
Main Focus	Counterplay (Passing the ball)			Communication, Voices react to each other,
Sub Focus		Dynamics related to counterplay	Harmony Sounds	Let yourself feel (+ the audience)
What's going?	Bass: Rhythm changes half the way, Tones and functions more than before, check lines and grooves, mind subdivisions and triplets for the others' sake, Tenor/Alto: take over groove from each other Everyone: Feel the bass	Tenor/Alto carry your lines, reduce dynamics when you pass the ball Soprano natural crescendo/decrescendo Bass: be present	Soprano/Alto/Tenor kick off your voices with „Whoo!“, sit on the first tone, use more Twang than before	Bass: React to Soprano Alto/Tenor take over solo from each other, transport the message

Evaluation	Good at listening to the fundament + Soprano, Tenor/Alto lay back and not too fast, yet energetic	Bass & Soprano try to be dynamically present between the melody lines, need more „body“ → presence, performance	! Feel yourself more as instruments, sound quality already radiates outward as powerful, could be more determined, Soprano „less lovely“	Works well, yet should be more secure and communicative, this needs processing on performance level → see „Air“
			All: ! Mind the final vowel sound and the ending of the word before („rufst“) when getting over to Part F	

! „Passing the ball“ is also a good reminder for a focus in part F, but F is very obviously built on Question & Answer, several voices singing the title line answered by the soloist. If you have a part like this and sing with lyrics, you should focus on this first.

For E and D in this case, the counterplay was more subtle and, to my mind, needed an extra eye and ear on it.

Process week 4 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rBY1PrkT5g>

Part F

	EARTH	AIR Dynamics	WATER Variations on Sound, Counterplay	FIRE
Main Focus				
Sub Focus				Solo
What's going?	Bass: integrate your lyrical parts into the groove, mind the triplets! Tenor: Take over Soprano groove from part E Soprano and Alto: Practise the change beforehand, mind the triplets, even though you know the line already integrate body work with steps	Be precise on lyrical and „guitar“ parts – loud versus softer when solo goes in and out, cool down (including body work) towards the end	Be precise on lyrical parts, let the „tutti“ fire your energy Be precise on instrumental parts and sharpen your sound	Let the solo lead! → be instrumental, be fun, especially on repeating sequences Earth extra: Get loose (increase enthusiasm) by implementing body work

Evaluation	Feel more free on steps, certainly more the less we need to focus on „music“	Good chance for the choir to „go for it“, solo needs dynamic space, sings „over the choir“ in any case	Lyrical parts and repetitiveness create more safety → fun increase Colour of sound more defined than in previous parts, radiates on the lyrics, too → room for development	More openness, more fun Solo is substitute and role model for choir soloists in near future
-------------------	--	--	---	--

Process week 5 2018

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN_kAngbOHc

Part G and H

	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE Kucheza
Main Focus				
Sub Focus	Groove		Bass Line	
What's going?	<p><i>Groove plus Expression</i></p> <p>„<i>Khuraba simbale</i>“ pattern sits on the steps, drum pattern as well, interlocks regarding the subdivision,</p> <p>Men's pattern is carried through the chords in H</p>	<p>Dynamic high intensity throughout, voices building up</p>	<p>Instrumental sound (Twang) is present, Chorus melody S/A more intense and carrying than Chorusses before – on top Basses sing on roots, though E (Do) only would do in I and IV chord, yet not enough singers to split the Bass</p>	<p>Steps R – L – R – L plus Grounding, Banging on drums with body support, dancing, opening and raising arms, final drum roll and jump</p>
Evaluation	<p>Nice body work, extraordinarily grounded and focussed, choir seems to be glad to be able to do this</p>	<p>Choir can hold the tension over the two parts, need to give all they can for the rest and not overpower themselves in the song as a whole</p>	<p>We need a bit more focus on which tones to pick to support the chords, harmonies are understood, which is fine</p>	<p>Just a few ideas, seemingly not too difficult and effective, performable with a good „standing“ - compared to just standing still - and yet contact with to audience, „Tribal feel“ and touch of freedom</p>

VINDO

This song is by the Latvian Vocal Group COSMOS, composed by Jānis Šipkēvics and Reinis Sējāns, arranged for choir by Jim Daus Hjernöe. Written in a fantasy language which just sounds Baltic and Folk-ish, it is great fun to sing; explore how light and sharp the sounds can be, how the harmonies will unfold and how energetic you can sing, without needing to care about a message ... or do we?

This song has the change of 4 times part A and part B, followed by a Bridge and a last B-part. Normally parts are repeated once in themselves, B4 and the last more often, to give the choir more space to „live“ it.

Now with a new structure of focus points:

GROOVE was to be fixed with steps, movements and earthiness,

INTERPRETATION went along with tone colour and articulation,

ATTACK was to be interpreted into energy, emotional sound and, to a degree, Kucheza,

DYNAMICS, except a natural rise and not overpowering, was to be sub-ordinate.

Process week 1 2018/2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kK2IXMk5EUU&>

Whole song (known piece)	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
Main Focus		Intonation		
Sub Focus	Steps/Tempo		Tone colour and placement	Sound (emotionally)
What's going?	It takes a few seconds to get into Basic step 2	Intonation check 2-3 times, clarity is quite good, tonal basis is taken over from ladies by men, yet some insets are too much (Bass Interlude)	Ladies do their best for a lighter sound and blending, lyrics and harmonic understanding is generally okay	Smile is brought in, works at first in balance with concentration, general energy level is high (so it seems)
Evaluation	Rhythm and tempo are okay, Feet (Bass!) mark the balance if anything else goes wrong Structure is present so far Steps are yet just steps	Basses need more consciousness of self and root, Soprano needs more defined endings dynamics change only slightly	Basses tend to drop their line for the Alto part (or sth else), need repetition, as well as Soprano 2 (not the surest in terms of melody at the end)	Sounds lack a bit of archaichness (how balance to lightness?) Did energy put into intonation raise dynamic level automatically? Action untied from thinking?

Instructions:

„Throw the tone against the ceiling - maybe also the ceiling of your mouth (palate).“

„Send the tone to the stars.“

„Push your hands up if you may - but don't lose your step.“

Process week 2 2018/2019

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cETB_J1YUk&

Pre-Exercise:

- Ground yourself
- Walk around the room with heavy, tribal feel
- Mind the lift as well as the step with each foot
- Stop on signs and walk on
- Energize with the steps

Whole song (known piece)	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
Main Focus	Body energy			
Sub Focus	Groundedness	Phrasing		Transformed energy
What's going?	Better sense of getting into the groove and stepping, though not really sure about the lift (is it carried through?) Movements stable but not very tribal Tempo okay	Soprano, though trying to smile, do not give the proper intonation energy to tenors and altos, key goes down in general, later holds level Soprano pushes more towards the Bridge, more <i>forte</i> and safety there	Harmony and blending go awry in first part, slight part mash-ups Last part is better in shape	More energetic phrases (Tenor, Bass) and downbeats, Alto sounds rather bored, choir shadows energy of leader only partly, after the bridge, energy is more equal and more synchronized
Evaluation	Did the walking exercises do their job? Where is the link to the music?	No lapse on the phrases, breathing did not take the energy off the intonation	Melody itself was okay, it suffered from the rest	Too much thinking, too little feeling? If there was energy, where did it go?

Process week 3 2018/2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYZswP0SxVw>

Pre-Exercise:

- Step shift in Part B4 - before Bridge – to give a new energy impulse, B-parts get Basic step 1 towards the middle

Whole song (known piece)	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
Main Focus			Pronunciation	
Sub Focus	Steps	Dynamics		Colour of sound
What's going?	Better on time, combined with energy and lifts Step shift – after stop – seems to work	Sopranos: Head start on intonation, Tenors do not take it over completely and „hand it down“ Intonation cannot be caught back	Phrases better in shape, sharper consonants and pronunciation go along, all try to level blending and harmony subconsciously Bass line confusion in the Bridge	More feeling in the Soprano part, makes sound lighter more energy, even Alto more envolved, but level is too equal over the song
Evaluation	Energy impulse by step is okay, as long as the two rows don't drift apart and everybody moves	It was too strong in the beginning, and could not really be topped (same goes for FIRE), more control?	Self-balance of choir and listening to common lyrics is okay, levels only a part of the whole puzzle,	Maybe the eagerness drove up the level so there was no space above, gave a push in the beginning – but needs to grow

Process week 4 2018/2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beXVpK0RoF0>

Whole song (known piece)	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
Main Focus				Expression
Sub Focus	Steps & Body	Intonation	Pronunciation	
What's going?	Starting okay, more body work, here and there even torso activity More established stops and step shift on B5, hard to stop after it	Soprano and Alto and Tenor: better, „riding on the surf“, mostly stays on level	Good start, maybe yet too much in-word-sense, good progression, B4: Basses cling on to some other melody part, fall out of line, try to keep the rest together Singers wanted to	Smiling faces, more perceptable engagement, energy good from the start without overpowering, yet climax is reached in Bridge We need to establish
Evaluation	It seems to grow	Link of dynamics,		

together IF people are capable of basic step 1	intonation and pronunciation to be completed to carry the sound	transfer last lesson's focus unto this one, Maybe extra work on Mixolydian scale?	the message more, help to internalize the stuff
	Dynamic curve: Same issue as before	Extra work on drone and establishing bass?	Same energy on variable dynamics (see AIR)

Process week 5 2018/2019

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6_zLjUTrVw

Pre-Exercise: Imagine a tribal sundance – physically and mentally

Whole song (known piece)	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
Main Focus	More focussed movements			Kucheza
Sub Focus		Dynamics	Sound colour	
What's going?	Slowly going into movements is good, singers get in and bodies are more straight → better link to singing energy	Intonation: Good start, but Soprano drags Alto down → harmonic overhang	Soprano drops line endings, Tenor messes up melody parts, creates harmony one A and B-part too early Bass close to repeat last lesson's mistakes a push of lightness to sound in last B-part	Facial expression works okay IF singers are on „safe ground“, energy carried more „as a whole“ energy level same as before, does not wane by intonation or melody mash-ups A little more joy + aggression in sound colour <----
Evaluation	See above	Choir knows where to breathe but ladies need to end lines and support lower tones more precisely	Too much focus elsewhere? No idea where melodic mistakes came from	Safety gives fun and pushes energy Eagerness for perfection smashes the puzzle

Conclusion: Every focus point needs to be refreshed now and then. Stage No.6 - if you can call it that - for „Harmony“ in any case.

Yet, stage No.5 presented the best „final phrase/statement“ up to date.

If you notice the subtle staging of elemental ingredients to add to the material of a song like this;

- first AIR (supported by WATER) for intonation,
- then EARTH for body energy,
- then WATER for pronunciation
- then FIRE (supported mostly by WATER) for expression
- and the Kucheza thought („tribal sundance“) on top of all

and see no development in the performance, you might conclude two things:

1. These elements need more practice even on a known piece.
2. This is a choir which just doesn't get it.

Let's assume the first one for IMPLEMENTING ELEMENTAL THOUGHTS AND APPROACHES.

POG AON OIDCHE EARRAICH

This song also has a Folk-ish character, since it is by the Scottish band Runrig, recently having retired from performing live after 45 years. It was actually composed by Calum and Rory Macdonald. The whole text originally is in Gaelic, telling about a romance in spring. „A kiss on a spring evening“, the title says. The accompaniment is spheric, a bit mysterious, waving – and my original arrangement was a bit more elaborated. I decided to re-create the verses into something spheric as well, yet give the Germany audience a recognizable „spring feel.“ Therefore, single singers recite 4 lines of a German spring poem per verse. The chorus remains 4-part in Gaelic. (Learned phonetically.)

Process week 1 2019

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jbd_gLb0Beg&

Pre-Exercise: 5-tone-range improvisation base - A minor from A to E -
Sing the scale up and down, grasp it and play with the tones. On „ooh“ first
Why not process to other vowels?

Whole song (re-construction)	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
Main Focus	Structure and resurfacing			
Sub-Focus	Breathing space		Tone range	Openness
What's going?	Remember the parts, remember the structure, try to get in after moments of orientation	Explore the 5-tone-range in practical, play with the tones, shortcheck out where and when to breathe (chorically)	Lyrics Pick up the melodies (Soprano, Alto, Tenor) Remember lyrics, lyrical context and phrase blocks	Expression Once you get the lyrics and lines, carry your part of the poem (including the chorus)

Evaluation	Quite okay, instructions necessary, but will be drawn back, piano as well?	No main „gaps“ by too many singers breathing at once → develop sense for tonality, range and hearing → dynamics need to develop → by feeling and leadership	Try on 5-tone-range was okay, a bit shy Melody lines okay, lyrics work better by heart and sense for phrasing needs to progress → playing with vowels should follow	Space for the lyricists was okay, more comfort and courage needed → safety does it
-------------------	--	---	--	---

Process week 2 2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrV8CoP16uM&>

Pre-Exercise: - same as before last unit, shorter

Whole song (re-construction)	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
Main Focus	Time, Pulse, Units			
Sub-Focus What's going?	Group follows sense of time, in touch with leader, Bass does his best to cling together on pulse	Breathing space No audible gaps in verses 1 and 2, rather in 3, due to lines A glimpse at dynamics in Verse 2, Chorus is stronger	Tone range ! Soprano and Tenor switch to higher tone range (a – e one octave up) in 2nd verse	Exploration More confident 5-tone-space presented a bit shy, but not lush Energy level is constant per part, more in Chorus
Evaluation	Good development on remembrance of last week, more internal pulse reference necessary	Good development, singers need to be more sure of what they sing in terms of: One ear inward, one ear outward	Melody has gained in comparison with previous week. Lines more secure	Audible growth, more freedom → need to curve the energy more, if it doesn't follow the melody, maybe just for a try

Process week 3 2019

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_Rw79h1ycQ&

Pre-Exercise: is linked to the song, starts with improvisation

Whole song (re-construction)	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
Main Focus			Harmony	
Sub-Focus	Time, units	Link to lyrics (pulse & hearing)		Link to lyrics (emotion)
What's going?	Actual form, after free intro, starts on sign	Let breathing flow while we're not in time	Singers start to improvise, harmonic build-up before actual form begins ! Bass messed up melody of Chorus 1, lyrics rush a bit	A bit shy, yet a bit undefined testing ground Relaxation versus engagement (mainly Bass)
Evaluation	! Sign for Verse 1 has to be very clear, for external pulse reference to pick up from as well → micro-timing in Chorus, taken from piano, has to be sharpened	Went well, IF lyrics were present, maybe a balance between relaxation vs. engagement must be checked, not only time- but dynamic-wise	Lyrics should not start before 1 of first part Good harmonic understanding	Do not overengage pulse and let it carry you out of line (same goes for leader) First glimpses of free (not layer) improvisation in Soprano

Process week 4 2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zImVDkYaL3w&>

Whole song (re-construction)	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
Main Focus				Sphere Expression
Sub-Focus	Structure	Dynamics, Tonality	Lyrics, Flow	
What's going?	Putting the pieces together, leaving more natural space between parts, less instructions Feeling for time and units is better, pulse reference developed a bit	More flow, single singers „stepping out“ from time to time,	Lyrics flow better over accompaniment ! Bass messes up Chorus 1 melody startend, strength as well ! Tones grow out of the range, but only momentarily	Quite good, general expression knows towards the end, strength as well

Evaluation

We got the structure, we need to fill up the „micro-things“ in between	Be sure - in any case A glimpse of vowel – that dynamics and mix, safety do not go together (connection: unsure = soft should be out of bounds)	Bass needs to grow together in all, question of communication?
--	---	--

Too many focusses here? I don't think so. Since the lyrics are reduced to single persons and the chorus is homophonic, there is one possible focus point less each.

We lay a base for improvisation at first, and add one extra element for the „backing singers“ one by one; vowels, dynamics, range switch and tone change. The only sub-conscious focus should be the pulse. All other possible changes are matter of single singers and reciters.

What further tasks do we need to fulfil if the song is gonna be staged?

These were my suggestions in combination with choir suggestions.

	EARTH	AIR	WATER	FIRE
Me	Micro-timing in Chorus Feel, energize and subdivide the 12/8-groove together Macro-timing: Verses in half-time or whole-note-feel to develop sense for space		Check harmony. What possible chords can we create in A-minor if we hold tones together?	Check energy scale together with dynamic scale from floor to roof
Choir	Feel and sing the pulse together, to grasp the fundament	Work on dynamics; check how loud or soft we can be, fitting to the song Leave space to the soloists	Maybe recite lyrics together to get a feeling for it and inspire each other	Dig into the message; imagining pictures of spring or something, maybe dance according to the song or move in slow motion?

9. Possible elemental approach to a choir song

The order of teaching the elements - to put the picture together - would be flexible, of course.

Yet, there is a possible one:

Spark (FIRE) - What is your intention with what you sing? Motivation?

Start to transport it when we start a new song by singing it to the choir.

So: Where will your AT-tension be on and to what will you draw the audience's attention?

→ SPIRIT

Ground (EARTH) - put the thing on its feet. Experience your body, involve your body, find the groove, energize, subdivide etc.

and establish first connection to the melody - you learn it part by part

Deep breath (AIR) - explore onsets, phrasing and dynamical aspects, as soon as the body work is settled and we know what supports us, really start listening to each other

Melody (WATER) - You should do this in small units in every rehearsal; develop melodies, dig into scale and harmony, next to hearing, check the highs and lows of the song, test the sound and level

→ check it back again every now and then

Emotion (FIRE) - Slowly implement emotion. If a sound/vowel alone carries some kind of meaning („aah“ of understanding), what is it? How can you carry it? Make it audible AND visible! Feel it! Transform this into expression, dynamics, energy.

Do we find micro-elements like this in the lyrics? Give thought to the lyrics and explore even small terms of „message“ to interpret them. How important are they?

→ SPIRIT with motivation raised to a higher power → PERFORMANCE

- 1 „SIX BASIC VOICE QUALITIES“ and „PRIMER OF BASIC FIGURES“, © Estill Voice Training Systems, Jo Estill, 1997
- 2 This was my state of knowledge when I finished my first diploma of Voice and Vocal Coaching. Estill Voice Training has since then developed branches of applied „Artistry“ and „Performance Magic“, for the optimized use of an EVTS-trained voice in public. The voice technique branch is called „Craft“ and is the first step of EVTS training system. For certification as an EVTS Voice Trainer, the other two branches are Master Training knowledge.
- 3 Complete Vocal Technique/Komplette Gesangstechnik, © Cathrine Sadolin, Copenhagen, 2010
- 4 Forsyth, D. R. (2014). Group dynamics (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning
- 5 Forsyth, D. R. (2014). Group dynamics (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning
- 6 Forsyth, D. R. (2014). Group dynamics (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning quotes: Dorwin Cartwright & Alvin Zander, 1960
- 7 The Study of Groups: Past, Present, and Future,” by Joseph E. McGrath, Holly Arrow, and Jennifer L. Berdahl (2000)
- 8 Forsyth, D. R. (2014). Group dynamics (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning
- 9 Forsyth, D. R. (2014). Group dynamics (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning
- 10 Forsyth, D. R. (2014). Group dynamics (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, Table 1
- 11 Tuckman, Bruce W. (1965) ‘Developmental sequence in small groups’, Psychological Bulletin, 63, 384-399. The article was reprinted in Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal Number 3, Spring 2001
- 12 Lewin, K. Frontiers in group dynamics. I. Concept, method and reality in social science, social equilibria, Human Relations, 1947
- 13 Lewin, K. Frontiers in group dynamics. I. Concept, method and reality in social science, social equilibria, Human Relations, 1947
- 14 Lewin, K. Frontiers in group dynamics. I. Concept, method and reality in social science, social equilibria, Human Relations, 1947
- 15 Regards to Peder Karlsson, „The organic choir“/“An Introduction to Vocal Leadership“, August 2016
- 16 Regards to Peder Karlsson, „The organic choir“/“An Introduction to Vocal Leadership“, August 2016
- 17 Terese Damsholt, Interview in Copenhagen, 29 Dec 2018
- 18 Referenced during my studies at RAMA also by Peder Karlsson
- 19 <http://www.brigidshearth.org/wisdomintroduction.html> - „Wisdom of the elements“ by Margie MacArthur
- 20 Helmert Woudenberg, „Vuur, Water, Lucht en Aarde“, IT&FB, ABC Uitgeverij 1999
- 21 https://www.haus-der-astrologie.de/horoskop/astrologie_elemente.html – among many others
- 22 Kindly inspired by „Modern Vocal Music – Handbook for Choir Leaders“, Malene Rigrtrup and Morten Kjaer © Gule Plader, 2013
- 23 See grounding exercise 1, p.16, „Modern Vocal Music – Handbook for Choir Leaders“, Malene Rigrtrup and Morten Kjaer © Gule Plader, 2013
- 24 Regards to Peder Karlsson, „The organic choir“
- 25 Again regards to Peder Karlsson, „The organic choir“
- 26 Inspirational exercise to „Vocal Painting“ (Jim Daus Hjernøe)
- 27 Regards to Jim Daus Hjernøe, „The intelligent choir“
- 28 Regards to Complete Vocal Technique/Komplette Gesangstechnik, © Cathrine Sadolin, Copenhagen, 2010
- 29 Regards to Jim Daus Hjernøe, „Vocal Painting“.