

The Imperial Ladies Choir 2012

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This is the time of year when I usually write an article to let everyone know what the Imperial Choir has been doing over the last twelve months. We have been extremely busy, as usual and you will find details of our numerous engagements elsewhere in this magazine.

We have just given our annual summer choral concert and, as I reflect on our achievements, I thought that I would share some of my thoughts on choral singing with you.

I have always sung in choirs – at church, primary school, secondary school and university. I sang in choral societies and chamber choirs in the UK and now sing in Malta with the New Choral Singers. I have also been conducting choirs for over thirty years so my ideas are based on over fifty years of experience .

Most people join a choir because they want to enjoy themselves and have a good time whilst making music. So what makes a good choir member? The most important factors are commitment and self-discipline. These can be shown in so many ways but the most important one is simply to turn up to rehearsals regularly. Leading on from this is the need for punctuality. Persistently being late shows a lack of respect for your fellow musicians and choral singing is all about teamwork and consideration for others.

The final results produced by a choir depend on every single individual. It's no good thinking that your fellow singers will cover you through the bits that you don't know, or haven't bothered to learn! If every singer thought in this way then there would be no choir. It's by paying attention at rehearsals that you learn and improve. You need to be engaged with what is going on at all times, even if it does not directly involve you. You should listen to others in your section so that you stay in tune and blend better whilst paying heed to the other parts and to the conductor.

It's also really important to listen to your own voice and analyze what you are doing.

When singing in a concert think about the lyrics and put your heart into communicating with the audience. Don't just stand there and sing or, (even worse) shout. If in doubt, behave as if you know what you are doing. Don't let the audience – and especially the conductor – know that you are floundering. Try to relax and SMILE. A great choir member wants to get the music right and the concerts to be the best that they can be.

What should a choir expect from their conductor?

They should expect clarity with regard to directions. A conductor has to be decisive so that the singers know exactly what is expected of them. They have to be enthusiastic, inspirational and able to generate excitement in the rehearsal room. They need lots of patience as no two singers learn in exactly the same way and allowances have to be made, however frustrating this can be as you try to keep smiling whilst rehearsing the same passage for the umpteenth time!

A confident approach is vital as choir members can smell fear and react to it very quickly. A good sense of humour is probably the most important requisite for any choral director for so many reasons!

If a choir member has had a bad day at work, home or school, what would be the best way to wind up your musical director?

Never be satisfied with the starting pitch of a piece. Always moan that it is too high or too low.

Complain about the rehearsal room – the lighting, draughts, the temperature – anything will do. This is really effective if the conductor is under pressure preparing for a concert!

Bury your head in the music just before important cues.

At dramatic moments in the music start to mark your copy.

Look at your watch frequently during rehearsals

and sigh a lot. Find an excuse to leave a rehearsal 15 minutes early so that the rest of the choir become restless and fidget a lot.

Talk through all instrumental introductions so that you have no idea of the tempo or tonality of the piece or when to come in. (Some people have a gift for multi-tasking. Mariella is a real master at this. She never misses anything and I have NEVER managed to catch her out !)

Rustle your music as much as possible when looking for scores or turning pages. (Even better – don't keep your music in the folder so all the loose sheets are mixed up and often end up on the floor).

Slump in your chair or sit in a strange yoga-like position whilst attempting to sing.

When asked to mark your music find that the entire section has only one pencil between them and then make a big fuss about it.

I could go on but some of the ladies may be worrying that I will share their own foibles with you all. Remember – people join a choir because they want to have fun and socialize with other singers.

Well, the ladies of the Imperial Choir have got that bit right! Thank you to all of the singers for their commitment this year.

Thank you to all of the ladies who help me set up and pack away the keyboard – such a simple thing but I really do appreciate it. Thanks to Carmen for her help with the library and to Ruth for her secretarial skills.

Congratulations to Marisa and Melita for their tasteful solos this year. Many of the choir have shown great commitment by organizing their very complicated family lives in order to allow them to continue singing and I appreciate their dedication to the choir.

Thank you to Odette for organizing our social functions - we are all looking forward to our next pizza evening. Over the coming weeks the choir will be studying hard in order to get their parts right for their Mellieħa Nights programme and for the festa concert on September 2nd. Remember ladies, keep smiling whatever happens and your audiences will love you.

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