

A Choir Observed..

Recently the Sydney Staff Songsters (Australia) toured five Ontario cities. I had the privilege of seeing them in two: the Mississauga Excyte Youth night, and the Anniversary Concert with The Canadian Staff Band (in Toronto). As I watched them in action, I noted the following:

1. **All the music was memorized.** What a difference this makes! Their noses were not in a page of music. Instead they looked at their audience as they sang. Their hands were free and relaxed, not stiffly holding a folder of music.
2. **They animated their faces.** They were not expressionless as they sang. The message of the music was reflected in the expression on their faces. The result was a sincerity in their singing. They sounded as if they believed in what they were communicating. The lyrics were coming from the heart.
3. **They moved as they sang.** This was not choreographed movement, but a response to the rhythm and joy of the music. It was not overdone, or extreme. They simply looked relaxed, and free.
4. **They varied the texture and position for each item presented.** By texture I mean that each song featured different voices. Many songs featured several different soloists, duos or quartets, with the whole choir backing them periodically. Some songs featured men, some the ladies. Each song had its own position. In the piece "I Love Old People", several of the men were up front, humorously presenting the song. For the more classical piece "Surely He Hath Borne Our Grievs", they took up a more classical, formal stance. For "We Are Not Ashamed", the sopranos, altos, tenors and basses separated into groups, since each part has its own melody and lyrics in the song.
5. **They engaged the audience.** They call themselves a worship-leading choir, so whenever possible, they had the congregation join in with them singing the chorus of a song, and sometimes performing simple actions. Many times Graeme Press (the conductor) would introduce a soloist before he or she sang the item, and allow the soloist to share why they have a personal connection with the song about to be sung. It helped us as an audience feel as if we were listening to a friend, and made the song more intimate in hearing it. There were even times (in the Excyte Youth night), that songsters not on duty in a song went down and sat next to various audience members, introducing themselves to their new seat-mates.

Why is all this important? **Because it made it much easier for the congregation to keep their focus on what was important, the message of the gospel found in the music.** There was nothing else happening in the room that could compete or distract. The concert became simply a heart-to-heart presentation of the simple yet profound truths of God's love and grace to His people; An open venue providing space and freedom for the Spirit to move. And isn't that what worship-leading is all about?



Kim Garreffa

Contemporary Music Consultant
The Salvation Army
Canada and Bermuda Territory