

Planning for UIL Concert—Make It Happen All Year

Consistently striving to help your students develop their musicianship throughout the year will prove extremely beneficial when it is time to compile your concert program for UIL. Consider some of these guidelines as you teach your choirs:

- Listening skills – not only does this apply to ear training, but direct your students to listen all around them—blending their voices within the section, and striving for balance and harmony by listening to other voice parts as they sing. Discuss intervallic and chordal relationships as well as dissonances. Direct their attention to rhythmic similarities and differences.
- Teach concepts of tuning by singing scales, thirds, I, IV and V chords as well as octaves and unison. Refer to these concepts in music you teach.
- Teach concepts of style such as marcato and legato, accented and unaccented syllables, note groupings, phrasing and dynamics. Study the text, making sure students understand the meaning and how the composer has written the music to express the text.
- Refine your rehearsal techniques. Tell the students your goals, rather than rehearsing something over and over. If the pitches are wrong, be exact as to how to tune them. If the rhythm is a concern, break it down using a concept you have taught. Have students mark their music. If the goal is memorization, tell the choir. Work as a team. Talk to them—not at them! Help your singers to develop ownership in their choir.

Increase the level of difficulty from the Fall Concert to the Holiday Concert. It is good to challenge the students, but take into consideration their musical experience. Do not over program in the fall. Choose pieces that offer the best teaching opportunities. Meet the students where they are vocally and develop their skills using music that is accessible for them.

The Formula

When preparing a program of only three pieces, it is good to consider certain criterion. One of the pieces, of course, must be a cappella. Two of the pieces must be from the Prescribed Music List. But what other guidelines should we follow when programming? CONTRAST: sing in a variety of keys, styles, texts and tempos. SUITABILITY: throughout the year your choir has been more successful with certain styles of pieces. Do they have good diction and rhythmic energy? Is legato singing difficult for them? Do they have trouble tuning in a specific key? Are there specific meters, styles and harmonies you have not yet taught them? How vocally independent are they? What ranges are comfortable for them? Let these types of questions be your guideline for choosing the program. Choose pieces which feature the choir's strong points. If the choir has only sung two part music this year, don't choose a three part piece. If you want to sing in three parts, be sure you did so on your Holiday Concert! Don't choose UIL preparation time as the time to teach 6/8 meter or modal harmonies!

Prepare them throughout the year and UIL will just be another wonderful concert!

