



*Using Social Media and Technology to Strengthen Your Choral Program – Gibbon's *The Silver Swan* in the 21st Century*

by

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At the beginning of October, I gave the following assignment to every member of my Concert Choir: Video record yourself singing the high scale, low scale, chromatic scale, and Gibbon's *The Silver Swan* (with CD) for your voice part.

A number of things inspired this assignment. I believe we directors arrive at the weeks before district, regional, or All-State auditions and, inevitably, there is one student who would do just about anything to have a successful audition, but, in reality, should have started working on the musical material at the beginning of the school year. Or you hear a singer goofing around in your classroom, a talented kid whom you convince to audition because you know she has what it takes to make that auditioned ensemble. Then you discover she isn't motivated and doesn't follow through. Translation: She lacked confidence in her ability and potential.

I assumed that if I assigned the material early in the year, I would not only discover unknown talent—I did, but I would also be able to offer encouraging comments and suggestions to every singer in the class, comments such as "Okay, it's time to step up your game. You are too talented to be acting out the way you do in class." "You have true leadership potential in your section. Think about making better choices to becoming the best singer you can be."

Realizing the technological savvy of most of my singers, I decided to leverage the ease with which our singers function in cyberspace into a 21st-century teaching opportunity. The

students had a two-week deadline to complete this four-minute assignment.

Knowing there would be singers who would need to use school equipment because they did not own MacBooks with webcams or because some parents would not permit their children to use the family video equipment, I purchased two ZOOM Q-3 video recorders for the choral department. To see this superb device, go to the Zoom website at <http://www.zoom.com.jp/english/products/q3>. The cost is \$199 + \$14.99 for a protective case. What an amazing piece of technology. The Zoom Q3 runs on AA Batteries, but since I had recently purchased the adaptors, operating this device was easy: Turn it on; press the red button to record; press the same button to stop; turn it off; take the USB plug out of the Q-3 and plug it into your computer to view and/or download. This was so easy a cavewoman could do it!

A portable CD player in my classroom houses the *Silver Swan* recording so that each student can complete the assignment during his or her lunch or study hall.

Next, I created a Concert Choir YouTube account. This was designed so that the entire choir could use the class username and password. Of course, privacy settings were put in place to assure that these recordings would not/could not go "viral."

For those singers whose parents were not comfortable with their child's subscription to YouTube, I accepted DVDs, flash drives or zip files sent to my email address. Once I had finished reviewing the YouTube recordings online, I deleted them.

Finally, I developed a rubric for grading purposes. You will find it below. With these tools and my feedback about this particular assignment, I was able to help all the singers understand exactly what they needed to do to be better prepared for their audition.

Grading this assignment was a joy. I praised those kids who always stand in the back of the room or don't think they are good enough. I was able to review the recordings, note-by-note, with students who did not agree with my assessment. There has been a remarkable change in the overall demeanor of the Concert Choir as a result of this assignment.

While I am not certain this exercise will boost the acceptance of Concert Choir singers into Region II or All-State, I do know I distributed twice as many Region II information packets

this year over prior years. I also know one can never underestimate the effect a teacher's words can have on her students. My constructive comments about a student's high and low scale could easily have been the highlight of that kid's week.

Kindness is one of the most powerful interpersonal tools that we can use to connect with one another. Kindness, in my estimation, propels students into action and empowers those who feel powerless.

As you well know, students can, and should, do something

to improve their world. You and I can help these young people uncover a solid musical talent of which they were unaware or gain confidence they had never experienced. Never underestimate the effect of the ripple we create as music teachers.

I love this quote borrowed from Sheena Stegent: "You can make a difference in the world that will be like a ripple effect just by changing one thought." Colleagues, I invite you to try this assignment with your choirs. You will be pleased with the overall results and the ripples you create!

Scoring Rubric

SCORING	A+...A...A- 12...11...10	B+...B...B- 9...8...7...	C+...C...C- 6...5...4...	D+...D...D- 3...2...1	NOTES
Vowel Production—"a perfect AH"	Vowel is properly created with ease	Evidence of some facial/jaw tension	Evidence of considerable facial/jaw tension	Vowel is quite close and the "AH" vowel is not evident	
Major Scale intonation	Performs all notes with accurate pitch placement	Performs most notes with accurate pitch placement	Performs several notes with inaccurate pitch placement	Performs with poor pitch placement	
Chromatic Scale intonation	Performs all notes with accurate pitch placement	Performs most notes with accurate pitch placement	Performs several notes with inaccurate pitch placement	Performs with poor pitch placement	
Silver Swan Note Accuracy	Performs all notes as written	Performs with a few note mistakes	Performs with several note mistakes	Performs with many incorrect notes	
Silver Swan Rhythmic Accuracy	Performs all rhythms as written	Performs with a few rhythmic mistakes	Performs with several rhythmic mistakes	Performs with a majority of incorrect rhythms	
Silver Swan Balance and Blend with CD	Performs with solid blend and balance with the recorded singers	Performs mostly with solid blend and balance with the recorded singers	Performs mostly with some blend and balance with the recorded singers	Blend and balance with the recorded singers needs to be addressed	
Silver Swan Tone Quality	Excellent tone achieved throughout entire performance Uniform, consistent, controlled	Excellent tone achieved most of the time ... Minor problems quickly corrected	Sound is often spread and unfocused	Sound is unfocused, spread, and not open, relaxed, or easily created.	
Silver Swan Breathing	Performs with correct breath support and takes breaths at appropriate places in music	Performs with very few breathing errors, breathes at a few inappropriate places in music	Several errors in breath support, breathing at several inappropriate places in music	Performs with a very breathy sound and breathes at many inappropriate places in music.	