

# GET A MOVE ON!

MOVEMENT STRATEGIES TO  
ENHANCE CHORAL REHEARSALS

STUART CHAPMAN HILL, PH.D.  
DIRECTOR OF MUSIC EDUCATION, WEBSTER UNIVERSITY  
STUARTHILL37@WEBSTER.EDU | WWW.STUARTCHAPMANHILL.COM

## WHY MOVEMENT?

- “Motor networks link to pleasure centers in the brain. **It feels good to move, and it feels good to move to music.**” (Hodges, 2010, p. 5)
- “When we hear a musical performance, we don’t just ‘think,’ we don’t even just ‘hear,’ **we participate with our whole bodies.** We enact it. We feel melodies in our muscles as much as we process them in our brains—or perhaps more accurately, our brains process them as melodies only to the extent our corporeal schemata render that possible. **And people make or listen to music not for what they know through it, or for the experience of mindfulness it affords, but for the way it is experienced, bodily.**” (Bowman, 2000, p. 50)
- “Recent neurological research confirms that **the nervous system is richly integrated...** Dualistic ideas of the mind and body being separate are now replaced by the conception of **body and mind working in tight reciprocal coordination in the generation of movements and consciousness.**” (Flohr & Persellin, 2011, pp. 14–15)
- “**Understanding means experiencing the harmony between intention and performance...** As I play a musical phrase on an instrument, I experience at every stage of movement the fulfilment of an intention which is not directed at my instrument as an object, but is **incorporated into my bodily space.** Thus, the **musical action is not only a means of showing musical understanding; it is the bodily understanding of a musical phenomenon as a habit of action.**” (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004, p. 6)

## MOVEMENT CONCEPTS TO CONSIDER:

- **Movement as a vocal tool:** Already common in many choral rehearsals. Using movement to model/encourage healthy vocal technique
- **Movement as a listening tool:** Use of exploratory and prescriptive movement in response to recorded or live listening examples. Helpful to use Laban efforts in combination (punch, slash, dab, flick, press, wring, glide, float).<sup>1</sup>
- **Movement as a score study tool:** Use movement to bring clarity to elements of score—articulation, dynamics, phrase direction, etc.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Jordan (2009) for more on Laban. Resources also available at [www.theatrefolk.com](http://www.theatrefolk.com).

## A FEW TIPS:

1. **Just move!** Model movement as much as possible in your teaching (not just conducting). Build a culture of movement in your classroom—seek opportunities to build your (and your students’) movement vocabulary.
2. **Balance prescription and exploration.** Offer plenty of opportunities for free movement. Observe, respond to, and incorporate students’ movements. Use movement as an *assessment tool* that reveals students’ inner musical thinking.
3. **Movement ≠ dance.** You don’t have to be a good dancer; you don’t have to be “good” at all! Follow Dalcroze’s lead and use *natural movements* as the springboard.

## REFERENCES

- Bowman, W. (2000). A somatic, “here and now” semantic: Music, body, and self. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 144, 45–60.
- Flohr, J. W., & Persellin, D. C. (2011). Applying brain research to children’s musical experiences. In D. L. Burton & C. C. Taggart (Eds.), *Learning from young children: Research in early childhood music* (pp. 3–22). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Hodges, D. A. (2010). Can neuroscience help us do a better job of teaching music? *General Music Today*, 23(2), 3–12. doi:10.1177/1048371309349569
- Jordan, J. (2009). *Evoking sound: Fundamentals of choral conducting* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Chicago, IL: G.I.A.
- Juntunen, M., & Hyvönen, L. (2004). Embodiment in musical knowing: How body movement facilitates learning within Dalcroze Eurhythmics. *British Journal of Music Education*, 21, 199–214. doi:10.1017/S0265051704005686

